

The Dark Side of Power-Sharing

Middle Managers and Civil War Recurrence

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La Violencia, Colombia's mid-20th century civil war, wreaked havoc on 64 percent of the country's territory and left 250,000 dead.¹ In 1958, the ten-year war was brought to a close. The two parties to the conflict, the Liberals and Conservatives, agreed to share power equally and to engage in peaceful electoral competition in a consociational system.² The negotiated settlement, referred to as the National Front, instituted a comprehensive power-sharing arrangement guaranteeing that neither party dominated the political arena, exclusively controlled the military, or hoarded a disproportionate share of the economic resources. The arrangement provided both sides with a sense of security and assurances that they would not become victims of opportunism by their rival party. As a result of these guarantees, the Liberals and Conservatives were able to put an end to their internecine bloodshed.³ However, despite these robust fear-reducing provisions, Colombia experienced only an interlude of peace, and violence re-erupted in the mid-1960s. In some regions, including those most bloody during *La Violencia*, no relapse of killing occurred, while in others, belligerent activity returned in the form of leftist insurgencies. Specifically, the renewed violence broke out in only 45 percent of the Colombian municipalities affected by the prior conflict while 55 percent consolidated peace.⁴ What explains this spatial and temporal variation in post-war violence? Why did the fighting decline and then later escalate? Why did violence re-erupt in some places while peace maintained in others? And why did the battle lines mutate so quickly from the Liberal–Conservative bitter rivalry to a war between the Colombian state and communist guerrilla movements? This article seeks to explain these patterns of civil war recurrence and, in doing so, contribute to our understanding of post-conflict violence. In the cross-national datasets, 36 percent of civil wars, which ended between 1945 and 1996, erupted in subsequent wars.⁵ In post-WWII Italy, post-conflict violence killed roughly 15,000 individuals, exhibiting significant temporal and spatial variation.⁶ In Africa and the Middle East, belligerent groups often turn on their own

members, with peace accords resolving certain conflicts, while simultaneously generating new divides and violence.⁷ What explains patterns of war recurrence?

This article proposes, ironically, that the very success of power-sharing arrangements can cause a return to violence. By creating and consolidating credible, horizontal, elite commitments, socializing adversarial elite into a cooperative regime, and elevating the weight of former rivals in the decision-making process through in-bidding, power-sharing erodes the vertical agreements that each elite has with its middle managers. It therefore undermines the elite's ability to offer enticing post-conflict outcomes to their subordinates. While the elite are constrained into fulfilling their peace promises to each other, they renege on those to their mid-ranking field officers. As a result, these betrayed and resentful officers have an incentive to remobilize. Where they have built their armed units on a local, social infrastructure, they tend to prove capable of successful remobilization. Where the factions were instead non-local to the regions in which they operated, they are prone to disintegration, losing their ability to redeploy and thereby consolidating peace. It follows that horizontal guarantees between former adversaries—the bright side of power-sharing—must be complemented with mechanisms aimed at fulfilling the elite's promises to their subordinates, thereby managing and harnessing the dark side of power-sharing.

This project makes several contributions to the literature. It offers to the scholarship on civil war recurrence a sub-national study. Resumed violence varies significantly within countries and across time, and yet, existing accounts of where and when violence re-erupts focus only on cross-national variation. This study further builds upon the burgeoning scholarship on insurgent organizational capital by examining why the organizational residue of violence is preserved and reactivated in certain cases while it remains dormant, unexploited, and dissolved in others, as well as why some former insurgent organizations return to fighting while others fully demilitarize. It also offers an alternative mechanism by which over half of the conflicts resolved through robust power-sharing peace agreements nonetheless result in resumed war. Finally, this project contributes an unwritten chapter to the Colombian historiography. Existing work on Colombia centers predominantly on periods of high-intensity war, *La Violencia*, and the system of violence that developed in the early 1990s, once the insurgencies were underway for over twenty years.⁸ By providing analysis of the period 1958–1984, this study fills this gap in the Colombia-specific literature.

Security Guarantees

The dominant explanation of the breakdown of peace centers on the extent to which negotiated settlements resolve the commitment problems between enemy armies. According to this literature, in the aftermath of war, there is no overarching government and thus, ex-adversaries cannot credibly commit to disarmament.⁹ Civil war settlements require that rebels disarm. However, once they do so, the balance of power shifts in favor of the government and the government becomes likely to exploit

“its enhanced bargaining position”¹⁰ and to act as a “crafty opponent ...[waiting] until full disengagement to strike.”¹¹ Knowing these government incentives to defect, the rebels are less likely to sign and maintain a peace agreement. Scholars have identified two mechanisms that address rebels’ security concerns and resolve the commitment problem: guarantees from third parties¹² and adopting institutional safeguards to share or divide power between belligerents.¹³ In this article I focus on the latter power-sharing arrangements.¹⁴ These arrangements constrain the ex-adversarial elite’s self-interested political actions by limiting their choice set and stabilizing equilibrium conditions.¹⁵ They further ensure both parties to the conflict a role in government decision-making and a fair allocation of scarce government resources, thereby addressing their security concerns.¹⁶ It follows that, if peace breaks down, it is because the peace agreements did not go far enough in resolving the commitment problems between enemies.

