

Moral Disengagement in the Evaluation of Violence Against Civilians in Colombia

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Abstract

How do individuals' attitudes toward armed actors shape their evaluations of violence against civilians committed by groups on both sides of the conflict? I argue that people reach less negative moral judgements about the abuse when they support the perpetrator. However, because of the widespread norm against civilian targeting, people must justify their side's violence. They use moral disengagement to do so, characterizing the violence as militarily necessary, minimizing how harmful it is, or placing responsibility for it onto individual fighters. I focus on attitudes toward state armed forces and utilize an online survey experiment in Colombia in which individuals read a news story about civilian targeting allegedly perpetrated by the state or guerrillas. The results suggests that supporters of the military justify more lenient punishments for state perpetrators by characterizing state violence as less harmful and less likely to be the responsibility of group leadership. These findings provide insights into how people come to terms with wartime abuses committed by armed actors they support.

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*“There are narratives that justify [war] crimes ...
whether [the perpetrator] is the state or the guerrilla.”¹*

Introduction

People often hold polarized stances regarding wartime violence which causes civilian casualties. For example, a 2024 study indicates that a fifth of adults in the United States believe Israel’s conduct in its campaign against Hamas since 2023 has been “completely acceptable” and another fifth believe that it has been “completely unacceptable.” The same survey indicates that 62% of U.S. Jews believe that Israel’s conduct is “somewhat/completely acceptable,” but only 5% of U.S. Muslims agree (Mohamed 2024). Another 2024 survey indicates that 94% of people living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank believe Israel has committed war crimes in the conflict; only 10% think Hamas has (PCPSR 2024). A third survey conducted the same year suggests that only 19% of Israelis think that Israel’s military response against Gaza has gone “too far” (Smerkovich 2024). These divergent perspectives beg the question: how do individuals’ attitudes toward armed actors shape their evaluations of violence against civilians committed by groups on both sides of the conflict?

Research from diverse contexts suggests that people’s responses to civilian targeting are shaped by whether their partisan, religious, national, and/or ethnic identity aligns with that of the perpetrator (Condra and Shapiro 2012; Lyall, Blair and Imai 2013; Samii 2013; Silverman 2019; Tellez 2020; Mironova and Whitt 2022; Levy 2025). At the same time, there is a widespread, strong norm against civilian targeting (e.g. Wood 2003; ICRC 2016; Levy 2022). So how do people come to terms with violence against civilians when it is committed by armed actors they support?

I focus on attitudes toward state armed forces, and I draw on work from psychology to argue that people with more positive views of the military reach less negative moral judgements of state-perpetrated violence against civilians, i.e., evaluations of how morally wrong it is and how severely its perpetrators should be punished. To maintain positive views of themselves despite characterizing state abuse in this way, military supporters utilize moral

¹Colombian social leader interview with author, spring 2022

disengagement (e.g. Bandura 1999; Moore 2015). They rationalize the violence with reference to 1) its cause (characterizing it as militarily necessary), 2) its consequences (portraying it as less harmful), or 3) who bears responsibility for it (blaming individual perpetrators rather than group leadership). People with the most positive attitudes toward state armed forces utilize the most moral disengagement to justify military violence.

I test the implications of this argument using an online factorial survey experiment in Colombia in which respondents are presented with a news article about a recent act of violence against civilians committed by FARC dissidents or the Colombian Armed Forces. The results suggest that supporters of state armed forces justify lighter punishments for state perpetrators than rebel perpetrators by characterizing military violence as less harmful and less likely to be the responsibility of military leadership. In contrast, they do not characterize violence committed by state forces as less morally wrong or more militarily necessary compared to opposition violence.

This project makes several contributions. First, while prior conflict research demonstrates that people respond less negatively to civilian targeting when they identify with the perpetrator, I explore how people justify their responses to such violence. Second, this research contributes to an emerging literature on moral judgement in political science (Kertzer et al. 2014; Kalmoe and Mason 2022; Nussio 2025; Jung and Clifford 2025); existing work has primarily focused on variation in moral beliefs across different groups of people rather than on forms of moralized reasoning common among the public, as this project does. Third, the findings help us understand the complex attitudes of citizens toward transitional justice (Aguilar, Balcells and Cebolla-Boado 2011; Tellez 2019; Kitagawa 2023). Indeed, understanding how people rationalize violence is crucial to uncovering the reasons why polarization surrounding wartime civilian targeting continues in spite of clear, publicly available evidence of abuse.

Existing Research on Reactions to Civilian Targeting

Civilian targeting, like all political violence, has a variety of forms and logics. For example, explanations for such violence range from territorial control (e.g. Kalyvas 2006)

to type of war (e.g. Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay 2004) to ideology (e.g. Straus 2015) to armed group characteristics (e.g. Weinstein 2006). This project focuses on one aspect of violence against civilians: how regular people affected by war react to it.

Whether people turn against armed actors which have committed abuses has broad implications for conflict processes because, in many irregular wars, whether and to whom civilians provide resources shapes territorial control and conflict outcomes (e.g. Kalyvas 2006; Berman and Matanock 2015). The centrality of winning the people’s support has been recognized by conflict practitioners ranging from Mao Zedong (Tse-tung 2005) to the U.S. government (Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative 2009). Citizens’ reactions also matter in the wake of conflict, when people choose whether to support transitional justice efforts to punish perpetrators (e.g. Tellez 2019; Capoccia and Pop-Eleches 2020; Kao and Revkin 2023) and whether to vote for parties linked to abuses (e.g. Bateson 2021; Daly 2022).

It is well established that indiscriminate civilian targeting increases the local population’s support for the side which opposes the perpetrator, in part because it makes remaining neutral more dangerous (e.g. Krane and Mason 1989; Kocher, Pepinsky and Kalyvas 2011).² However, people do not respond uniformly negatively to civilian targeting. Characteristics of the violence and combatants’ involvement in it shape evaluations (Sagan and Valentino 2017; Dill and Schubiger 2021; Levy 2022; Kao and Revkin 2023), as do people’s values and attitudes toward the victims (Sagan and Valentino 2017; Rathbun and Stein 2020; Bloom et al. 2020) as well as their gender and exposure to international law (Wallace 2019; Hadzic and Tavits 2019). Most importantly, the identity of the perpetrator shapes reactions: people respond less negatively to such violence and its perpetrators when they share a partisan (Tellez 2020; Levy 2025), religious (Condra and Shapiro 2012), national (Lyall, Blair and Imai 2013; Silverman 2019), or ethnic identity (Samii 2013) with the perpetrator.

A range of theories can explain these findings. For example, work on motivated reasoning suggest that people use their reasoning abilities to reach their desired conclusions (Kunda

²Factors such as governance (e.g. Arjona 2016; Berman et al. 2013) and ideology (e.g. Petersen 2009; Parkinson 2021) also shape attitudes toward armed groups.

1990). Recent research on the subject has found that individuals' willingness to acknowledge facts depends on whether the evidence aligns with their political party's positions or is endorsed by members of that party (e.g. Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Druckman and McGrath 2019). Similarly, social identity theory posits that individuals define themselves based on their group membership and exhibit both in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Recent work invoking this theory indicates that shared-group identity affects support for military action (Chu and Lee 2024; Findor et al. 2025) and human rights violations (Cordell 2025).

However, while motivated reasoning and social identity theory can explain why people's moral judgements about violence against civilians differ based on their attitudes toward the perpetrator, they do not offer guidance about which thought processes help them reach these conclusions. They do not provide insight into which pieces of evidence or which stereotypes are more influential.

The theory I offer, in contrast, generates predictions about which justifications people rely on. My argument is consistent with the logics of motivated reasoning and social identity theory, but it takes as its starting point the idea that evaluations of civilian targeting are moral judgements because there is a strong norm against this type of violence. A 2016 Red Cross survey indicates that 78 percent of people living in countries affected by armed conflict believe that it would be wrong to attack enemy combatants in populated areas; opposition to direct targeting of civilians is likely even higher (ICRC 2016). Further, people evaluate variations in civilian targeting in a way that suggests that they view it as immoral (Levy 2022). Violence against civilians provokes anger and grievance (Goodwin 2001; Wood 2003; Cederman et al. 2020), and even people who are not affected prefer tactics that result in fewer civilian casualties (Johns and Davies 2019; Dill and Schubiger 2021; Han et al. 2021). Given that violence against civilians is understood to be wrong, I theorize about how people justify or rationalize it when they support the perpetrator.

Moral Judgements and Moral Disengagement

Like the work on motivated reasoning and social identity discussed above, scholarship on moral judgement indicates that people’s prior beliefs about actors shape their evaluations of the things those actors do (e.g. Uhlmann, Pizarro and Diermeier 2015; Helzer and Critcher 2018). As Hester and Gray (2020) summarize, “when people make moral judgements in everyday life, they usually know both what someone did (i.e., their act) and who they are (i.e., their identity) – and *who* often matters more than *what*” (p. 217). Thus, people’s moral judgements about civilian targeting should vary depending on who the perpetrator is.

I define moral judgements as evaluations of both moral wrongfulness and appropriate punishment; a wide range of research in psychology demonstrates the close relationship between these concepts (Hofmann et al. 2018; Jackson, Choi and Gelfand 2019; Malle 2021).³ Similarly, work in political science indicates that people approve of harsher punishment and are less likely to vote for combatants and criminals who commit morally objectionable crimes (Levy 2022; García-Ponce, Young and Zeitzoff 2022; Kao and Revkin 2023; Dow et al. 2024).

I examine how beliefs about the military shape moral judgements of civilian targeting committed by both the state and its opponents. Civilians’ attitudes shape their behaviors, and civilians’ decisions about whether to provide resources to and otherwise comply with the government are central to prominent theories of irregular conflict processes (e.g. Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay 2004; Kalyvas 2006), state legitimacy (e.g. Levi, Sacks and Tyler 2009; Risse and Stollenwerk 2018), and counterinsurgency (e.g. Kilcullen 2010; Berman et al. 2013). I thus argue that people with positive attitudes toward the military should reach less harsh moral judgements about state violence than opposition violence. However, attitudes toward armed actors are not binary. Therefore, I also argue that, compared to weak

³Malle (2021) describes four elements of moral judgement: evaluations of actions as bad, norm judgements about whether actions are forbidden, wrongness judgements, and blame judgements. All civilian targeting is “bad” and “forbidden,” so I do not focus on these first two elements. I directly measure wrongness judgements, and I capture blame judgements by asking about punishment. Many scholars treat punishment and blame as almost identical concepts (e.g. Cushman 2008; Rothschild et al. 2012), though others do not (e.g. Malle 2025).

supporters of the military, strong supporters should reach even less harsh moral judgements about state-perpetrated abuses.

- *Prior Attitudes & Wrongfulness Hypothesis*: The more positively individuals feel about state armed forces, the less likely they are to believe that violence against civilians committed by state forces is morally wrong compared to when it is committed by opposition forces.
- *Prior Attitudes & Punishment Hypothesis*: The more positively individuals feel about state armed forces, the less likely they are to believe that the perpetrators should be harshly punished when violence against civilians is committed by state forces compared to when it is committed by opposition forces.

However, it is not easy to characterize violence against civilians as neither particularly morally wrong nor worthy of harsh punishment; supporting immoral actions destabilizes individuals' understandings of their own character (Roccas, Klar and Liviatan 2006; Wohl, Branscombe and Klar 2006). I therefore suggest that, when state forces perpetrate abuse, military supporters endeavor to justify it through moral disengagement: a cognitive process that allows people to maintain a positive view of themselves despite engaging in (e.g. Bandura 1999; Moore 2015) or supporting wrongful behavior (e.g. McAlister 2001; Aquino et al. 2007; Leidner et al. 2010; Gino and Galinsky 2012; Kalmoe and Mason 2022). Importantly, people are more likely to utilize moral disengagement when they feel psychologically close to the actors, glorify them, or stand to benefit from their actions (Leidner et al. 2010; Gino and Galinsky 2012; Paharia, Vohs and Deshpandé 2013). In other words, stronger supporters of state forces will use more moral disengagement when evaluating state violence than weak supporters of the military.

