

Public Policy and Law Series Editorial *Dejusticia*

A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT FOR PEACE MOBILIZATION: Stigmatization and Violence- Justifying Attitudes Toward Land Rights Advocates in Colombia

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KELLOGG INSTITUTE
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Despite signing a peace accord in 2016, Colombia remains one of the most dangerous countries for social mobilization for peace, democracy, and equality. Between 2016 and 2023, 1,804 social leaders and 351 ex-combatants were assassinated. However, there has been no strong or sustained public outcry in response to this violence.

This policy brief presents findings from a research project examining public attitudes toward lethal violence against social leaders and ex-combatants, with a focus on stigmatization against these actors and violence-justifying beliefs and attitudes. Drawing on data from an online survey conducted in late 2023—which is representative of the urban population with internet access—the study shows that violence-justifying attitudes toward both unarmed civilians—who did not engage in insurgent action—and former guerrilla combatants depends largely on their demands. Although public opinion tends to be more favorable toward social leaders than ex-combatants, citizen perceptions of both groups become more negative when these actors advocate for structural reforms, particularly land redistribution. This is because social mobilization for land redistribution is often associated with wartime grievances and thus perceived as a threat to the existing social order. These findings show that redistributive peace commitments are seen as potentially destabilizing, which in turn reinforces stigma against actors who advocate for redistribution. The study draws policy and practice recommendations to counteract such stigmatization, prevent violence, and support the implementation of the peace accord.

Key words: stigmatization, land redistribution, social leaders, ex-combatants, citizen attitudes, violence.

A pesar de la firma del acuerdo de paz en 2016, Colombia continúa siendo uno de los países más peligrosos para la movilización social por la paz, la democracia y la igualdad. Entre 2016 y 2023 fueron asesinados 1804 líderes sociales y 351 firmantes del acuerdo. Sin embargo, no ha ocurrido una contundente movilización ciudadana en rechazo de esta situación.

Este documento presenta hallazgos de una investigación académica que analiza las actitudes ciudadanas frente a la violencia letal contra líderes sociales y firmantes de paz, con énfasis en la estigmatización de estos actores y la justificación de la violencia. A partir de datos recolectados en dos encuestas en línea a finales de 2023 —las cuales son representativas de la población urbana con acceso a internet— el estudio demuestra que la justificación de la violencia contra civiles que no participaron en la insurgencia y firmantes de paz depende, en gran medida, de las demandas que promueven. A pesar de que las actitudes ciudadanas son más favorables hacia los líderes sociales que frente a firmantes de paz, las percepciones hacia ambos grupos se vuelven más negativas cuando estos actores abogan por reformas estructurales, particularmente la redistribución de la tierra. Esto se debe a que la movilización en favor de esta se asocia con reclamos de la guerra y, por lo tanto, es vista como una amenaza al orden social. Los resultados subrayan que los componentes redistributivos del acuerdo son percibidos como potencialmente desestabilizadores, lo que refuerza el estigma contra los actores que lo promueven. El estudio identifica posibles vías de acción para romper con dicha estigmatización y, de esta manera, prevenir la violencia y facilitar la implementación del acuerdo.

Palabras clave: estigmatización, redistribución de tierras, líderes sociales, firmantes de paz, actitudes ciudadanas, violencia.

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**A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT
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The Eliminating Violence Against Women (E-VAW) Lab is housed at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. The E-VAW Lab aims to address underlying obstacles to gender equality through evidence-based policies and strategies in Latin America and the Caribbean, accounting for research and practice in other regions of the Global South. We conduct multi-method research and policy work on the social and political causes and consequences of gender-based violence, the gendered risks of political leadership and social mobilization, and the impact of strategies to increase survivors' access to justice. Our analysis is attentive to the entrenched inequalities women deal with along the axes of class, race, and ethnicity. We bring in diverse methodological approaches to delve into gender exclusion, including quantitative and qualitative methods. The E-VAW Lab partners with international and domestic policy organizations and human rights defenders advocating for the eradication of violence against women and the promotion of equality and democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as other countries in the Global South. For more information: <https://kellogg.nd.edu/evaw-lab>

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LIBRO
RESULTADO DE
INVESTIGACIÓN

20 AÑOS
Dejusticia

Public Policy and Law Series / **Editorial Dejusticia**

Isabel Güiza-Gómez

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Introduction

Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries for social mobilization for democracy and equality. Globally, at least 300 human rights defenders were killed in 2023 in 28 countries. 79% of these killings occurred in Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, and Honduras. Colombia alone accounts for 47% of these worldwide deaths (Front Line Defenders, 2024). Following the 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP in Spanish), social mobilization for peacebuilding—specifically, the implementation of the peace accord—became an increasingly dangerous activity, often running the risk of death threats and targeted killings. From 2016 to 2023, 1,804 social leaders¹ were killed (Rozo & Ball, 2024), and between 2016 and 2022, 351 demobilized guerrilla fighters were killed (Coordinación Social y Política Marcha Patriótica, 2022).² This report draws on a work-in-progress which examines stigmatization and violence—

1 In Colombia, the term “social leaders” (*líderes sociales*) refers to a broad group of grassroots activists and human rights defenders, who advocate for fairer political competition, land redistribution, environmental protection, accountability, reparations, truth-seeking, and public goods provision. These leaders include Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, campesino, women, and victim activists who are deeply embedded in local politics and serve as intermediaries between communities and state institutions. In conflict-affected areas, social leaders are key actors in mobilizing civilian resistance against violence and territorial control by armed groups.

2 Disaggregated data on the murders of ex-combatants are available only up until 2022. However, the Institute for Development and Peace Studies reports that forty-four ex-combatants were murdered in 2023 (Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz, 2023).

justifying attitudes and beliefs toward the assassinations of peace and democracy activists (Córdoba & Güiza-Gómez, 2024).

Previous studies indicate that citizens' attitudes toward peace processes and their participants are pivotal for both strengthening peace agreement implementation and nurturing a political environment that rejects violence as a form of conflict resolution (Barbosa et al., 2021; Botero & García Sánchez, 2024; García-Sánchez et al., 2022; Haass et al., 2022; Murillo Orejuela & Restrepo-Plaza, 2021; Nilsson, 2012; Plata Caviedes et al., 2023). If citizens voice their disapproval of murder and other forms of violence against peacebuilders, politicians and public officials will be under greater pressure to adopt measures to protect those who advocate for violence-prevention programs and for public policies that address the underlying causes of armed conflict.

Recent scholarship has shown the determinants and consequences of Colombians' attitudes toward the country's peace negotiations and the implementation of the peace accord between the government and former guerrilla group FARC-EP (Botero & García Sánchez, 2024; García-Sánchez et al., 2022). In particular, the literature has focused on citizens' attitudes toward the peace accord,³ the political and social reintegration of ex-combatants,⁴ and transitional justice measures.⁵ While these studies offer evidence on the role that public opinion plays in fostering a conducive environment for peacebuilding, we still have only a limited understanding of citizens' beliefs and attitudes toward lethal violence against activists who advocate for the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement, particularly its redistributive commitments.

This policy brief presents primary research findings conducted by the University of Notre Dame's Eliminating Violence Against Women Lab, hosted by the Kellogg Institute for Inter-

3 See Garbiras-Díaz et al. (2023); Liendo & Braithwaite (2018); Montoya & Téllez (2020); Téllez (2019).

4 See Albarracín & Gamboa (2024); Barbosa et al. (2021); Bruneau et al. (2022); García-Sánchez & Plata-Caviedes (2020); Murillo Orejuela & Restrepo-Plaza (2021).

5 See Botero (2020); Nussio et al. (2015).

national Studies (Córdova & Güiza-Gómez, 2024), in partnership with *Dejusticia*. The study examines citizens' beliefs and attitudes toward lethal violence against advocates for peacebuilding in Colombia in the wake of the 2016 peace accord. Our analysis focuses on public opinion on the assassinations of social leaders in a context where violence is also being directed against those who signed the peace agreement with the government—in other words, demobilized FARC combatants. Although these two groups have distinct identities, comparing citizen attitudes toward social leaders and ex-combatants allows us to show that stigmatization and violence justification do not stem solely from a group's identity—that is, ex-combatants versus activists who do not use weapons as a form of mobilization—as suggested by prior scholarship.

We show that, beyond the imaginaries associated with a person's group affiliation, the type of demands made by social leaders significantly shapes citizens' attitudes toward violence against these actors. When social leaders advocate for structural reform—particularly land redistribution—citizens are more likely to perceive such activism as a destabilizing force, rooted in the dynamics of the civil war. Put another way, collective action aimed at land redistribution is often viewed as echoing wartime grievances that threaten stability in the post-accord period. These perceptions arise regardless of who advances such demands—whether social leaders with no ties to guerrilla groups, or ex-combatants now committed to peacebuilding. Ultimately, such perceptions feed the stigmatization of social leaders and the justification of violence against them, which translates into less willingness to demand justice when they are killed.

Our data come from a two-wave online panel survey, which is representative of the Colombian population with internet access—that is, primarily the urban population. Although our findings may not reflect public opinion in rural areas, they nonetheless offer valuable insights for the adoption of programs aimed at promoting the implementation of the peace accord and protecting peacebuilders. This is particularly relevant since the majority of voters—who influence the government's agenda at

the ballot box—reside in urban areas. Indeed, 77.1% of Colombia’s population lives in municipal capitals (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2019). Urban populations warrant special attention because, as previous surveys show, they tend to be less supportive of negotiated settlements and hold more negative attitudes toward former FARC members compared to their rural counterparts (Plata Caviedes et al., 2023). Our study population is therefore critical for determining how to counter stigma and increasing public support for the peace process.

The two waves of the panel survey were administered in November and December 2023 with support from the market research company Netquest. The first wave included 2,945 respondents, representing different genders, socioeconomic levels, and regions across the country.⁶ It sought to assess initial public attitudes toward peacebuilders and the violence they face due to their activism. The second wave was sent to the same panel and received 2,306 responses. It experimentally examined which social mobilization scenarios are the most threatening to citizens.

The brief is organized into four sections. The first provides background on grassroots organizing around peacebuilding and land redistribution, lethal violence targeting social leaders and ex-combatants, and the implementation of the peace accord in Colombia. The second section outlines the concepts we measured through the two survey waves. The third discusses the key findings of our study, and the fourth offers some conclusions and policy recommendations. Our findings stem from an initial study conducted within a broader research agenda examining mechanisms to counter stigma and engage citizens who remain largely indifferent to the risks faced by peacebuilders.