However, in Colombia, the power-sharing arrangement “worked magnificently. Its success... [was] an excellent illustration of how a change in political structures may greatly reduce political violence.”¹⁷ 95.3 percent of the Colombian electorate voted in favor of the consociational, political experiment.¹⁸ By the rules of the pact, the two traditional parties alternated the presidency, participated in a bipartisan coalition cabinet, and evenly divided the bureaucracy. The parity and rotation formula applied equally to the Congress, to the appointive mayors and governors, and to the legislative bodies in the departments and municipalities. The National Front also granted both parties veto power over government expenditures. The new electoral arrangement mitigated the inter-party electoral competition in Colombia’s highly polarized society and reduced the need to use violence for electoral purposes. No longer did winning the election imply the exclusion, status reversal, and repression of the losing party. Meanwhile, the grand coalition further dampened conflict by giving the opposition party a stake at the center and fulfilling the Liberal and Conservative party elite’s security, political, and economic needs irrespective of which party was in power, thereby enabling them to look to the government, rather than to violent actors for protection and public goods.

Thus, while there are scholarly critiques of power-sharing, this arrangement actually proved effective. In theory, it operated as proposed and brought about its desired end: peace between ex-adversaries. This “bright side” of power-sharing, however, cannot account for the subsequent breakdown in peace in some regions and not in others. Largely due to its disproportionate focus on country-level dynamics and datasets, the power-sharing literature cannot account for the significant sub-national variation in war recurrence as the peace terms were held constant at this level of analysis.¹⁹ Additionally, the “bright side” of power-sharing can explain only cooperation (peace) or its subsequent breakdown but is unable to account for both as the power-sharing guarantees did not vary across time; rather, the National Front arrangement held. The literature’s overemphasis on cross-sectional variation and slow-moving or constant variables at the cost of longitudinal variation has rendered these theories unsuited to explain a key component of war recurrence: its timing. Even looking across the world, we find that robust power-sharing guarantees between parties to a conflict do not

shield a society from a relapse into violence. In fact, of twenty-four power-sharing agreements signed since 1989, 42 percent consolidated stable peace while 58 percent resulted in resumed war.²⁰

Roeder and Rothchild call this the “dilemma of power-sharing”: the institutions “facilitate a transition from civil war, but thwart the consolidation of peace and democracy.”²¹ The mechanisms these authors highlight—escalation of elite demands, decision-making deadlock, and low citizen representation—are not present in the Colombian case and thus cannot account for the breakdown in peace. We are therefore missing a piece of the puzzle to account for the micro-foundations of violence recurrence in Colombia.

Longitudinal Variation in War Recurrence: Intra-Organizational Bargains

I propose a causal process by which wars ended through sound and effective negotiated settlements may nonetheless resume: the breakdown of intra-organizational, vertical bargains between the political elite and their mid-tier officers. I find that durable peace regimes comprise two components: the forging of horizontal pacts (negotiated settlements) between the adversaries’ elite as discussed above and the maintenance of vertical pacts between these elites and their mid-ranking officers. The argument thus concurs with but qualifies the power-sharing literature.

Importance of Middle Management For elite power-sharing to generate sustainable peace, the top commanders must continue to maintain these intra-factional cooperation arrangements. The existing literature on power-sharing and spoilers suffers from elite bias, focusing principally on the peace accords brokered at the highest levels of command.²² The demobilization and reintegration literature focuses disproportionately on the rank and file soldiers and their transition to civilian life.²³ The middle-manager cohort has received scant attention in this scholarship and yet, it is a critical actor in the post-war environment. This cohort of battalion commanders is the “highly manipulatable skeleton organization ... [It] is the permanent staff of leaders who train recruits and around whom new units may be built.”²⁴ These mid-level leaders have territorial control over demarcated zones but are of insufficient rank to be present in the peace negotiations. They possess the “highly specialized training and knowledge,” operational and tactical experience, and the direct contact with and loyalty of the foot soldiers necessary to either remobilize or fully demilitarize the armed units.²⁵ An organizationally disaggregated approach, which opens the black box and different ranks of the armed actors, is needed to deepen our understanding of war recurrence.

Vertical Bargain of Dual Sovereignty Concurrent to the elite National Front pact, intra-partisan alliances held initially whereby the mid and low-level combatants remained loyal to the commanders who, in return, allowed their subordinates to preserve their fiefdoms and transferred them other “goodies” to buy their cooperation.²⁶ During

these early years of the transition, the mid-tier leaders remained key to the commanding elite's power and ability to deter non-cooperation by their ex-adversary. Thus, the elite continued to offer their subordinates enticing post-conflict outcomes. In particular, amnesties were granted in 1953–4 and 1958 and a Rehabilitation Department was created for the “reincorporation of political criminals back into social [civilian] life”^{27,28} such that they could exchange their “rifle[s] for hoe[s].”²⁹ Meanwhile, social welfare and community development agencies (Versatile Teams and Community Action) offered aid to the guerrilla regions ravaged by the civil war. All of these programs accepted the mid-ranking guerrillas’ political legitimacy as partisan fighters. Finally, the government institutionalized the National (truth) Commission and hired violentologists to investigate the causes of La Violencia, collect testimonies, and weave a narrative of the civil war.³⁰

At the same time, the political party elite accommodated the mid-tier guerrilla leaders’ prerogatives and influence in their regions. These leaders demanded that “the army withdraw from their areas and that it recognize a shared form of rule in the area[s] they controlled, ‘within a peculiar concept of *bandolero* sovereignty.”³¹ The elite acquiesced to these demands. Where army detachments did operate, they “were known to have established a *modus vivendi* of noninterference.”³² In fact, these fiefdoms proved “unresponsive to government actions to improve social and economic conditions in their areas *unless it was coordinated through former guerrilla leaders.*”³³ Meanwhile, the party elite preferred “to let [the former mid-tier officers] rule over [their] fairly isolated domain than to pursue [them] actively in [their] own territor[ies].”³⁴ Thus, during this period, a type of collusion emerged whereby the former mid-ranking guerrilla leaders maintained their “sovereign” republics in exchange for not engaging in violent actions against the unity government; both the horizontal and the vertical pacts held.