I focus on three forms of moral disengagement. First, people can justify the violence with reference to its cause, characterizing it as militarily necessary. Second, they can minimize the consequences of the violence by characterizing it as harming fewer people. Third, they can displace responsibility for the violence from group leadership onto lower level fighters. These

forms of moral disengagement are not exhaustive, and people may rely on only some of them. Indeed, many studies focus only on specific forms of moral disengagement (e.g. Leidner et al. 2010; Paharia, Vohs and Deshpandé 2013; Kalmoe and Mason 2022). Importantly, each form of moral disengagement entails a theory about the characteristics of violence which are perceived as meriting less harsh moral judgement. I next consider each type of moral disengagement.

In the first relevant form, “detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy or moral purposes” (Bandura 1999, p. 194). Indeed, actors are blamed less for wrongdoing when they have “valid” reasons for engaging in it (Monroe and Malle 2019). As such, people are more likely to support torture when it is portrayed as effective (Kearns and Young 2020) and more likely to support attacks that cause civilian casualties when they also offer military benefits (Press, Sagan and Valentino 2013; Sagan and Valentino 2017; Dill, Sagan and Valentino 2022). I argue that violence against civilians is seen as serving a worthy purpose when it is not gratuitous, i.e. when it contributes to winning the war. I thus argue, first, that violence seen as militarily necessary will be met with less harsh moral judgement and, second, that military supporters will see state abuses as more militarily necessary than similar violence committed by the opposition. This will be particularly true among strong supporters of state forces.

- *Necessity Hypothesis*: People who believe that violence against civilians is necessary for the achievement of military goals are less likely to believe that a) the violence is morally wrong and b) its perpetrators should be strongly punished
- *Prior Attitudes & Necessity Hypothesis*: The more positively individuals feel about state armed forces, the more likely they are to believe that violence against civilians committed by state forces is necessary for the achievement of military goals compared to when it is committed by opposition forces.

The second relevant form of moral disengagement is minimizing, ignoring, or misconstruing the consequences of the wrongful behavior (Bandura 2015). Indeed, wrongdoing is condemned

proportionally to the harm it inflicts (e.g. Cushman 2013; Schein and Gray 2018). Although there are various ways to measure wartime harm, a simple and common heuristic is the number of people killed (e.g. Seybolt, Aronson and Fischhoff 2013; Wilke and Naseemi 2022). Thus, people engaging in moral disengagement should minimize the volume of civilian casualties. Indeed, in a study of Americans’ attitudes toward the war in Iraq under a Republican president, most people correctly identified the number of casualties. However, Democrats interpreted this number as “large” rather than “small,” like Republicans (Gaines et al. 2007). Therefore, I hypothesize, first, that people who perceive a large volume of casualties should reach harsher moral judgements and, second, that people’s attitudes toward the military should shape their perceptions of casualty volume.

- *Harmfulness Hypothesis*: People who believe that violence against civilians causes more harm [casualties] are more likely to believe that a) the violence is morally wrong and b) its perpetrators should be strongly punished.
- *Prior Attitudes & Harmfulness Hypothesis*: The more positively individuals feel about state armed forces, the less likely they are to believe that violence against civilians committed by state forces causes extensive harm [casualties] compared to when it is committed by opposition forces.

The last relevant form of moral disengagement is the displacement of responsibility. While existing work focuses on how individuals avoid responsibility by blaming leadership figures (Bandura 1999), I argue that civilian targeting for which group leadership is responsible is seen as more morally objectionable. There are two broad categories of combatants who can be responsible for wartime targeting: the fighters who engage in the violence, or the leaders who order or condone it. Individual fighters are responsible for violence if it occurs against the wishes of group leaders (Wood 2018; Hoover Green 2016). In contrast, leaders are responsible if the targeting is part of a deliberate strategy of the group, even if it is not explicitly ordered (e.g. Downes 2008; Cohen 2013). When group leadership is responsible, any act of violence is only one example of a more systematic pattern which likely inflicts

more harm than an isolated instance of abuse. Further, moral judgement is correlated with agency, the ability to plan and execute an action (e.g. Gray and Wegner 2010; Schein and Gray 2018); civilian targeting which is part of a large-scale strategy requires more agency and is thus judged more harshly.⁴ Therefore, I argue that believing leadership is responsible for abuse is correlated with harsher moral judgements of the violence. Further, I suggest that, to justify violence committed by the state, supporters of state forces place responsibility on fighters rather than military leadership.

- *Responsibility Hypothesis*: People who believe that armed group leadership is responsible for the violence are more likely to believe that a) the violence is morally wrong and b) its perpetrators should be strongly punished
- *Prior Attitudes & Responsibility Hypothesis*: The more positively individuals feel about state armed forces, the less likely they are to believe that armed group leadership is responsible for the violence committed by state forces compared to when it is committed by opposition forces.

It is not clear whether people first reach moral judgements about the violence – how morally wrong it is and how much its perpetrators should be punished – or first make evaluations about the characteristics of the violence – how harmful it is, how militarily necessary it is, and who bears responsibility for it. Do people immediately reach moral judgements and then subsequently seek to rationalize these judgements? Or do they perceive violence committed by actors they support as less harmful, more militarily necessary, and/or less likely to be the responsibility of leadership, subsequently reaching less harsh moral judgements as a result of these understandings of the abuse’s characteristics? Ultimately, as Kalmoe and Mason (2022) ask, “does moral disengagement cause violent views, or do violent views force a moral rationalization? Probably both.” In a survey setting, it is impossible to discern the order in which people reach judgements. Given this difficulty, I do not interpret

⁴I assume that people see group leadership as among the “perpetrators” to be punished when they are responsible. Alternatively, if people see only the fighters that directly engaged in the violence as “perpetrators,” they may seek reduced punishment when leadership is responsible.

evaluations of the traits of the violence as *causes* of moral judgements or as *mediators* of the relationship between attitudes toward the state and moral judgements; both of these terms imply a particular directional relationship between the variables.

There are three scope conditions for this theory. First, there must be a strong norm against violence against civilians, meaning that the public does not reward the killing of outgroup civilians. Thus, I exclude conflicts with extreme intergroup animosity, such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killings based on categorical victim profiles. Given the exclusion of these conflicts, I do not examine the victim-blaming form of moral disengagement. Second, I focus on conflicts in which violence against civilians is common and publicized, meaning that neither armed groups nor civilians can plausibly deny that violence has occurred. Third, the war must feature two fundamentally opposing sides, the state and its opposition.

This focus on conflict between rebels and the state means that I cannot directly examine attitudes toward different non-state armed actors fighting on the same side of a conflict's master cleavage. Indeed, rebel groups frequently fragment, ally, or fight against each other (e.g. Christia 2012; Wood and Kathman 2015; Schubiger 2023). The theory also does not help us understand attitudes toward non-state armed groups that are allied with or support the state. Indeed, research has demonstrated the prominence of pro-state paramilitaries in conflicts around the world (e.g. Carey, Mitchell and Paula 2022).

Research Design

Case Selection

Since the 1960s, Colombia has been embroiled in a conflict involving the state, leftist guerrillas, pro-state paramilitaries, and criminal groups. The country is deeply divided over the conflict and civilian targeting, making it an effective case upon which to test the theory.

Colombia's Truth Commission, established in a 2016 peace accord between the FARC and the government, concluded that over 90% of conflict fatalities were civilians and that

all armed actors have engaged in such abuse (La Comisión de la Verdad 2022).⁵ Colombia continues reckoning with this abuse; transitional justice institutions are prominently covered in the news (e.g. *El Espectador* 2024; Morales Castillo 2024), as are relevant proceedings in international organizations (e.g. *El Espectador* 2021). Despite the peace accord, a range of armed groups remain active throughout Colombia’s territory, including FARC dissidents who did not disarm after the agreement or have since rearmed (e.g. Indepaz 2022; Bonilla et al. 2025). Civilian targeting also continues (e.g. Corredor Rodríguez 2023; Indepaz 2025). In other words, Colombia is a country that is contending with past and present conflict and its associated civilian targeting.

While few Colombians have expressed support for non-state guerrilla groups over the past few decades (e.g. Dugand, García and Sánchez 2018; Cárdenas, Downing and Johnson 2022), people who would consider themselves supporters of the state have diverse attitudes toward the state’s armed forces. For example, former President Duque (2018-2022) was elected on a platform of modifying the peace agreement to ensure stricter punishment for FARC war criminals, but not for state perpetrators of similar abuses (*El Tiempo* 2018). In contrast, President Petro (2022-2026) is a harsh critic of wartime human rights abuses committed by the state (*El Espectador* 2010).

There are many ways in which the Colombian conflict is similar to other wars. For example, in many conflicts both sides commit civilian targeting; governments and non-state actors committed similar total volumes of violence against civilians 1989 - 2021 (Davies, Pettersson and Öberg 2022). Many conflicts involve armed groups financed by natural resources, such as coca in Colombia (Weinstein 2006; Blair, Christensen and Rudkin 2021). Further, roughly half of all non-state groups that engaged in or threatened violence between 1970 and 2017 were leftist (Jasko et al. 2022).⁶ Thus, while it is impossible to know if the results would travel, there are principled reasons to believe that they would.

⁵The Truth Commission makes clear that women, LGBTQI+ individuals, children, and ethnic minorities have suffered unique harms. However, the primary cleavage in the conflict is ideological. The war therefore does not feature genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killings based on categorical victim profiles.

⁶Like other conflicts, Colombia also has pro-state militias and complex relationships between rebel groups.

Experimental Setup

This project uses an online survey experiment in Colombia with 1,587 respondents fielded on July 28th, 2021 by Dynata.⁷ All respondents consented and indicated that they were Colombian citizens before continuing to the survey, during which they could skip any question. The design was approved by — University’s IRB with protocol number 2021-0609. All hypotheses were pre-registered.⁸

I operationalize individuals’ support for the military using two questions with 1-5 answer scales.⁹ First, “to what degree do you have confidence in the Armed Forces?” Second, “what should happen to the budget of the Ministry of Defense?” I then create an additive index, **Pro-Military**, which is rescaled to 0-1.¹⁰ Questions about attitudes toward the military were asked before treatment to ensure that the experiment did not affect responses.¹¹

These two questions are precise enough to identify respondents’ support for the state as an actor in the armed conflict. Alternatives, such as ideology, are insufficiently exact; ideology is one of several determinants of support for armed actors (e.g. Levy 2025), and people can subscribe to an ideology for reasons besides their beliefs about the conflict.¹² Additionally, the questions which make up the index are unlikely to put respondents at risk, since Colombians regularly express and hear diverse perspectives on the armed forces (e.g.

⁷Respondents were not nationally representative (Table A1). The benefits of demographically weighing online samples in Latin America are limited (Castorena et al. 2023), and online convenience samples provide reliable estimates of experimental treatment effects (Coppock 2019; Mullinix et al. 2015).

⁸The pre-analysis plan is available at —.

⁹Note that the pre-analysis plan specified a 3-item index. See Appendix F for a discussion of this change and other deviations from the pre-analysis plan. The results are robust to using the three-item index.

¹⁰Indices built from survey items are more stable and precise (Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2008; Brookman, Kalla and Sekhon 2017). The correlation between these two variables is .42, and the Cronbach’s Alpha for the index is .59. PCA suggests that the first component explains 71% of the variance in the two variables; both items load positively onto this component. The second component explains 29% of the variance. The opposite signs of the loadings of the two variables onto this second component indicate that some individuals distinguish between confidence in the military and support for increasing its funding. Therefore, these two questions form a coherent index capturing an underlying concept while still retaining variation in how respondents answer the two questions. For more details, see Tables A6 and A7.

¹¹I did not use an endorsement or list experiment because neither would not recover individual-level measures of attitudes (e.g. Imai, Park and Greene 2015; Bullock, Imai and Shapiro 2017).

¹²Table A8 indicates that **Pro-Military** attitudes are correlated with gender, age, income, victimization, ideology, and perceptions of local security.

Rivera, Plata Caviedes and Rodríguez Raga 2018; El Espectador 2019, 2021).¹³

Respondents next read a vignette simulating the first paragraph of a newspaper article. The randomized treatment is whether the act of violence against civilians was allegedly committed by the Colombian Armed Forces or FARC dissidents. I did not include a control condition which did not name the perpetrator because, in the context of an ongoing conflict, respondents would likely infer that the perpetrator was on the other side of the conflict. In other words, inferences would be correlated with the key independent variable.