6 For more information on the study sample, see the appendix.

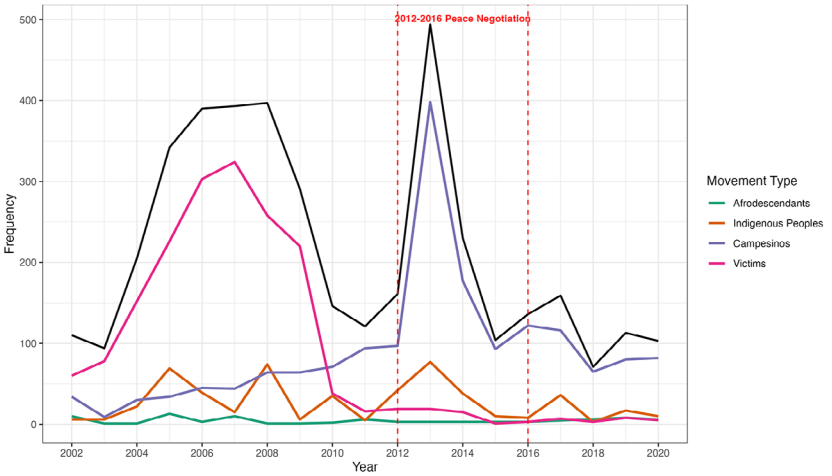
1. Background: Social Mobilization and Lethal Violence in the Wake of the Peace Accord

Undoubtedly, Colombia's 2016 peace accord marked a turning point in the country's modern political history. The accord established measures aimed not only at reintegrating and disarming the main guerrilla group in the country—the FARC-EP—but also at seeking justice and truth, ensuring reparations, promoting political participation, and redistributing land to historically marginalized populations. From the outset of the peace talks, grassroots organizers enjoyed a burgeoning space to advance various agendas related to democracy and redistribution. Evidence of this expanded political space includes the 2013 nationwide agrarian strike, the coca growers' strikes in 2013 and 2014, and successive waves of mobilization since 2016 (Cruz Rodríguez, 2017; Güiza-Gómez, 2025; Ramírez, 2017).

In particular, social movements led by campesinos (peasants), Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities, rural women, and civil war victims gained momentum that had not been seen since the 1960s and 1970s, when redistributive land reform emerged as a top political priority (García-Montoya et al., 2025; Güiza-Gómez, 2025). Figure 1 illustrates the number of protests between 2002 and 2020 that were led or joined by Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, campesinos, and war victims. Rural social movements significantly increased contentious action during the peace talks, with a marked peak in 2013. Figure 2 suggests that these protests gained national reach, contrasting with earlier years, when they were mostly confined to local areas.

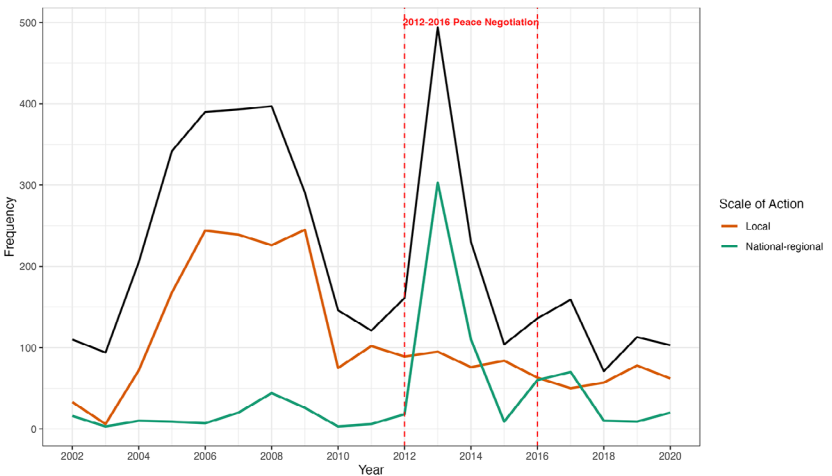
Moreover, the 2016 peace accord established mechanisms to ensure broad-based participation by both organized movements and the public. For example, the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus and the National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops created opportunities for rural actors to advance redistributive initiatives at the local level (Velásquez et al., 2021; Velásquez Ospina, 2017). The peace accord also introduced community-based and participatory mechanisms for the

Figure 1. Number of rural protests, by year (2002–2020)



Source: Güiza-Gómez (2025), using data from the *Social Struggles* database assembled by the Center for Research and Popular Education (Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular). The figure shows the number of protests organized by each type of social movement.

Figure 2. Number of rural protests, by scale of action (2002–2020)



Source: Güiza-Gómez (2025), using data from the *Social Struggles* database assembled by the Center for Research and Popular Education. The national/regional category refers to protests classified as national or regional in scope, while the local category refers to protests held in specific municipalities, towns, departments, and subregions.

reintegration of ex-combatants, enabling them to engage in politics through a new political party and to gain a foothold in the economy through income-generation measures (Brewer-Osorio, 2025; Carranza-Franco, 2019). Further, the agreement established oversight mechanisms and institutional frameworks to facilitate citizen engagement in the implementation of rural development and transitional justice programs.

In terms of land redistribution, the peace agreement placed a strong emphasis on expanding access to land for campesinos, Indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendant communities. Points 1 (“Comprehensive Rural Reform”) and 4.1 (Illicit Crop Substitution Program), and the chapter on ethnic issues, established that within twelve years of the rollout of the peace accord (i.e., by December 1, 2028), the Colombian government would redistribute three million hectares of land to landless and land-poor rural Colombians, and formalize ownership rights for seven million hectares of land currently occupied but lacking legal titles. This measure benefits low-income campesinos, Indigenous groups, and Afro-descendant communities.

To meet this objective, the peace accord created the Land Fund, which is an inventory sourced from multiple channels: lands with annulled property rights,⁷ untitled public lands that were illegally occupied or acquired,⁸ forest reserve lands,⁹ recov-

7 The judicial extinction of ownership (*extinción judicial de dominio*) is a legal process through which property ownership is annulled when the property has been acquired through illegal means, such as drug trafficking.

8 A number of agrarian legal processes aim to restore state control over *baldíos* (public, untitled lands) that have been unduly occupied or appropriated by individuals who do not meet the legal requirements for possessing such lands. In 2014 and 2022, the Constitutional Court found, for example, that *baldíos* intended for campesinos had been illegally acquired by private individuals through civil court proceedings.

9 Forest reserves are state-owned lands dedicated to the preservation of soil, water, and wildlife (Law 2 of 1959). Colombia formally recognizes seven such reserves: Pacific, Central, Magdalena River, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Serranía de los Motilones, Cocuy, and Amazonia. Some of these areas are currently under legal dispute by campesinos, Indigenous groups, and Afro-descendants, who either assert ancestral tenure rights predating the reserves’ designation or assert that they settled the land after their establishment.

ered “unexploited” lands,¹⁰ expropriated properties,¹¹ and voluntary donations. Further, the agreement committed the government to regulating and protecting property and land-use rights through key institutional reforms, such as the establishment of a specialized agrarian jurisdiction to resolve land-related disputes; the creation of a modern, multipurpose cadaster; protection for areas of special environmental importance; and the promotion of campesino territoriality via “campesino reserve zones.” For coca-growing regions, the accord also included a land-related provision to support farming communities in transitioning away from illegal crops, along with land access measures for alternative livelihoods.

Mindful of the violent backlash that peacebuilders faced following the peace talks of the 1980s and 1990s, the Colombian government and the FARC-EP agreed to establish mechanisms to protect social leaders and ex-combatants, focused on destigmatizing grassroots advocacy. The peace agreement introduced institutional frameworks designed to foster an enabling environment for collective action for peacebuilding, such as the Technical Committee on Security and Protection, the National Commission on Security Guarantees, and the Comprehensive Security System for the Exercise of Politics.

According to the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, stigmatization during the war served as a symbolic tool, legitimizing violence against political opponents, who were portrayed as “internal enemies” and threats to national security. In the “Findings and Recommendations” volume of its final report, the commission urged the state to adopt concrete measures aimed at reshaping the social norms that have historically justified violence, which is an essential step for peacebuilding (Comisión para el Esclareci-

10 The recovery of idle lands refers to the state reclaiming properties that are not fulfilling the social and ecological function of property, as mandated by the Colombian Constitution.

11 In Colombia, lands may be expropriated for reasons of social interest or public utility. Despite several attempts at expropriation, the state has rarely succeeded in using expropriation as an effective mechanism for land redistribution.

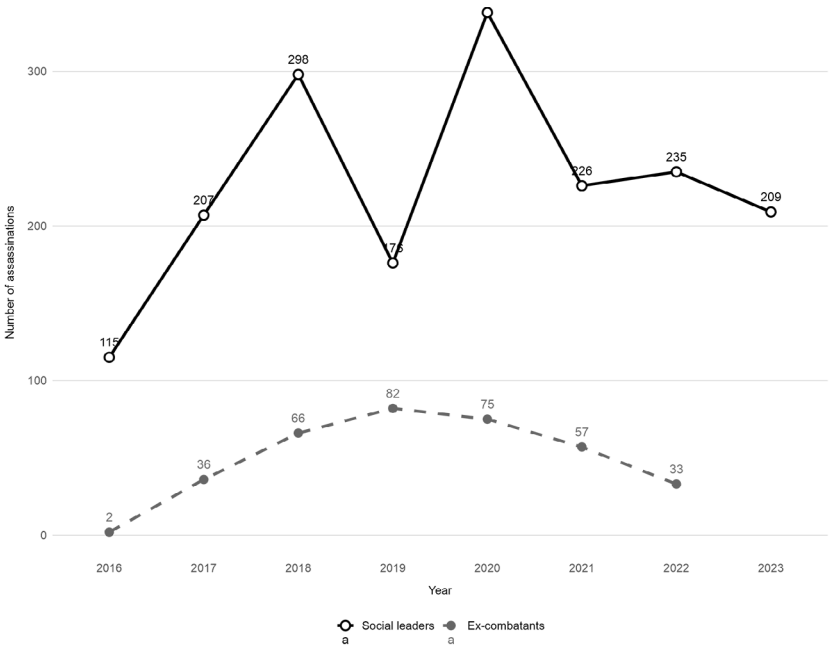
miento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición, 2022a). Along the same lines, the Constitutional Court recently acknowledged that the state has systematically failed to protect social leaders and ex-combatants due, among other factors, to the perceived lack of legitimacy of grassroots peacebuilding and the absence of measures to prevent public officials from stigmatizing peacebuilders (see rulings SU-020 de 2022, SU-545 de 2023, and SU-546 de 2023).