Interlude of Peace This truce arrangement led to a sharp decline in violence.³⁵ As a result of these intra-factional alliances, the former battalions remained latent groups, but were not armed. They were “largely inactive... relatively passive. [They] caused little interference in government affairs.”³⁶ The weapons “were buried” and “rehabilitation involved the return of the former guerrilla to their [agrarian] activities.”³⁷ They called themselves “ex-combatants” and stated: “We are not interested in armed struggles.”³⁸ The mid-tier leaders were able to preserve their collective structures and capacity for collective action as local strongmen and political entities.³⁹ Furthermore, because the mid-tier officers’ “law was strictly abided,” the regions under their control became “completely pacified.”⁴⁰

It was an equilibrium, and both elite and mid-tier ex-combatants were contained. The elite gained law and order without having to stretch their inadequate state, seriously weakened by a decade of brutal war, across Colombia’s vast territory. They also gained political benefit. Mid-tier commander Aljure, for example, was known to be able to deliver 8,000 votes: over one-third of Meta’s electorate. For their part, the former guerrilla field officers “seemed content to run things in [their] section[s]” of the country.⁴¹ As Hobsbawm wrote, “their political horizon is completely local, if left alone they concentrate on their own region, and hardly even challenge the higher

levels of administration and economic activity. Viotá, for instance, lives in a state of informal coexistence with the central Government.”⁴²

Accordingly, this period has become known as an intermission of peace.⁴³ It was the combination of formal inter-elite accords and informal bargains brokered between the elite and their respective field officers that generated peace; both were required to avert a return to violence. So what happened to erode this interlude of peace? I propose that power-sharing’s mechanisms of credible commitments, socialization, and in-bidding caused the elite to renege on their field officers and to spark these officers’ redeployment.

The Dark Side of Power-Sharing: Renewed Violence For centuries, Colombia’s partisan armies and guerrilla leaders had proven essential to the Conservative and Liberal parties’ success and were thus endowed with a sense of patriotism and legitimacy. They were “used by these national political forces ... [to] maneuver in their continual contest ... So long as [they] continue[d] to have links to the legitimate political process, there [were] forces working for their preservation.”⁴⁴ In contrast, under the terms of the power-sharing National Front, the spoils of political office were divided equally between the parties, reducing politicians’ need to appeal to and mobilize their constituents; electoral victory and future cooperation were guaranteed. As a result, the former militias’ utility as a latent, easily reactivated insurance policy in the case that cooperation broke down, was mitigated. These receptacles of armed collective action under the command of mid-level partisan field officers thus instead became a “potential threat to the government.”⁴⁵

Additionally, the National Front, as a nonpartisan pact between Conservative and Liberal politicians, not only resolved the commitment problem but also forged bonds and engendered a sense of horizontal identification among the enemy elites. Overtime, it socialized them into an iterated prisoner dilemma game by structuring their strategies and preferences in a centripetal way. The top party leadership was trained into cooperation that “transcend[ed] the segmental or subcultural cleavages at the mass level.”⁴⁶ That is, while society remained partisan,⁴⁷ the elite betrayed these sentiments and colluded. Cárdenas García writes: “It is an obvious fact that Liberals and Conservatives ... have ended up growing closer together until their ideological boundaries are now meshed.”⁴⁸ The power-sharing institutions also conferred to the elite cognitive short-cuts and standard operating procedures, creating behavioral patterns in favor of peace.⁴⁹ Once the gap between the former adversaries narrowed, the two parties began to act as a unified state with singular statehood goals such as a desire for a Weberian monopoly over the means of violence and an aspiration to extend state presence to its borders. Regions kept autonomous under mid-tier strongmen came to violate this preference for singular, national sovereignty.

Finally, the ruling Liberal Party⁵⁰ became vulnerable to a process of “in-bidding.” The top command began to see its former adversary’s elite as its key to maintaining power; collusion replaced combat. Barry posits that, if the elite cooperate, “it is always open to some rival to denounce the terms as a sell-out and to seek to gather support

for repudiating them.”⁵¹ He predicts centrifugal outbidding by members of each side. However, rather than becoming vulnerable to outbidding by middlemen or the masses, the party leaders instead became subject to “in-bidding” by their former enemy’s elite who criticized their accommodation of their subordinates and insisted that inter-elite alliances required them to break their bargains with regional “warlords.” Power-sharing produced a wedge between the commanders’ personal and organizational interests, reordered the elite’s preferences, and elevated the former goals over the latter ones. In particular, Conservative opposition politicians began to oppose rehabilitation programs, claiming they were a payoff to former bandits.⁵² For example, when former mid-tier officer, Pedro Brincos, received a “rehabilitation” loan, the Conservative newspaper *El Colombiano* set off a nationwide scandal, denouncing the loan as “the macabre symbol of a tolerance mentality” while *La Patria* argued that the monies of the Rehabilitation Office, created for La Violencia’s victims and to help former combatants return to peaceful activities, were really “a crime fund.”⁵³ Another report described the Lleras administration’s efforts as “strongly identified, rightly or wrongly, with an appeasement policy toward the bandits.”⁵⁴ “Voices that opposed a ‘social’ strategy and that advocated fighting ‘violence with violence’ began to speak more openly, both in and out of Congress. Some repeatedly called for a purely military response.”⁵⁵ These Conservative preferences gained greater sway over the Liberal Party elite than those of their partisan mid-level officers and rank and file. Liberals were now in bed with Conservatives, and the Conservatives demanded an exclusive relationship.

