The Transnational Diffusion of Peace

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Introduction
Do historic peace agreements between insurgents and governments influence similar processes in other countries? The relevant literature on conflict resolution and peace agreements focuses primarily on formal peacebuilding and peacekeeping measures through international organizations and the importance of the characteristics of peace agreements. However, there is little understanding of the context of negotiations and how agreements are designed and drafted. I aim to address this gap in the literature by exploring the interactions of advisers from Northern Ireland in Colombia throughout Colombia’s peace negotiations. I argue that the Good Friday Agreement and Irish experience have significant links to the peace process in Colombia. This research can begin to bridge the gap between researchers of conflict resolution and practitioners of peace agreements. Additionally, this research aims to uncover different variables. These previously overlooked variables may increase the likelihood of success when a comprehensive exploration of micro-interactions is made.

Methodology
To assess this argument, I conducted a qualitative study that collected data from in-depth interviews with peace practitioners and experts involved in negotiations. I interviewed respondents over the phone in addition to conducting field work in Bogotá, Colombia.

The sample of respondents comprises negotiators and advisors advocating for the Colombian government and former negotiators and advisors from the Good Friday Agreement, who were present during the Colombian peace process. My sample is a diverse convenience sample that utilized snowball sampling to expand my network of potential respondents as I built my network throughout the population and identified important actors.1

To interpret and code the interviews, I adopted a strategy derived from Joel Aberbach and Bert Rockman’s 2002 article, “Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews.” In my study, I defined manifest items consistent with Aberbach and Rockman by coding it as formally answers to specific questions. However, I altered the meaning of latent items to better fit my study. I redefine latent items as latent interpretation to include both the respondent’s overall response in addition to my own interpretation of the complete dataset. I did this to capture answers to my questions that were less complete, but still relevant and valuable to my hypothesis and to

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provide my own analysis of connections the interviews had with one another. By framing my analysis this way, I show the formal and informal influences the Irish agreement had on the Colombian peace process.

**Formal Processes**

As shown in the broader academic literature, conflict resolution is particularly difficult in civil conflict because one group (almost always the insurgents) must completely give up their weapons to transition and reintegrate back into society. The Colombian and FARC negotiation parties both studied the peace process in Northern Ireland to establish their negotiations for demilitarization. This is because FARC in Colombia and the PIRA in Ireland both amassed large arsenals throughout decades of conflict and weaponry was spread throughout either country.

The Good Friday Agreement did not establish a detailed timetable to demilitarize weapons. The negotiation period was short, and ambiguity was agreed on to guarantee the violence would stop. The agreement states:

> Both Governments [the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom] will take all necessary steps to facilitate the decommissioning process to include bringing the relevant schemes into force by the end of June.

The Colombian agreements reads:

> The National Government and the FARC-EP have agreed to establish a logical order for implementation of BDCCH [Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities] and LA [Laying Down of Arms] activities. To that end, they will implement that which is established in the annexed timeline, which takes as reference events or dates prior to or after day D and hour H.

Jonathan Powell, the former chief negotiator in the Good Friday Agreement and personal adviser to President Santos, discussed how Colombia learned from the mistakes that were made in Good Friday Agreement, “If you leave the section on demilitarization vague, the process could go on forever.” Unlike in Northern Ireland, Colombia established clear missions and an agenda to demilitarize FARC, successfully disarming the group in only six months.

Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Rodrigo Mezu stated that throughout his work in the negotiation process, he and his team studied dozens of peace agreements across the world, particularly focusing on demilitarization strategies. In regard to Northern Ireland and the PIRA, he argued that FARC wanted to replicate how the PIRA demilitarized, as it took eight years for them to completely demilitarize. To better understand the negotiation strategies of FARC throughout the peace process, Mezu and others studied the Good Friday Agreement. In Northern Ireland, he stated that only a small number of people knew where the weapon caches were. From the Good Friday Agreement experience, the importance of setting an agenda and transparent de-


5 Interview with Jonathan Powell, March 8, 2019.

6 Interview with Rodrigo Mezu, March 13, 2019.
mobilization was reiterated to Colombian negotiators and advisers. This was key in the entire process as well as the preparation for the implementation phase, because every other part of the peace negotiations depended on rigorous demilitarization, according to Elena Ambrosio.

Although the section on demilitarization of the Good Friday Agreement was vague, it emphasized the importance of an independent verification body to oversee the decommissioning process. It states:

They note the progress made by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and the Governments in developing schemes which can represent a workable basis for achieving the decommissioning of illegally held arms in the possession of paramilitary groups. The Independent Commission will monitor, review and verify progress on decommissioning of illegal arms, and will report to both Governments at regular intervals.7

In the Colombian agreement, it states:

In all units, the international component leads the MVM [Monitoring and Verification Mechanisms] and is responsible for settling disputes, submitting recommendations and generating reports, in accordance with the guidelines given to it in order to guarantee and support the impartiality and transparency of the BDCCH and LA.8

Independent third parties are vital to overcome the credible commitment problem. Throughout the demilitarization process, insurgent groups fear that the government may not respect the negotiated political rights agreed on in a peace agreement after they lay down their weapons. Sergio Jaramillo, the Colombian Minister of Peace at the time, said the strongest technical influence from the Good Friday Agreement was the inclusion of independent bodies to monitor the demilitarization process. Both insurgent groups had weapon caches throughout their respective countries and the governments needed third party bodies to guarantee the weapons were collected and destroyed by monitoring and verifying the process. Without an independent third party, it would be unlikely that the demilitarization process would be implemented. Although it took many years, Northern Ireland serves as an example of both what to do and what not to do when demilitarizing an insurgent group.

