

“Sí” o “No”: Who Supports the Peace Process in Colombia?

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Guest post by [Nicolás Liendo](#) and [Jessica Maves Braithwaite](#).



An anti-FARC demonstration in Colombia, 2008. Photo via [AlCortés](#).

After more than fifty years of conflict and multiple failed efforts at negotiating peace, on August 24th the Colombian government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) rebels have reached an agreement to end their civil war. As historic as the accord is, myriad tasks remain before the terms can be implemented (see [this explainer](#) from the Washington Office on Latin America).

The next major step is a popular referendum scheduled for October 2nd, where Colombian voters have the chance to decide whether or not to approve the terms of the agreement with the FARC. In order for the peace process to proceed with a binding vote, at least 13 percent of eligible voters must turnout to polls and over 50 percent of them must vote “YES.” Recent polling shows [considerable variation](#) in public opinion regarding the agreement and its terms, leaving many to wonder what will happen next month and how best to go about campaigning for their desired outcome.

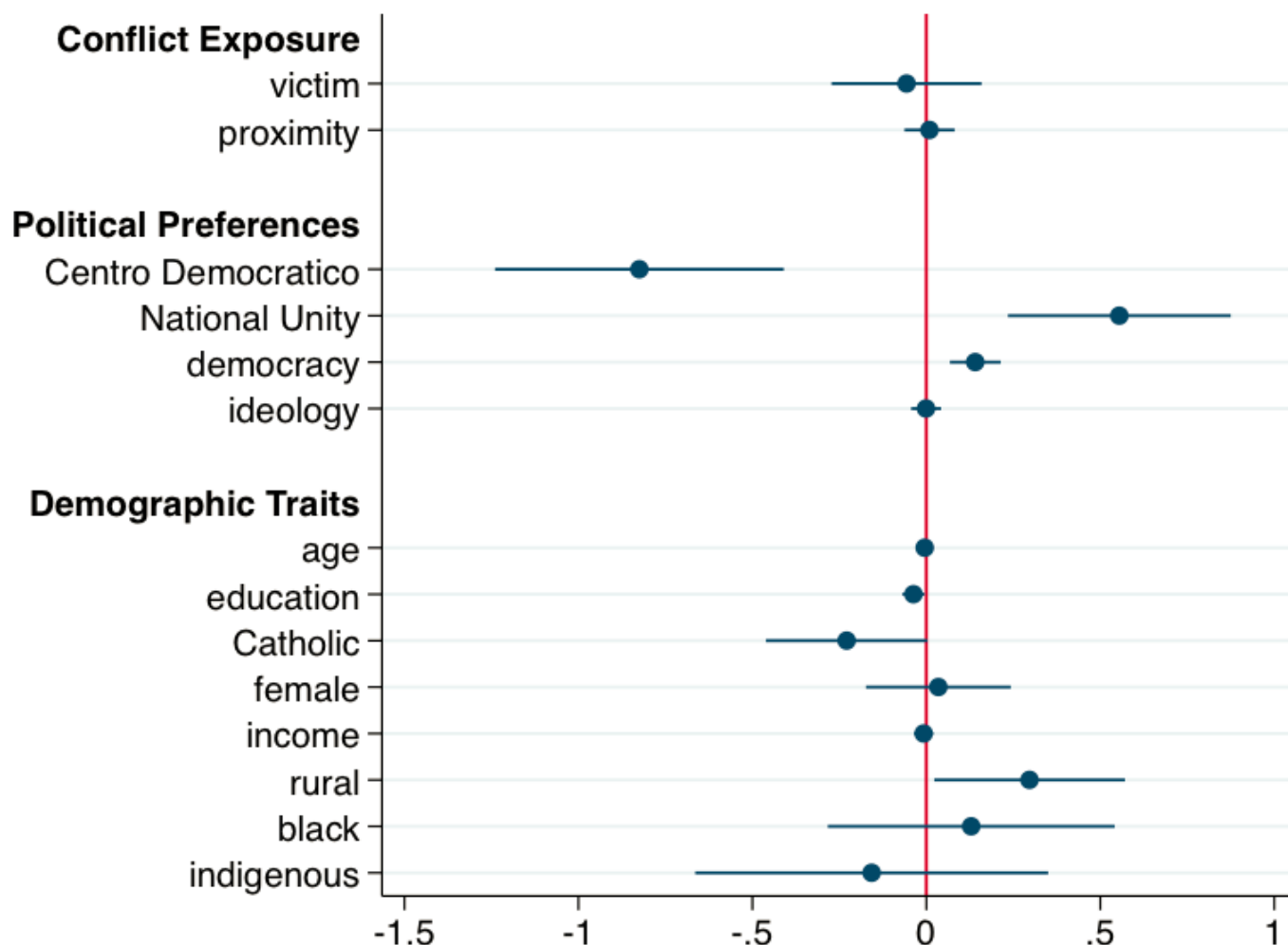
In spite of the incredible [human costs](#) associated with this conflict, a substantial number of Colombians are skeptical of the terms of this peace agreement and efforts to negotiate with the FARC in the first place. Recent posts on PV@G sketch some of these issues. [Findley](#), [Ponce de Leon](#), and [Denly](#) write about popular concerns over the potential for spoiling by elements within the FARC. [Matanock and Garbiras Díaz](#) discuss experimental survey