Thus, as a result of power-sharing’s mechanisms of credible commitments, socialization, and “in-bidding,” the unity government changed course and began to engage in military actions against the ex-guerrilla fiefdoms aimed at undermining the mid-ranking guerrillas’ local power and autonomy: state-building through force rather than through alliances of non-interference. For example, in May 1964, the army sent thousands of troops into the independent republic of Marquetalia.⁵⁶ It also ceased the selective incentives, shutting down the rehabilitation and civic action programs. Finally, in order to justify non-cooperation, specifically the military targeting its ex-subordinates, and to eliminate the non-material ties to these former mid-tier leaders, the bipartisan elite changed the language it used to refer to the guerrillas and reversed their political status.⁵⁷

The ex-combatants became labeled criminals and were denied the status, respect, and legitimacy they had enjoyed as “political guerrillas.”⁵⁸ Now, rather than thanking their soldiers for their service in the heinously bloody war, the politicians, who had benefited from La Violencia from the “safety of their urban offices,” instead called these soldiers “bandits.”⁵⁹ In a public letter, Eduardo Santos announced that the elite “had not authorized them ... now the guerrillas constitute an obstacle to the re-establishment of peace.”⁶⁰ The ex-fighters’ status was reversed; they transitioned from the pedestal of “party soldiers” to an unwarranted subordinate position of “socially incorrigible criminal[s].”⁶¹ This bred resentment, a powerful impetus for violence.⁶² A remarkable example is Pedro Brincos who had fought in the 1950s as a mid-ranking guerrilla, demobilized, and was then stigmatized as a *bandolero*

(bandit) in the 1960s. He became a champion of social revolution, helping remobilize the rebel movements. Language was a matter of political convenience with the term bandit signaling ex-guerrillas' relationships with their political party sponsors rather than their activities or intrinsic qualities. The bandit label signified the erosion of the elite's commitment to their former soldiers.

Thus, power-sharing brought a ceasefire between the elite. However, it was the simultaneous preservation of the bargains between this elite and their middle management, which brought an episode of peace. When this latter bargain subsequently broke down due to the commitment, socialization, and in-bidding mechanisms of power-sharing, which eroded incentives for politicians to take care of their mid-level officers, peace shattered.

Reneged upon, resentful, and facing military aggression by the unified state, the latent organizational capital of the previous war, if it had been preserved, reactivated.⁶³ The state attacked offensively and the middle managers responded defensively for "the maintenance of [their] local power bases."⁶⁴ Once rearmed, these groups became the leftist insurgencies of the 1960s. They "scrap[ped] [their] *self-defense* doctrine[s] and create[d] a more aggressive insurgency that would fight to install a Marxist regime."⁶⁵

Looking to contexts beyond Colombia, a similar logic seems to have been at play in post-WWII Italy where post-war violence exhibited significant temporal and spatial variation as it took nearly 15,000 lives. Moreover, the role of betrayed and resentful mid-tier commanders proved central to the resumption of conflict.⁶⁶ While focused on elite level processes, Atlas and Licklider show how peace agreements across Africa and the Middle East resolved certain conflicts while instigating new ones.⁶⁷ These cases provide support for betrayal, violent targeting, and bargains breaking down within organizations as a result of negotiated settlements. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the Lancaster House peace accord rendered Mugabe more concerned about placating his former white enemy than keeping his commitments to his own factions. As a result, he reneged on the ZAPU/ZIPRA.

It should be noted that the middle managers described above were not civil war "spoilers" by the logic of the existing literature. In Stedman's account, spoilers are elite players. They have a constant preference for war during the peace negotiations. They initiate violence to undermine the peace accord and do not return to war as they never cease to use violence.⁶⁸ They engage in "nonserious bargaining" and "commit to vague agreements for political purposes" with no intention of actually enforcing the agreements.⁶⁹ In contrast, Colombia's middle managers supported and signed on to the peace accord and disarmed. They engaged in the costly behavior of demobilizing,⁷⁰ behavior inconsistent with nonserious negotiating or stalling for time. Their preferences changed only after the power-sharing elite had reneged. And, in their use of violence, they acted in self-defense rather than offensively.

It further merits discussing why, given the ultimate outcome of elite renegeing, the strategic battalion officers (and foot soldiers) ever demobilized. The simple answer is "they receiv[ed] the *order* to surrender their arms."⁷¹ Commanders rarely consult their subordinates before agreeing to disarm, and these mid-tier leaders were socialized

and indoctrinated into acting in pursuit of the top command's objectives and as part of a collective, not as individuals; their survival and promotion within the organization depended on it. Thus, the combatants entered the peace process out of submission, loyalty to, and fear of their commanders, and because the process afforded them a package of selective incentives: amnesty, regional power, economic transfers, and recognition of their status. The elite commanders' past behavior also did not lead the middle managers to expect disloyalty; instead, the managers' priors made the commanders' defection to their bitter enemies inconceivable. It was difficult to imagine power-sharing working. Moreover, these officers tended to remain convinced that if the process derailed, they could return to war.

