



**Return to legality or recidivism of excombatants
in Colombia:**
Dimension of the phenomenon and risk factors

Fundación **Ideas para la paz**

Return to legality or recidivism of excombatants in Colombia:

Dimension of the phenomenon and risk factors

Excutive Summary

With the auspice of:
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden



And the support of:
Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia (MAPP-OEA)



Bogotá, June, 2014
Serie Informes No. 22

RESEARCH TEAM

- Coordinator: María Victoria Llorente, Executive Director, Fundación Ideas para la Paz
- Lead Researcher: Sarah Zukerman Daly, Assistant Professor at the University of Notre Dame
- International Researchers:
 - Laura Paler, Assistant Professor and the University of Pittsburgh
 - Cyrus Samii, Assistant Professor at New York University
- Fundación Ideas para la Paz Research Team:
 - Juan Carlos Palou and Sergio Guarín León, Coordinators Peace building and Post-conflict Area
 - Carolina Serrano, Researcher Peace building and Post-conflict Area
 - Juan Diego Duque, Research Assistant Peace building and Post-conflict Area
- Surveys: Sistemas Especializados de Información (SEI).

This study was carried out with the cooperation of the Organization of American States' Support Mission to the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP-OEA for its acronym in Spanish), that contributed with in-depth discussions regarding the methodology applied and the end results, as well as the generous financial support of the Kingdom of Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The results, views and recommendations are an exclusive responsibility of Fundación Ideas para la Paz and the Research Team and thus, do not compromise either MAPP-OEA or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Sweden.

Contents

**Return to legality or recidivism of
excombatants in Colombia:**
Dimension of the phenomenon and risk
factors

5	Acknowledgements
5	1. Introduction
6	2. Methodology
6	3. Measuring Recidivism
8	4. Explaining Recidivism
10	5. Public Policy Recommendations
10	5.1. Recommendations for the reintegration process
11	5.2. General recommendations

Acknowledgements*

We would like to thank the ex-combatants that voluntarily chose to participate and answer our survey, main instruments of this study. Likewise, we thank all State institutions that supported this study by opening doors to our researchers and providing valuable information. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR for its acronym in Spanish) whose public servants were always willing to cooperate with us in contacting and getting access to the demobilized population, and providing key information. Also, we would like to thank them for participating with their knowledge and experience in the discussions on the findings of this study.

We are very grateful for the invaluable contribution made by the MAPP/OEA that supported this study since the beginning with the methodological design, during the field work and the final discussions on the results.

Additionally, we would like to stand out and thank the work done by the survey firm, Sistemas Especializados de Información (SEI), which contributed not only with the design of the survey but also carried out an impeccable application of the surveys nationwide. Finally, we are especially grateful for the support provided by the Kingdom of Sweden and in particular to their Embassy in Colombia, which donated the resources needed for the development of this study.

1. Introduction

One of the most serious challenges that societies have experienced regarding DDR processes (demobilization, disarmament and reintegration) is that of ex-combatants reengaging in violence and entering criminal structures. In the Colombian case, this phenomenon, which has not only resulted in security problems at a regional level but has also generated debates regarding the government's reintegration program, is not well understood due to the lack of information and knowledge on the subject.

Although official statistics and data provide an initial effort towards understanding the dynamics of the demobilized population, they are insufficient to fully explain the complexity of recidivism. On the one hand, it is essential to recognize that the size of the demobilized population that has returned to illegality remains uncertain (beyond official records) to date. On the other hand, it is important to highlight the fact that little information is available regarding the motivations that cause and explain recidivism among ex-combatants.

Consequently, the question of why some ex-combatants return to illegal activities while others manage to reintegrate successfully into civilian life is the starting point of this study, which presents an initial attempt to achieve a more in-depth understanding of the factors and risks associated with recidivism and the size and geographic distribution of the recidivist population of ex-combatants in Colombia.

The next sections present a brief summary of the methodology applied as well as the main results of this research, and public policy recommendations regarding the reintegration process.

