

Reunited? Post-conflict attitudes toward former FARC members in Colombia

Mathieu Bourret Soto*[†]

Thibaut Plassot Sansans[†]

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Abstract

Understanding how societies reconcile with former combatants is essential to building lasting peace. Nearly a decade after the 2016 peace agreement, Colombia still struggles to reintegrate former FARC members. While much of the existing literature has focused on individual factors that shape attitudes toward former combatants, territorial determinants have often been overlooked. This paper examines the factors influencing Colombians' attitudes toward the reintegration of former FARC members from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) following the 2016 peace agreement. Using the *Programa Transformando Territorios* survey, this study analyzes how individual and territorial characteristics shape various attitudes toward former combatants. The results indicate that men, politically left-leaning individuals, religious respondents, those with higher socioeconomic status, and residents of larger urban cores in intermediate territories – compared to more rural areas – are more likely to express favorable attitudes. Victimization by paramilitary groups is also associated with more positive attitudes. In contrast, past victimization by the FARC shows no significant effect. Finally, implementing propensity score matching, living closer to ETCRs (Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation) is linked to more supportive attitudes toward former FARC. These results highlight the importance of territory-sensitive reconciliation policies and suggest that sustained investment in reintegration zones can foster social acceptance and contribute to long-term peace.

Keywords: Colombian Peace Process, ETCR, Post-Conflict Attitudes, Reintegration of FARC

JEL Codes: D74, H56, O18, P35, R12

*Corresponding author: email: mathieu.bourret@u-bordeaux.fr

[†]Bordeaux School of Economics, University of Bordeaux

1 Introduction

Armed conflicts remain one of the most pressing challenges to humankind and collective coexistence. In 2023, an estimated 468 million children—one out of every six globally—lived in conflict zones (Østby et al., 2023). In addition to their immediate humanitarian toll, conflicts exhibit a strong tendency toward recurrence, with over half of post-World War II conflicts that reemerged after finding an initial resolution (PRIO, 2017). A key determinant of long-term peace lies in the effectiveness of reconciliation processes, which mediate post-conflict social and economic integration, (Bar-Tal, 2000; Loyle and Appel, 2017). The failure to establish mechanisms that foster reconciliation can lead to protracted hostilities and instability, as evidenced in cases such as Israel-Palestine and Azerbaijan-Armenia (Falah, 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2022; Yavuz and Gunter, 2022). It is therefore essential to understand the factors that promote successful reconciliation. This study seeks to explore the determinants of these attitudes, using Colombia as a case study to investigate post-conflict reconciliation processes.

Colombia’s long-standing armed conflict offers a relevant setting to examine post-conflict reconciliation. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)¹ emerged in the 1960s in rural areas, drawing support from communities affected by land inequality and political exclusion. In the following decades, the proliferation of numerous armed actors exacerbated violence, leading to massive displacement and economic disruption (Medina Gallego, 2010). Under the presidency of Uribe (2002–2010), an intensified counterinsurgency strategy significantly weakened the FARC, paving the way for peace negotiations that culminated in the 2016 agreement under President Santos.

Despite substantial research on Colombia’s peace process, key gaps remain—particularly regarding the territorial dimensions of post-conflict attitudes. In this paper, we explore how territory, and specifically the proximity to Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCRs), shapes

¹FARC’s origins date back to the early 1950s (InSightCrime, 2023). The group officially adopted the name *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) in 1966, presenting itself as a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla movement advocating land reform and political inclusion. In the early 1980s, the group added the suffix -EP (for *Ejército del Pueblo*, people’s army) to underline its self-identification as a structured, autonomous insurgent force with military and political objectives going beyond traditional guerrilla warfare (Tawse-Smith, 2008). For simplicity’s sake, we will be using the term FARC in the remainder of the article.

public perceptions of former FARC combatants. ETCRs were created as transitional zones for demobilized fighters, combining economic reintegration and symbolic reconciliation. Yet their broader social impact has not been rigorously assessed. Drawing on a unique georeferenced survey conducted in 2018, this study contributes to the literature in two main ways. First, we identify the individual and territorial characteristics that predict indifference or support toward former combatants' reintegration. Second, we examine whether living near an ETCR is associated with more favorable attitudes, using propensity score matching to mitigate selection bias. By focusing on intermediate territories, regions that are among the most directly affected by the Colombian conflict, often overlooked in existing research (Fergusson et al., 2018) and excluded from traditional dichotomies between rural and urban areas, our findings highlight the spatial complexity of reconciliation processes.

2 Empirical and Historical Background

2.1 The Colombian Conflict and the 2016 Peace Agreement

Colombia's armed conflict, spanning more than five decades, has its roots in deep historical inequalities, weak state legitimacy, and the interplay between ideological insurgency and illicit economies. Its origins can be traced to the aftermath of *La Violencia*, a partisan civil war (1946–1958) that caused over 200,000 deaths and left lasting grievances over land distribution and political exclusion (Oquist, 1978). In the 1960s, left-wing guerrilla groups emerged—most notably the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), founded on Marxist-Leninist principles and advocating agrarian reform. Around the same time, the National Liberation Army (ELN), influenced by liberation theology and the Cuban revolution, was formed with relatively similar ideologies. However, while the FARC initially focused on rural guerrilla warfare and building local power bases, the ELN adopted a more doctrinaire approach with an explicit aim to seize national political power from the outset. Both groups gained support in peripheral rural areas where the state was largely absent.

From the 1980s onward, the conflict was transformed by the cocaine trade, which became a key source of guerrilla financing. By 2000, Colombia accounted for roughly 70% of global cocaine production (Mejia and Restrepo, 2013). In response, President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) launched the

Política de Seguridad Democrática, a U.S.-backed counterinsurgency campaign aimed at restoring state control. While successful in reducing kidnappings and regaining territory, it was also marred by human rights abuses, notably the “false positives” scandal where civilians were killed and falsely presented as guerrilla combatants (Pachón, 2009). During the same period, the right-wing paramilitary AUC formally demobilized under the “Justice and Peace” law (2003–2006), but many former combatants regrouped into criminal networks known as *Bacrim*. The process was widely criticized for its limited accountability and reparations². By 2012, with the FARC significantly weakened (due to the deaths or capture of key leaders), President Juan Manuel Santos initiated peace talks, first in Oslo, then in Havana, with support from Cuba, Norway, and Venezuela. These efforts led to the 2016 peace agreement, establishing provisions for transitional justice, rural reform, and political participation.