Cross-Sectional Variation in War Recurrence: Organizational Capital

When renewed violence did break out, however, it did not emerge in all municipalities plagued by killings during the prior civil war; rather, it re-erupted in only 45 percent of them. The violence did not recur everywhere because mid-ranking commanders' access to durable, post-war organizational capacity was not guaranteed; rather, there existed variation in the sustainability and rates of erosion of demobilized rebel capital.⁷² The explanatory power of betrayal and resentment depends not only on "the feeling that status relations are unjust," but also that "something can be done about it."⁷³ The organizational capital of war provided that.

An exciting, new body of literature points to the centrality of organizational structure in accounting for variation in levels and types of violence against civilians, the extent of group fragmentation during war, and the duration and outcomes of civil conflict.⁷⁴ These theories, however, do not extend to the post-war period to account for variation in the preservation and reactivation of insurgent organizational capital after the armed factions have demobilized.

I propose that where the armed units of the previous war built upon a local social infrastructure, they tended to remobilize. Accordingly, in these regions, at this moment in time, we observe war recurrence.⁷⁵ Where instead the factions were non-local to the regions in which they operated, despite the elite's renegeing and attempts to return to fighting, they tended to prove unable to redeploy. As a result, peace was preserved.⁷⁶

A similar logic seems to hold in other places beyond Colombia's borders. In Sierra Leone, for example, the strongly local Kamajors survived organizationally, and the state respected their sovereignty in expanses of the country and permitted them to govern civilian affairs. The army reports: "We never go to this corner of the country and if we need to go there, we call on the Kamajors to mobilize their large numbers of combatants."⁷⁷ As a result of the maintenance of these alliances, there was no recurrence of war, and the Kamajors remained an intact organization without a manifest, active military structure. Similarly, the local and densely networked Rondas Campesinas in Peru preserved control over their communities and continued to constitute a latent threat to the government were it to encroach on these communities' prerogatives.⁷⁸

In the Philippines, the Huk rebels built upon a strong local infrastructure of peasant union organizations, which enabled them to remobilize when the government shifted from treating them as heroes for driving out the Japanese to seeing them as criminals and targeting them with repressive state-building.⁷⁹ In contrast, in the case of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), “even if they wanted to, it is extremely unlikely they could rally ex-combatants.”⁸⁰

Non-Local Guerrilla Units During La Violencia, some armed units deployed their fighters away from their hometowns while others focused their recruitment efforts in concentrated localities and stationed their fighters “in the same area where they recruited.”⁸¹ Variation in post-war organizational capacity, in part, resulted from these paired strategies of forming roving groups of guerrillas assigned to larger regions of operation and local armed bands, which protected local villages and farms.⁸² Additionally, massive displacement caused self-defense units to operate far from their towns of origins. Oftentimes, spontaneous self-defense forces formed as individuals fled partisan violence. Landowners also sponsored the transfer of certain armed units. For example, Liberal politicians and coffee growers in Quindío, especially in Calarcá, collected funds to finance the transfer of guerrilla commander Chispas from Southern Tolima. Similarly, Officer Efraín González, a native Santandereño, operated in far-off Quindío. Finally, armed groups operated away from their towns of origin in order to win over areas under the partisan enemy. For instance, so as to assure their allegiance, militias deployed to the eastern plains “relied heavily on Conservative party, Indian-mestizo recruits from Andean departments such as Boyacá and Nariño, a people quite different in cultural as well as political character from the mestizo-white [Liberal] people of the plains.”⁸³

These armed groups, which operated away from their home regions, though equally militarily strong and effective upon disarming, were constructed on “more improvised” recruit bases and lacked dense combatant networks.⁸⁴ They also tended towards greater dispersion of their fighters post-war as “two weeks after the surrender they returned to their places of origin.”⁸⁵ Thus, when these factions later attempted remobilization, their remnant units became subject to degradation. And, non-local to their communities, they proved easily captured.⁸⁶ This was the trajectory of the guerrilla armies of Valle, Caldas, and northern Tolima, which, when they sought to collectively redeploy, instead splintered into between 90 and 150 bandit gangs totaling over 2,000 men. These gangs, such as those of El Mosco, Zarpazo, La Gata, Chispas, Capitan Venganza, Desquite, and Sangrenegra eventually disappeared,⁸⁷ and peace consolidated. These regions thus escaped the recurrence of war.