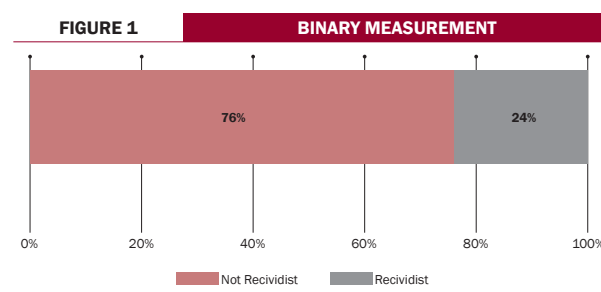
* This translation was made by FIP

2. Methodology

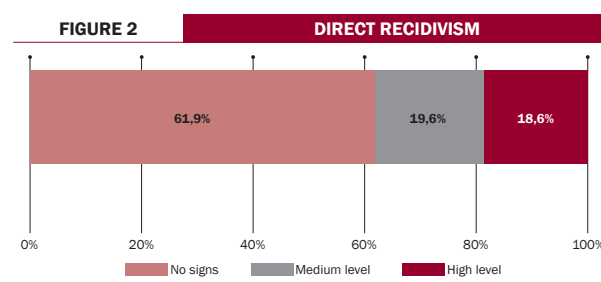
In order to achieve the objectives of this study, a survey was conducted on a random sample of 1,158 demobilized individuals, a representative sample of the whole demobilized population in Colombia. The sample included demobilized participants in the Colombian reintegration program and demobilized persons in prison. Various innovative techniques were used to obtain reliable and robust information. Among these methods we included a self-administered survey in which the demobilized individuals answered potentially incriminating questions, but without the interviewer knowing the answers directly, all for the purpose of guaranteeing the respondents' trust and anonymity. In addition, hypothetical questions, list experiments and questions regarding networks which inquire indirectly into recidivist behaviors were all included in the study. These constitute the most recent innovations in methodologies for studying sensitive behavior.

3. Measuring Recidivism

This study measures recidivism in different ways, taking into account both data from the survey and official statistics. The first measurement is the binary measurement, which is comparable to the official data. In this sense, the study was able to confirm that 76% of the demobilized population is not recidivist, while 24% has engaged in recidivism.



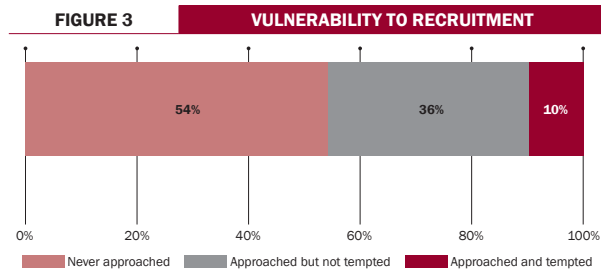
In order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within the framework of this study, direct and indirect measures of recidivism were created in order to present more detailed results. The first index was that of direct recidivism, which relies on information on whether the respondent admits to recidivist behavior and Fiscalía information on whether s/he has been charged or convicted of a crime¹. According to this index, 61.8% of the demobilized population shows no signs of recidivism on any of our direct measures. 19.6% show medium levels of recidivism which means that they have positive values for some components of the index, and 18.6% shows high levels of recidivism, meaning they are answering in the affirmative for many of our recidivism measures.



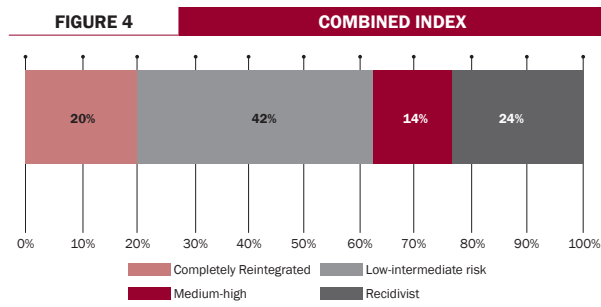
The second index is that of proclivity to recidivism (first indirect measurement), which seeks to determine how much sympathy the demobilized population has towards recidivist behaviors. According to this measurement, 38%

¹ This index ranges from zero to ten with an average index score of 0.83. It is important to highlight that these are natural break points in the data.

appear to operate completely within legality and 47% of the 61.8% in the direct measurement sympathize with recidivist behaviors. Finally, a third index was created, that of vulnerability to recruitment, which seeks to identify whether the ex-combatants have been approached by criminals to join these groups (recruitment) and if they have been tempted to accept such offers. According to this index, 54% of the demobilized population has not been approached, 36% has been approached by criminal groups, and 10% has been approached and tempted to accept the offer.



Summarizing the results, a combined index was created which takes into account all three measurements described above. According to this index, 20% of the ex-combatant population in Colombia is completely reintegrated into civil society (no positive value in any of the three measurements), 42% is at a low-intermediate risk (positive value either in the proclivity to recidivism and/or vulnerability to recruitment measurements), 14% has a medium-high risk (positive values in the direct measurement but not in the binary one) and 24% is recidivist (positive values in the direct and binary measurements).