The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC marked one of the most comprehensive attempts to end an internal armed conflict in modern history. Finalized after four years of negotiations in Havana, it aimed not only at disarmament and demobilization but also at addressing the structural roots of violence and fostering long-term peace. Although initially rejected by plebiscite (50.21% “no”), a revised version was adopted incorporating opposition input. The accord rests on six pillars: (1) rural reform to reduce land inequality via redistribution, infrastructure, and service access; (2) political participation, including temporary congressional seats for the FARC’s successor party; (3) ending the conflict through a ceasefire, UN-supervised disarmament, and civilian reintegration; (4) addressing illicit drugs through crop substitution, rural development, and public health; (5) victims’ rights, including truth, justice, reparations, and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP); and (6) monitoring mechanisms involving national and international actors, notably the United Nations (Colombian’s Government and FARC, 2016). Figure 1 outlines the reintegration process available to former FARC members.

Despite international praise, implementation has faced major challenges—political resistance, security threats against former FARC members and social leaders, and delays in structural reforms.

²The lack of complete and transparent demobilisation of the former paramilitaries, who quickly formed Bacrim, fuelled persistent mistrust of the new peace processes (Stone, 2017)



Figure 1: ARN Reintegration Route

Note: Reintegration route part of the 2016 peace agreement. This is the road-map of a former FARC member after formally going through the reintegration process in Colombia. Source: ARN, last accessed 20/05/2025 at:

<https://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/en/reintegration/Pages/route.aspx>

Nonetheless, the agreement remains a cornerstone of Colombia’s peacebuilding efforts.

2.2 The Reintegration Framework: ETCRs

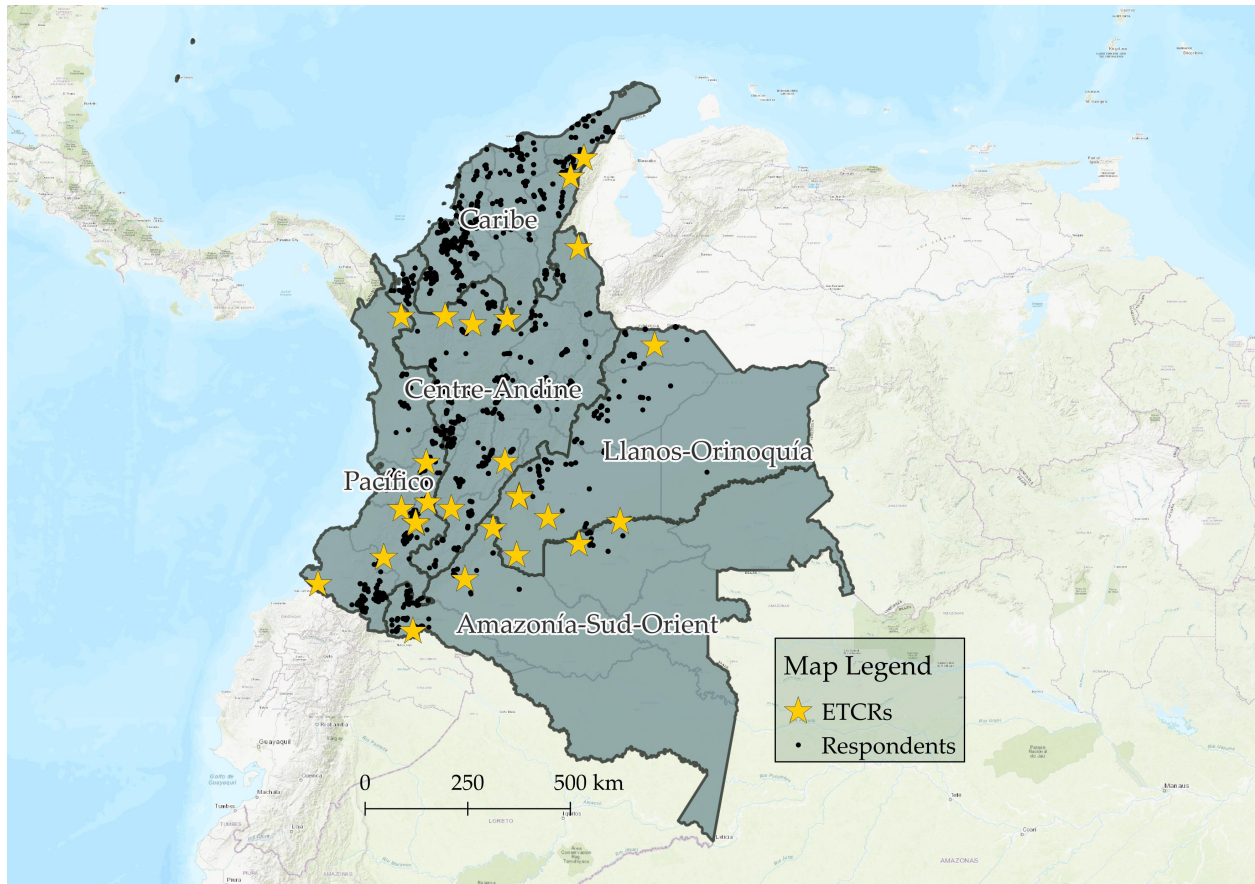
A central component of the 2016 peace agreement was the creation of 26 *Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación* (ETCRs), or Territorial Training and Reintegration Spaces. These zones were designed to support the transition of former FARC combatants into civilian life by providing vocational training, psychological assistance, economic opportunities, and healthcare. The United Nations played a key role in verifying disarmament procedures, which led to the demobilization of approximately 7,000 FARC members by 2017 (United Nations, 2017).

A defining feature of the ETCRs was their voluntary nature. Former combatants were encouraged—but not obligated—to remain in these spaces, reflecting a reintegration process grounded in personal agency and social inclusion.³ Despite this, a significant number chose to stay due to

³While the ETCRs were designed to encourage voluntary participation in long-term reintegration programs, the initial presence of FARC members in these areas was in fact mandatory for a period of around six months following the signing of the final agreement. From day D+1 to day D+180, these Transitional Local Zones for Normalization (ZVTN) functioned as structured spaces where former combatants were required to remain for weapons surrender and verification procedures supervised by the United Nations (Colombian’s Government and FARC, 2016). This mandatory stay underscored the state’s interest in ensuring orderly and verifiable disarmament before moving on to more flexible, community-based reintegration strategies. After this period (starting on the 15th of August, 2017), they were no longer legally required to remain and were free to leave the centers, marking the transition from a

the services provided. In 2019, over 3,000 former combatants were still residing in ETCRs, out of approximately 13,000 participating in the peace process (Semana, 2019).

Figure 2: Location of the ETCRs



Unlike isolated encampments, the ETCRs were conceived as community-integrated spaces promoting coexistence and reconciliation. As noted by the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN), they aimed to “contribute to coexistence, reconciliation, peace and stabilization of the territories” (ARN, 2020). Between 2017 and 2020, 397 territorial initiatives were implemented—such as road construction, agricultural cooperatives, and cultural associations—demonstrating a dual emphasis on economic reintegration and social cohesion (ARN, 2020). These efforts contributed to broader peacebuilding goals by fostering trust, reducing stigma, and supporting post-conflict

phase of controlled disarmament to a process of voluntary reintegration based on individual autonomy and support for social reintegration (WOLA, 2021).

stabilization.

The Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) provides a useful theoretical lens to understand how such proximity might influence attitudes. According to this framework, sustained contact between members of opposing groups—particularly under conditions of cooperation, equal status, and institutional support—can reduce prejudice and foster improved intergroup relations (Pettigrew, 1998). Empirical studies across diverse post-conflict settings tend to support this view. For instance, Mousa (2020) shows that interreligious football teams in post-ISIS Iraq improved trust and tolerance between communities, while Carrell et al. (2019) finds that contact with politically divergent peers among U.S. military recruits reduced partisan animosity. In addition, in the context of the post-1919–1922 Greco-Turkish conflict, Murard (2023) provide evidence that early investments in inclusion policies may play a significant role in facilitating refugees’ integration. While not all of these studies focus on post-conflict environments, they offer valuable insight into the conditions under which contact fosters reconciliation. In the Colombian context, we can reasonably assume that the ETCRs may have generated opportunities for this type of structured and repeated interaction, potentially contributing to more favorable attitudes toward former FARC members.

3 Literature Review and Analytical Framework

3.1 Reconciliation and Reintegration processes

A growing body of literature identifies several conditions conducive to sustaining long-term peace. First, implementing inclusive political institutions that ensure broad participation in governance and democratic stability are essential. Power-sharing arrangements in different domains have been shown to reduce the likelihood of conflict recurrence (Gurses and Mason, 2008; Hartzell and Hoddie, 2003). Second, improving living conditions and economic opportunities plays a central role in preventing renewed violence (Collier et al., 2008; Walter, 2004). Third, Enhanced interactions between previously divided communities can foster mutual understanding and trust (Al Ramiah and Hewstone, 2013; McKeown and Taylor, 2017,?). Fourth, international engagement such as UN peacekeeping operations can reduce conflict recurrence (Collier et al., 2008; Fiedler et al., 2020; Fortna, 2008), though it may also prolong conflicts or foster fragile agreements (Regan and

Aydin, 2006; Beardsley, 2011). Fifth, robust state capacity—particularly in terms of judicial institutions—is widely associated with durable peace (Hegre and Nygård, 2015; North et al., 2009). Sixth, transitional justice mechanisms—such as truth commissions, criminal trials, reparations, and institutional reforms—are linked to lower risks of renewed violence (Hamber et al., 2002; Loyle and Appel, 2017; Stedman et al., 2002). Finally, the effectiveness of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs depends on their focus: strengthening social capital enhances their success (Leff, 2008), while limiting efforts to economic reintegration may be insufficient or counterproductive (Sharif, 2018).

Successful reintegration of former combatants fosters sustainable peace (Knight and Ozerdem, 2004). Although direct empirical evidence is limited, literature highlights indirect mechanisms, particularly economic reintegration via employment, education, and financial support, reducing risks of rearmament or crime (Boothby et al., 2006; Gilligan et al., 2013; Grip et al., 2019; Kilroy, 2012, 2014). Also, social reintegration through community-based approaches fosters trust and acceptance between former combatants and civilians (Gilligan et al., 2013; Kaplan and Nussio, 2018; Kilroy, 2012, 2014). Trauma-informed psychological support addressing mental health, both among former combatants and affected civilians, also promotes successful reintegration and reconciliation (Boothby et al., 2006; Ertl et al., 2011). These various policies have a common goal: to prevent former combatants from remaining socially (and symbolically) separated from the rest of the population.

3.2 What drives the attitudes toward former combatants?

Attitudes are commonly defined as “a psychological tendency expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). In post-conflict settings, they reflect civilians’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dispositions toward former combatants. These attitudes range from acceptance and forgiveness (Bakke et al., 2009; Čehajić et al., 2008; Grossman et al., 2015) to mistrust or outright hostility (Meernik et al., 2023; Schmitt et al., 2021; Tellez, 2019; Dyrstad and Binningsbø, 2019; Kao and Revkin, 2023; Restrepo-Plaza and Fatas, 2022).

Understanding public attitudes is essential, as they shape the social environment in which former combatants reintegrate. Even well-designed programs may fail if communities resist engaging with former fighters, leading to stigma, exclusion, or renewed tensions. Identifying the drivers of these attitudes is thus key to effective post-conflict policy. Studies from diverse post-conflict societies emphasize the role of individual and social factors in shaping attitudes towards former combatants.

Victimization is a key but ambiguous individual-level determinant. While some victims are more forgiving when apologies or justice mechanisms are perceived as sincere (Allan et al., 2006), others show reduced willingness to reconcile when exposed to violence, especially without institutional support (Bakke et al., 2009). The perpetrator's identity also matters (Kreiman and Masullo, 2020; Lyall et al., 2013; Noor et al., 2008). In Colombia, Kreiman and Masullo (2020) show that municipal-level exposure to FARC violence correlates with support for the peace deal, whereas exposure to paramilitary violence predicts rejection. In contrast, Fergusson et al. (2018) find at the individual level that FARC victimization worsens attitudes, while paramilitary victimization improves them—highlighting the importance of scale and context. This divergence likely reflects differences in analytical scale: municipal-level correlations may capture collective dynamics, while individual-level data may reveal personal grievances and perceptions.

Territorial factors play a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward the peace process and reintegration. Several studies underline the positive association between rurality and support for peace (Kreiman and Masullo, 2020; Fergusson et al., 2022), in particular if they are in a conflict zone. (Álvarez Vanegas and Garzón Vergara, 2016) show a positive correlation between rurality and the vote for the “Sí,” while urban areas were more divided. Still, cities near recent violence hotspots—like Quibdó, Pasto, and Mocoa—tended to support the agreement. Regional variation also matters. At the municipal level, the support for the peace agreement was stronger in marginal regions—such as the Amazon, Pacific Coast, and Orinoquía—where state presence and market integration are limited but the impact of armed conflict was more severe. (Fergusson et al., 2022) note that positive attitudes towards reconciliation are more prevalent in the Caribbean region and among rural populations, despite the historical intensity of conflict.

Demographic characteristics also influence attitudes toward former combatants: older individuals are generally more forgiving (Cheng and Yim, 2008), religious respondents show greater willingness to reconcile (Čehajić et al., 2008; Davis et al., 2013; López López et al., 2018), and gender effects vary by context and perceived threat (Conejero et al., 2014; Čehajić et al., 2008). At the social level, positive intergroup contact (McKeown and Taylor, 2017; Moeschberger et al., 2005), perceived remorse (Allan et al., 2006; Godefroidt and Langer, 2023), and trust—both political and social (Casas-Casas et al., 2020; Dyrstad et al., 2021; Noor et al., 2008; Regalia et al., 2015)—are consistently linked to greater acceptance. While spatial context has been examined in post-conflict attitudes (Meernik et al., 2023; Tellez, 2019), territorial characteristics are often reduced to a rural–urban dichotomy, overlooking intermediate and peri-urban settings.