Local Armed Units In contrast, locally-recruited groups’ collective capacity tended to endure. Into this category fall groups such as Eliseo Velásquez’s and Guadalupe Salcedo’s groups in the eastern plains, Juan de la Cruz Varela’s unit in Sumapaz, and Captain Juan de J. Franco’s units in western and southeastern Antioquia. These groups built upon strong community and familial ties and decades of organization,

having co-opted communist enclaves and labor mobilization.⁸⁸ For example, the Tequendama-Sumapaz-southern Tolima guerrilla corridor of the 1950s was a bastion of agrarian unions and peasant leagues in the 1920s and 30s. Similarly, San Vicente de Chucurí in Santander had a long history of mobilization dating back to communist protests in the 1920s. In addition to organizational histories, it was also very common to find strong family and community ties among the ranks of these local, armed groups.⁸⁹ The guerrillas in southern Tolima, for example, began under the command of Gerardo Loaiza, his five sons, his relative, Pedro Antonio Marín, and his father. The nuclei of other battalions consisted of the members of single families: the Borja brothers, Fonseca brothers, Bautista brothers in the eastern plains, and the Calvo Ocampo family in Córdoba. In one of my interviews, an ex-EPL described how there were three to four generations of rebels in these zones. He said: “When you ask combatants why they joined... they respond: ‘My five brothers, my uncles, my father, my grandmother, my great-grandfather ... were all in the guerrillas. It is a family tradition.’”⁹⁰

Because these fighters were local, they tended to stay concentrated in their communities after disarming. This geographic clustering of their networks preserved their organizational capacity. Additionally, it provided the local units strong social ties with the civilian population.⁹¹ They were admired “as the defender[s] of local political and social interests... Relatives and trusted friends scattered throughout [their] territor[ies] [thus] acted as [their] eyes and ears and provided refuge when needed.”⁹² These collective structures endured as strongmen and political entities.⁹³ Julio Guerra, for example, formed the Juntas Patrióticas,⁹⁴ “designed to be the government of the region.”⁹⁵ These Boards intervened in conflicts between farmers, resolved problems of boundaries, and encouraged the organization of the population. Meanwhile, in Agriari, Viotá, Tequendama, Sumapaz, El Pato, Guayabero, Rio Chiquito, 26 de Septiembre, and Marquetalia, the ex-mid-level officers formalized their “independent republics.”⁹⁶ These were essentially proto-states in which approximately 6,500 former guerrillas exercised influence over the social, political, and economic lives of the civilian population. Bogotá enjoyed little if any control.⁹⁷ Similarly, in the eastern plains, ex-commander Aljure set up a shadow governmental structure. In these communities, “the guerrillas were everything. They were the law, they imposed the rules regulating daily life, they resolved everything in these municipalities from marital problems to the cantina’s operating hours ... everything. They were the authority and were just accepted.”⁹⁸

As a result of this preserved organizational capital, when the power-sharing elite betrayed the mid-tier ex-guerrillas, those with locally recruited units were able to redeploy in self-defense. The local army led by mid-tier commander Rafael Rangel throughout La Violencia⁹⁹ remobilized in the 1960s as the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Magdalena Medio. “The majority of [its] combatants were familiarly linked with the liberal guerrilla protagonists [of the 1950s] and even with the Bolshevik movements of 1929,”¹⁰⁰ building on “the combative experience and tradition” of the local communities.¹⁰¹

Similarly, Julio Guerra was a well-known politician in the south of Córdoba who, like Rangel, raised a self-defense army in 1948, which remained active until 1958.

His combatants then “silenced their rifles and abandoned all military activity,” and Guerra became Chief of the Juan José Police.¹⁰² In 1967, when the power-sharing government changed course due to the mechanisms described above, he proclaimed to his ex-rank and file:

I inform you that we are living in a dark time ... in which the government is pursuing all of us. Therefore I call upon the old and new fighters to take up arms and to prepare ourselves to deal with the offensive being prepared.¹⁰³

He reactivated his local self-defense organization to form a rebel group, the People’s Liberation Army (EPL),¹⁰⁴ building on the “tradition of struggle and the remains of the liberal guerrilla structures.”¹⁰⁵ He, along with other prominent mid-tier leaders such as Pedro Vásquez Rendón and Libardo Mora Toro, retained the dense social ties, leadership, and respect needed to exercise pressure on their “reservoir” of demobilized soldiers who clustered in certain localities of Córdoba.¹⁰⁶

Finally, regions with local, ex-guerrilla organizations were also “breeding grounds for the birth of the FARC.”¹⁰⁷ After the party elite reneged on their bargain and launched “Operation Sovereignty” to establish singular rather than shared sovereignty over the independent republics, ex-guerrilla officer Manuel Marulanda remobilized his latent structure into a rebel organization, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

These narratives raise an additional question, why would non-local groups demobilize if they would later face difficulty remobilizing? We should expect selection into peace processes with only units equipped with a credible threat of remilitarization entering and those lacking this threat to continue fighting. This prediction is not supported empirically. Non-local factions demobilize because the erosion in their organizational capacity occurs only after decommissioning and is not foreseen. As I show in my other writing, these groups do not perceive their eroding organizational capital because military capacity is only evident when units are engaged in fighting. When demobilized, predicting this capacity is difficult and depends on social networks within the organizations transmitting accurate information. However, it is precisely these networks that decay in non-local units.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the capacity estimations are calculated under the conditions of high uncertainty and rapid change that characterize political transitions, rendering them even more prone to error. It follows that both local and non-local units demobilize.

In sum, I propose that violence was reborn in enclaves that had hosted local, strongly-networked guerrilla groups during La Violencia, and the previous civil war’s mid-tier protagonists were cast again in leading roles in the new era of rebellion.¹⁰⁹

Data on the incidence of organized violence in locations that experienced past conflict suggest the plausibility of this claim. The data consist of 4,109 violent events involving rebels derived from daily news reports from the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*.¹¹⁰ While rosters of all Violencia-era combatants’ towns of origins and locations of fighting are not available, on the basis of the qualitative material, it is

possible to construct binary characterizations of regions subjected to locally rooted organizations during La Violencia.¹¹¹ When we compare regions with and without local factions during the prior conflict, we observe differential rates of re-incited violence in the post-war period. Of the localities hosting local organizations, 71 percent experienced renewed rebel violence compared to 39 percent of regions not subjected to local armed mobilization during La Violencia. The odds of rebels reinitiating violence are nearly four times greater in places that witnessed local armed units during the past civil war.