Regarding the regional distribution of recidivist ex-combatants within the country, the analysis suggests that although there are regional variations in the results of each of the recidivism measurements (direct, proclivity, and vulnerability to recruitment), that variation is not caused by idiosyncratic factors in the municipality (non-observable or non-measurable variables inherent to the municipality that do not change over time), but rather by the concentration of

individual factors and the type of relationships ex-combatants have, which vary from region to region. In this sense, it can be said that the probability of recidivism in certain regions increases when risk factors converge, risk factors that depend mainly on the ex-combatant's individual reintegration experience. Nevertheless, the study confirmed that ex-combatants who reintegrate in the places where they carried out their illegal activity are more likely to become recidivist than those who reintegrate elsewhere.

In conclusion, results vary according to the measurement and indicate a proportion of recidivist ex-combatants, a proportion of ex-combatants that have reintegrated successfully into civilian life and another group of ex-combatants that are potentially vulnerable to recidivism or recruitment, or vulnerable to falling into the gray zone of non-recidivism. Peace and reintegration processes in Colombia are more successful than what critics suggest, but a lot of work still remains to be done on this. Understanding the risk factors associated with reintegration or successful reintegration is the best way to determine the means to prevent potential recidivists from becoming confirmed recidivists.

4. Explaining Recidivism

The second part of the study focuses on the analysis of risk factors associated with recidivism and successful reintegration. The results prove that factors related to the reintegration experience are generally the most precise predictors of direct recidivism, more so than factors related to experience prior to joining illegal groups or those related to length of time inside the groups, which gives special importance to the mission and the work of the ACR.

Nevertheless, the study shows that educational level, monetary motivations, a steady job, a comfortable life or other material motives for joining, such as power, status, respect, vengeance, a taste for the military life, adventure and other psychological motivations, as well as bad family relationships, all play an important role in the different measurements of recidivism, especially in the vulnerability to recruitment index. Regarding experience in the illegal armed groups, the length of time in the group, along with its degree of internal discipline and combat experience are the main factors positively associated with vulnerability to recruitment. (See Table 1 and Table 2).

In addition to the correlations applied to the risk factors related to the period prior to reintegration, hypothetical interventions on risk factors related to the reintegration period were also done, to better understand the causal relation be-

tween said risk factors and the different measurements of recidivism. At first, the study determined relevant hypothetical interventions in terms of public policy. Then, the impact of those interventions was estimated by means of counterfactual scenarios (what the level of recidivism would be if X intervention were applied), and later compared to the levels of recidivism obtained with the surveys.

The analysis of the risk factors and the hypothetical interventions show that breaking ties with former combatants and commanders, reducing dissatisfaction with the reintegration program, reducing levels of insecurity (both real and perceived), reducing certain psychological traumas (mainly post-traumatic stress syndrome and depression), guaranteeing proximity to family, and guaranteeing high exposure to the reintegration program, are effective at significantly reducing the probability of direct recidivism, proclivity to recidivism and vulnerability to recruitment. It is important to emphasize that the interventions with the greatest impact are those which increase exposure to the program from less than three years to more than three years and break vertical and horizontal ties between combatants. These interventions significantly reduce the probability of both direct and indirect recidivism.

It is also important to point out that the study obtained and presents results that are quite surprising and unexpected, results related to factors and interventions such as

TABLE 1 RISK FACTORS POSITIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE MEASUREMENTS OF RECIDIVISM				
PERIOD	RISK/PROTECTION FACTOR	DIRECT RECIDIVISM	PROCLIVITY TO RECIDIVISM	VULNERABILITY TO RECIDIVISM
BEFORE	Increase level of education	Increase	Increase	NSS*
	Had a material motivation for joining the illegal armed group	NSS	Increase	NSS
	Had psychological motivations for joining the illegal armed group	NSS	Increase	Increase
	Had poor family relationships	NSS	NSS	Increase
	Was forced to join the illegal armed group	NSS	NSS	Increase
	Has ideological motivations for joining the illegal armed group	NSS	NSS	Increase
DURING	The more war experience/war exposure	Increase	Increase	Increase
	The more time in the illegal armed group	NSS	NSS	Increase
	The more discipline in the unit in the illegal armed group	NSS	NSS	Increase
AFTER	The closer the relationship with former commanders	Increase	NSS	Increase
	The better the community reintegration	Increase	Increase	NSS
	The closer the relationships with ex-combatants from the same group	Increase	Increase	Increase
	The more dissatisfaction with the reintegration program	Increase	NSS	NSS
	Better objective economic welfare	Increase	NSS	NSS
	Higher levels of real or perceived insecurity	NSS	NSS	Increase
	If the ex-combatant regrets demobilization	NSS	NSS	Increase
	Depression or PTSD	NSS	NSS	Increase