Therefore, significantly reducing—and ultimately eliminating—violence against social leaders and ex-combatants hinges on creating a stigma-free environment for those who defend rights, including land rights. Shifting public and elite attitudes toward grassroots peacebuilders is essential for deconstructing delegitimizing narratives and for reinforcing the normative acceptance of their political participation. Such attitude change is critical not only for ensuring the physical safety of social leaders and ex-combatants but also for enabling the full and effective implementation of the peace agreement.

Nevertheless, peacebuilders—whether social leaders or ex-combatants—remain highly vulnerable to targeted violence. Since the 2016 peace accord, these actors have become targets of lethal attacks, reflecting the persistence of delegitimizing frames and the fragility of protective norms. Figure 3 shows trends in assassinations of social leaders and ex-combatants after the signing of the peace accord. For both groups, the data indicate an upward trend in violence in the wake of the accord.

Although the 2016 peace agreement reconfigured political space—through promoting social mobilization and legitimizing redistributive demands—lethal violence against peacebuilders has simultaneously risen. Targeted victims are at the forefront of promoting the implementation of the accord's land-related provisions, including rural reform, illicit crop substitution, and land restitution. Victims also include progressive mayoral and city council candidates, and advocates for the socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants (Albarracín et al., 2022; Gutiérrez Sanín et al., 2020; Marín Llanes, 2022; Prem et al., 2018). This violence acts as a powerful constraint on the peace accord's re-

Figure 3. Number of murders of social leaders and ex-combatants after the 2016 peace accord



Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the Institute for Development and Peace Studies, Somos Defensores, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Marcha Patriótica. Data on the killings of ex-combatants are available only for 2016–2022.

distributive efforts, impeding both land redistribution and inclusive political participation at the local level.

Simultaneously, implementation of the accord’s redistributive provisions rapidly stalled, particularly under a right-wing administration that opposed key reforms outlined in the agreement. According to the Barometer Initiative team at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, as of November 2023—seven years after the accord took effect—Point 1 (“Comprehensive Rural Reform”) remained among the least advanced. Specifically, 6% of the commitments under this point had not initiated, 70% had been minimally implemented, 18% had seen moderate progress, and only 6% had been fully implemented (Echavarría Álvarez et al., 2024, p. 140).

In contrast, according to the Technical Secretariat of the International Verification Component—comprising teams from the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP) and Centro de Recursos para el Análisis de Conflictos (CERAC)—implementation of rural reform showed significant progress between January and December 2023. The current administration (2022–2026) allocated 50.4 trillion Colombian pesos to peace implementation, representing a nominal increase of 27% and a real increase of 5% after accounting for inflation—or 13.39 trillion more than the previous administration. Of this total, 41.6 trillion pesos (80%) were earmarked for comprehensive rural reform (Secretaría Técnica del Componente de Verificación Internacional CINEP-CERAC, 2024).

Additionally, Congress has been tasked with enacting the regulatory framework for the recently established agrarian jurisdiction. However, Congressional debates have moved slowly due to resistance from economic elites and certain political factions. Furthermore, campesinos were recognized as a collective rightsholder, representing a landmark change in their political incorporation that had not been achieved even during the political opening embedded in the 1991 Constitution (Güiza-Gómez et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the National Land Agency created four new “campesino reserve zones,” expanding to seventeen the number of officially designated zones regulated under Colombian law since 1994 (Secretaría Técnica del Componente de Verificación Internacional CINEP-CERAC, 2024, p. 14).

Regarding the Land Fund, the Technical Secretariat of the International Verification Component reports that, as of October 25, 2023, 2,269,407 hectares—approximately 75% of the three-million-hectare target—had been added to the fund. However, only 37% of this land is located in municipalities prioritized under the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus. Despite these additions, the actual transfer of land to rural communities has been minimal. Between December 2016 and October 2023, only 86,486 hectares were awarded to landless campesinos, representing just 2.88% of the overall redistribution target. Notably, 0.73% of this was awarded in the first five years of implementa-

tion, while 2.14% was awarded in 2023 alone. In terms of increasing women's access to land, the government set the subgoal of awarding 84,793 hectares to women. As of October 2023, just 27,736 hectares had been granted (representing 0.9% of the overall redistribution target and 32% of the women-specific subgoal).

These figures, however, have sparked controversy due to inconsistencies in how the National Land Agency distinguishes between land transactions that count toward the three-million-hectare redistribution goal and the seven-million-hectare formalization target.¹² The lack of a standardized methodology has complicated public oversight and hindered transparent evaluation of implementation progress.

Land formalization efforts have shown greater progress than land redistribution. According to the Technical Secretariat of the International Verification Component, drawing upon data from the National Land Agency, ownership rights over 3,393,342 hectares were formalized between December 2016 and October 2023, representing 48% of the total goal for land formalization. Regarding gender-specific targets, the state set the subgoal of titling 568,165 hectares of land to women. As of October 2023, 299,572 hectares had been titled to women, accounting for 4.2% of the formalization goal and 52.7% of the women-specific subgoal. However, these figures have also sparked controversy. The National Land Agency has been criticized for including in its tallies deeds issued in previous years—even before the signing of the peace accord—that had not been registered in the public record or formally delivered to beneficiaries, raising questions about the accuracy and transparency of reported progress.¹³

12 The Office of the Inspector General documented that, as of October 2023, the National Land Agency had not clearly registered whether land allocation fell under the redistribution target or the formalization goal based on the accord's criteria. On the one hand, land allocations should count toward the redistribution target if awarded land is new and productive—that is, it had not been occupied by beneficiaries. On the other hand, land transfers count toward the formalization goal if beneficiaries had occupied either public or privately owned land yet lacked legal deeds (Secretaría Técnica del Componente de Verificación Internacional CINEP-CERAC, 2024, p. 36).

13 For further details on the debate over the methods being used to

Regarding the agreement’s “Ethnic Chapter,” the Technical Secretariat of the International Verification Component reports that 2,898,533 hectares were awarded to Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities between December 2016 and October 2023, representing 41% of the overall formalization goal. This figure includes 2,842,179 hectares collectively awarded to Indigenous peoples, and just 56,354 hectares (or 0.8% of the overall titling goal) collectively granted to Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero communities (Secretaría Técnica del Componente de Verificación Internacional CINEP-CERAC 2024, p. 40).

Against this backdrop, the broadening of political space and shift toward redistribution ushered in by the peace agreement have proven insufficient to mitigate barriers to rural reform. Persistent implementation gaps—alongside targeted violence and stigmatization against advocates for land redistribution—have created a hostile environment for grassroots peacebuilding. In this study, we investigate the underlying factors fueling stigmatization of peacebuilders—especially those who advocate for land redistribution—aiming to identify strategies to shape citizen attitudes toward justice-seeking that would ultimately foster a more conducive environment for peacebuilding.

2. Measurement Concepts: Stigmatization and Violence Justification Attitudes

To assess Colombians’ attitudes toward lethal violence, we used two interrelated constructs: stigmatization and the justification of violence. Drawing on the literature on social psychology, we conceptualize stigma as a socially constructed “label” that marks certain individuals or groups as deviant based on a distinguishing characteristic or behavior (Link & Phelan, 2001; Major & O’Brien, 2005; Phillips & Gates, 2011). In other words, stigma is a social construct whereby an undesirable at-

measure land redistribution and land formalization progress, see Secretaría Técnica del Componente de Verificación Internacional CINEP-CERAC (2024, pp. 36–38).

tribute becomes the basis for defining a person or group (Dijker, 2013).

We operationalized stigmatization through three indicators that capture different dimensions of the concept (Murillo Orejuela & Restrepo-Plaza, 2021). First, *cognitive stigma* refers to the attribution of negative stereotypes to certain groups. In our case, respondents were asked whether they perceived social leaders or ex-combatants as violent. Second, *emotional stigma* captures affective reactions, specifically whether respondents felt unsafe in settings where social leaders or ex-combatants constitute the majority. Last, *behavioral stigma* reflects avoidance tendencies, measured by respondents' discomfort at the idea of having a social leader or ex-combatant as a neighbor.

Table1. Concepts measured in the survey

Concept	Dimension	Definition
Stigmatization	Cognitive stigma	Attribution of negative characteristics to certain groups
	Emotional stigma	Feelings of insecurity toward certain groups
	Behavioral stigma	Tendency to avoid contact with certain groups
Violence-Justifying Attitudes	Victim blaming	Perception of victims as being responsible for the violence they suffer
	Empathic concern	Ability to understand the feelings and suffering of others
	Willingness to demand justice	Willingness to seek justice for victims

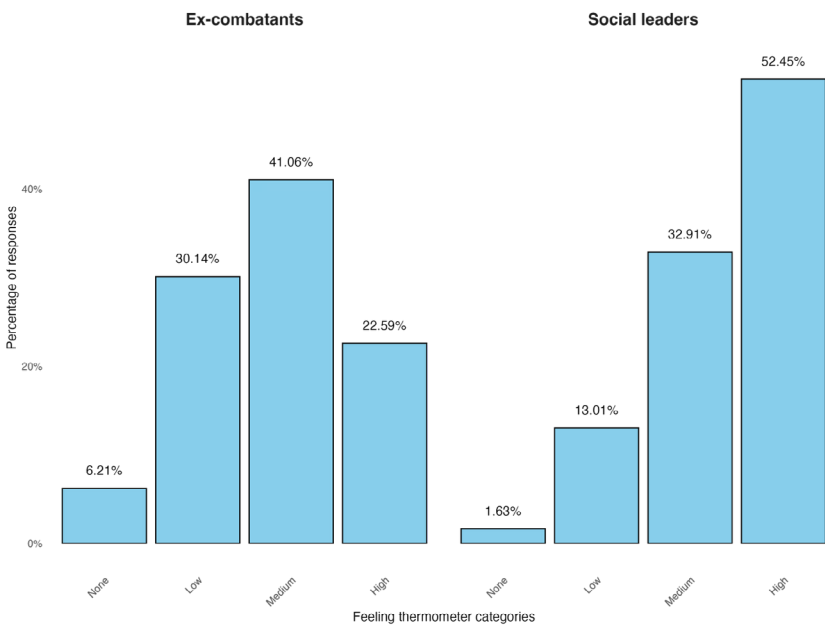
The second construct—violence justification—comprises attitudinal and cognitive biases related to the perceived legitimacy of harm inflicted on others. Within this domain, victim blaming reflects the belief that victims are responsible for their fate due to risky or unlawful behavior (Johnson et al., 2002). In contrast, empathic concern is defined as the ability to un-

derstand and emotionally resonate with the suffering of others (Davis, 2018; Decety & Lamm, 2006). Both high levels of victim blaming and low empathic concern are associated with reduced citizen willingness to condemn or take action against the killings of social leaders and ex-combatants in the post-accord context. Table 1 summarizes the concepts measured in our survey.