Although the proposed framework is consistent with the empirical reality, there are other potential confounding explanations dominant in the Colombian narrative, namely, cycles of vengeance, political exclusion, and economic grievances, which merit exploration.

Cycles of Retribution A first alternative mechanism linking past and future violence focuses on the way in which the prior war was fought and centers on emotional processes, namely anger and revenge. According to this scholarship, we should expect violence to resume where past war was especially intense and brutal, and thus animosity and the need for retribution are heightened.¹¹² Victims of violence usually experience the emotion of anger, which distorts their cognitive processes, alters their preferences, and renders them obsessed with vengeance.¹¹³ If the state does not punish perpetrators on behalf of the victims, vengeance-driven individuals may take matters into their own hands.¹¹⁴ Studies of transitional justice offer credence to these claims, positing that wars cement identities and engender vicious cycles of recurrent killings.¹¹⁵

All violence and seven major wars between Colombia's independence and 1958 occurred along the lines of the "hereditary [partisan] hatreds"¹¹⁶ between Liberals and Conservatives.¹¹⁷ Political parties in Colombia resembled ethnic groups; party allegiance was inherited and party carnets, first issued in the 1920s, were like ethnic passports.¹¹⁸ Dix describes Liberals and Conservatives as "two races which live side by side and hate each other eternally."¹¹⁹

If revenge were the dominant mechanism we should witness violence returning on the scale of and along the same partisan patterns as La Violencia. Specifically, more polarized communities prior to La Violencia, those that experienced the greatest partisan homogenization, displacement, and massacre during the war, should have proven more likely to experience recurrent strife than localities less violently and brutally targeted during La Violencia.¹²⁰ This pattern does not appear to hold when examining the polarization of voting patterns prior to La Violencia in 1946. 41 percent of polarized communities experienced renewed violence compared to 44 percent of non-polarized communities.¹²¹ However, past violence duration does appear correlated with violence resumption.¹²² 56 percent of communities that experienced longer than average periods of past war were plagued by recurring conflict compared to 35 percent of those that had endured a below average episode of prior violence.

While the quantitative evidence is mixed, the qualitative empirics cast doubt on the vengeance mechanism. First, the National Front reconciliation process between

the former Liberal and Conservative enemies was extremely successful. The Front brought together the parties and mitigated levels of anger. Pizarro Leongómez writes: “[the National Front] deactivated the tradition of ‘hereditary hatreds:’ the sectarian culture, which had nourished the two traditional parties through the passionate mobilization of their sympathizers. Civil wars would now be a thing of the past.”¹²³

More importantly, the subsequent violence in Colombia did not occur along Liberal-Conservative partisan lines as predicted by the revenge mechanism but along new cleavages: the guerrillas (in representation of “the masses”) against the elite. The disparate guerrilla forces now no longer fought each other; rather, belligerent actions were targeted at the unified National Front state as violence became vertical (revolutionary) rather than horizontal (partisan).

War Onset Grievances A second alternative explanation argues that political violence recurs when and where fighters are motivated by reasons similar to those that incited war in the first place: acute economic and political grievances. This logic has a long tradition in the “structural causes” of civil war scholarship¹²⁴ and a more recent variant in Barbara Walter’s work. Walter writes: “Civil wars will have little chance to get off the ground unless individual farmers, shopkeepers, and potential workers choose to enlist in the rebel armies that are necessary to pursue a war.”¹²⁵ Enlistment and thus renewed war, she argues, are likely to be attractive only when two conditions hold. The first is a situation of individual hardship or severe dissatisfaction with one’s current situation. Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom and Quinn, Mason, and Gurses make a similar argument, predicting that war will recur in areas of poverty where the opportunity costs to rebel participation are low.¹²⁶

The qualitative account of the rise of Colombia’s rebel movements, also propagated by the rebels themselves, assumes a similar narrative focused on the role of inequitable land tenure patterns, absence of land reform, and rural poverty in motivating armed mobilization.¹²⁷ A piece by Albertus and Kaplan on the impact of partial land reform on Colombian violence from 1988–2000, once the rebellions were underway for several decades, further suggests the potential role played by economic grievances in inciting violence.¹²⁸

However, in contrast to these accounts, the 1964–1984 data suggest that the Colombian rebel organizations were less likely to reemerge in areas of high poverty, characterized by large populations with unsatisfied basic needs, and in those offering low opportunity costs, as captured by per capita income levels; they were more likely to reinitiate violence in regions of more robust past land reform, measured as the total land concessions per capita, 1827–1931.¹²⁹

The second condition of war recurrence posited by Walter is political exclusion and “the absence of any nonviolent means for change.”¹³⁰ According to this logic, we should anticipate regions populated with citizens excluded from the political arena to be more likely to mobilize rebellion.