*NSS stands for Not Statistically Significantly

TABLE 2**RISK FACTORS NEGATIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE MEASUREMENTS OF RECIDIVISM**

PERIOD	RISK/PROTECTION FACTOR	DIRECT RECIDIVISM	PROCLIVITY TO RECIDIVISM	VULNERABILITY TO RECIDIVISM
During	Has a high rank in the illegal armed group	NSS	Decrease	NSS*
	The more cohesion in the unit in the illegal armed group	NSS	NSS	Decrease
After	The more exposure to the reintegration program	Decrease	Decrease	NSS

*NSS stands for Not Statistically Significantly

community reintegration, economic welfare and job training.² According to the data gathered, these factors and their subsequent intervention have positive impacts on different measurements of recidivism. The greater the degree of community reintegration, economic welfare and job training, the greater the probability of direct recidivism, proclivity to recidivism, and/or vulnerability to recruitment. These results, which defy general knowledge on the subject, underscore the importance of conducting further, more detailed analysis regarding those specific factors.

One of the most interesting pieces of information in this study is that which relates to the benefits of the reintegration program. The study shows that one of the most significant results is the importance of long periods of exposure to the program to reducing recidivism while the different reintegration benefits (job training, economic support and psychosocial attention) do not all impact successful reintegration separately. This result might suggest that the success of the reintegration program lies in its comprehensiveness.

On the other hand, in Table 3 below, we present the interventions that had some effect on one or various measurements of recidivism.

Finally, it is important to mention that this study denotes the importance that relations, networks and social capital have in the reintegration process of ex-combatants. The List Experiment methodology showed that recidivism occurs mainly as part of a group rather than individually. Also, according to this last method (Network Scale-Up) the regions with the highest levels of recidivist networks are, from lowest to highest: Santander, Antioquia, Bogotá, Córdoba, Meta, Norte de Santander y Sucre.

These results suggest that motives related to the ex-combatants' networks and ties frequently converge when it comes to understanding recidivism. Accordingly, one of the interventions with the greatest impact is that which breaks down the ex-combatant's social networks and ties with former comrades-in-arms and former commanders. In fact, the results obtained indicate that this rupture decreases direct recidivism. In general terms, it can be said that breaking down the ex-combatants networks is significant in preventing recidivism regarding all measurements of this phenomenon.

Thus, the evaluation demonstrates that it is crucial to promote and offer ex-combatants an environment of protective relationships and social capital.

TABLE 3**RESULTS OF THE HYPOTHETICAL INTERVENTIONS**

RANKING	INTERVENTIONS	DIRECT RECIDIVISM	PROCLIVITY TO RECIDIVISM	VULNERABILITY TO RECIDIVISM
1	Minimum 3 or more years in the program	Decrease	Decrease	NSS*
2	No networks with ex-combatants	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease
3	No networks with ex Commandants	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease
4	Constant contact with family	NSS	Decrease	
5	Integration with the government	NSS	NSS	Decrease
6	Has a Citizenship ID card	NSS	NSS	Decrease
7	Perception on security	NSS	NSS	Decrease
8	Low levels of depression	NSS	NSS	Decrease
9	Average Monthly Income (3'700,000)	NSS	Decrease	NSS
10	Received job training	Increase	NSS	NSS

*NSS stands for Not Statistically Significantly

² This is one of the benefits that the ACR offers to those who demobilize from the illegal armed groups.