This study addresses literature gaps by analyzing georeferenced survey data from Colombia to explore how individual and territorial factors influence support toward the reintegration of former FARC members.

4 Data

The Survey

The *Programa Transformando Territorios* (PTT) survey was conducted in 2018 by the *Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural* (RIMISP) in Chile, Mexico and Colombia to understand the dynamics of intermediate territories. These areas are often overlooked in national-level studies, while they can offer crucial insights regarding national or local issues. One of the survey’s key strengths is its georeferenced data, as it records the precise latitude and longitude of each respondent’s location. The survey, implemented less than two years after the peace agreement, covers a broad range of socioeconomic and demographic variables, as well as an entire module on the demobilization of the FARC.

Attitudes toward former combatants

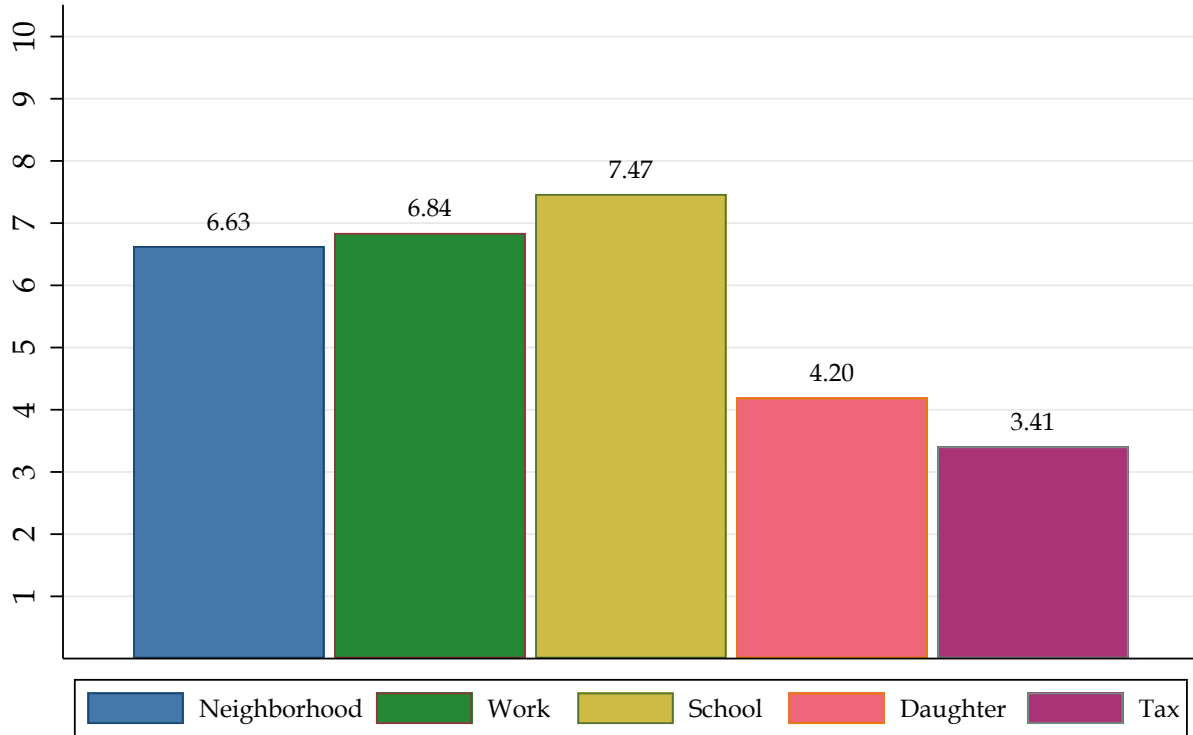
The set of variables assesses the extent to which respondents are willing to accept the reintegration of former FARC combatants into their daily lives, drawing directly from Rettberg (2014). This aspect of reconciliation is particularly significant, as it captures the process of strengthening trust between civilians and former FARC. To capture these attitudes, respondents were asked to rate their level of discomfort across five hypothetical scenarios, ranging from 1. ("it bothers me a lot") to 10. ("it does not bother me at all"):

- **Neighborhood** "A reintegrated ex-guerrilla fighter comes to live on the block where I live";
- **Work** "The place where I work hires a group of demobilized combatants";
- **School** "My children's school receives children of demobilized combatants for the same grade as my son";
- **Daughter** "My daughter becomes the girlfriend of a demobilized guerrilla fighter";
- **Tax** "I have to pay a tax to help demobilized guerrilla fighters".

By confronting respondents with these concrete situations, this set of questions aims to measure their readiness to coexist with and socially reintegrate former FARC. Figure 3 provides an overview of these five attitudes. Respondents were most bothered by the prospect of paying a tax ($M = 3.41, SD = 3.26$), whereas they were least bothered by their child attending school alongside the child of a former combatant ($M = 7.47, SD = 3.15$).

Figure 3: Attitudes toward former FARC members

Attitudes toward former FARC (mean) 1. Very bothered - 10. Not at all bothered



Covariates

Tables 1 and 2 present descriptive statistics for the covariates included in the analysis. Table 1 covers a wide range of individual characteristics; notably, more than a third of the respondents declared having been victimized at least once by any actor related to the internal conflict. Table 2 shows all the territorial covariates, also being very diverse (historical, political, geographical and ETCR-related). The type of territory is along two dimensions: the size of the urban core (i.e., the principal city or town in the area, typically functioning as a regional hub for economic and administrative activity) and the size of the locality where respondents live, a smaller administrative unit than municipalities. Based on these criteria, we distinguish three categories:

- (1) **Rural Periphery:** urban cores between 15 000 and 60 000 inhabitants with a locality of

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: individual characteristics

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Gender (0=male)	0.69	0.46	0.00	1.00
Age	49.52	16.39	3.00	97.00
Socioeconomic Status				
1st quantile	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00
2nd quantile	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00
3rd quantile	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00
4th quantile	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00
5th quantile	0.20	0.40	0.00	1.00
Religiosity	0.14	0.34	0.00	1.00
Trust in public institution	3.60	1.78	1.00	10.00
Victim Status				
Never victim	0.62	0.48	0.00	1.00
Victim: only FARC	0.17	0.38	0.00	1.00
Victim: only Para. or Bacrim	0.17	0.37	0.00	1.00
Victim: both FARC & Para. or Bacrim	0.04	0.20	0.00	1.00
Political leaning				
Left-winger	0.06	0.24	0.00	1.00
Centrist / none	0.76	0.43	0.00	1.00
Right-winger	0.18	0.38	0.00	1.00
Perception: % FARC in extreme poverty	3.10	1.03	1.00	4.00
Perception: % FARC victim of violence	2.89	1.02	1.00	4.00
Perception: % FARC recruited by force	3.01	0.99	1.00	4.00
Satisfaction w/: standards of living	6.14	2.77	0.00	10.00
Satisfaction w/: future	6.60	2.63	0.00	10.00
Satisfaction w/: security	5.21	2.71	0.00	10.00
Satisfaction w/: neighborhood	6.69	2.63	0.00	10.00

fewer than 2 500 inhabitants;