Imagine a hypothetical article in the newspaper *El Tiempo*. After you read the first paragraph of the hypothetical article below, please answer several questions about the violence described in the article. Even if you are unsure of your answer, please do your best to respond.

“Four civilians, who were not fighting and were not a part of either a non-state armed group or the Colombian Armed Forces, were killed in Antioquia yesterday morning. According to initial reports, the victims were two men and two women; all were shot at close range. The local mayor alleges that the perpetrators were (*leftist dissidents of the FARC / members of the Colombian Armed Forces*).”

Note several design decisions. First, the text references a massacre; a variety of armed actors have engaged in this tactic, making it plausible that either FARC dissidents or the Armed Forces were the perpetrator (e.g. La Comisión de la Verdad 2022). Second, the vignette is in *El Tiempo* newspaper; it is the largest newspaper in the country and is relatively centrist (Newman et al. 2022). Third, it is plausible that a range of victims and perpetrators could be involved in violence in Antioquia and that the mayor could have a range of political affiliations.¹⁴ Fourth, the vignette mentions four deaths; that is the average number of victims of massacres in 2020 and in 2021 through April 27 (Indepaz 2025). Fifth, the vignette says little about the victims to avoid suggesting a specific perpetrator. Last, the vignette is realistic but hypothetical to avoid deception; describing a scenario as hypothetical

¹³Matanock and García-Sánchez (2018) have found that Colombians inflate their confidence in the military; they used a binary direct question and a list experiment. In this project, the average of **Pro-Military** is .4, suggesting that the continuous scales may have helped people express dissatisfaction.

¹⁴Massacres are frequent in Antioquia (Indepaz 2025), and a variety of non-state armed groups have an established presence in the region (Indepaz 2022). There are over 120 mayors in Antioquia (Datos Abiertos, Gobierno de Colombia 2022) representing a variety of political parties (Gobierno de Colombia 2026).

does not change survey results (Brutger et al. 2022).¹⁵

Respondents then answered questions about the vignette which were presented in a random order. **Wrongfulness** asks, on a scale from 1 (“strong disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), how much the respondent agrees that the violence was morally wrong. **Punishment** asks what degree of punishment is appropriate, ranging from pardon to life imprisonment. Four response options reflect punishments established in the peace accord (Roccatello and Rojas 2020; JEP 2021), and the other two are more lenient and more harsh.¹⁶ **Military Necessity** asks, on a scale from 1 (“very unlikely”) to 5 (“very likely”), how likely it is that the violence was necessary to achieve military gains. **Leader Responsibility** asks how likely it is that the leadership of the organization was responsible for the violence, on the same scale. **Harmfulness** asks respondents to describe the number of victims on a 5-point scale ranging from “very small” to “very large.” Full question wording is in Appendix A.

Regressions are OLS. The key models are summarized in the equation below. **Armed Forces Perpetrator** is the treatment; it takes a value of 0 if FARC dissidents are the perpetrator and a value of 1 if the Colombian Armed Forces are the perpetrator. **Pro-Military** is the two-item index capturing attitudes toward the armed forces. The interaction between these two variables captures my argument that people with stronger pro-military attitudes will engage in greater levels of moral disengagement when violence is committed by state forces. β_0 is the intercept and ϵ captures the error term. Given that this is a randomized experiment and there are not significant demographic differences across individuals in the treatment groups (Table A2), no control variables are used in the main analyses.

$$DV = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Armed Forces Perpetrator} + \beta_2 \text{Pro-Military} + \beta_3 (\text{Armed Forces Perpetrator} \times \text{Pro-Military}) + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

¹⁵For two examples of a mayors making allegations about the perpetrators of recent massacres in their towns, see WRadio (2021) and Agudelo (2021).

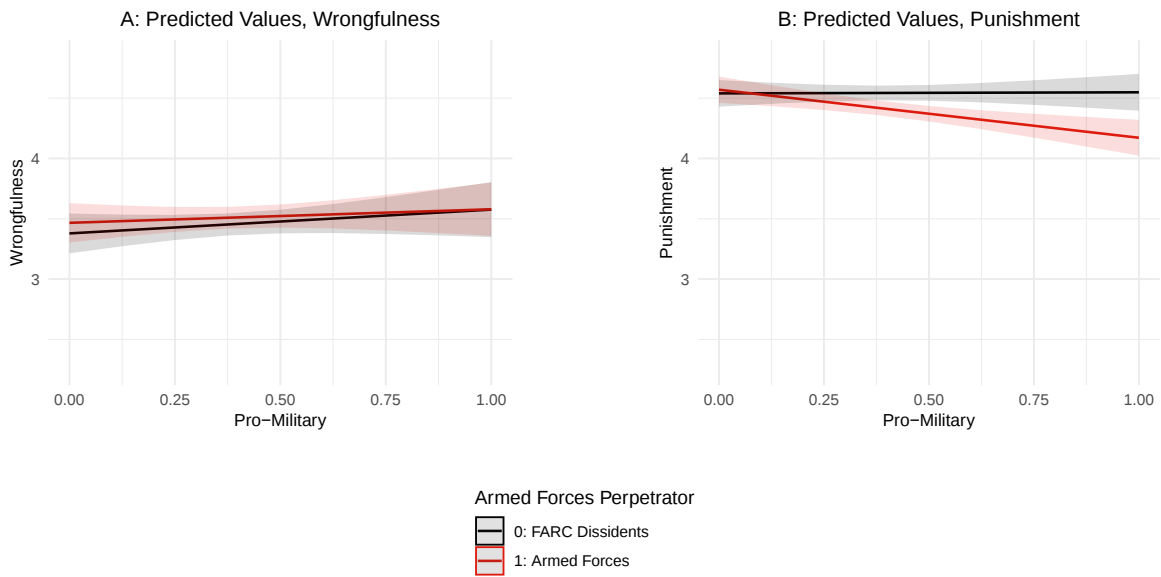
¹⁶The variable has been rescaled to 1-5 to match the scale of all other dependent variables.

Results

The results in Table A9 suggest that supporters of state armed forces seek less harsh punishment for the military than for opposition forces that have committed similar violence against civilians. Supporters of state armed forces justify military violence – and their less harsh moral judgements of it – by characterizing it as less harmful and less likely to be the responsibility of armed group leadership. However, compared to violence committed by opponents of the state, they do not characterize state violence as less morally wrong or more militarily necessary. These results are visualized in Figures 1 and 2; figures show 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 1 (models 1 and 2, Table A9) focuses on whether attitudes toward state armed forces affect moral judgements of violence: evaluations about how wrong the violence was and how much its perpetrators should be punished for it. More precisely, the figure visualizes the interaction effect of **Armed Forces Perpetrator** and **Pro-Military** in regressions on **Wrongfulness** and **Punishment**.

Figure 1: Perpetrator Shapes Moral Judgement

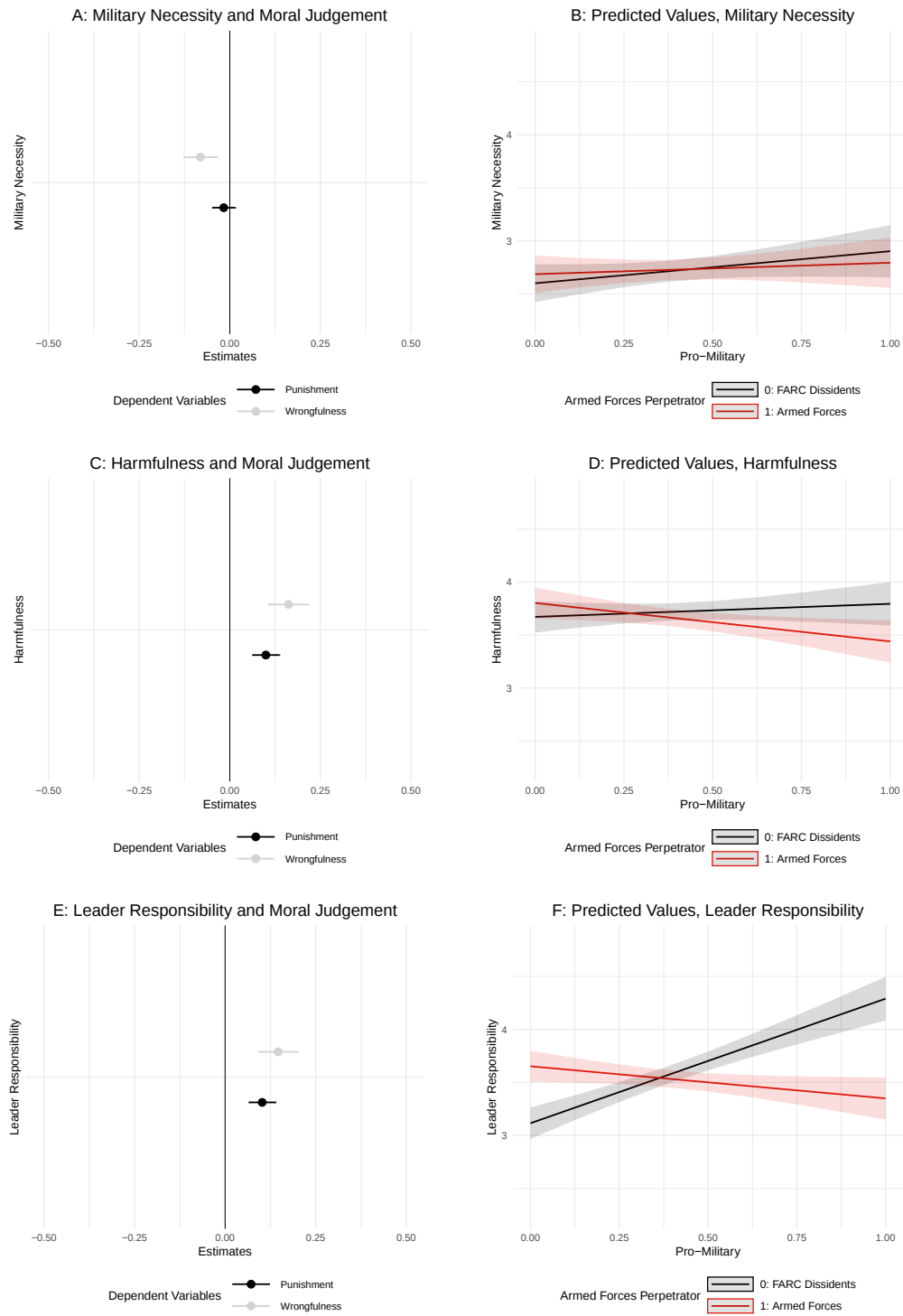


Panel A of Figure 1 shows that this interaction is not significant in the regression on **Wrongfulness**. Regardless of their attitudes toward state forces, people do not characterize violence by the military as any more or less morally wrong than violence committed by opposition forces. This does not support the *Prior Attitudes & Wrongfulness Hypothesis*. In contrast, Panel B shows the negative and statistically significant interaction effect of the same two variables on **Punishment**.¹⁷ When someone has the strongest **Pro-Military** attitude, they seek punishment for state perpetrators which is .41 points less severe than the punishment they seek for guerrillas. At lower levels of **Pro-Military** support, the difference between evaluations of punishment for the two sides is smaller. These results support the *Prior Attitudes & Punishment Hypothesis*: the more positive individuals' attitudes toward the military are, the less likely they are to believe that the armed forces should be harshly punished for their violence compared to when similar violence is perpetrated by guerrillas. Overall, these findings support existing work but also suggest that prior attitudes matter more for some types of moral judgements than others.

The next three sets of analyses in Figure 2 explore how supporters of state forces justify their less severe moral judgements of violence committed by the military (models 3-11 of Table A9); these models examine the three forms of moral disengagement hypothesized above. Panels on the left side of the figure (A, C, E) consider whether judgements of **Military Necessity**, **Harmfulness**, and **Leader Responsibility** are correlated with moral judgements about how wrong the violence is and how severely its perpetrators should be punished. Panels on the right side of the figure (B, D, F) focus on whether the interaction between attitudes toward the military and the treatment – who the perpetrator is – affects evaluations of whether the violence is militarily necessity, how harmful the abuse is, and whether armed group leaders bear responsibility for it.

¹⁷Respondents have a range of **Pro-Military** values (Figure A1), ensuring that I am not interpreting interactions at impossible or extremely rare values.