3. Findings: Stigmatization, Violence Justification, and Land Redistribution

Finding #1. Both social leaders and ex-combatants operate in a hostile environment for collective action advocating for democracy and equality due to widespread stigma and violence-justifying attitudes toward these groups.

Figure 4. Positive attitudes toward social leaders and ex-combatants



Overall, citizens perceive social leaders more positively than ex-combatants. However, as shown in Figure 4, only about

52% of respondents expressed highly positive attitudes toward social leaders, indicating that almost half of the population holds more critical views. When it comes to ex-combatants, the gap is even wider: just 22% of respondents reported strongly positive attitudes. These results highlight that Colombians' opinions toward these two groups are extremely divided.¹⁴

Finding #2. Stigma lies at the core of negative attitudes toward social leaders and ex-combatants. Using three distinct indicators, we found that stigmatization is most pronounced toward ex-combatants. However, stigmatization toward social leaders is also high. Depending on the measure, only between 22% and 30% of respondents hold low levels of stigma toward social leaders, while these figures fluctuate between 7.5% and 11% for ex-combatants.

Figures 5 and 6 summarize the main trends in stigmatizing attitudes toward social leaders and ex-combatants across the three dimensions of stigma. Among all forms, emotional stigma was the most prevalent for both groups.¹⁵ Approximately 66% of respondents reported moderate to high levels of emotional stigma toward social leaders, while 77% expressed similar unease toward ex-combatants.

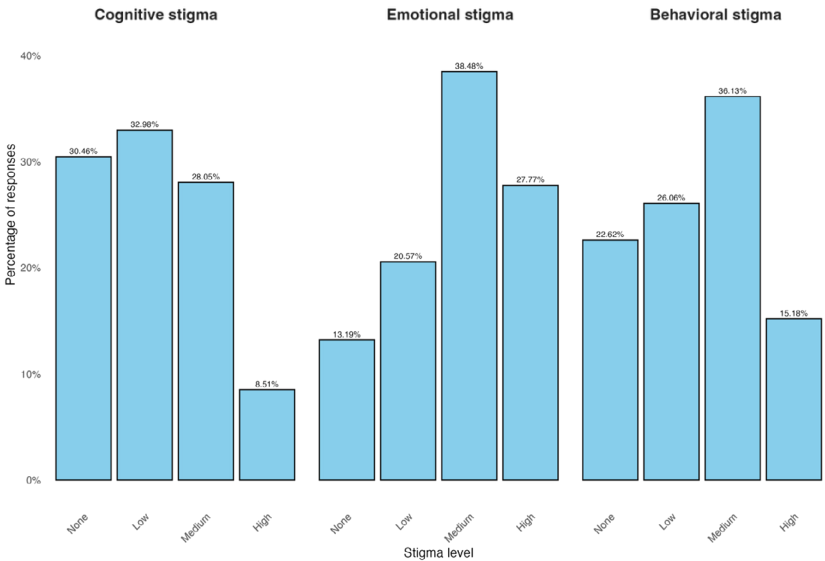
Respondents generally exhibited low to moderate levels of cognitive stigma, measured by the belief that social leaders

14 Participants responded to the following statement: "On a scale where 0 means 'very negative' and 100 'very positive,' we would like to know how positive or negative your feelings are toward social leaders in Colombia / FARC ex-combatants who laid down their arms. You can also choose a number in between." For illustration purposes, we converted the original scale of 1-100 to a categorical scale where "none" equals 0, "low" is greater than 0 and less than 33, "moderate" is greater than 33 and less than 66, and "high" is greater than 66.

15 The question reads as follows: "On a 1-7 scale, where 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 7 means 'strongly agree,' how much do you agree with the following statements? ... If I were in a setting where most of the individuals were social leaders / FARC ex-combatants who laid down their arms, I would feel very unsafe." The original scale for this question ranged from 1 to 7. We recoded it into a categorical scale where 1 is "none," 2-3 is "low," 4-5 is "moderate," and 6-7 is "high."

and ex-combatants are inherently violent, with higher levels of this stereotype attributed to former combatants (see Figure 6).¹⁶ Finally, respondents expressed moderate to high levels of behavioral stigma—that is, discomfort at the idea of having a social leader or ex-combatant as a neighbor. Respondents reported more pronounced negative attitudes toward ex-combatants.¹⁷

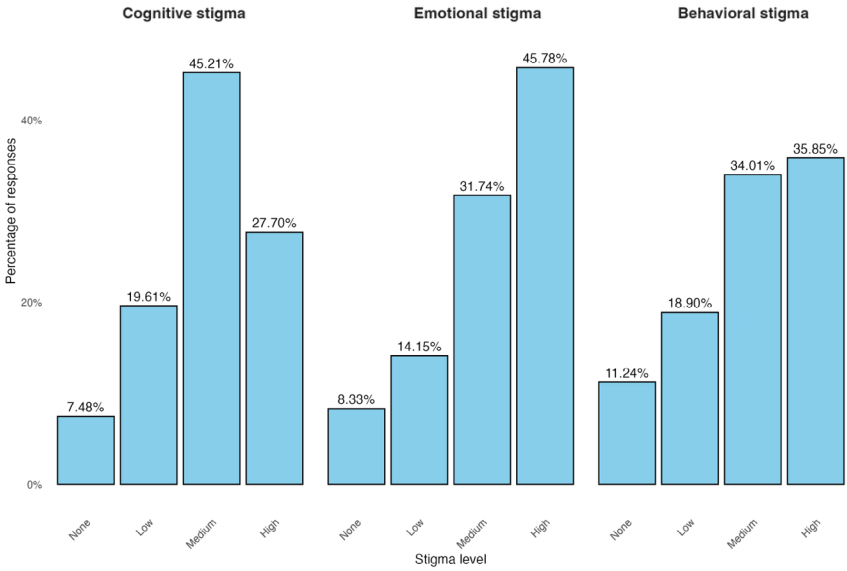
Figure 5. Stigma against social leaders



16 The question reads as follows: “On a 1–7 scale, where 1 means ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 means ‘strongly agree,’ how much do you agree with the following statements? ... Social leaders / FARC ex-combatants who laid down their arms tend to be violent.” The original scale for this question ranged from 1 to 7. We recoded it into a categorical scale where 1 is “none,” 2–3 is “low,” 4–5 is “moderate,” and 6–7 is “high.”

17 The question reads as follows: “On a 1–7 scale, where 1 means ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 means ‘strongly agree,’ how much do you agree with the following statements? ... If a social leader / FARC ex-combatant who laid down their arms were a neighbor of mine, I would feel uncomfortable.” The original scale for this question ranged from 1 to 7. We recoded it into a categorical scale where 1 is “none,” 2–3 is “low,” 4–5 is “moderate,” and 6–7 is “high.”

Figure 6. Stigma against ex-combatants



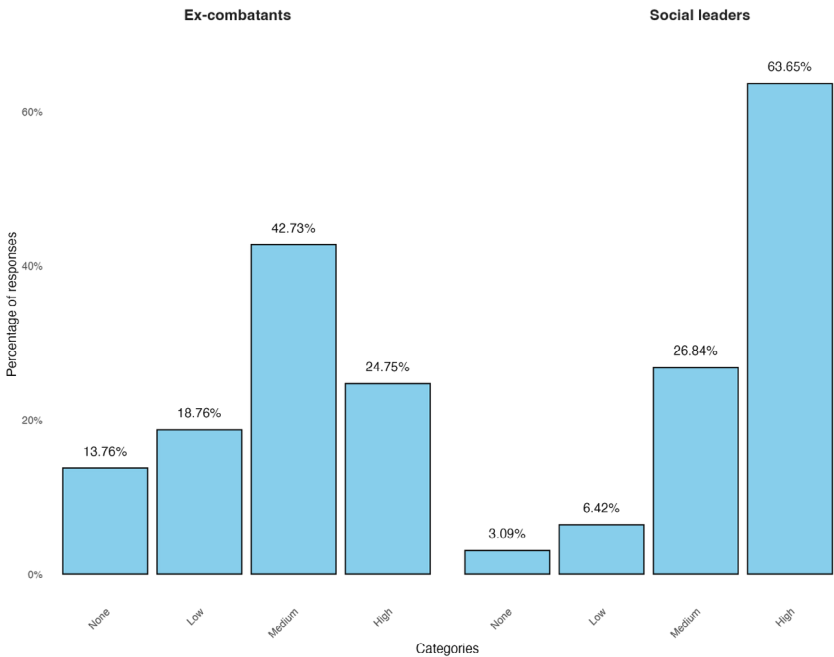
Finding #3. Stigma toward peacebuilders is associated with violence-justifying attitudes toward lethal violence against social leaders and ex-combatants. However, citizens are less tolerant of violence against social leaders than they are of violence against ex-combatants. Less than 25% of respondents exhibited a high level of concern toward the killing of ex-combatants. In the same vein, a larger share (more than 40% of respondents) expressed a moderate to high level of victim blaming toward ex-combatants who have been murdered.

Figure 7 shows that 63.58% of respondents expressed a high level of empathic concern toward the killing of social leaders, compared to just 24.77% for ex-combatants.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Figure 8 illustrates that a majority of respondents (59.88%) re-

¹⁸ The question reads as follows: “On a 1–7 scale, where 1 means ‘not at all concerned’ and 7 means ‘very concerned,’ how concerned are you by the high risks faced by social leaders in Colombia / the high risks faced by FARC ex-combatants in the country who laid down their arms?” The original scale for this question ranged from 1 to 7. We recoded it into a categorical scale where 1 is “none,” 2–3 is “low,” 4–5 is “moderate,” and 6–7 is “high.”