The chronicle of Colombia’s political left makes this argument, positing that the National Front’s bipartisanship generated a “feeling of exclusion,” which “cast a whole

generation of young radicals into the ranks of the emerging...guerrilla movement.”¹³¹ Otis writes: “By shutting out all other political organizations for the next two decades, the National Front created a constitutional straitjacket... Frustrated activists trudged into the mountains to join ... guerrilla armies.”¹³² However, the political exclusion thesis suffers several empirical inconsistencies.¹³³ First, during this period, the left could participate in the electoral process by running on the Liberal and Conservative Party tickets; exclusion was incomplete. Pizarro Leongómez observes: “Many militants of the radical left and even of the Communist Party were able to join Congress wrapped in the flags of the Liberal Party.”¹³⁴ There were, moreover, successful third parties such as the Liberal Revolutionary Movement (MRL) and the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO). Second, when the system did open up more fully with the conclusion of the National Front, rebel enlistment did not diminish. Third, the Communist Party wavered and even, at times, denied support to the armed movement and instead threw in its lot with the establishment. Accordingly, the “*perception of closure*” of the National Front acted more as the rebels’ justification for armed opposition than as a viable explanation for war recurrence.¹³⁵

This set of findings related to retaliation and economic and political grievances goes against the dominant Colombian account, which locates the causes of the 1960s guerrilla movements in desires for vengeance, land reform, poverty alleviation, and political inclusion. This is not to say that these grievances did not play centrally in the subsequent ideology and *raison d’être* of the rebels once they were organized or in the multiple motivations of newly recruited individuals in a period of leftist mobilization across Latin America. However, the empirics cast doubt on these grievances’ ability to account for the breakdown of peace in Colombia following La Violencia’s negotiated settlement.

Conclusion

This article’s analyses of the dark side of power-sharing and varying organizational residue of past conflict provide new insights into why wars recur in some geographic places and not in others and at some moments in time and not others.

According to the model, absent formal assurances of mid-ranking officers’ prerogatives over the full course of the transition, we should expect violence to resume at the moment when elite power-sharing has its desired effects: when commitments, socialization, and in-bidding take hold, causing the elite to renege. We should further expect the remobilization only of local units under mid-tier leadership while non-local armed groups should prove likely to dissolve.

Although there are obviously limits to what can be learned from a single case, the implications of this research may potentially be applicable to contexts beyond Colombia where strong elite settlements were successfully brokered and the armed factions were territorial in nature. To locate the framework’s potential applicability, it is worth exploring if the Colombian case diverges significantly from the trends in

war recurrence. First, the above analysis presumes a several-year time frame for conflict to recur in order to allow power-sharing to generate a sense of security and incentivize elites to dismantle their partisan organizations. In Walter's dataset, the median duration of peace before war recurrence in conflicts that occurred between 1945 and 1996 was fourteen years.¹³⁶ Thus, the Colombian case does not appear an outlier in the time lapsed between wars. Second, in the case under examination, conflict resumed not between the former Liberal and Conservative antagonists but between former middle managers and the unified state. Of the war recurrences in Walter's database, 36 percent were fought along entirely new battle lines, while 64 percent were fought by the same combatants for the same goals as the original war. Colombia is a mixed case as it involved the same combatants with new goals. However, Colombia once again does not appear to diverge significantly from the trend line. Future empirical research could probe the applicability of this framework to other contexts of violence recurrence around the world.

The article's findings may be important from a public policy perspective as well. The logic suggests that dismantling former armed organizations may have unanticipated, negative side effects. Demobilization expert Joanna Spear contends that "peace requires breaking the command and control structures operating over rebel fighters."¹³⁷ The international community's ideology of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration views all intact structures and sustained command and control arrangements as threats to peace.¹³⁸ While certainly plausible, this article suggests that divorcing the leadership from their structures and breaking apart the command chain may also prove detrimental to peace. Instead, concurrent with the launching of power-sharing institutions, peace accords should generate and formalize guarantees of intra-factional alliances to deter commanders from renegeing on their subordinates. One may argue that this would enhance the power of "spoilers" to the unfolding peace process. While singular sovereignty and the state's monopoly over the nation's territory and use of legitimate violence are obviously preferred, this is rarely a feasible option at the conclusion of violent intrastate strife. The states' institutions are usually crippled, and territory and power often rest with formerly armed regional actors. I am not advocating weakening the state further by surrendering regional power and autonomy; rather, this fragmented authority already exists as the state of affairs. Where the state is too weak to take back these territories—the case with most negotiated settlements, otherwise the war would have ended in military victory—, recognizing and respecting the status quo of shared sovereignty in the short to medium term is the next best alternative while the state bolsters itself. This state strategy should avert a return to violence by socially-embedded, mid-ranking commanders linked to reservoirs of rank and file recruits. Over time, these localized proto-governments may be co-opted and brought into the unitary state's legal framework. The exact process by which this happens requires further analysis, and theory is needed on when these bargains of non-interference generate long-term state-building and when they instead freeze a status-quo of incomplete states.

Finally and critically, policy needs to move away from an elite-focused approach and instead assume an organizationally disaggregated framework, which centers

attention on the mid-ranking commanders: those with the capacity to renew violence or consolidate peace.

NOTES

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40. Sánchez and Meertens, 56.
41. Maullin, 1968, 7.
42. Hobsbawm, 254.
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61. Sánchez and Meertens, 52.
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96. Peñate, interview.
97. Rempe. Francisco Gutiérrez, interview by author, Bogotá, July 2006. See also Arturo Alape, *Las Vidas de Pedro Antonio Marín, Manuel Marulanda Vélez Trofijo* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2004).
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