Figure 2: Justifications



Panels A and B of Figure 2 indicate that understandings of whether violence is necessary for military gains are not important in evaluations of civilian targeting. As Panel A demonstrates, **Military Necessity** is negatively correlated with evaluations of **Wrongfulness** but is not correlated with **Punishment**.¹⁸ Panel B indicates that the interaction between respondents' attitudes toward the military and the identity of the perpetrator is not statistically significant in the regression on **Military Necessity**. In other words, even strong supporters of the military do not consider armed forces violence to be more militarily necessary than similar violence committed by rebels. These results do not provide strong support for either the *Necessity Hypothesis* or the *Prior Attitudes & Necessity Hypothesis*.

In contrast, Panels C and D suggest that understandings of harm shape moral judgements and that supporters of state forces assess state violence as less harmful than rebel violence. Panel C demonstrates that **Harmfulness** is positively correlated with **Wrongfulness** and **Punishment**.¹⁹ Compared to violence with a “very small” number of victims, abuse with a “very large” number is characterized as .64 points more morally wrong and its perpetrators as deserving .40 points more punishment (on 1-5 scales). This finding supports the *Harmfulness Hypothesis*. Panel D visualizes the negative and statistically significant interaction between **Pro-Military** attitudes and **Armed Forces Perpetrator** in the regression on **Harmfulness**. When individuals strongly support the military, they characterize military violence as .49 points less harmful than guerrilla violence (on a 5-point scale). At low levels of support for the state, the difference in the perceived harmfulness of state and guerrilla violence is smaller. This provides support for the *Prior Attitudes & Harmfulness Hypothesis*. Overall, the findings suggest that people justify violence by characterizing it as resulting in fewer casualties, i.e. causing less harm.

Lastly, Panels E and F suggest that evaluations of who is responsible for the violence shape moral judgements about it; further, supporters of state forces characterize violence

¹⁸It is important to be cautious about interpreting these results, as well as the results in Panels C and E, because both the independent and dependent variables were measured post-treatment.

¹⁹These correlations remain statistically significant even when applying a strict Bonferroni correction to adjust for the fact that the hypothesis contains two parts.

committed by the armed forces as less likely to be the responsibility of leadership. Panel E indicates that, compared when it is “very unlikely” that group leaders were responsible for the violence, when it is “very likely” that they were, the violence is characterized as .60 points more morally wrong and worthy of punishment .40 points harsher. This supports the *Responsibility Hypothesis*.²⁰ Panel F visualizes the negative and statistically significant interaction between **Pro-Military** attitudes and **Armed Forces Perpetrator** in the regression on **Leader Responsibility**. The results indicate that, when individuals are strong military supporters, they characterize military violence as 1.48 points less likely to be the responsibility of group leadership (on a 5-point scale). At low levels of support for the state, in contrast, respondents characterize military violence as *more* likely to be the responsibility of leaders than guerrilla violence. These results provide strong support for the *Prior Attitudes & Responsibility Hypothesis*. They suggest that people justify violence committed by armed groups they support by blaming lower-level fighters rather than leadership of the perpetrator organization.

The findings from the main analyses are supported by a moderated mediation analysis (Tingley et al. 2014); details are in Section D.1.²¹ Many of the interaction results are robust to a range of alternative ways to measure pro-military attitudes, including using each of the two variables which make up the additive index (Tables A10, A11), replacing the index with ideology (Table A12), and using an index that weights the two questions according to the first principal component loadings from PCA (Table A13). The results are also mostly robust to including a range of controls (Tables A16 and A17), excluding respondents who failed the attention check (Table A18), excluding residents of the department where the vignette is set (Table A19), treating the dependent variables as ordinal rather than continuous (Table A20), and utilizing post-stratification weights based on the 2018 census (Table A21). The main models have assumed that the interactions are linear, and the three

²⁰These correlations remain statistically significant even when applying a strict Bonferroni correction to adjust for the fact that the hypothesis contains two parts.

²¹Note that this section also contains a description of why mediation analysis is not the main approach taken in this paper.

significant interactions are also robust to using an alternative interaction model as suggested by Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019); see right panels of Figure A2. Indeed, diagnostic tests indicate that linear interaction models are an appropriate approach (see left panels of Figure A2 and Table A15). Lastly, there is little evidence that treatment affects beliefs about the state (Table A14).

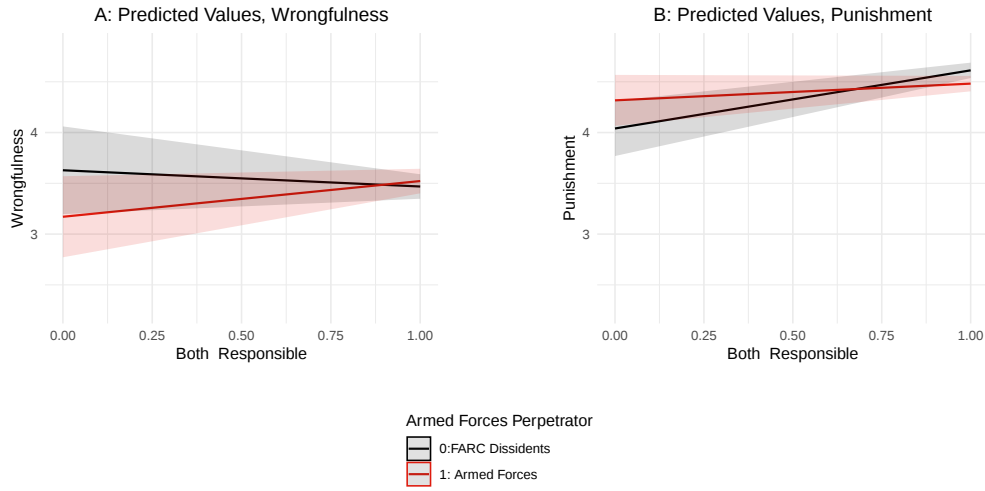
Opposition Supporters

The theory focuses on supporters of the state, but the broader argument about how prior attitudes shape evaluations of violence should also apply to supporters of opposition forces. However, **Pro-Military** cannot differentiate between FARC supporters and individuals who do not support either side.

In an attempt to disentangle these groups of respondents, I draw on a post-treatment survey question that asks which groups were principally responsible for Colombia’s violence. I first subset the data to exclude people who think that the guerrillas but not the state were responsible; these could be considered state supporters. Then, **Both Responsible** is 1 if respondents identify both the state and the guerrillas as principally responsible for the violence or indicate that “all” groups were responsible. It is 0 if respondents identify the state but not guerrillas as responsible. In other words, respondents with a value of 1 are centrists, and others are guerrilla supporters.

I then rerun some analyses on this subset of respondents (Table A22). Panel B of Figure 3 demonstrates that guerrilla supporters (**Both Responsible** = 0) seek less harsh punishment for FARC dissidents than for armed forces perpetrators. This analysis provides exploratory and suggestive evidence that the priors of guerrilla supporters affect their moral judgements, just as the priors of military supporters do.

Figure 3: Subset, Excluding Military Supporters



Social Desirability

Social desirability bias could have prompted people to skip some or all experimental questions. For several reasons, this is unlikely. First, the correlations between NAs is high (See Table A3). Second, while demographics matter for who does not respond, respondents were no more likely to skip questions if they had weaker **Pro-Military** attitudes, were in a specific treatment group, or were victims of the conflict (Tables A4 and A5). Because victims could be reluctant to answer questions about violence, and because people could fear expressing negative opinions about armed actors with the capacity to retaliate against them, these nulls indicate that missingness is unlikely the result of social desirability bias.

Social desirability bias could also prompt people to falsify their answers. Yet, many respondents expressed distasteful opinions. The average respondent supported 15 years in prison for perpetrators and neither agreed nor disagreed that the violence was morally wrong. 2% advocated for pardon, and 8% “strongly disagreed” that the violence was morally wrong. Because respondents expressed more socially desirable responses to **Punishment** than to **Wrongfulness**, it is unlikely that social desirability bias in answers to the question about morality caused the null results for that variable.

Conclusion

I have argued that people’s prior attitudes toward perpetrators of civilian targeting shape their moral judgements of the abuse. Supporters of state armed forces therefore reach less harsh moral judgements about state violence than about opposition violence. Given the strong norm against civilian targeting, they rely on moral disengagement in order to reach these moral judgements while maintaining a positive view of themselves. They justify state violence by characterizing it as militarily necessary, as causing less harm, or as being the responsibility of fighters rather than leaders. An online survey in Colombia indicates that supporters of the military justify lesser punishment for state violence by characterizing military violence as less harmful and less likely to be the responsibility of leadership compared to similar violence committed by rebels.

These results suggest that people rely on some, but not all, forms of moral disengagement. If there were not a strong norm against such violence, and if people did not need to exculpate themselves, then respondents would not feel a need to find justifications for the abuse; in other words, there would not be support for the *Harmfulness* and *Responsibility* hypotheses. Conversely, the null results regarding military necessity indicate that respondents are not simply latching onto any given excuse for the violence which the survey provides them.

It is important to briefly consider why people’s attitudes toward the military don’t shape their views on the moral wrongfulness or military necessity of the violence. The null results regarding necessity may be the result of the protracted nature of the Colombian conflict; people may not think that any given attack makes a difference. Similarly, it is possible that questions about punishment have larger policy and security implications than questions about moral wrongfulness; in the Colombian context, punishment is a component of the 2016 peace accord and transitional justice. Indeed, there is some evidence that cognitive dissonance – which people likely feel when armed actors they support commit abuses – is heightened amidst aversive or unwanted consequences (e.g. Cooper and Carlsmith 2015). Moral disengagement is also amplified amidst heightened insecurity (Moore 2015). If

these null results are due to Colombia-specific features, additional research is necessary to determine whether people rely on alternative justifications in other contexts.

Turning toward policy implications, the United Nations argues that transitional justice institutions such as trials and truth commissions “ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation” (General 2010). The findings presented here suggest that moral disengagement poses a challenge to such goals. If people differentially interpret information about violence, then the work of truth commissions to discover and disseminate accurate information may not affect people’s polarized views. If so, then moral disengagement is an impediment to reconciliation. Indeed, in Colombia, the work of the truth commission established in the 2016 peace accord has been controversial (Meléndez 2022). Moral disengagement may also encourage people to oppose neutral, procedurally just punishments applied to perpetrators of equivalent crimes from different armed groups. Indeed, Colombia’s recently elected president has harshly criticized the court established in the 2016 peace accord to prosecute human rights violators (Ortega 2026).

As such, a key question is how to ameliorate the influence of moral disengagement on judgements of wartime violence. Prior work indicates that explaining the phenomenon and teaching people how to recognize it reduces its use (McAlister 2001; Bustamante and Chaux 2014), as do reminders of harm and of one’s morality (Aquino et al. 2007; Kish-Gephart et al. 2014). Some forms of messaging about the violence itself may also prove particularly effective. This research suggests that, if transitional justice institutions can prove that leaders were responsible for the violence, regular people may find it more difficult to use moral disengagement to justify the abuses.

Further research should examine how information or propaganda about civilian targeting affects people’s judgements about war crimes. It should also extend this research to other contexts and examine how attitudes toward pro-state paramilitaries, different rebel groups on the same side of a conflict’s master cleavage, and criminal organizations shape evaluations of these groups’ violence.

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Moral Disengagement in the Evaluation of Violence Against Civilians in Colombia

Supplementary Appendices

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A Full Survey Text

A.1 English

- In what year were you born?
- What is your gender?
 1. Male
 2. Female
 3. Other gender
 99. Prefer not to answer
- In what municipality were you born (e.g. Cali)?
- In what municipality do you live (e.g. Medellín)
- What is the highest level of education you have finished?
 0. None
 1. Primary school
 2. Secondary school
 3. Associate degree
 4. University
- Can you tell me in which of these ranges is your monthly household income, including remittances from abroad and the income of all adults and children who work?
 0. No income
 1. Less than 205.000
 2. Between 205.001 and 325.000
 3. Between 325.001 and 440.000
 4. Between 440.001 and 565.000
 5. Between 565.001 and 650.000
 6. Between 650.001 and 710.000
 7. Between 710.001 and 750.000
 8. Between 750.001 and 810.000
 9. Between 810.001 and 915.000
 10. Between 915.001 and 1.000.000
 11. Between 1.000.001 and 1.250.000
 12. Between 1.250.001 and 1.365.000
 13. Between 1.365.001 and 1.600.000
 14. Between 1.600.001 and 2.000.000
 15. Between 2.000.001 and 3.150.000
 16. More than 3.150.000
 98. Inapplicable (no work or retired)
- What best describes the area in which you live?
 1. Rural area
 2. Small city
 3. Mid-sized city
 4. Large city
 5. National Capital (metropolitan area)

- On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 5 indicates “strongly agree,” how much do you agree with the following statement: the peace accord was necessary to end the conflict with the FARC-EP?