5. Public Policy Recommendations

5.1. Recommendations for the reintegration process

- After reviewing the results of the risk-factor analysis, we recommend that the reintegration process include a profile analysis at the beginning of the process, when the ex-combatant first enters the program. This analysis might help to identify ex-combatants at risk and thus alert the ACR for closer follow-up. This profile analysis must include the following variables related to recidivism:
 - High exposure to direct combat
 - Having joined an illegal armed group (IAG) for material or psychological motives
 - Educational level
 - Levels of depression and posttraumatic stress syndrome
 - Length of time in the armed group
 - Level of discipline and cohesion in the group the ex-combatant belonged to.
- Based on the findings regarding networks, it is recommended that the program undertake a mapping and analysis of networks from two different perspectives: 1) an analysis of those social networks that contribute to the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life, and 2) an analysis of those social networks that may potentially reconnect them to illegality. With respect to the first type, it is vital to determine the participants' protective milieus and networks at the start of the process, so as to guarantee their reinforcement in developing the route to successful reintegration. With respect to the second, it is crucial to complement and/or overcome the focus that has traditionally been given to studying such networks - which has often turned participants into potential informants for the armed forces or the police - so that the information and analysis of ex-combatants' illegal networks can be placed at the service of the reintegration process, in order to avoid the risk factors that increase the possibility of recidivism.
- Taking into account the varied effect of program benefits, considered individually, on recidivism, we recommend the elaboration of an institutional strategy that will allow the ACR to: 1) identify the ex-combatant's will to participate in each of the program benefits (job training, education, etc.) and 2) understand the ex-combatant's perceptions regarding each of the benefits to transform his/her view of the benefits as mere requirements rather than viewing them with a sense of real will to successfully reintegrate.
- The study suggests that psychological factors have an important effect on recidivism. Nevertheless, psychosocial programming does not seem to have an impact on decreasing the probability of recidivism. Focusing directly on post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, and ex-combatants that joined an armed group due to psychological motivations and/or long exposure to violence, can help to improve psychological attention and thus decrease the probability of recidivism. Taking into account that to date there has been no rigorous diagnosis of the psychological situation of ex-combatants, we suggest that the ACR conduct a study to determine the size of the demobilized population with these psychological problems and their main characteristics in order to improve their care.
- Consequently, we recommend that the ACR strengthen and provide incentives as a transversal axis in their psychosocial workshops and their interventions during the process and that didactic strategies within the framework of promoting a "legal culture" be carried out. In this sense, it is essential to undertake activities that make it possible to identify the level of moral judgment of the people involved in the program and their modification throughout the program. Some of the measurements of recidivism created within the framework of this study can be of great help for the ACR to have a tool for follow-up on this particular subject.
- Although the ACR develops its endeavors in individual terms, it should promote a process wherein networks and dynamics replace the social capital of risk among the demobilized population for social capital that supports their process of reintegration. This strategy may counteract the networks that pull the demobilized individual back to a life outside the law.
- According to the analyses of reintegration that were carried out, the probability of recidivism decreases if the ex-combatants have strong family relationships. We therefore recommend that the reintegration program develop a strategy that will enable ex-combatants to rebuild former family relationships (as long as the family was not a motive for joining the armed group, e.g., family violence, family-related criminal networks), and/or to create new family ties for the purpose of strengthening a social and legal sense of belonging and thereby reducing the risk of recidivism.
- Just as is being done today, it is important to continue to guarantee long-term exposure to the program that includes - as the ACR has been doing for years - attention focused on accompanying and understanding the

individual motivations and perceptions of ex-combatants participating in the program. Given that the reintegration experiences are definitely an important factor regarding recidivism, it is crucial to ensure that participants are constant in their involvement in the program and to prevent them from participating only intermittently.

- The results obtained demonstrate that a high level of trust in the government reduces the probability of recidivism. We therefore recommend that the ACR embark on three courses of action that can help increase the ex-combatants' trust in the government.
 - The ACR should keep strengthening a dialogue with different government entities and institutions that takes into account the demobilized population as people that need to be treated and dealt with by the different institutions (joint responsibility) in order to achieve national reconciliation and the construction of a sustainable and lasting peace.
 - We suggest that the ACR, in coordination with other government institutions, carry out awareness campaigns and strategies for ex-combatants that clearly explain what the state is offering. All of this should be done within a framework that shows the entire ensemble of government institutions to the ex-combatants, and not just the ACR.
 - The study shows that ACR credibility is fundamental for the success of the reintegration process. It is thus important to maintain high levels of satisfaction regarding the offer of benefits and the accompaniment the ACR provides.
- The measurements used to evaluate security factors (one combined and the other binary) suggest that a higher level of security (real or perceived) decreases the probability of recidivism. In this sense, we recommend that the ACR, in coordination with other government institutions, provide guarantees for individual reintegration so that levels of perception of insecurity decrease. Additionally, we recommend that the ACR do preliminary consciousness-raising work with beneficiary communities to promote integration and protective environments and avoid community marginalization.