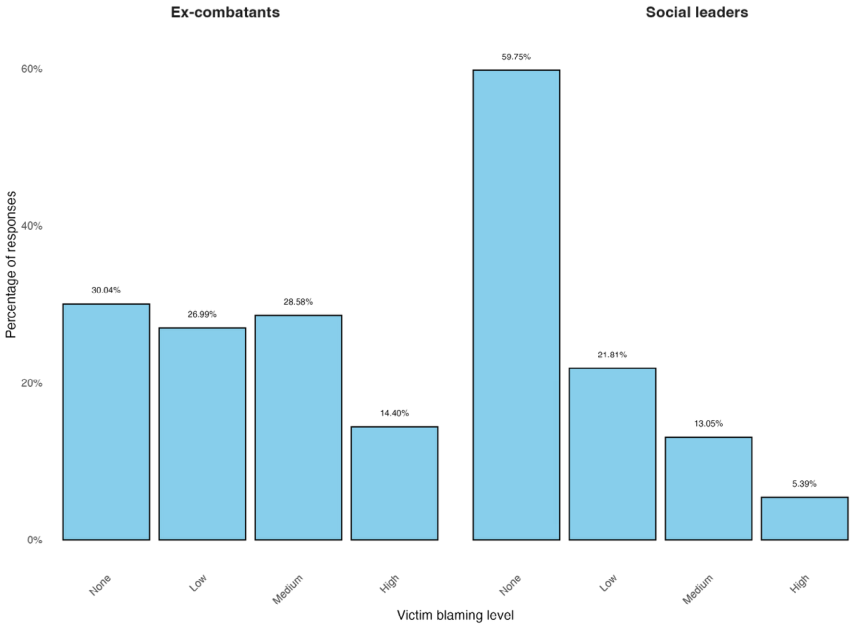
frained from blaming social leaders for their own assassinations (victim blaming),¹⁹ while this percentage dropped sharply for ex-combatants (30.08%). In other words, respondents are significantly more likely to perceive ex-combatants—compared to social leaders—as responsible for their own victimization—implicitly framing them as having “brought it upon themselves.”

Figure 7. Empathic concern toward social leaders and ex-combatants



19 The question reads as follows: “On a 1–7 scale, where 1 means ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 means ‘strongly agree,’ how much do you agree with the following statements? ... When a social leader is murdered, it is often because they brought it upon themselves / When a FARC ex-combatant who laid down their arms is murdered, it is often because they brought it upon themselves.” The original scale for this question ranged from 1 to 7. We recoded it into a categorical scale where 1 is “none,” 2–3 is “low,” 4–5 is “moderate,” and 6–7 is “high.”

Figure 8. Victim blaming: Social leaders vs. ex-combatants



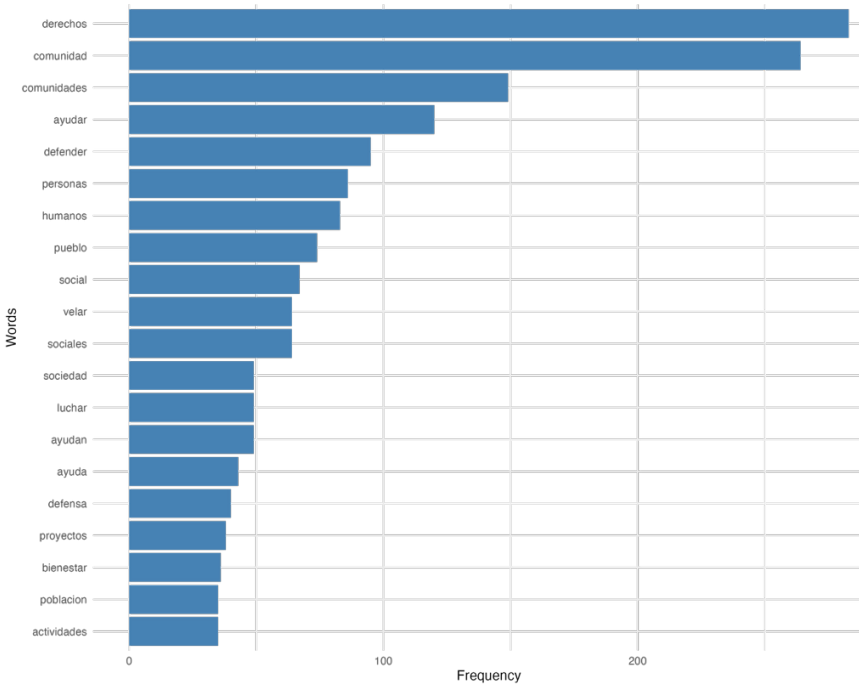
Finding #4. What words do respondents use to describe peacebuilders? To gain deeper insight into citizens' perceptions of each group, we asked respondents to list the first two words that come to mind when they think about social leaders or FARC ex-combatants.²⁰ Figure 9 illustrates the words that respondents used to describe each group. Each dot in the figure represents a word mentioned by respondents, while lines between dots indicate frequently co-occurring word pairs. The thickness of the lines reflects how often each word pair was mentioned.

In describing social leaders, respondents commonly used terms related to community leadership, human rights advocacy, and the risks they face. In contrast, descriptions of ex-combatants frequently included references to peace, reintegration, and

20 The question reads as follows: "When you think of social leaders in Colombia / FARC ex-combatants who laid down their arms, what are the first two words that come to mind?"

When asked an open-ended question about the public activities carried out by social leaders and ex-combatants, respondents again assigned more positive words to describe social leaders than ex-combatants. Figure 10 shows that respondents described social leaders with words such as “rights,” “community,” “help,” and “defend” in 100 or more answers. The bottom panel of Figure 10 visualizes the most frequently mentioned words associated with this group. Words placed near the center were cited most often, while the thickness of the connecting lines reflects the frequency with which two words co-occurred. The figure suggests that respondents largely associate social leaders with the defense of rights and community-oriented work. It also points to a broader public recognition of the risks and vulnerabilities faced by social leaders.

Figure 10. Words associated with the activities of social leaders



Finding #5. Citizens' attitudes toward social leaders are strongly shaped by perceptions and stigma against ex-combatants. Although respondents generally hold more favorable views of social leaders than of ex-combatants, attitudes toward the two groups are closely linked. Figure 12 (page 34) shows predicted probabilities of respondents' feelings toward social leaders and their feelings toward ex-combatants, after controlling for other factors—such as ideology, exposure to violence during the armed conflict, and sociodemographic characteristics. Particularly, it illustrates the average predicted values on a 0–100 feeling thermometer toward social leaders as a function of feelings toward ex-combatants.²¹ These results suggest that citizens' attitudes toward ex-combatants strongly predict their attitudes toward social leaders, independently of other factors such as ideology and exposure to violence during the conflict. In other words, negative views of ex-combatants tend to spill over onto social leaders, suggesting that broader stigmatizing narratives shape public opinion toward peacebuilders more generally.

In addition, we experimentally tested whether priming respondents with information about ex-combatants would influence their affective evaluations of social leaders. These results indicate a statistically significant priming effect: when attitudes toward ex-combatants were activated first, respondents frequently expressed more negative feelings toward social leaders. As shown in Figure 13 (page 34), average ratings on the feeling thermometer for social leaders dropped by approximately 5 points (on a scale of 0 to 100) when questions about ex-combatants preceded those about social leaders. This effect suggests that cognitive associations between the two groups may trigger evaluative spillover, reinforcing stigmatizing attitudes toward social leaders.

These findings, as we discuss in the conclusion, carry important implications for the design of stigma-reduction policies targeting peacebuilders. They suggest that interventions aimed at reducing stigma against social leaders will be effective only if stigma against ex-combatants is also addressed.

21 The regression coefficient tables are available in the appendix.

Figure 12. Predicted values of attitudes toward social leaders as a function of attitudes toward ex-combatants

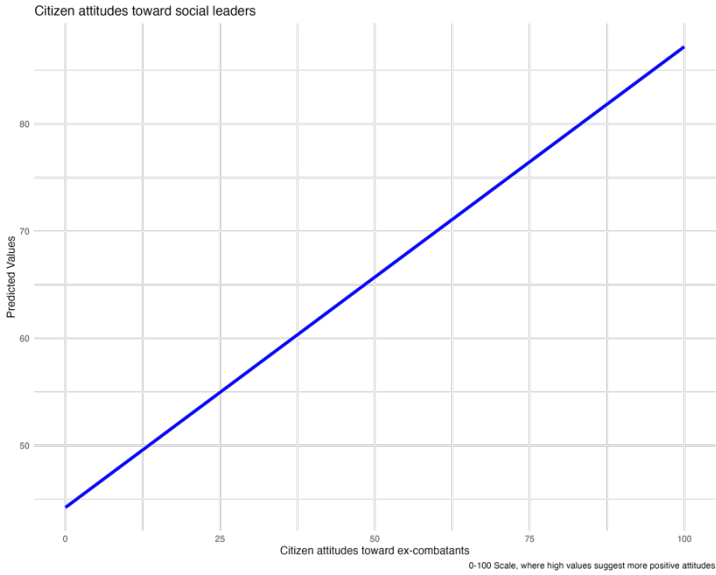
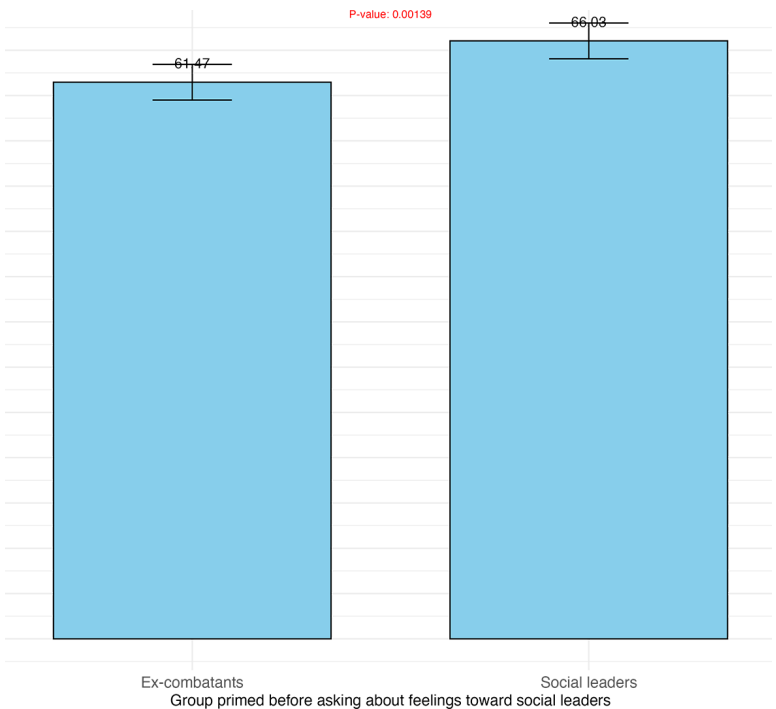