Informal Processes

Overall the Good Friday Agreement provided an example that peace was possible. According to Monica McWilliams, a former negotiator for the Women’s Coalition in Northern Ireland, the Irish experience was a strong influence on the Havana negotiations because unlike many other peace processes around the world, the Good Friday Agreement had established a long-lasting peace.9 “Roughly half of the global peace agreements break down within two years. The Good Friday Agreement definitely provided a strong influence for Colombia.”10 The importance of the PIRA acting as an example of what is possible cannot be understated. Both McWilliams and Jaramillo, among others, emphasized the impact former PIRA members and the Irish demilitarization experience had on convincing FARC and the government that such a

7 Good Friday Agreement, 22.
8 Colombian Agreement, 61.
9 Interview with Monica McWilliams, February 26, 2019.
10 Interview with Monica McWilliams, February 26, 2019.
process was possible in Colombia.

Following the failure of the Good Friday Agreement to fully demilitarize paramilitary groups, the British and Irish governments had two notable subsequent agreements that amended the 1998 peace agreement. In 2003, the Agreement Between the British and Irish Governments established stronger protocols for monitoring and complying with the Good Friday Agreement. In 2006, the St. Andrews Agreement established a clear timetable for compliance with the agreement before political institutions were devolved in Northern Ireland as a result of failed demilitarization. The Good Friday Agreement was too vague and ambiguous to establish an effective way to demilitarize the PIRA. This allowed the PIRA to keep their weapons eight years after the initial agreement was passed. President Santos and his team of peacemakers valued the entire demilitarization process in Northern Ireland and sought to learn how the country was able to overcome obstacles and finally disarm the PIRA in 2006. The 2003 Agreement provided clear details on the demilitarization monitoring body comprised of a diverse selection of representatives.

Analyzing and understanding the mistakes throughout the early implementation stage of the Good Friday Agreement was important throughout the Colombian process. The 2003 Agreement provides a benchmark of the Irish peace process highlighting the lessons learned by the British and Irish governments throughout the early implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The 2003 agreement and 2006 St. Andrews Agreement provided physical documents indicating the shortcomings of the 1998 agreement and offered concrete examples to future peace processes. Captain Omar Cortes noted that the “FARC wanted to model demilitarization off of the PIRA. We looked towards historic processes while building our own [demilitarization] model.” The subsequent Irish agreements that amended the Good Friday Agreement allowed Colombia to learn from the shortcomings of the process.

Humberto de la Calle, the chief negotiator for the Colombian government, said that the lessons learned from the Irish peace process via Jonathan Powell had the most impact on the Colombian negotiations by helping set an agenda with FARC during the secret negotiation phase and establishing the rules of negotiation. Powell said that he and former Prime Minister Tony Blair had set up a secret backchannel in Northern Ireland almost identical to Santos’ in Colombia. During the secret talks, Powell worked with Santos on creating a framework agreement to bring to the negotiation table with FARC. “We focused on a framework agreement. This idea that we had in Northern Ireland where we negotiated the heads of agreement, which were the initial agreements that narrowed down what we were going to talk about.” In past negotiations with FARC, no work like this was done to prepare for the negotiation phase.

The peace achieved in Northern Ireland served as a constant reminder of what is possible for Colombia. Both conflicts are deeply rooted and intersected within their respective cultures and societies. Elena Ambrosio stated that an important lesson from Jonathan Powell and the Good Friday Agreement was “to give dignity to the counterparts. We needed an agreement that could be accepted by [both] of our constituencies.” The Colombian government analyzed the Good Friday Agreement specifically to understand FARC’s negotiating strategies and to use when developing their own tactics. FARC liked the Good Friday Agreement because a similar

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11 Interview with anonymous politician, March 15, 2019.
12 Interview with Elena Ambrosio, March 13, 2019.
13 Interview with Omar Cortes, March 14, 2019.
14 Interview with Humberto de la Calle, March 12, 2019.
ambiguous agreement in Colombia would give them the opportunity to interpret the accords to benefit their organization. A navy lieutenant discussed how FARC loved the Irish agreement and the government studied it to understand FARC's negotiation strategies.\textsuperscript{15}

**Conclusion**

This extensive and original qualitative research demonstrates the relationship and influence from the Good Friday Agreement on the Colombian peace process and subsequent agreement. There are both formal and informal influences that impacted the process in Colombia. The Irish experience of demilitarization and the use of third-party guarantors formally impacted the 2016 Colombian Agreement by teaching peace practitioners important lessons derived from the Good Friday Agreement and the eight-year implementation period until the PIRA decommissioned in 2008. To support this, I compare the formal peace agreements and show the progression of demilitarization from the Good Friday Agreement to the St. Andrews Agreement. Informally, the Irish peace process shaped the methodological approach to negotiations with FARC. Establishing a backchannel negotiation was critical for the success of the Colombian peace agreement and intense interactions with former combatants and government negotiators acted as a powerful indicator of what is possible through a peace process.

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with anonymous, February 1, 2019.