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree

- On this page we have a scale that goes from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and signifies “none” and 5 is the highest and signifies “a lot.” To what degree do you have confidence in the Armed Forces?

1. None	2.	3.	4.	5. A lot

- What should happen to the budget of the Ministry of Defense?

1. It should be decreased a lot
2. It should be decreased a little
3. It should stay the same
4. It should be increased a little
5. It should be increased a lot

Imagine a hypothetical article in the newspaper El Tiempo. Please read the first paragraph of the hypothetical article below, and then please answer several questions about the violence described in the article. Even if you are unsure of your answer, please do your best to respond.

“Four civilians, who were not fighting and were not a part of either a non-state armed group or the Colombian Armed Forces, were killed in Antioquia yesterday morning. According to initial reports, the victims were two men and two women; all were shot at close range. The local mayor alleges that the perpetrators were *(leftist dissidents of the FARC / members of the Colombian Armed Forces)*.

- On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “strongly disagree” and 5 indicates “strongly agree,” how much do you agree with the following statement: the violence described in the article above was morally wrong?

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Neither agree nor disagree	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree

- What degree of punishment should the perpetrators of the violence described in the above article receive?
 1. No punishment/pardon
 2. 2 years of house arrest
 3. 5 years of house arrest
 4. 5 years of imprisonment
 5. 15 years of imprisonment
 6. Life imprisonment
- On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “very unlikely” and 5 indicates “very likely,” how likely is it that the violence described in the article above was necessary to achieve military gains? Even if you are unsure of your answer, please do your best to respond.

1. Very unlikely	2. Unlikely	3. Neither likely nor unlikely	4. Likely	5. Very likely

- Do you think that the number of victims of the violence described in the above article is very small, small, neither small nor large, large, or very large?
 1. Very small
 2. Small
 3. Neither small nor large
 4. Large
 5. Very large
- On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates “very unlikely” and 5 indicates “very likely,” how likely is it that the leadership of the organization that the perpetrators belonged to were responsible for the violence described in the article above? Even if you are unsure of your answer, please do your best to respond.

1. Very unlikely	2. Unlikely	3. Neither likely nor unlikely	4. Likely	5. Very likely

- On this page we have a scale that goes from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and signifies “none” and 5 is the highest and signifies “a lot.” To what degree do you have confidence in the National Government?

1. None	2.	3.	4.	5. A lot

- On this page we have a scale from 1 to 10 that goes from left to right, in which 1 signifies left and 10 signifies right. Today when we talk about political tendency, many people talk about those that sympathize more with the left or the right. According to the meaning that the terms “left” and “right” have for you when you think about your political point of view, where would you place yourself on this scale?

1 Left	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Right

- Have you lost a family member or close relative as a consequence of the armed conflict, or do you have a relative who was disappeared in the conflict?

0. No

1. Yes

99. Prefer not to answer

if yes, proceed to following question; if not, skip

- Which type of actor or actors were responsible? Indicate all that apply.

1. Guerrillas

2. Paramilitaries

3. BACRIM (criminal bands)

4. The army

5. The police

6. Other

98. Don't know

99. Prefer not to answer

- Would you say that the services the municipality is giving to the people are?

1. Very bad (awful)	2. Bad	3. Neither good nor bad (regular)	4. (Good)	5. Very good

- Speaking of the place or neighborhood where you live and thinking about the possibility of being a victim of assault or robbery, do you feel very insecure, somewhat insecure, somewhat secure, or very secure?

- Did you vote in the second round of presidential elections in June of 2018?

0. No

1. Yes

99. Prefer not to Answer

if yes, proceed to following question; if not, skip

1. Very insecure	2. Somewhat insecure	3. Somewhat secure	4. Very secure

- Who did you vote for?
 1. Iván Duque
 2. Gustavo Petro
 99. Prefer not to answer
- In your opinion, which is the principal actor responsible for the violence you've lived through in Colombia?
 1. Guerrillas
 2. Paramilitaries
 3. BACRIM (criminal bands)
 4. The army
 5. The police
 6. Other
 7. All
 99. Prefer not to answer
- What best describes the area in which you live?
 5. National Capital (metropolitan area)
 4. Large city
 3. Mid-sized city
 2. Small city
 1. Rural area
- Imagine that (*no new information emerged about the false positives / the JEP found that former President Uribe ordered the false positives, but he continued to deny involvement / the JEP found that former President Uribe ordered the false positives, and he apologized for his involvement*). What degree of punishment do you think former President Uribe should receive for the false positives?
 1. No punishment/pardon
 2. 2 years of house arrest
 3. 5 years of house arrest
 4. 5 years of imprisonment
 5. 15 years of imprisonment
 6. Life imprisonment

A.2 Spanish

- ¿En qué año nació?
- ¿Usted se considera?

1. Hombre
 2. Mujer
 3. Otro género
 99. Me niego a contestar
- ¿En qué municipio nació usted (p. ej Cali)?
 - ¿En qué municipio vive usted (p. ej Medellín)?
 - ¿Cuál es el nivel educativo más alto alcanzado por usted?
 0. Ninguno
 1. Primario
 2. Secundario o bachillerato
 3. Técnico / Tecnólogo
 4. Universitario
 - ¿En cuál de los siguientes rangos se encuentran los ingresos familiares mensuales de este hogar, incluyendo las remesas del exterior y el ingreso de todos los adultos e hijos que trabajan?
 0. Ningún ingreso
 1. Menos que 205.000
 2. Entre 205.001 y 325.000
 3. Entre 325.001 y 440.000
 4. Entre 440.001 y 565.000
 5. Entre 565.001 y 650.000
 6. Entre 650.001 y 710.000
 7. Entre 710.001 y 750.000
 8. Entre 750.001 y 810.000
 9. Entre 810.001 y 915.000
 10. Entre 915.001 y 1.000.000
 11. Entre 1.000.001 y 1.250.000
 12. Entre 1.250.001 y 1.365.000
 13. Entre 1.365.001 y 1.600.000
 14. Entre 1.600.001 y 2.000.000
 15. Entre 2.000.001 y 3.150.000
 16. Más que 3.150.000
 98. Inaplicable (no trabaja ni está jubilado)
 - ¿Cuál categoría describe mejor el área en dónde usted vive?
 1. Área rural
 2. Ciudad pequeño
 3. Ciudad mediana
 4. Ciudad grande
 5. Capital Nacional (área metropolitana)
 - ¿En una escala del 1 a 5, donde 1 es “muy en desacuerdo” y 5 es “muy de acuerdo,” ¿hasta qué punto está de acuerdo o en desacuerdo con la siguiente frase: El acuerdo de paz era necesario para finalizar el conflicto con las FARC-EP?

1. Muy en desacuerdo	2. En desacuerdo	3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	4. De acuerdo	5. Muy de acuerdo

- En esta página hay una escalera con escalones numerados del 1 a 5, en la cual 1 es el escalón más bajo y significa “nada” y el 5 es el escalón más alto y significa “mucho.” ¿Hasta qué punto tiene confianza usted en las Fuerzas Armadas?

1. Nada	2.	3.	4.	5. Mucho

- ¿Qué debe pasar con el presupuesto del Ministerio de Defensa?

1. Debe ser reducido mucho
2. Debe ser reducido un poco
3. Debe quedar igual
4. Debe ser aumentado un poco
5. Debe ser aumentado mucho

Imagine un artículo hipotético en el periódico El Tiempo. Por favor lea el primer párrafo de este artículo hipotético ubicado a continuación, y luego por favor conteste las preguntas sobre la violencia descrita en el artículo. Incluso si no está seguro de su respuesta, por favor haga su mejor esfuerzo por responder.

“Cuatro civiles, que no estaban luchando y que no eran miembros de ningún grupo armado ni de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia, fueron asesinados en Antioquia ayer por la mañana. Según los primeros datos, las víctimas fueron dos hombres y dos mujeres; a todos les dispararon a corta distancia. El alcalde del municipio alega que los perpetradores fueron *(izquierdistas disidentes de las FARC / miembros de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia)*.”

- ¿En una escala del 1 a 5, donde 1 es “muy en desacuerdo” y 5 es “muy de acuerdo,” ¿hasta qué punto está de acuerdo o en desacuerdo con la siguiente frase: la violencia descrita en el artículo anterior fue moralmente incorrecta?

1. Muy en desacuerdo	2. En desacuerdo	3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	4. De acuerdo	5. Muy de acuerdo

- ¿Qué tipo de sanción merecen los perpetradores de la violencia descrita en el artículo anterior?
 1. Ningún castigo/perdón
 2. 2 años de detención domiciliaria
 3. 5 años de detención domiciliaria
 4. 5 años en el cárcel
 5. 15 años en el cárcel
 6. Cadena perpetua
- En una escala del 1 a 5, donde 1 es “nada probable” y 5 es “muy probable,” ¿qué tan probable es que la violencia descrita en el artículo anterior fuera necesaria para lograr objetivos militares? Incluso si no está seguro de su respuesta, por favor haga su mejor esfuerzo por responder.

1. Nada probable	2. No muy probable	3. Ni probable ni no probable	4. Probable	5. Muy probable

- ¿Cree usted que el número de víctimas de la violencia descrita en el artículo anterior es muy bajo, bajo, ni bajo ni alto, alto, o muy alto?
 1. Muy bajo
 2. Bajo
 3. Ni bajo ni alto
 4. Alto
 5. Muy alto
- En una escala del 1 a 5, donde 1 es “nada probable” y 5 es “muy probable,” ¿qué tan probable es que los líderes de la organización a la que los perpetradores pertenecen fueran responsables de la violencia descrita en el artículo anterior? Incluso si no está seguro de su respuesta, por favor haga su mejor esfuerzo por responder.

1. Nada probable	2. No muy probable	3. Ni probable ni no probable	4. Probable	5. Muy probable

- En esta página hay una escalera con escalones numerados del 1 a 5, en la cual 1 es el escalón más bajo y significa “nada” y el 5 es el escalón más alto y significa “mucho.” ¿Hasta qué punto tiene confianza usted en el Gobierno Nacional?
- En esta página tenemos una escala del 1 a 10 que va de izquierda a derecha, en la que el 1 significa izquierda y el 10 significa derecha. Hoy en día cuando se habla de tendencias políticas, mucha gente habla de aquellos que simpatizan más con la izquierda o con la derecha. Según el sentido que tengan para usted los términos “izquierda” y “derecha”

1. Nada	2.	3.	4.	5. Mucho

cuando piensa sobre su punto de vista político, ¿dónde se encontraría usted en esta escala?

1 Izquierda	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Derecha

- ¿Usted ha perdido algún miembro de su familia o pariente cercano a consecuencia del conflicto armado, o tiene un familiar desaparecido por el conflicto?

0. No

1. Sí

99. Me niego a contestar

if yes, proceed to following question; if not, skip

- ¿Qué tipo de actor o actores fueron responsables? Por favor marque todos los que apliquen.

1. La guerrilla

2. Los paramilitares

3. BACRIM (Bandas criminales)

4. El ejército

5. La policía

6. Otro

98. No sé

99. Me niego a contestar

- ¿Diría usted que los servicios que la municipalidad está dando a la gente son:

1. Muy malos (pésimos)	2. Malos	3. Ni buenos ni malos (regulares)	4. Buenos	5. Muy buenos

- Hablando del lugar o el barrio donde usted vive y pensando en la posibilidad de ser víctima de un asalto o robo, ¿usted se siente muy inseguro(a), algo inseguro(a), algo seguro(a) o muy seguro(a)?

- ¿Votó usted en la segunda ronda de las elecciones presidenciales en mayo del 2018?