- (2) **Intermediate Urban:** respondents residing in urban cores with 15 000–60 000 inhabitants and a locality larger than 2 500, as well as all residents of urban cores with 60 000–120 000 inhabitants, regardless of the locality size;
- (3) **Large Urban Core:** all inhabitants living in urban cores between 120 000 and 400 000 inhabitants.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics: territorial characteristics

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Attacks by FARC in 2005 (per 10,000)	0.13	0.35	0.00	2.53
Terrorist acts in 2005 (per 10,000)	0.32	0.74	0.00	4.43
Disappearances in 2005 (per 10,000)	2.71	4.20	0.00	34.91
Homicides in 2005 (per 10,000)	12.85	12.87	0.00	69.89
Internally displaced in 2005 (per 10,000)	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.08
2016 Plebiscite: % yes	52.25	13.81	23.31	95.84
2016 Plebiscite: turnout	33.97	8.79	5.83	54.43
2014 Elections: % vote for Santos (R2)	53.23	18.28	11.66	90.43
Distance to closest ETCR (meters)	245,711.5	146,174.5	3,660.02	769,569.60
Lives at less than 50km from ETCR	0.08	0.27	0.00	1.00
Multidimensional Poverty Index	35.79	15.55	10.40	86.70
Aggregated Regions				
Caribe	0.37	0.48	0.00	1.00
Pacífico	0.13	0.34	0.00	1.00
Centre-Andine	0.34	0.47	0.00	1.00
Llanos-Orinoquía	0.08	0.27	0.00	1.00
Amazonía-Sud-Orient	0.07	0.25	0.00	1.00
Type of Territory				
Rural periphery	0.31	0.46	0.00	1.00
Intermediate urban	0.38	0.49	0.00	1.00
Urban large core	0.31	0.46	0.00	1.00

Proximity to the ETCRs

The precise locations of the ETCRs were obtained through direct communication with the ARN, enabling the calculation of each household’s distance to the nearest ETCR. To ensure accuracy in these measurements, we incorporated road network data from OpenStreetMap (2025), allowing us to compute distances based on actual travel routes rather than euclidean distances. Figure 2 shows the distribution of those centers as well as the respondents while

5 Empirical strategy

Our empirical analysis is conducted in two stages. First, we use OLS regressions to examine which individual and territorial characteristics are associated with opinions towards reintegration. Second, we seek to assess whether proximity to an ETCR is correlated with a more tolerant attitude towards former combatants, using propensity score matching to account for potential selection bias related to the location of ETCRs.

5.1 Determinants of Attitudes towards Reintegration

We use OLS models to analyze the level of discomfort of respondents with situations in which demobilized combatants are part of it. We choose a set of covariates that are relevant to the analysis, related to various socioeconomic and territorial characteristics.

5.2 Proximity to ETCRs: Matching Estimations

Because ETCRs were not randomly assigned across the territory—but rather selected through negotiation criteria involving security, remoteness, and logistical feasibility—their location is likely correlated with local political and historical characteristics. This raises concerns of selection bias in estimating their effect on attitudes toward former FARC. In particular, ETCRs may have been placed in municipalities more supportive of the peace process, or individuals with negative views may have moved away. However, only twelve respondents reported having changed location between 2016 and 2017, limiting concerns about mobility-based self-selection.

A naïve OLS approach would risk extrapolation bias and model dependence, especially if treated and control observations differ substantially in covariate distribution. To address these concerns, we implement a propensity score matching (PSM) approach, which re-weights observations to ensure better covariate balance and limit functional-form dependence. We define “treatment” as residing within 50 km of an ETCR and estimate the following propensity score, as introduced by Rosenbaum and Rubin (1983):

$$\hat{p}_i = \Pr(D_i = 1 \mid X_i) = \frac{e^{X_i'\beta}}{1 + e^{X_i'\beta}} \quad (1)$$

Here, D_i is a binary indicator equal to 1 if the unit is treated and 0 otherwise, and X_i is the vector of covariates. Matching is conducted on the logit-transformed score to improve covariate balance (Ho et al., 2007). Among the different methods tested, Epanechnikov kernel matching with a 0.02 bandwidth achieves the best balance (see Figure A1). We then estimate the average treatment effect on the treated (ATT):

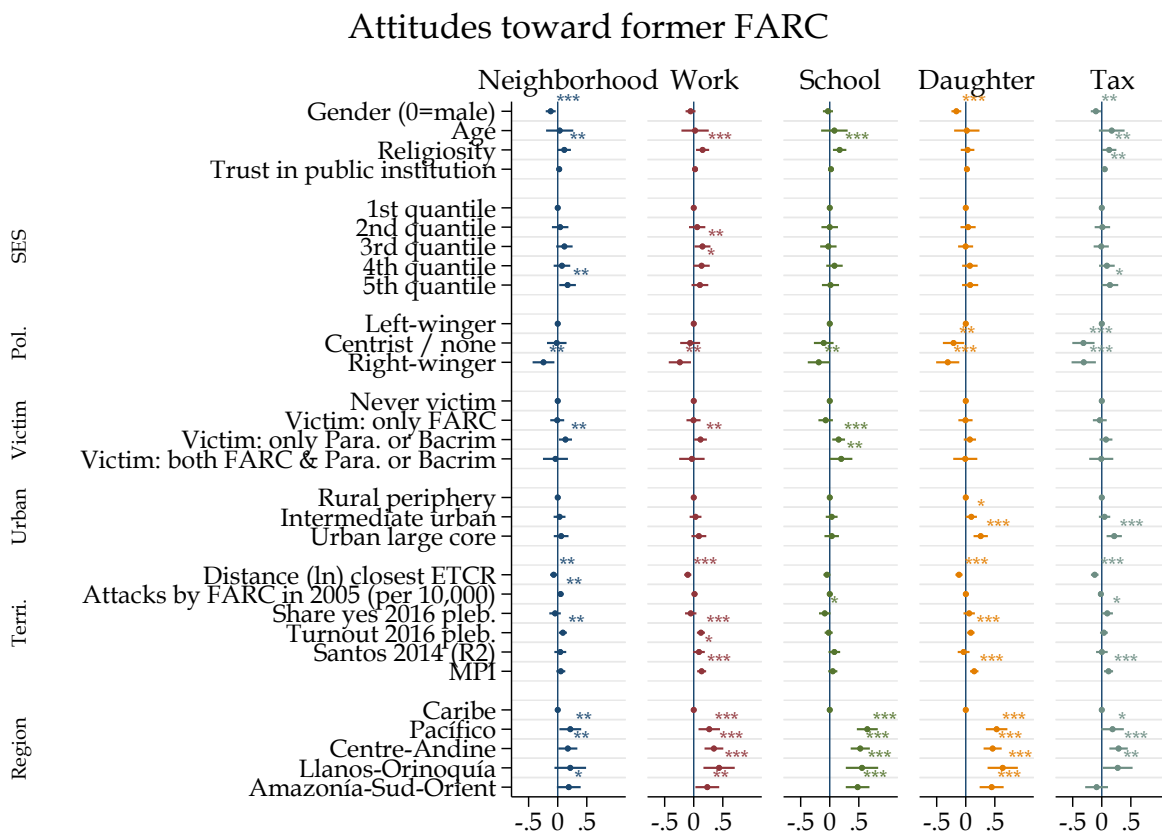
$$\widehat{\text{ATT}} = \frac{1}{N_1^*} \sum_{i \in \mathcal{T}^*} (Y_i - Y_{j(i)}) \quad (2)$$