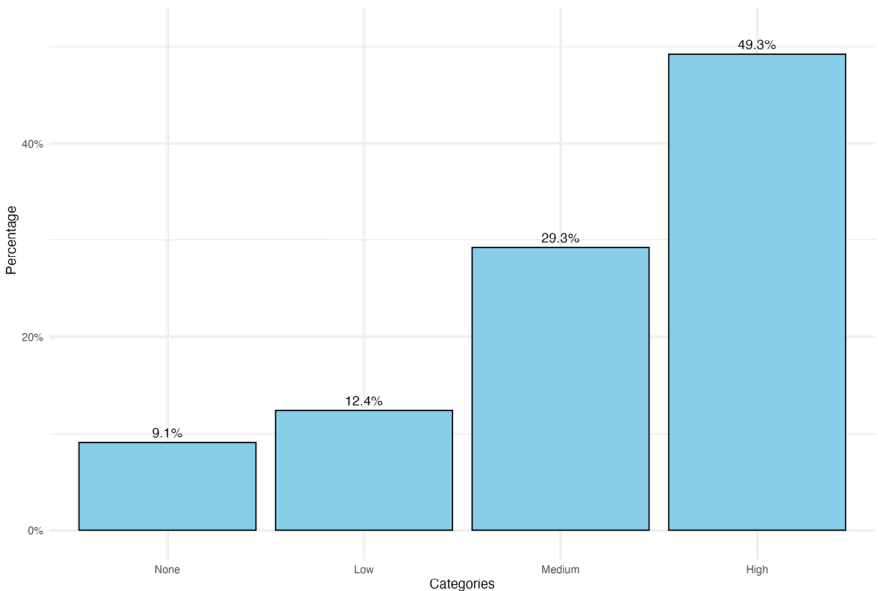
Figure 13. Average positive feelings toward social leaders, with and without prior exposure to the topic of ex-combatants



Finding #6. Why do citizens' attitudes toward social leaders depend on their feelings about ex-combatants? The evidence suggests that respondents often associate social leaders and ex-combatants with a shared cause—that is, land redistribution—which triggers stigmatization and violence-justifying attitudes toward both groups. In Colombia's social imaginary, these redistributive demands are often linked to the historical grievances underlying armed confrontation, and thus become symbolically associated with guerrilla insurgency and political instability.

This dynamic is especially evident when a group organizes around land redistribution, which is a demand widely viewed as emblematic of the conflict's root causes. Under such circumstances, citizens are more likely to exhibit both stigmatizing and violence-justifying beliefs and attitudes, regardless of whether these actors are identified as ex-combatants or social leaders (Córdova & Güiza-Gómez, 2024). In other words, even when the underlying claim is legitimate, its association with guerrilla activity, the armed conflict, and political instability activates more negative attitudes and reinforces cognitive links to violence. This associative framing helps explain the parallel stigma faced by both groups.

Figure 14. Levels of support for land redistribution



Public opinion is extremely divided on the question whether land should be redistributed to combat economic inequality. While 49% of respondents expressed strong support for such an initiative, the remaining portion of respondents expressed lower levels of support (see Figure 14, page 35).²² Such political divide is consequential: citizen attitudes toward land reform are strongly tied to perceptions of peacebuilding actors, who are often seen as the leading voices behind social mobilization for land redistribution in Colombia.

As shown in Figures 15 and 16 (pages 37 and 38), low support for land redistribution is associated with more negative feelings, less empathy, and a higher degree of victim blaming. Conversely, positive attitudes toward both social leaders and ex-combatants are observed only among respondents who express high levels of support for land redistribution. Importantly, this relationship holds independently of other potentially confounding factors, including support for other redistributive policies (e.g., progressive taxation), support for different forms of social mobilization (e.g., peaceful demonstrations or state petitioning), ideology, exposure to violence during the armed conflict, income, gender, and age.²³

Taken together, these findings indicate that citizens' attitudes toward peacebuilders are rooted in social representations of these actors, which are shaped not only by past roles (namely, whether such actors joined the guerrilla movement) but also by the historical grievances expressed by these actors during and after the armed conflict. In particular, structural demands raised during the war—most notably land redistribution claims—are closely connected with stigma and violence-justifying attitudes, as they are perceived to challenge the status quo and risk destabilizing the political order. Within this collective imaginary, demands for equitable land distribution are viewed not simply as

22 The question reads as follows: “On a 1–7 scale, where 1 means not at all necessary and 7 very necessary, how necessary do you consider the following action to be in the country? The redistribution of land to reduce inequality in land ownership between the rural rich and poor.”

23 The regression coefficient tables are available in the appendix.

Figure 15. Effect of support for land redistribution on positive feelings toward social leaders and ex-combatants

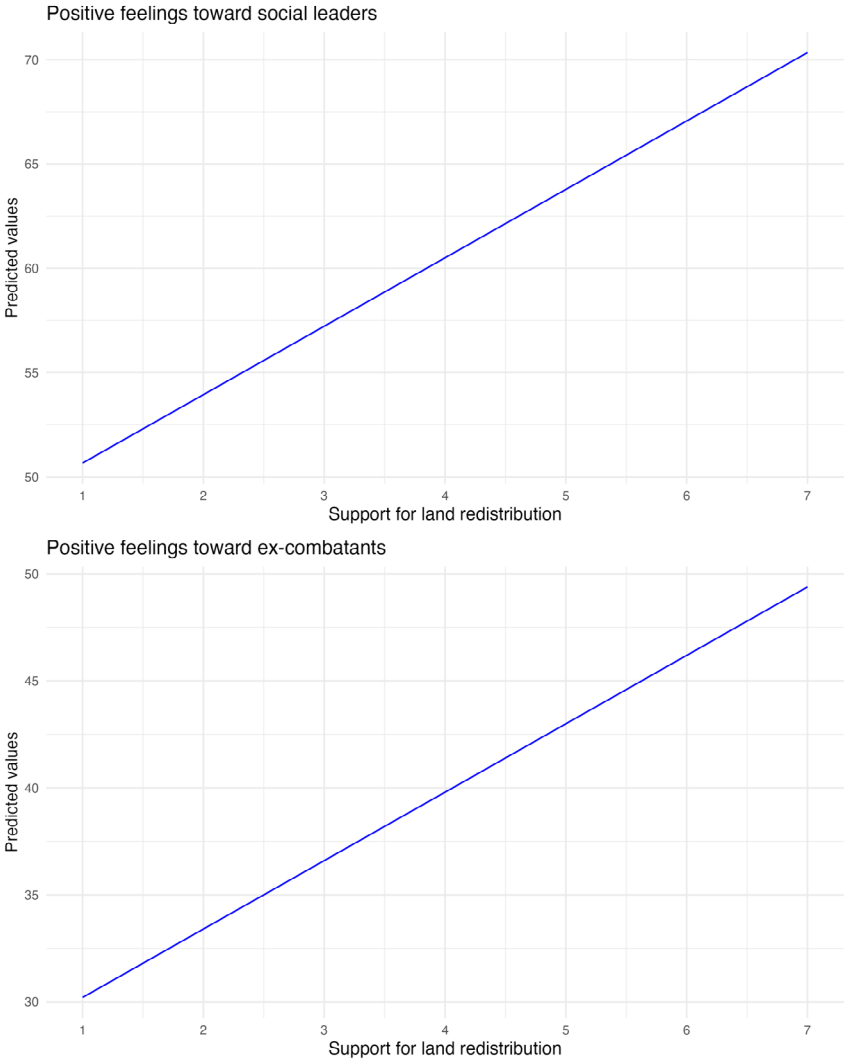
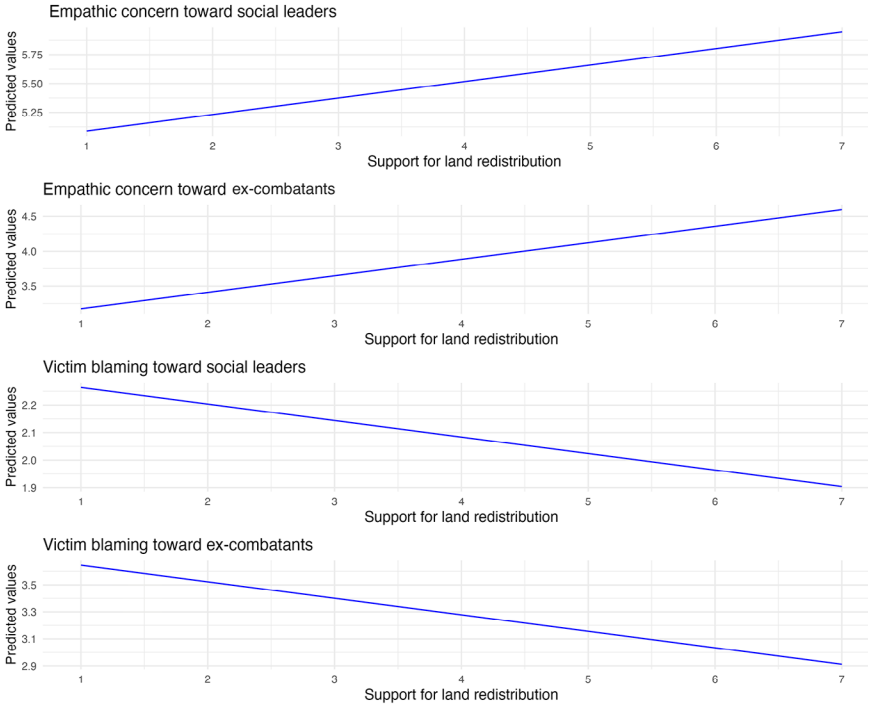


Figure 16. Effect of support for land redistribution on empathic concern and victim blaming toward social leaders and ex-combatants



policy proposals but rather as symbolic claims associated with insurgency and political unrest. As a result, stigmatizing attitudes, victim blaming, and reduced empathic concern extend beyond ex-combatants to include social leaders who, despite never having engaged in armed struggle, are perceived as advancing similarly disruptive agendas.

Finding #7. Three additional findings underscore the importance of fostering an environment in which the public views rights activism—particularly land rights advocacy—and the legitimacy of structural reforms. Respondents who support more equitable land distribution are more likely to believe that the

peace agreement strengthens democracy and that peace is both a right and a constitutional duty. They also express more willingness to engage in activities related to the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. These three findings suggest that civilian perceptions of land redistribution as a destabilizing or potentially conflict-generating factor not only underpin stigmatization against social leaders and ex-combatants but also shape broader public attitudes toward the peace process itself. In contrast, positive perceptions of redistributive reform are associated with increased support for political participation and grassroots mobilization for human rights defense and policies aimed at addressing factors that underlie armed confrontation.