0. No

1. Sí

1. Muy inseguro(a)	2. Algo inseguro(a)	3. Algo seguro(a)	4. Muy seguro(a)

99. Me niego a contestar

if yes, proceed to following question; if not, skip

- ¿Por quién votó usted?

1. Iván Duque
2. Gustavo Petro

99. Me niego a contestar

- En su opinión, ¿cuál o cuales son los principales responsables de la violencia que se ha vivido en Colombia?

1. La guerrilla
2. Los paramilitares
3. BACRIM (Bandas criminales)
4. El ejército
5. La policía
6. Otro
7. Todos

99. Me niego a contestar

- ¿Cuál categoría describe mejor el área en dónde vive usted?

5. Capital Nacional (área metropolitana)
4. Ciudad grande
3. Ciudad mediana
2. Ciudad pequeña
1. Área rural

- Suponga que *(no hay información nueva sobre los falsos positivos / la JEP se entera de que el expresidente Uribe ordenó los falsos positivos, pero él continúa negándose a aceptarlo / la JEP se entera de que el expresidente Uribe ordenó los falsos positivos, y él se disculpa por su involucramiento)*. ¿Qué tipo de sanción merece el expresidente Uribe por los falsos positivos?

1. Ningún castigo/perdón
2. 2 años de detención domiciliaria
3. 5 años de detención domiciliaria
4. 5 años en el cárcel
5. 15 años en el cárcel
6. Cadena perpetua

B Data

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Year Born	1,496	1988	11.22	1945	2003
Gender	1,538	1.50	0.50	1	2
Education	1,553	3.20	0.83	0	4
Income	1,497	10.66	4.94	0	16
Rural	1,552	2.46	1.28	1	5
Accord Not Necessary	1,549	0.40	0.32	0	1
Confidence Military	1,547	0.49	0.33	0	1
Military Budget Increase	1,554	0.31	0.30	0	1
Pro Military	1,540	0.40	0.26	0	1
Wrongfulness	1,527	3.48	1.27	1	5
Punishment	1,527	4.48	0.85	1	5
Military Necessity	1,525	2.72	1.36	1	5
Harmfulness	1,528	3.69	1.14	1	5
Leader Responsibility	1,524	3.55	1.15	1	5
Ideology	1,505	5.44	2.31	1	10
Victimized	1,437	0.32	0.46	0	1
Victimized by Gov	1,587	0.05	0.23	0	1
Victimized by Guerrilla	1,587	0.14	0.35	0	1

Table A2: Balance Table, Treatment

Variable	Treatment=0	Treatment =1	Difference
	Guerrilla Perp	State Perp	
Education	3.21	3.19	- .02
Gender	1.49	1.51	.02
Income	10.50	10.80	.30
Rural	2.48	2.45	-.03
Victimized Gov	.05	.06	.01
Victimized Guerrilla	.13	.15	.02

Note:°p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

Table A3: Correlation between Missingness in Dependent Variables

	Wrongfulness NA	Punishment NA	Necessity NA	Harmfulness NA	Responsibility NA
Wrongfulness NA	1	0.97	0.95	0.96	0.94
Punishment NA	0.97	1	0.95	0.96	0.94
Necessary NA	0.95	0.95	1	0.96	0.94
Severity NA	0.96	0.96	0.96	1	0.95
Responsibility NA	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.95	1

Table A4: Balance Table, Punishment Missingness

Variable	Not NA	NA	Difference
Education	2.87	3.21	.34°
Gender	1.63	1.50	-.13
Income	8.42	10.70	2.28*
Rural	2.73	2.46	-.27
Victimized	.50	.31	-.19
Pro-Military	.38	.40	.02
Armed Forces Perp.	.53	.51	-.02

Note:°p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

Table A5: Balance Table, Necessity Missingness

Variable	Not NA	NA	Difference
Education	2.91	3.21	.30
Gender	1.55	1.50	-.05
Income	8.18	10.70	2.52*
Rural	2.82	2.46	-.36
Victimized	.67	.31	-.36
Pro-Military	.36	.40	.04
Armed Forces Perp.	.53	.51	-.02

Note:°p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

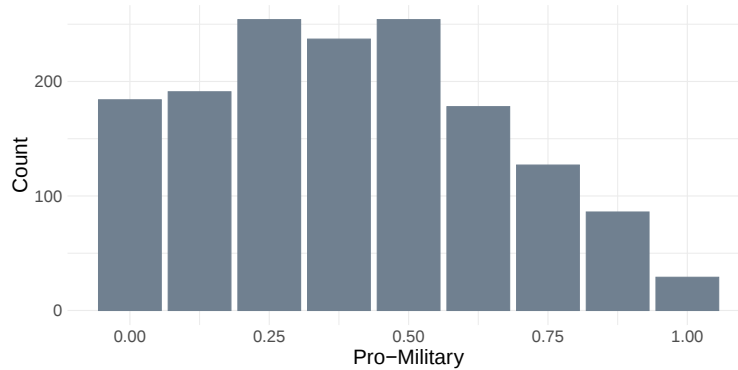
Figure A1: Distribution of **Pro-Military**

Table A6: Importance of Principal Components in Pro-Military Index

	PC1	PC2
Standard deviation	1.19	0.76
Proportion of Variance	0.71	0.29
Cumulative Proportion	0.71	1.00

Table A7: Principal Component Loadings in Pro-Military Index

	PC1	PC2
Confidence in Military	0.71	0.71
Budget Ministry of Defense	0.71	-0.71

Table A8: Determinants of Pro-Military

	Pro-Military
Intercept	-0.02 (0.05)
Gender	-0.03* (0.01)
Education	0.00 (0.01)
Age	0.04*** (0.01)
Income	0.00* (0.00)
Rural	-0.00 (0.01)
Victimized by Gov	-0.09** (0.03)
Victimized by Guerrilla	0.06** (0.02)
Ideology	0.04*** (0.00)
Security	0.02** (0.01)
R ²	0.21
Adj. R ²	0.20
Num. obs.	1372

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Note that **Age** is in 10-year increments and that both **Rural** and **Education** are measured on 5-point scales. “Ideology” is measured on a 1-10 scale. **Security** measures how respondents feel about the possibility of being a victim of assault or robbery in their neighborhood; it thus captures a concept which is distinct from conflict-related victimization (**Victimized by Gov** and **Victimized by Guerrilla**).

C Main Results

Table A9: Main Results

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
Intercept	3.38*** (0.08)	4.54*** (0.06)	3.70*** (0.07)	4.53*** (0.05)	2.60*** (0.09)	2.89*** (0.11)	4.11*** (0.07)	3.67*** (0.08)	2.96*** (0.10)	4.12*** (0.07)	3.12*** (0.08)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.09 (0.12)	0.03 (0.08)			0.09 (0.13)			0.13 (0.11)			0.54*** (0.11)
Pro-Military	0.20 (0.18)	0.01 (0.12)			0.30 (0.19)			0.12 (0.16)			1.17*** (0.16)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.08 (0.25)	-0.41* (0.17)			-0.19 (0.27)			-0.49* (0.22)			-1.48*** (0.22)
Military Necessity			-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)							
Harmfulness						0.16*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)				
Leader Responsibility									0.15*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)	
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.04
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.04
Num. obs.	1512	1512	1523	1523	1511	1525	1525	1513	1522	1522	1510

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ° $p < 0.1$

D Robustness Tests

D.1 Mediation Analysis

Use of the R package ‘Mediation’ indicates that **Military Necessity**, **Harmfulness**, and **Leader Responsibility** are not statistically significant mediators of the relationship between the treatment, **Armed Forces Perpetrator**, and moral **Wrongfulness**. Similarly, none of the three variables mediates the relationship between **Armed Forces Perpetrator** and **Punishment** in a statistically significant fashion. This is unsurprising; the theory suggests that these three variables have different effects on the dependent variables depending on the value of **Pro-Military**.

I thus conducted a moderated mediation analysis to examine whether the average causal mediation effect (ACME) of these three variables on **Wrongfulness** and **Punishment** varies between two illustrative cases: **Pro-Military** values of .25 and one of .75. Using both **Wrongfulness** and **Punishment** as dependent variables, the ACME of **Necessity** does not vary in a statistically significant fashion across the two examined values of **Pro-Military**.

However, the ACMEs of **Harmfulness** vary in a statistically significant fashion in models using both **Wrongfulness** and **Punishment** as the dependent variable. At **Pro-Military** values of .75, the AMCEs in both analyses are negative and statistically significant; this implies that beliefs about the volume of casualties moderate the negative relationship between **Armed Forces Perpetrator** and both perceptions of how wrong the violence is and how much the perpetrators should be punished. At the lower level of support for the armed forces, the ACMEs are not statistically significant.

Similarly, using both dependent variables, the ACMEs of **Leader Responsibility** vary in a statistically significant fashion across the two values of **Pro-Military**. At **Pro-Military** values of .75, the AMCEs in both analyses are negative and statistically significant; at **Pro-Military** values of .25, the AMCEs in both analyses are positive and statistically significant. Judgements about leader responsibility moderate the relationship between perpetrator identity and moral judgement regardless of attitudes toward the armed forces, but the direction of this relationship varies by respondent attitudes toward the armed forces.

This mediation is not the main analysis for several reasons. First, it is not clear whether people make decisions about the traits of the violence before or after moral judgements. Second, it is unlikely that the data meets the requirements of the sequential ignorability assumption (Imai, Keele and Tingley 2010). See Table A16. Third, analyses in which mediators are not randomized are subject to bias, especially when multiple mediators are correlated (Bullock and Ha 2019). Fourth, respondents may not believe attempts to randomize characteristics of the violence (Acharya, Blackwell and Sen 2018; Bullock and Ha 2019).

Mediation References:

- Acharya, Avidit, Matthew Blackwell and Maya Sen. 2018, “Analyzing Causal Mechanisms in Survey Experiments.” *Political Analysis* 26(4): 357-378.
- Bullock, John G. and Jens Ha. 2019. Mediation Analysis is Harder Than it Looks. In *Cambridge Handbook of Advances in Experimental Political Science*. Cambridge University Press.
- Imai, Kosuke, Luke Keele and Dustin Tingley. 2010. “A General Approach to Causal Mediation Analysis.” *Psychological Methods* 15(4): 180-196.

D.2 Alternatives to Pro-Military

Table A10: Confidence in the Military Instead of Pro-Military

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment	3. Necessity	4. Harmfulness	5. Responsibility
(Intercept)	3.46*** (0.08)	4.54*** (0.06)	2.62*** (0.09)	3.67*** (0.08)	3.14*** (0.08)
Armed Forces Perp.	-0.00 (0.12)	0.02 (0.08)	0.06 (0.13)	0.11 (0.10)	0.49*** (0.11)
Confidence Military	-0.02 (0.14)	0.02 (0.10)	0.21 (0.15)	0.10 (0.13)	0.91*** (0.13)
Confidence Military x Armed Forces Perp.	0.12 (0.20)	-0.31* (0.13)	-0.11 (0.21)	-0.35* (0.18)	-1.11*** (0.18)
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.03
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.00	0.03
Num. obs.	1515	1515	1514	1516	1513

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

Table A11: Military Budget Increase Instead of Pro-Military

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment	3. Necessity	4. Harmfulness	5. Responsibility
(Intercept)	3.35*** (0.07)	4.54*** (0.04)	2.65*** (0.07)	3.70*** (0.06)	3.34*** (0.06)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.14 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.06)	0.06 (0.10)	0.04 (0.08)	0.26** (0.09)
Budget Min Def	0.33* (0.16)	0.00 (0.11)	0.23 (0.17)	0.05 (0.14)	0.77*** (0.14)
Budget Min Def x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.28 (0.22)	-0.27° (0.15)	-0.17 (0.24)	-0.31 (0.20)	-1.00*** (0.20)
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.00	0.02
Num. obs.	1523	1523	1521	1524	1520

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

Table A12: Ideology Instead of Pro-Military

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment	3. Necessity	4. Harmfulness	5. Responsibility
(Intercept)	3.49*** (0.12)	4.54*** (0.08)	2.52*** (0.13)	3.76*** (0.11)	3.06*** (0.11)
Armed Forces Perp.	-0.18 (0.17)	0.08 (0.11)	0.13 (0.18)	-0.04 (0.15)	0.54*** (0.15)
Ideology	-0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.04° (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.09*** (0.02)
Ideology x Armed Forces Perp.	0.04 (0.03)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.11*** (0.03)
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.02
Num. obs.	1504	1503	1502	1503	1500

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

Table A13: PCA Pro-Military Instead of (Additive Index) Pro-Military

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment	3. Necessity	4. Harmfulness	5. Responsibility
Intercept	3.46*** (0.05)	4.54*** (0.03)	2.72*** (0.05)	3.72*** (0.04)	3.58*** (0.04)
Armed Forces Perp	0.05 (0.07)	-0.13** (0.04)	0.01 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)
PCA Pro-Military	0.05 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)	0.07 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	0.26*** (0.04)
PCA Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.09* (0.04)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.11* (0.05)	-0.32*** (0.05)
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.04
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.00	0.04
Num. obs.	1512	1512	1511	1513	1510

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. The PCA version of **Pro-Military** is constructed from the same two variables that make up the additive index, but it is a weighted composite score designed to capture the maximum amount of variance in the data.