5.2. General recommendations

- Given the complexity involved in the study and understanding of recidivism, as well as the legal implications that may arise for ex-combatants if or when they accept any link to criminal activities, the national government should consider the possibility of establishing perma-

nent alliances with NGOs (national or international) for the purpose of promoting and supporting monitoring and follow-up on this phenomenon. All of this should be done taking into account the importance of maintaining a detailed analysis on this subject.

- The study confirmed that the reintegration program is quite effective for those who have demobilized individually, mainly guerrilla members who entered the program out of conviction and/or their own decision. Regarding recidivism, we therefore recommend that the ACR provide special attention for those who have demobilized collectively (mainly paramilitaries) and who, according to the results of the study, are more likely to relapse into a life of crime.
- Given the results obtained regarding job training, we recommend further research focused on the relation between this benefit and recidivism in order to identify the demobilized population's perceptions on the subject and how changes and improvements made over time have changed those perceptions and results. A similar exercise should also be done regarding the benefit of psychosocial attention, economic welfare and community reintegration.
- The ACR's successful experience in structuring an institutional offer to control recidivism risks and to consolidate a successful process of transition to civil life could be more widely transferred at an institutional level. Without a doubt, INPEC could benefit and improve its penitentiary policy based on this example.
- From the data obtained and the research carried out on the reintegration process, as well as taking particular account of the importance of trust in the government, in security and in providing clear and effective rules of the game, it is crucial to conceive reintegration as a government policy that needs to strengthen joint responsibility with other government institutions. In this sense, and given the ACR's real capacities, it seems naïve and irresponsible to hold this agency responsible for everything that is needed to achieve successful reintegration.

To finalize these recommendations and considering the historic moment in which this study is being written, we wish to point out some initial impressions regarding the challenges and factors that must be taken into account in any possible future DDR process with the FARC.

In the first place, this study, both in the context section and in the results section, shows that reintegration depends on very different historical and political conditions. In this sense it is plausible to affirm that each reintegration model

seeks an optimal solution regarding the challenges posed by the environment, the armed groups involved, the social expectations, the legal frameworks in force, and the political interpretation of demobilization. For these reasons, in any possible peace process with the FARC, it would be desirable to consider the experiences of previous processes and to design a roadmap that can take inspiration from those experiences and learn lessons from them, taking into account that the results of this study can only be generalized with respect to the demobilized population that is presently participating in the ACR reintegration program.

Nevertheless, we consider it desirable to maintain the current DDR approach as an alternative. At this point, it is important to point out that the individual approach applied by the ACR can become an integral element of a successful arrangement within the framework of a new DDR process. Furthermore, the maintenance of this offer may confirm the possibility of ex-combatants joining and becoming part of a dynamic construction of legality such as the one that the government has been providing.



Textos/Texts

FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA LA PAZ

Fotografías/Photographs

Revista Semana

Diagramación/Design and layout

David Rendón

Preprensa e impresión/Prepress and Printing

Zetta Comunicadores

ISSN: 1909-4310

Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP)

Calle 100 No. 8ª – 37 Torre A. Of. 305. Bogotá

Tel. (57-1) 218 3449

www.ideaspaz.org / e-mail: fip@ideaspaz.org

IMPRESO EN COLOMBIA/PRINTED IN COLOMBIA

La Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) es un centro de pensamiento creado en 1999 por un grupo de empresarios colombianos. Su misión es generar conocimiento de manera objetiva y proponer iniciativas que contribuyan a la superación del conflicto armado en Colombia y a la construcción de una paz sostenible, desde el respeto por los derechos humanos, la pluralidad y la preeminencia de lo público. La FIP, con independencia, se ha propuesto como tarea central contribuir de manera eficaz a la comprensión de todos los escenarios que surgen de los conflictos en Colombia, en particular desde sus dimensiones política, social y militar. Como centro de pensamiento mantiene la convicción de que el conflicto colombiano necesariamente concluirá con una negociación o una serie de negociaciones de paz que requerirán la debida preparación y asistencia técnica. Como parte de su razón de ser llama la atención sobre la importancia de preparar al país para escenarios de postconflicto.



FUNDACIÓN IDEAS PARA LA PAZ

Tel: (57-1) 218 3449

Calle 100 No. 8A-37, Torre A, Oficina 305

www.ideaspaz.org / e-mail: fip@ideaspaz.org