With N_1^* the number of treated units successfully matched, \mathcal{T}^* the set of treated units with valid matches, Y_i the observed outcome for treated unit i and $Y_{j(i)}$ the observed outcome for the matched control unit j corresponding to treated unit i . This estimator assumes that, conditional on the observed covariates, the potential outcomes are independent of treatment assignment (unconfoundedness), and that there is sufficient overlap in propensity scores between treated and control groups (common support).

6 Results

6.1 OLS estimates

Figure 4: Average effect of individual characteristics on attitudes toward former FARC



Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

The composite SES index based on assets and education shows moderate effects. In the *Neighborhood* and *Tax* model, only the top quintile displays significantly more favorable attitudes. In the *Work* dimension, respondents in the third and fourth quintiles are more supportive than others. No clear SES effect appears in the *School* and *Daughter* models. Women respondents express significantly greater discomfort with the reintegration of former FARC, particularly in the *Neighborhood*, *Daughter*, and *Tax* dimensions. Although not consistently significant across all outcomes, religiosity is positively associated with higher acceptance. The results also suggest a pronounced ideological divide, with right-wing respondents showing greater resistance to the presence of former

FARC members in both public and private life.

Individuals who report having only been victimized by paramilitary groups express significantly more favorable attitudes in the *Neighborhood*, *Work*, and *School* dimensions. The coefficient for only FARC victimization is close to zero across all models, suggesting no direct effect of victimization by only the FARC.

Attitudes toward former FARC members vary with territorial size. In the *Daughter*, and *Tax* dimensions, support increases consistently in urban large core places, those linked to cores above 120,000 inhabitants. For *School*, only the middle territories (core 60–120k) show significantly more favorable views. Effects are weaker and less consistent in the *Neighborhood and Work* dimension.

Higher historical exposure to FARC violence, measured by the number of attacks in 2005, is negatively associated with support for reintegration, but only in the *School* dimension, while being positively associated with more positive attitudes for the *Tax* variable. Multidimensional poverty is also positively related to reintegration, but this effect is limited to the *Work*, *Daughter* and *Tax* dimensions. Also, Territories with higher turnout in the 2016 peace plebiscite tend to exhibit more favorable attitudes toward reintegration. Respondents in the Caribbean region consistently express less favorable views across almost all dimensions compared to other regions. In contrast, individuals from the Caribbean region display significantly more negative attitudes in all five dimensions. These patterns may reflect differing historical experiences with the conflict and local perceptions of its resolution.

6.2 Propensity Score Matching

In the absence of a randomized evaluation design to assess the impact of proximity to ETCRs on attitudes toward former FARC members, we adopt a propensity score matching (PSM) approach, following best practices in the literature (Caliendo and Kopeinig, 2008; Ho et al., 2007; King and Nielsen, 2019). Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimation presents significant challenges in this context, as results are highly model-dependent, and unbiased estimation may be problematic when control units lie outside the covariate range of treated units. This concern is particularly relevant

Table 3: Propensity score matching - Effect of proximity of ETCR on positive attitudes towards former FARC (1 to 10). Baseline Analysis - Closest ETCR within 50 kilometers with a Epanechnikov Kernel matching

Dependent variable	Neighborhood	Work	School	Daughter	Tax
Baseline					
ATT	0.84*** (0.31)	0.92*** (0.31)	0.63** (0.29)	0.66* (0.34)	1.00*** (0.34)
Observations	3,031	3,031	3,031	3,031	3,031
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36

Note: ATT = Average Treatment effect on the Treated. This table presents the propensity score matching (PSM) estimates of the effect of proximity to the closest ETCR (50km) on attitudes toward former FARC. The estimates are obtained using the `psmatch2` command in Stata, employing a Epanechnikov Kernel matching approach with a bandwidth of 0.2 of the logit-transformed propensity score. Standard errors are displayed in parenthesis. The covariates included in the analysis are the full set of individual characteristics, individual perceptions and territorial characteristics.

Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

given the non-random location of ETCRs across Colombia, which raises issues of selection bias. A naïve OLS approach could thus produce biased estimates due to unobserved confounders influencing both ETCR placement and local attitudes.

To mitigate these concerns, we implement a PSM procedure to compare observations with similar pre-treatment characteristics, thereby improving causal inference. As noted by Imbens and Rubin (2015), PSM seeks to balance covariates across treatment and control groups, effectively mimicking randomization. While matching does not fully eliminate bias, it reduces dependence on functional form assumptions and helps mitigate issues related to extrapolation (Imbens and Rubin, 2015). PSM has been widely applied in diverse empirical settings (Crawford et al., 2018; Nakano et al., 2018; Shaikh, 2024), demonstrating its robustness as a non-experimental evaluation method.

For implementation, we use the `psmatch2` module in Stata (Leuven and Sianesi, 2018), which allows for flexible specification of matching algorithms and robustness checks. The baseline results are displayed in Table 3. The baseline distance is set at 50 km, which ensures a sufficient sample size while maintaining a meaningful measure of proximity. Results are presented as Average Treatment Effects on the Treated (ATT), meaning that the estimates reflect the effect of proximity to an

ETCR only for individuals who are actually exposed to it, rather than for the entire population.

Quantitatively, the ATT range from 0.63 to 1.00 standard deviations, indicating substantial increases in positive attitudes among those living near an ETCR. In relative terms, these effects amount to 8% to 30% increases compared to the control group means, depending on the attitudinal dimension considered. We do not claim causality in our estimation of how proximity to ETCRs shapes attitudes toward former FARC members, yet the use of propensity score matching (PSM) still marks an improvement over standard OLS estimates by helping to address selection bias. This approach offers a more credible understanding of how living closer to an ETCR is associated with public perceptions of reintegration.