D.3 Treatment's Effect on Attitudes Toward the State

Table A14: Effect of Treatment on Attitudes Toward the State

	1. Confidence Nat Gov	2. Confidence Nat Gov	3. Ideology	4. Ideology	5. Gov. Responsible	6. Gov. Responsible
Intercept	1.13*** (0.05)	1.14*** (0.06)	4.14*** (0.11)	4.16*** (0.14)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Armed Forces Perp.	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.11)	-0.11 (0.20)	0.01 (0.01)	0.04° (0.02)
Pro-Military	2.68*** (0.09)	2.64*** (0.14)	3.32*** (0.21)	3.28*** (0.30)	-0.11*** (0.02)	-0.08* (0.03)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.		0.08 (0.19)		0.08 (0.42)		-0.07 (0.04)
R ²	0.35	0.35	0.14	0.14	0.02	0.02
Adj. R ²	0.35	0.35	0.14	0.14	0.02	0.02
Num. obs.	1494	1494	1490	1490	1540	1540

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. **Confidence Nat Gov** is measured on a 1-5 scale, **Ideology** is measured on a 1-10 scale, and **Gov Responsible** is a binary variable indicating whether the respondent thinks that the state was primarily responsible for the violence that Colombia has experienced. These questions were asked after treatment.

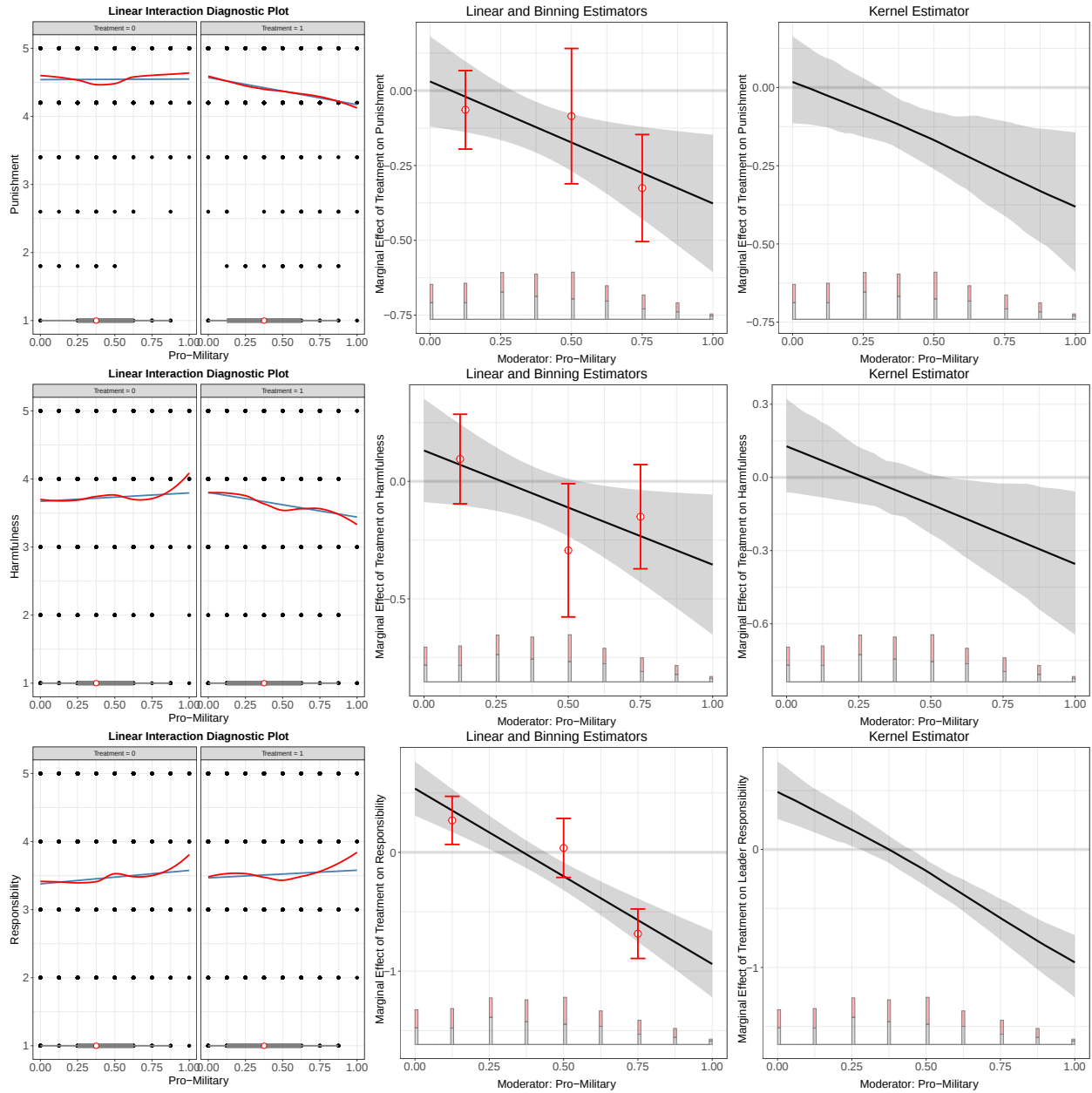
D.4 Assessing Inferences from Interactions

Table A15: Interaction Diagnostics from Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019)

DV	Same Effects at High vs. Low Moderator Levels?	Severe Extrapolation?	Reject Linear Model?
Punishment	No	No	No
Harmfulness	No	No	No
Responsibility	No	No	No

Note: Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019) recommend three simple diagnostic tests to evaluate the quality of multiplicative interaction results. First, they suggest examining whether there are statistically different treatment effects at typical low (in this case, 25th percentile) and typical high (in this case, 75th percentile) levels of the moderator (**Pro-Military**). A lack of such differences would indicate a weak interaction. Second, they recommend examining extrapolation with the use of an L-kurtosis score. A score of .12 is a normal distribution. They classify scores of .16 or more, which corresponds to the L-kurtosis of an exponential or logistic distribution, as exhibiting severe extrapolation. Results which rely on extrapolation are extremely sensitive to outliers. Third, they utilize a Wald-test to examine whether it is possible to reject a linear multiplicative interaction model by comparing it to a more flexible model with multiple bins (in this case, three bins which divide the data into terciles).

Figure A2: Alternative Interaction Estimators from Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019)



Note: The linear interaction diagnostic plots on the leftmost panels show the linear regression line (blue) and a locally estimated scatterplot smoothing, or LOESS (red). A LOESS approach makes no assumptions about the underlying data structure. If the two lines considerably diverge, the true marginal effect may be nonlinear. The middle panels show linear marginal-effect estimates (black lines) and a binning estimator (red dots) designed by Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019). This binning estimator breaks the moderator, in this case **Pro-Military**, into terciles and creates a dummy variable for each. The approach then estimates a model that includes interaction between the median of each bin and the treatment. The advantage of this approach is that it does not require an assumption of a linear effect. Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (2019) note that, “when the estimates from the binning estimator are far off from the line or when they are non-monotonic, we have evidence that the LIE [linear interaction effect] assumption does not hold” (p. 173). The rightmost panel uses a kernel smoothing estimator of the marginal effect; it estimates a number of local effects. The kernel estimator can produce linear or a range of nonlinear effects.

D.5 Other Robustness Tests

Table A16: Results With Pre-Treatment Controls

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
(Intercept)	2.90*** (0.23)	4.10*** (0.15)	3.22*** (0.23)	4.13*** (0.15)	3.30*** (0.25)	2.50*** (0.23)	3.76*** (0.15)	3.10*** (0.20)	2.47*** (0.23)	3.76*** (0.15)	2.72*** (0.20)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.11 (0.12)	0.05 (0.08)			0.08 (0.13)			0.10 (0.11)			0.54*** (0.11)
Pro-Military	0.17 (0.18)	-0.04 (0.12)			0.36° (0.20)			-0.03 (0.16)			1.17*** (0.16)
Gender	0.08 (0.07)	0.09* (0.04)	0.07 (0.07)	0.08° (0.04)	-0.14° (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.09° (0.04)	0.03 (0.06)	0.08 (0.07)	0.08° (0.04)	0.10 (0.06)
Education	0.06 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.05)	0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.11** (0.07)	0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.08* (0.04)
Age	0.06° (0.03)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.06° (0.03)	0.05** (0.02)	-0.07* (0.03)	0.05° (0.03)	0.05* (0.02)	0.07* (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)	0.05** (0.02)	0.00 (0.03)
Rural	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.17 (0.25)	-0.43** (0.17)			-0.17 (0.27)			-0.45* (0.23)			-1.49*** (0.23)
Military Necessity			-0.08** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)							
Harmfulness						0.15*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)				
Leader Responsibility									0.15*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)	
R ²	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.04
Num. obs.	1439	1439	1446	1446	1437	1449	1449	1440	1445	1445	1436

Note: ° p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. Note that **Age** is in 10-year increments, and **Rural** and **Education** are measured on 5-point scales.

Table A17: Results With Pre- and Post-Treatment Controls

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
(Intercept)	2.62*** (0.25)	4.38*** (0.16)	2.93*** (0.25)	4.41*** (0.16)	3.15*** (0.27)	2.18*** (0.25)	4.04*** (0.17)	3.08*** (0.22)	2.18*** (0.25)	4.06*** (0.17)	2.65*** (0.22)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.13 (0.12)	0.04 (0.08)			0.07 (0.13)			0.08 (0.11)			0.55*** (0.11)
Pro-Military	0.13 (0.19)	-0.03 (0.12)			0.36° (0.20)			-0.04 (0.17)			1.13*** (0.17)
Gender	0.10 (0.07)	0.07 (0.04)	0.09 (0.07)	0.07 (0.04)	-0.12° (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.07 (0.04)	0.04 (0.06)	0.10 (0.07)	0.07 (0.04)	0.09 (0.06)
Education	0.06 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.05)	0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.10* (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.03)	0.08* (0.04)
Age	0.07* (0.03)	0.06** (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)	0.05* (0.02)	-0.07* (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)	0.04* (0.02)	0.07* (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)	0.05* (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)
Rural	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)
Victimized by Gov	-0.10 (0.15)	-0.23* (0.10)	-0.06 (0.15)	-0.19° (0.10)	0.15 (0.17)	-0.11 (0.15)	-0.22* (0.10)	0.22 (0.14)	-0.02 (0.15)	-0.16 (0.10)	-0.30* (0.14)
Victimized by Guerrilla	0.02 (0.10)	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.10)	0.01 (0.06)	0.16 (0.11)	0.02 (0.10)	0.01 (0.06)	0.04 (0.09)	-0.00 (0.10)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.11 (0.09)
Security	0.11** (0.04)	-0.11*** (0.03)	0.12** (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)	0.12** (0.04)	-0.12*** (0.03)	0.01 (0.04)	0.11** (0.04)	-0.13*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.23 (0.26)	-0.40* (0.17)			-0.17 (0.28)			-0.42° (0.23)			-1.51*** (0.23)
Military Necessity			-0.08** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)							
Harmfulness						0.16*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)		0.15*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)	
Leader Responsibility											
R ²	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.05
Adj. R ²	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.04	0.04
Num. obs.	1421	1421	1429	1429	1420	1431	1431	1421	1427	1427	1418

Note:°p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. Note that **Age** is in 10-year increments, and **Rural** and **Education** are measured on 5-point scales. **Security** measures how respondents feel about the possibility of being a victim of assault or robbery in their neighborhood (ranging from very insecure to very secure); it thus captures a concept which is distinct from conflict-related victimization (**Victimized by Gov** and **Victimized by Guerrilla**)

Table A18: Excluding Respondents Who Failed the Attention Check

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
Intercept	3.41*** (0.09)	4.59*** (0.06)	3.72*** (0.08)	4.55*** (0.05)	2.62*** (0.10)	2.73*** (0.12)	4.16*** (0.08)	3.73*** (0.08)	2.93*** (0.11)	4.18*** (0.08)	3.15*** (0.08)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.11 (0.13)	0.00 (0.09)			0.04 (0.14)			0.14 (0.12)			0.62*** (0.12)
Pro-Military	0.16 (0.20)	-0.08 (0.13)			0.24 (0.21)			0.05 (0.17)			1.10*** (0.17)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.17 (0.27)	-0.33° (0.18)			-0.16 (0.29)			-0.48* (0.24)			-1.59*** (0.24)
Military Necessity			-0.08** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)							
Harmfulness											
Leader Responsibility						0.21*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.02)		0.16*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.02)	
R ²	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.04
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.03
Num. obs.	1267	1267	1276	1276	1267	1277	1277	1267	1275	1275	1266

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001. The attention check was a repeated question about rurality with the responses reverse coded in the second version.