evidence indicating that people view policies less favorably when seen as efforts to make concessions to the former rebels, while research by [Carlin, McCoy, and Subotic](#) suggests similar dynamics with respect to political opportunities and amnesty for members of the FARC. We are engaged in [research](#) that explores whether individual-level traits, and the conflict-specific experiences of different segments of the Colombian population, influence peoples' likelihood of voting "YES" or "NO" next month. [Our working paper](#) provides insight to how the "YES" campaign might target its resources most effectively in order to sway voters who are (moderately) unconvinced about supporting the peace process.

We use survey data from the [2014 LAPOP Americas Barometer](#) survey to investigate how conflict exposure (direct victimization as well as general proximity to violence), political preferences, and various socioeconomic characteristics shape Colombian attitudes toward the peace process. We wonder: do characteristics such as an individual's educational and economic situation, their political and religious beliefs, ethnicity, age, and wartime experiences systematically influence one's support for the peace accord, and thus might inform us about which segments of the Colombian population are more (or less) likely to vote "YES" in the referendum?

We find that political preferences – namely, support for the far-right *Centro Democrático* (CD) party led by former president Álvaro Uribe – are by far the most robust and important predictors of attitudes towards the talks. Even when taking into account factors like age, education, income, and wartime experiences, CD supporters are far less likely to hold favorable views of the peace talks (and logically might be expected to be less likely to vote "YES" in the referendum), preferring instead to see a military solution to the conflict. Conversely, supporters of the ruling *Unidad Nacional* coalition are very supportive of the peace process.

Figure from Liendo and Braithwaite (2016) presenting the estimated effects of various individual characteristics on support for the peace process. Points to the left of the center line indicate less support while points to the right indicate more support.



Colombians seem to remain divided with respect to their support for the talks and the particular elements of the peace accord. In recent days, months, and years, public opinion has fluctuated greatly on this topic; however, over these last four years of peace talks the tendency has been that every time the FARC and the government announced an agreement on a topic, trust and support among the broader public increased.

It is possible that the brief five-week period between the announcement and the holding of the referendum vote will benefit the “YES” campaign, riding the tide of optimism surrounding signs of progress in the peace process. However, if the CD is able to mobilize a meaningful contingent of its supporters, the “NO” campaign may prevail. If the [results](#) from both stages of the 2014 Presidential Election (and the saliency of the civil war in Colombian politics generally, as detailed by [Weintraub, Vargas, and Flores](#)) is any indication, the margin of victory in this plebiscite could be incredibly close.

Our research suggests that the “YES” campaign would be particularly well served in its efforts to make terms of the accords (or at the very least the general prospect of peace) appealing from the perspective of a CD voter – at least more appealing than a return to civil war. However, many of those individuals may be difficult to sway given the hardening of political preferences over time. Focusing efforts and resources of the “YES” campaign to reach segments of the population that tend to be marginally more skeptical than optimistic of the Havana talks could also be particularly beneficial for those wanting to see the current peace process continue beyond the referendum. This would likely involve targeted contact with Catholics, individuals with higher levels of education, and voters in urban areas.

We stress that this referendum campaign, while critical for moving the peace process forward, is but one part of a much larger effort that will be necessary to ensure the complete termination of civil war in Colombia. [Phayal and Thyne](#) highlight a number of factors that are important for minimizing recidivism and increasing satisfaction amongst former rebels following participation in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs. More broadly, [Zech](#) discusses a number of cultural solutions to engage wider communities in fostering long-term solutions to social conflict in the region. Post-conflict recovery after decades of civil war in Colombia will necessarily be multi-faceted and slow-moving at times, but an essential task at this moment is mobilizing voters for the “YES” campaign.

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