Figure 17 (page 40) illustrates this relationship: respondents who express the highest levels of support for land redistribution are also the most likely to view the peace accord as a democracy-strengthening mechanism²⁴ and to believe that peace is a right and a constitutional duty.²⁵ They are also more willing to participate in peacebuilding initiatives. We observe that these results hold independently of other factors, such as ideology, exposure to violence during the armed conflict, socio-economic status, support for other redistributive measures (e.g., progressive taxation), and support for different forms of social mobilization (e.g., peaceful demonstrations or written petitions to the state).²⁶

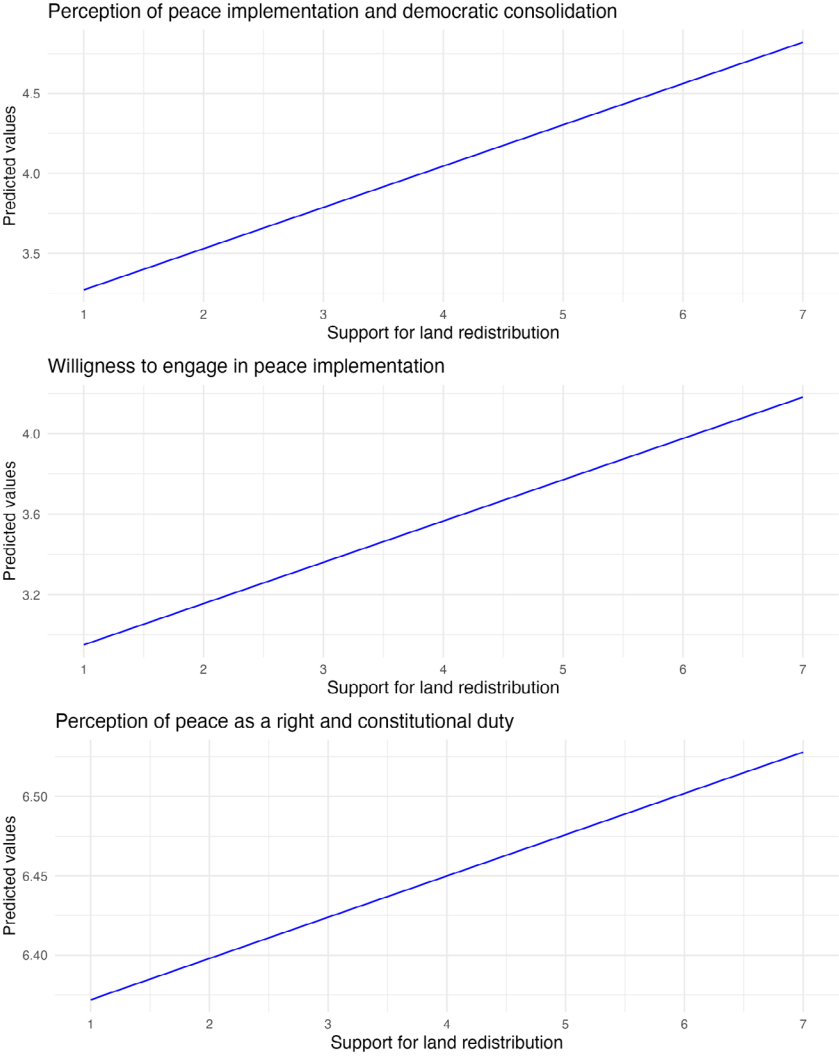
These results highlight the urgent need to counteract stigmatization directed at peacebuilders and the claims they advance. The state has a role to play in this process by publicly sup-

24 The question reads as follows: "On a 1-7 scale, where 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 7 means 'strongly agree,' how much do you agree with the following statements? The implementation of the 2016 peace agreement strengthens Colombia's democracy."

25 The question reads as follows: "On a 1-7 scale, where 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 7 means 'strongly agree,' how much do you agree with the following statements? Peace is a right and a constitutional duty."

26 The question reads as follows: "On a 1-7 scale, where 1 means 'not at all willing' and 7 means 'very willing,' how willing would you be to participate in an organization, group, or committee that helps implement the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the FARC?"

Figure 17. Effect of support for land redistribution on citizen perceptions of the 2016 peace accord as a democracy-strengthening mechanism and citizen willingness to participate in its implementation



porting the redistributive reforms championed by these actors. When the government incorporates such demands into its policy agenda, it signals to the broader public that structural grievances can be addressed through democratic and peaceful channels, including dialogue, negotiation, and institutional reform. To the extent that land redistribution is perceived by citizens as a legitimate and necessary component for strengthening democracy, public support can be cultivated, thereby fostering a more conducive environment for grassroots organizing around peace and equality, as well as the implementation of the peace agreement.

Beyond the imperative to counteract stigmatizing and violence-justifying attitudes, these results also highlight that public support for land reform can serve as a civic accountability mechanism, pressuring the state into fulfilling its commitments to redress structural inequalities that contributed to the armed conflict. Land redistribution represents more than an inequality-reduction policy for campesinos, Indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendant communities; it is also a foundational pillar of democracy. In Colombia, extreme land concentration has historically facilitated the entrenchment of political power and served as a key driver of armed confrontation (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2016; Fajardo, 2015; López-Uribe & Sánchez Torres, 2024). As a result, rural reform that expands access to land ownership for the country's landless rural population would improve the living conditions of low-income rural communities and facilitate the political participation of a wide range of actors.

4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

In this research project, we seek to nurture public debate—together with civil society actors and government stakeholders—on countering stigma and promoting public support for grassroots peacebuilding strategies. The findings point to the urgent need to build a more hospitable environment for peacebuilding in Colombia. When violence against advocates for democracy and equality is met with widespread citizen indif-

ference, the government has less incentive to adopt measures to address the immediate and underlying factors of such violence. In other words, the lack of public pressure in defense of life contributes to an environment where lethal violence is normalized.

In one of its recommendations, the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition notes that

Peace consolidation also requires the promotion of peaceful coexistence, tolerance and non-stigmatization, ensuring conditions that uphold democratic values and, in doing so, foster greater respect for those engaged in political opposition. (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición 2022b)

Similarly, the Constitutional Court has affirmed the essential role of human rights defenders under Colombia's 1991 Constitution:

Human rights leaders and defenders occupy a very important place within the framework of the 1991 Constitution because their work allows them to identify and report human rights violations, alert authorities to the consequences and impact of their actions and omissions, and contribute to the development of public policies to ensure compliance with its obligations and the realization of rights. (Sentencia SU-546 2023)

Regarding ex-combatants, the Constitutional Court has also emphasized the importance of a comprehensive, rights-based approach to guerrilla reincorporation:

The processes of political, social and/or economic reintegration, as well as the guarantee of security for those who signed the Final Peace Agreement, must be undertaken with full recognition that both institutional mechanisms and the process of rebuilding family, social, and community relations require an ethos of reconciliation, tolerance and non-stigmatization, along with the application of gender-based and differential approaches. (Sentencia SU-020 2022)

In line with this study's findings, a series of governmental and society-led actions can help improve the conditions in which peacebuilders operate:

- Design and implement campaigns to improve public attitudes toward social leaders and ex-combatants, seeking to encourage citizen engagement in efforts to protect peacebuilders. Campaign design should be carried out collaboratively between social movements and academia, who are currently developing programs aimed at increasing empathy toward peacebuilders and rejecting violence against them. Such partnerships enable joint assessment of ongoing and planned awareness-raising strategies and help identify effective messaging strategies to shift public attitudes. In particular, academic institutions can contribute by producing evidence on the impact of educational and awareness campaigns aimed at strengthening the legitimacy of social leaders' and ex-combatants' activism, cultivating empathic concern for their safety, and, ultimately, bolstering public rejection of violence against them.

Our findings suggest that stigma-reducing efforts will be successful only if they are paired with strategies to counter stigma against ex-combatants. Citizens often evaluate social leaders based on their perceived association with broader redistributive agendas—particularly demands for land redistribution—which are also historically linked to the roles of ex-combatants. Such overlap points to the need for evidence-based messaging that emphasizes the positive impact of the activism of social leaders and ex-combatants. Such messages should be widely disseminated through mainstream and community media to challenge the dominant narratives that have fueled stigma and violence-justifying attitudes against these actors.

Moreover, anti-stigma campaigns should place stronger emphasis on the right to defend rights. More concretely, they should affirm the legitimacy of social mobilization for redistributive land reform. Campaign messaging should also highlight the

nonviolent mechanisms available to address the redistributive claims of social movements, along with the positive contributions of equitable land tenure to democratic consolidation and sustainable peace. In doing so, these campaigns can help shift public perceptions, moving away from narratives that frame land redistribution as inherently destabilizing toward an understanding anchored in the mutually reinforcing relationships between socioeconomic equality, democracy, and peace.

- Expand public investment in social mobilization and citizen participation in peacebuilding. The 2016 peace accord explicitly provides for mechanisms to promote civic engagement and grassroots participation in its implementation. Ensuring adequate and sustained public funding for these initiatives is essential to strengthening democratic rule, fostering broad-based ownership of the peace process, and reinforcing the legitimacy of collective action as a means to advance structural reforms.
- Together with evidence-based awareness-raising campaigns designed collaboratively by civil society and the government, implement public policies that enhance the safety of peacebuilders. These policies should aim not only to ensure physical protection but also to shift public attitudes in favor of grassroots peacebuilding. Prior research shows that public policies can generate *feedback effects* on public opinion by legitimizing the claims of specific groups and improving citizens' perceptions of their members (Córdova & Kras, 2022). Recent rulings by the Constitutional Court represent a major step in this direction. Government institutions should guarantee that peacebuilders have access to effective protection mechanisms that dismantle violent obstacles to their work.
- Accelerate the implementation of land reform aimed at increasing ownership for landless communi-

ties and reduce asset concentration in the country. These policies would advance compliance with the commitments outlined in the 2016 peace accord and reinforce public support for grassroots organizing around land rights. The successful rollout of these policies could ultimately generate a *boomerang effect* in which tangible progress on redistribution helps shape citizen perceptions of peacebuilders and their demands.

5. Appendix

5.1 Technical Specifications of Study Sample

This study draws upon a two-wave online panel survey conducted between November and December 2023 with assistance from the polling company Netquest. The first wave employed stratified sampling to select participations by department of residence, gender, socioeconomic status, and age. Survey respondents largely lived in urban areas with access to internet. However, the sample includes respondents from diverse socioeconomic levels and different regions of the country. Notably, approximately 48% of respondents represent the two lowest socioeconomic categories in Colombia (strata 1 and 2).