Table A19: Excluding Respondents Who Live in Antioquia

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
Intercept	3.41*** (0.09)	4.52*** (0.06)	3.68*** (0.08)	4.52*** (0.05)	2.65*** (0.10)	2.91*** (0.12)	4.13*** (0.08)	3.67*** (0.08)	2.94*** (0.11)	4.13*** (0.07)	3.13*** (0.08)
Armed Forces Perp.	-0.02 (0.13)	0.05 (0.08)			0.08 (0.14)			0.10 (0.11)			0.49*** (0.12)
Pro-Military	0.14 (0.19)	0.04 (0.13)			0.23 (0.21)			0.08 (0.17)			1.11*** (0.17)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	0.06 (0.27)	-0.37* (0.17)			-0.26 (0.29)			-0.43° (0.24)			-1.36*** (0.24)
Military Necessity			-0.08** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)							
Harmfulness											
Leader Responsibility						0.15*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)		0.15*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)	
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.03
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.00	-0.00	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.03
Num. obs.	1305	1306	1314	1315	1304	1316	1317	1306	1315	1316	1304

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

Table A20: Ordered Logit

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
Armed Forces Perp.	0.14 (0.17)	0.09 (0.19)			0.12 (0.17)			0.21 (0.17)			0.98*** (0.18)
Pro-Military	0.25 (0.25)	0.14 (0.29)			0.43° (0.26)			0.12 (0.26)			1.98*** (0.26)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.18 (0.35)	-1.04** (0.39)			-0.26 (0.36)			-0.76* (0.36)			-2.65*** (0.37)
Military Necessity			-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.07° (0.04)							
Harmfulness						0.25*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.04)				
Leader Responsibility									0.23*** (0.04)	0.17*** (0.04)	
Cox-Snell Pseudo R ²	.00	.01	.01	.00	.00	.02	.01	.00	.02	.01	.04
Observations	1,512	1,512	1,523	1,523	1,511	1,525	1,525	1,513	1,522	1,522	1,510

Note:° p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table A21: Results with Post-Stratification Weights (Gender, Age, Education)

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
Intercept	3.38*** (0.08)	4.46*** (0.06)	3.60*** (0.07)	4.39*** (0.05)	2.74*** (0.09)	2.95*** (0.10)	4.01*** (0.07)	3.58*** (0.08)	3.00*** (0.10)	4.01*** (0.07)	3.26*** (0.08)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.04 (0.12)	0.14 (0.08)			0.02 (0.13)			0.28** (0.11)			0.38*** (0.11)
Pro-Military	0.36* (0.16)	0.09 (0.12)			-0.00 (0.17)			0.10 (0.15)			0.84*** (0.15)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.26 (0.23)	-0.61*** (0.17)			-0.29 (0.25)			-0.77*** (0.21)			-1.42*** (0.21)
Military Necessity			-0.04° (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)							
Harmfulness						0.15*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.02)				
Leader Responsibility									0.14*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.02)	
R ²	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.04
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.04
Num. obs.	1512	1512	1523	1523	1511	1525	1525	1513	1522	1522	1510

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ° $p < 0.1$

E Exploratory Analysis: Centrists

Table A22: Replace Pro-Military with Both Responsible, Subset of Data

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment
Intercept	3.63*** (0.22)	4.04*** (0.14)
Armed Forces Perp.	-0.46 (0.30)	0.28 (0.19)
Both Responsible	-0.16 (0.23)	0.57*** (0.14)
Both Responsible x Armed Forces Perp.	0.51 (0.31)	-0.41* (0.20)
R ²	0.00	0.02
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.02
Num. obs.	970	970

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

F Deviations from the Pre-Analysis Plan

Below are the hypotheses from the pre-analysis plan (PAP) for this project. Following those hypotheses, I describe 1) changes in language which do not affect analysis or interpretation of the results; 2) a reframing of the paper from “preferences” to attitudes toward state forces; 3) the combining of PAP hypotheses; 4) a change to the **Pro-Military** index.

- (PAP) *Punishment Hypothesis 1*: People are less likely to believe that the perpetrators should be harshly punished when violence against civilians is committed by their preferred armed group compared to when it is committed by an armed group they oppose.
- (PAP) *Punishment Hypothesis 2*: The stronger an individual’s preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.
- (PAP) *Cause Bias Hypothesis 1*: People are more likely to believe that violence against civilians is necessary for the achievement of military goals when it is committed by their preferred group compared to when it is committed by an armed group they oppose.
- (PAP) *Cause Bias Hypothesis 2*: The stronger an individual’s preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.
- (PAP) *Cause Bias Hypothesis 3*: People who believe that violence against civilians is necessary for the achievement of military goals are less likely to believe that the violence is morally wrong and its perpetrators should be strongly punished.
- (PAP) *Consequences Bias Hypothesis 1*: People are more likely to believe that violence against civilians causes relatively little harm when it is committed by their preferred group compared to when it is committed by an armed group they oppose.
- (PAP) *Consequences Bias Hypothesis 2*: The stronger an individual’s preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.
- (PAP) *Consequences Bias Hypothesis 3*: People who believe that violence against civilians causes relatively little harm are less likely to believe that the violence is morally wrong and its perpetrators should be strongly punished.
- (PAP) *Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 1*: People are less likely to believe that the armed group as a whole is responsible for the violence when it is committed by their preferred group compared to when it is committed by an armed group they oppose.

- (PAP) *Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 2*: The stronger an individual's preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.
- (PAP) *Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 3*: People who believe that the armed group as a whole is responsible for the violence are less likely to believe that the violence is morally wrong and its perpetrators should be strongly punished.

There are several small differences in language to note. First, the titles for the hypotheses in the manuscript have been changed from those in the PAP in order to convey more clearly their content. Second, several variables have been relabeled; for example, the variable labeled **Harmfulness** in the manuscript was called **Severity** in the PAP. Third, in terms of processing the data, the rescaling of several variables was not discussed in the PAP. None of these changes affect the survey instrument, empirical models, or interpretation of the results.

The first substantive change has to do with a reframing of the theory, hypotheses, and results from a focus on individuals' preferences for armed groups on one side of the conflict or the other to a focus on attitudes toward state armed forces. I originally conceived of the **Pro-Military** index as capturing whether people relatively prefer the state or the rebels. However, given ethical concerns surrounding directly asking respondents about their attitudes toward rebel forces, I chose only to ask questions about attitudes toward the Colombian military. As several reviewers pointed out, and as the section on centrists and FARC supporters makes clear, I cannot infer support for rebels from a lack of support for state armed forces. These changes do not affect the empirical approach of the paper.

The second substantive change is that all PAP hypotheses numbered 2 have been combined with the PAP hypotheses numbered 1. While writing the paper, I found three reasons to combine them. First, PAP hypotheses 1 are nested within PAP hypotheses 2; PAP hypotheses 2 contemplate the possibility that the phenomenon described in PAP hypotheses 1 varies by the strength of preference. Second, in combining these two sets of hypotheses, I have prioritized for parsimony the models with fewer assumptions. In the PAP, I assumed that the sample would, on average, be more supportive of the military than of the guerrillas. Thus, in terms of testing PAP hypotheses 1, I predicted that respondents on average would characterize guerrilla violence as more morally wrong, more worthy of harsher punishment, less militarily necessary, more harmful, and more likely to be the responsibility of group leadership compared to military violence. The hypotheses discussed in the manuscript do not require an assumption about the average preferences of the sample. Lastly, an examination of the data led me to reconsider the assumption that the sample would strongly prefer the Armed Forces. As Table A23 shows, in models which do not take into account **Pro-Military** attitudes or their interaction with the treatment, the treatment affects only perceptions of appropriate **Punishment** but not any other dependent variables.

Table A23: Non-Interactive Results

	1: Moral Wrongfulness	2: Punishment	3: Necessity	4: Harmfulness	5: Responsibility
Intercept	3.45*** (0.05)	4.55*** (0.03)	2.72*** (0.05)	3.72*** (0.04)	3.58*** (0.04)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.06 (0.06)	-0.13** (0.04)	0.01 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.06)
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.01	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
Num. obs.	1527	1527	1525	1528	1524
RMSE	1.27	0.85	1.36	1.14	1.15

Note: °p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

The last substantive change from the pre-analysis plan is that the **Pro-Military** index was originally intended to have three questions: the two in the manuscript and a third about attitudes toward the 2016 peace accord with the FARC. The third question, more precisely, asked : “how much do you agree with the following statement: the peace accord was necessary to end the conflict with the FARC-EP.” It was then to be reverse coded so that a 5 indicated a hawkish attitude toward the guerrillas i.e. a strong preference for the state as an armed actor in the conflict; much of the opposition to the peace accord came from the hawkish far right. Principal component analysis and consideration of the Cronbach’s alpha led me to drop the third item. In the three-item index, the first component explains 48 percent of the variance, the second explains 31 percent of the variance, and the third explains 19 percent of the variance. The factor loadings below suggest that confidence in the military and support for increasing the budget of the ministry of defense long strongly onto the first component (PC1). In contrast, attitudes toward the peace accord seems to load onto a separate latent dimension (PC2). Further, the standard Cronbach’s alpha of the three-item index is only .39; that rises to .59 if the question about the peace accord is dropped. The results are robust to using the three-item index; see Table A25.

Table A24: Principal Component Loadings

	Confidence in Military	Budget Ministry of Defense	Accord Not Necessary
PC1	0.69	0.71	0.17
PC2	-0.19	-0.04	0.98
PC3	0.70	-0.71	0.10

Table A25: Results With 3-Item Index

	1 Wrong- fulness	2 Punishment	3 Wrong- fulness	4 Punishment	5 Military Necessity	6 Wrong- fulness	7 Punishment	8 Harm- fulness	9 Wrong- fulness	10 Punishment	11 Leader Responsibility
Intercept	3.53*** (0.10)	4.53*** (0.07)	3.70*** (0.07)	4.53*** (0.05)	2.60*** (0.11)	2.89*** (0.11)	4.11*** (0.07)	3.71*** (0.09)	2.96*** (0.10)	4.12*** (0.07)	2.99*** (0.09)
Armed Forces Perp.	0.08 (0.14)	0.09 (0.09)			0.19 (0.15)			0.20 (0.12)			0.84*** (0.12)
Pro-Military	-0.20 (0.22)	0.02 (0.15)			0.29 (0.24)			0.04 (0.20)			1.52*** (0.20)
Pro-Military x Armed Forces Perp.	-0.05 (0.31)	-0.54** (0.21)			-0.44 (0.33)			-0.64* (0.28)			-2.27*** (0.28)
Military Necessity			-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)							
Harmfulness						0.16*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)				
Leader Responsibility									0.15*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.02)	
R ²	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.05
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.05
Num. obs.	1507	1507	1523	1523	1506	1525	1525	1509	1522	1522	1505

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; ° $p < 0.1$

G Pre-Analysis Plan