A plausible explanation for these findings is that increased exposure to former FARC members within ETCRs areas encourages normalization and more frequent interaction, which may gradually reduce stigma and fear. Previous research has indicated that structured, direct contact with former combatants can foster greater social acceptance (Blattman and Annan, 2016; Kaplan and Nussio, 2018). However, the extent of this impact likely depends on local factors, including the availability of economic opportunities, prevailing security conditions, and the effectiveness of state-led reintegration initiatives.

From a policy standpoint, these results highlight the value of short-term investment in reintegration zones. After 2019, involvement from the Colombian state in ETCRs declined significantly, as outlined in the peace agreement⁴. Nonetheless, sustained institutional support and investment in these centers may have further improved attitudes toward former FARC members over time. Strengthening economic opportunities and promoting community engagement within these areas could support a more lasting reconciliation process.

⁴This was part of the peace agreement signed in 2016. All ETCRs were officially terminated two years after their creation. Nevertheless, many of them continued to exist without formal support from the government, which raised security concerns. In fact, killings of former FARC members were reported within ETCRs starting the end of 2019 (see for instance this article from *Justice for Colombia*). Many former FARC members subsequently left the ETCRs to settle in the *Nuevas Áreas de Reincorporación*, which were perceived as safer, although they were not officially recognized by the government Charles et al. (2020)

It is also important to recognize that Colombia’s experience may not be directly transferable to other post-conflict situations. The Colombian peace process, while delayed on some aspects, was relatively well-structured and comprehensive. In settings where peace agreements are weaker or reconciliation mechanisms are lacking, reintegration policies may yield different outcomes. Careful attention to these contextual differences is essential for designing effective post-conflict reintegration strategies.

6.3 Robustness and Sensitivity

These results are robust to various sensitivity analysis: considering an alternative type of matching (Table A1), defining alternative distances for defining treatment (Table A2). Both placebo analysis (alternative treatment in Table A3; and alternative outcome A4) reassures the main results. Indeed, among the nine supposedly non affected outcomes (which are defined at both the individual and municipal level), only one is found to be positively affected by the proximity to the ETCRs (the share of low-weight births in 2005), while significant at 10%. In addition, the average relative effect size of 5.38% can be considered relatively low.

7 Conclusions

This study examines the determinants of attitudes toward former FARC in Colombia, with a particular focus on territorial factors and proximity to ETCRs. While individual characteristics overall align with existing literature – confirming the role of gender, political ideology, and economic status – our findings also reveal more nuanced patterns. Regarding the role of victimization in the attitudes toward former FARC, we found that it does not play such a big role as the literature may suggest. This may be explained by several factors: but the main hypothesis we can draw is that the attitudes does not reflect forgiveness: one may be ready to reconcile with the perpetrator but it does not necessarily means that they are forgiven.

In addition, existing studies generally suggest that rural communities exhibit greater support for the peace process, primarily due to expectations of reduced inequalities and stronger state presence (Álvarez Vanegas and Garzón Vergara, 2016; Dávalos et al., 2018). In contrast, urban populations

are often portrayed as less accepting of the peace process, driven by concerns over security and economic stability (Álvarez Vanegas and Garzón Vergara, 2016; Basset, 2018). We find that residents of larger urban centers (120,000–400,000 inhabitants) tend to exhibit more positive attitudes (while significant for only two of the five variables) toward former FARC members than their rural counterparts, a finding that contrasts with existing literature. One possible interpretation of these results is that our study focuses on intermediate territories, requiring caution when generalizing findings to the broader population.

Although we do not claim causality in estimating the effect of ETCR proximity, our propensity score matching (PSM) approach allows us to move beyond standard OLS limitations by accounting for selection bias. Our results suggest that exposure to ETCRs is associated with more positive attitudes toward former FARC, reinforcing the idea that institutional support can foster reconciliation. However, the gradual withdrawal of state investment in ETCRs after 2019 raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of these effects.

While Colombia’s peace process offers a well-structured framework, its lessons may not be directly transferable to settings with weaker institutional capacity or less comprehensive reconciliation mechanisms. Future research should explore spatial heterogeneity in reintegration outcomes and examine how different territorial configurations influence post-conflict social cohesion.

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A Appendix

Table A1: Propensity score matching - Effect of proximity of ETCR on positive attitudes towards former FARC (1 to 10). Alternative Types of Matching

Dependent variable	Neighborhood	Work	School	Daughter	Tax
Panel A: 1-1 Matching					
ATT	1.22*** (0.39)	1.30*** (0.37)	0.80** (0.36)	0.64 (0.39)	1.07*** (0.37)
Observations	316	316	316	316	316
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36
Panel B: 1-5 Matching					
ATT	0.99*** (0.33)	1.01*** (0.32)	0.73** (0.31)	0.78** (0.35)	0.97*** (0.34)
Observations	573	573	573	573	573
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36
Panel C: Radius Matching					
ATT	0.87*** (0.30)	0.86*** (0.30)	0.68** (0.28)	0.72** (0.32)	1.09*** (0.33)
Observations	3,041	3,041	3,041	3,041	3,041
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36

Note: ATT: Average Treatment effect on Treated. This table presents the propensity score matching (PSM) estimates of the effect of proximity to the closest ETCR (50km) on attitudes toward former FARC. The estimates are obtained using the `psmatch2` command in Stata, employing a Nearest-Neighbor (5 neighbors and logit transformed, Panel A), Nearest-Neighbor (10 neighbors and logit transformed, Panel B) and a Radius (caliper = 0.2 and logit transformed) matching approach. Standard errors are displayed in parenthesis. Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2: Propensity score matching - Effect of proximity of ETCR on positive attitudes towards former FARC (1 to 10). Alternative Types of Matching

Dependent variable	Neighborhood	Work	School	Daughter	Tax
Panel A: 30km					
ATT	1.23** (0.48)	1.26*** (0.47)	1.02** (0.41)	1.14** (0.55)	1.15** (0.53)
Observations	3,025	3,025	3,025	3,025	3,025
Mean control group	6.60	6.82	7.44	4.17	3.39
Panel B: 40km					
ATT	0.74** (0.37)	0.78** (0.37)	0.57 (0.35)	0.50 (0.40)	0.98** (0.39)
Observations	3,026	3,026	3,026	3,026	3,026
Mean control group	6.60	6.82	7.44	4.17	3.37
Panel C: 60km					
ATT	0.83*** (0.30)	0.75** (0.30)	0.35 (0.28)	1.02*** (0.32)	1.10*** (0.32)
Observations	3,044	3,044	3,044	3,044	3,044
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.15	3.36
Panel D: 70km					
ATT	0.84*** (0.31)	0.67** (0.31)	0.51* (0.29)	0.59* (0.33)	0.83*** (0.31)
Observations	3,041	3,041	3,041	3,041	3,041
Mean control group	6.58	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36

Note: ATT: Average Treatment effect on Treated. This table presents the propensity score matching (PSM) estimates of the effect of proximity to the closest ETCR (30-40-60-70km) on attitudes toward ex-combatants. The estimates are obtained using the `psmatch2` command in Stata, Epanechnikov Kernel matching approach with a bandwidth of 0.02 on the logit-transformed propensity score. Matching is performed without replacement to ensure comparability between treated and control units. Standard errors are displayed in parenthesis.

Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A3: Propensity score matching - Effect of proximity of ETCR on positive attitudes towards ex-combatants (1 to 10). Alternative Treatment

Dependent variable	Neighborhood	Work	School	Daughter	Tax
Panel A: Random Binary					
ATT	0.04 (0.12)	0.03 (0.12)	0.01 (0.12)	0.01 (0.13)	0.03 (0.12)
Observations	3,041	3,041	3,041	3,041	3,041
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36
Panel B: > 45mn from hospital					
ATT	-0.30 (0.20)	-0.16 (0.19)	-0.36* (0.18)	0.25 (0.20)	0.03 (0.18)
Observations	3,043	3,043	3,043	3,043	3,043
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36
Panel C: > 45mn from doctor					
ATT	-0.26 (0.20)	-0.20 (0.19)	-0.18 (0.19)	0.25 (0.21)	0.23 (0.19)
Observations	3,044	3,044	3,044	3,044	3,044
Mean control group	6.59	6.81	7.44	4.16	3.36

Note: ATT: Average Treatment effect on Treated. This table presents the propensity score matching (PSM) estimates of the effect of three alternative placebo treatment on attitudes toward former FARC. The estimates are obtained using the `psmatch2` command in Stata, employing a Epanechnikov Kernel matching approach with a bandwidth of 0.02 on the logit-transformed propensity score. Standard errors are displayed in parenthesis.

Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A4: Propensity score matching - Effect of proximity of ETCR on outcomes supposedly non affected (Placebo analysis)

Plecebo var.	Random Variable	Listen radio	Voted last election	Lived w/ parents age 14	Highest parental education	Years schooling (2005, <i>municipio</i>)	Share low-weight births (2005, <i>municipio</i>)	Altitude (meters)	Distance nearest market (meters)
ATT	-0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.05)	0.00 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.12)	0.10 (0.09)	0.11* (0.06)	41.07 (60.21)	2.56 (7.94)
Observations	3,031	3,031	3,031	3,031	1,619	3,031	2,626	3,031	3,031
Mean control group	0.50	0.42	0.79	0.85	0.75	7.98	0.36	683.64	152.82

Note: ATT refers to the Average Treatment effect on the Treated. This table presents propensity score matching (PSM) estimates of the effect of proximity to the closest ETCR (within 50km) on a set of placebo outcomes — both at the individual and geographic level. Estimates are obtained using the `psmatch2` command in Stata, employing a Epanechnikov Kernel matching approach with a bandwidth of 0.02 on the logit-transformed propensity score. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. Significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. The placebo outcomes used as dependent variables are described below:

Random variable: Uniformly distributed variable generated independently of any observed data.

Listen to radio: Indicator variable equal to 1 if the respondent reports regularly listening to the radio, 0 otherwise.

Voted in last election: Equals 1 if the respondent reported voting in the most recent national election, 0 otherwise.

Lived with father at age 14: Equals 1 if the respondent lived with their parents at age 14, 0 otherwise.

Highest parental education: Ordinal variable capturing the highest education level attained by either parent, from 0 (no formal education) to 5 (university or higher).

Years of schooling (2005, *municipio*): Average number of years of formal education in the respondent's municipality in 2005.

Share of low-weight births (2005, *municipio*): Proportion of newborns with low birth weight in the municipality in 2005.

Altitude (meters): Average elevation of the municipality above sea level.

Distance to nearest market (meters): Distance from the respondent to the closest formal market.

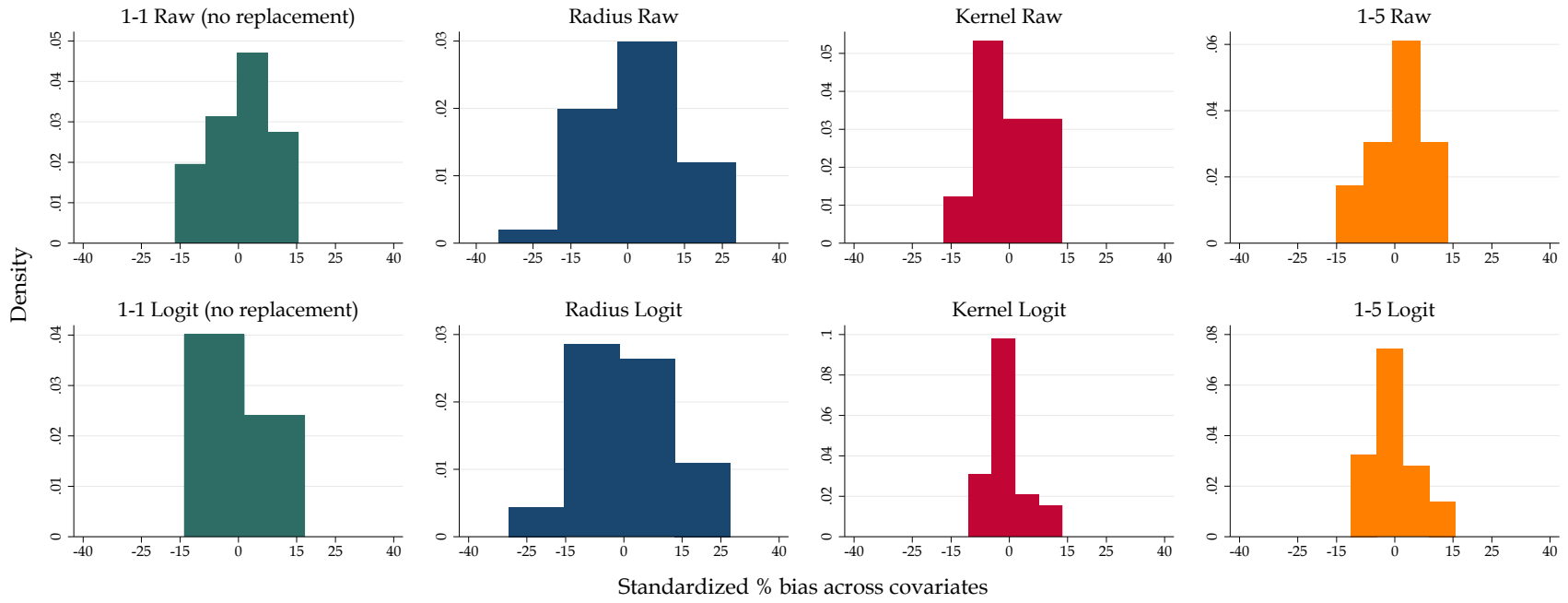


Figure A1: Standardized Bias across Covariates in the 4 different specifications