Table 2. Study sample

Variable	Descriptive statistics
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	1,496 (50.8 %)
Male	1,448 (49.2 %)
<i>Region</i>	
Amazónica	31 (1.1 %)
Orinoquía	130 (4.4 %)
Atlántico	659 (22.4 %)

cont. »»

Table 2. Study sample (cont.)

Variable	Descriptive statistics
Central	1,448 (49.2 %)
Oriental	387 (13.1 %)
Pacífica	289 (9.8 %)
<i>Socioeconomic stratum</i>	
1	501 (17.0 %)
2	938 (31.9 %)
3	861 (29.2 %)
4	345 (11.7 %)
5	213 (7.2 %)
6	85 (2.9 %)
No data	1 (0.0 %)
<i>Age</i>	
Mean (standard deviation)	39.7 (13.4)
<i>Self-identification</i>	
White	863 (29.3 %)
Mestizo	1,674 (56.9 %)
Indigenous	68 (2.3 %)
Black or Afro-Colombian	131 (4.4 %)
Mulatto	53 (1.8 %)
Other	152 (5.2 %)
No data	(0.1 %)

5.2 Regression of the Effect of Attitudes Toward Ex-Combatants on Attitudes Toward Social Leaders

Table 3 shows multivariate regression results where citizen attitudes toward ex-combatants were used to predict attitudes toward social leaders (main outcome). The model included

control variables such as exposure to civil war violence, ideology, educational level, gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

Table 3. Attitudes toward social leaders

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	55.305	3.276	16.881	0.000
Positive attitudes toward ex-combatants	0.430	0.017	25.870	0.000
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	-2.268	1.218	-1.862	0.063
Ideology	-1.559	0.210	-7.423	0.000
Educational level	0.242	0.203	1.194	0.233
Gender (binary)	2.042	0.908	2.247	0.025
Age	-0.072	0.034	-2.108	0.035
Household income	-0.721	0.554	-1.302	0.193

5.3 Regression Analysis of Positive Attitudes, Empathic Concern, and Victim Blaming

Tables 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 present multivariate regression results where land redistribution (on a 1–7 scale) was used to predict positive attitudes (on a 1–7 scale), empathic concern (on a 1–7 scale), and victim blaming (on a 1–7 scale) for each group (social leaders and ex-combatants). Control variables included exposure to civil war violence, support for progressive taxation, support for different forms of mobilization (e.g., peaceful demonstrations or written petitions to the state), ideology, educational level, gender, age, and socioeconomic level.

Table 4. Positive attitudes toward social leaders

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	34.634	4.202	8.242	0.000
Land redistribution	3.326	0.290	11.460	0.000
Progressive taxation	0.888	0.299	2.971	0.003
Peaceful demonstrations	2.484	0.353	7.026	0.000
State petitioning	1.119	0.347	3.222	0.001
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	-2.468	1.267	-1.947	0.052
Ideology	-1.709	0.227	-7.533	0.000
Educational level	0.320	0.213	1.500	0.134
Gender (binary)	0.917	0.953	0.963	0.336
Age	-0.089	0.036	-2.499	0.013
Household income	-1.851	0.578	-3.201	0.001

Table 5. Positive attitudes toward ex-combatants

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	39.071	4.427	8.826	0.000
Land redistribution	3.236	0.307	10.550	0.000
Progressive taxation	0.943	0.315	2.998	0.003
Peaceful demonstrations	0.896	0.373	2.406	0.016
State petitioning	-0.384	0.366	-1.050	0.294

Table 5. Positive attitudes toward ex-combatants (cont.)

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	-0.621	1.337	-0.465	0.642
Ideology	-2.388	0.238	-10.021	0.000
Educational level	0.087	0.223	0.390	0.696
Gender (binary)	0.869	1.002	0.867	0.386
Age	-0.077	0.038	-2.041	0.041
Household income	-2.218	0.607	-3.653	0.000

Table 6. Empathic concern toward social leaders

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	3.083	0.245	12.569	0.000
Land redistribution	0.145	0.017	8.549	0.000
Progressive taxation	0.050	0.017	2.873	0.004
Peaceful demonstrations	0.177	0.021	8.594	0.000
State petitioning	0.088	0.020	4.347	0.000
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	-0.010	0.074	-0.138	0.891
Ideology	-0.068	0.013	-5.134	0.000
Educational level	0.005	0.012	0.390	0.697
Gender (binary)	0.272	0.055	4.901	0.000
Age	0.004	0.002	1.821	0.069
Household income	0.028	0.034	0.836	0.403

Table 7. Empathic concern toward ex-combatants

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	2.967	0.296	10.025	0.000
Land redistribution	0.240	0.020	11.771	0.000
Progressive taxation	0.043	0.021	2.044	0.041
Peaceful demonstrations	0.059	0.025	2.395	0.017
State petitioning	-0.041	0.024	-1.674	0.094
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	-0.008	0.089	-0.088	0.930
Ideology	-0.122	0.016	-7.643	0.000
Educational level	0.010	0.015	0.689	0.491
Gender (binary)	0.063	0.067	0.941	0.347
Age	0.008	0.003	3.314	0.001
Household income	-0.076	0.041	-1.883	0.060

Table 8. Victim blaming of killed social leaders

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	2.677	0.260	10.305	0.000
Land redistribution	-0.058	0.018	-3.237	0.001
Progressive taxation	-0.001	0.018	-0.058	0.953
Peaceful demonstrations	-0.124	0.022	-5.712	0.000
State petitioning	-0.059	0.021	-2.754	0.006
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	0.310	0.078	3.969	0.000
Ideology	0.113	0.014	8.082	0.000
Educational level	-0.007	0.013	-0.564	0.573
Gender (binary)	-0.093	0.059	-1.589	0.112
Age	0.003	0.002	1.347	0.178
Household income	0.022	0.036	0.629	0.529

Table 9. Victim blaming of killed ex-combatants

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	2.892	0.315	9.177	0.000
Land redistribution	-0.123	0.022	-5.665	0.000
Progressive taxation	0.019	0.022	0.858	0.391
Peaceful demonstrations	-0.053	0.026	-1.998	0.046
State petitioning	-0.009	0.026	-0.347	0.729
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	0.311	0.095	3.284	0.001
Ideology	0.198	0.017	11.703	0.000
Educational level	-0.009	0.016	-0.567	0.571
Gender (binary)	-0.013	0.071	-0.176	0.860
Age	-0.002	0.003	-0.630	0.528
Household income	0.070	0.043	1.627	0.104

5.4 Regression Analysis of Citizen Perceptions Toward Peace Implementation

Tables 10, 11, and 12 illustrate multivariate regression results where land redistribution was used to predict citizen perceptions of the 2016 peace accord as democracy consolidation (on a 1–7 scale), citizen willingness to engage in peace implementation (on a 1–7 scale), and civilian beliefs of peace as a right and constitutional duty (on a 1–7 scale). Control variables included exposure to civil war violence, support for progressive taxation, support for different forms of mobilization (e.g., peaceful demonstrations or written petitions to the state), ideology, educational level, gender, age, and socioeconomic level.

Table 10. Citizen perceptions of peace implementation as democratic consolidation

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	3.583	0.293	12.236	0.000
Land redistribution	0.261	0.020	12.907	0.000
Progressive taxation	0.065	0.021	3.110	0.002
Peaceful demonstrations	0.052	0.025	2.126	0.034
State petitioning	-0.001	0.024	-0.023	0.982
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	-0.162	0.088	-1.836	0.067
Ideology	-0.126	0.016	-8.031	0.000
Educational level	0.007	0.015	0.474	0.635
Gender (binary)	-0.069	0.066	-1.047	0.295
Age	-0.002	0.002	-0.659	0.510
Household income	-0.210	0.040	-5.228	0.000

Table 11. Willingness to participate in peace implementation

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	2.175	0.340	6.394	0.000
Land redistribution	0.202	0.023	8.626	0.000
Progressive taxation	0.073	0.024	3.026	0.003
Peaceful demonstrations	0.175	0.028	6.157	0.000
State petitioning	-0.038	0.028	-1.356	0.175
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	0.476	0.102	4.652	0.000
Ideology	-0.099	0.018	-5.426	0.000
Educational level	0.022	0.017	1.290	0.197
Gender (binary)	-0.219	0.077	-2.849	0.004
Age	-0.008	0.003	-2.695	0.007
Household income	0.010	0.047	0.207	0.836

Table 12. Perception of peace as a right and a constitutional duty

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
(Intercept)	4.557	0.176	25.833	0.000
Land redistribution	0.025	0.012	2.014	0.044
Progressive taxation	0.065	0.013	5.171	0.000
Peaceful demonstrations	0.146	0.015	9.888	0.000
State petitioning	0.072	0.015	4.931	0.000

cont. >>>

Table 12. Perception of peace as a right and a constitutional duty (cont.)

Variable	Estimate	Standard error	Statistic	p value
Exposure to civil war violence (binary)	-0.041	0.053	-0.763	0.445
Ideology	-0.016	0.009	-1.640	0.101
Educational level	0.005	0.009	0.594	0.552
Gender (binary)	0.002	0.040	0.041	0.967
Age	0.006	0.001	3.674	0.000
Household income	-0.010	0.024	-0.426	0.670

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Despite signing a peace accord in 2016, Colombia remains one of the most dangerous countries for social mobilization for peace, democracy, and equality. Between 2016 and 2023, 1,804 social leaders and 351 ex-combatants were assassinated. However, there has been no strong or sustained public outcry in response to this violence.

This policy brief presents findings from a research project examining public attitudes toward lethal violence against social leaders and ex-combatants, with a focus on stigmatization against these actors and violence-justifying beliefs and attitudes. Drawing on data from an online survey conducted in late 2023—which is representative of the urban population with internet access—the study shows that violence-justifying attitudes toward both unarmed civilians—who did not engage in insurgent action—and former guerrilla combatants depends largely on their demands. Although public opinion tends to be more favorable toward social leaders than ex-combatants, citizen perceptions of both groups become more negative when these actors advocate for structural reforms, particularly land redistribution. This is because social mobilization for land redistribution is often associated with wartime grievances and thus perceived as a threat to the existing social order. These findings show that redistributive peace commitments are seen as potentially destabilizing, which in turn reinforces stigma against actors who advocate for redistribution. The study draws policy and practice recommendations to counteract such stigmatization, prevent violence, and support the implementation of the peace accord.