

Perpetrator Identity and Public Responses to Civilian Victimization

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Abstract

How does perpetrator identity shape the ways that people respond to civilian victimization? I argue that people assess violence by their preferred armed actors as less morally wrong and less deserving of harsh punishment than violence committed by armed groups they dislike. I suggest that three possible mechanisms may explain why: perpetrator identity may shape beliefs about the causes of the violence, i.e. whether it is militarily necessary; the consequences of the violence, i.e. whether it harms a lot of people; or the attribution of responsibility for the violence, i.e. whether the armed group as a whole bears responsibility. To test this argument, I utilize an online survey experiment in Colombia with 1,500 respondents in which individuals read a news story about an allegation of violence against civilians perpetrated by either the state or guerrillas. The results suggest that judgements of appropriate punishment are shaped by perpetrator identity, but not evaluations of moral wrongfulness. Furthermore, people justify reduced punishments for their favored armed groups by characterizing the violence as less severe and less systematic but not as less necessary. These findings provide insight into the ways in which armed group and transitional justice institution messaging may shape perceptions of violence against civilians.

1 Introduction

How does perpetrator identity shape the ways that people respond to civilian victimization? A wide range of evidence suggests that people do not react as negatively to violence against civilians committed by some groups as they do to similar violence perpetrated by other groups. For example, research on conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Spain indicates that violence against civilians has differential effects on subsequent levels of support for armed groups, volumes of violence, and political affiliations of civilians based on the identity of the perpetrator (Lyall, Blair and Kosuke 2013; Condra and Shapiro 2012; Balcells 2012). While these studies focus on the long-term consequences of violence, Silverman (2019) concludes that perpetrator identity also affects approval of individual military strikes in Pakistan.

However, we know little about the precise mechanisms by which characteristics of the perpetrator affect how people interpret and respond to violence against civilians. Lyall, Blair and Kosuke (2013) theorize that the identity of the perpetrator impacts whether people think that the group was compelled by a given situation to behave poorly or, alternatively, whether they think the perpetrators are innately flawed. In other words, perpetrator identity could shape beliefs about the *causes* of the violence. However, Lyall, Blair and Kosuke (2013) do not directly test this theory. In contrast, Silverman (2019) proposes and tests another possibility, that perpetrator identity shapes beliefs about the *consequences* of the violence. Silverman (2019) focuses on perceptions of how indiscriminate the violence is, whereas I focus more broadly on how harmful the violence is. A third mechanism, whereby identity shapes attributions of who bears *responsibility* for the violence, emerges from a review of literature in psychology on blame judgements (e.g. Alicke 2000; Malle 2021). More specifically, perpetrator identity could influence whether observers consider the entire armed organization or merely the direct perpetrators responsible. In summary, perpetrator identity could shape beliefs about the causes of violence i.e. whether it was necessary, the consequences of violence i.e. whether it harmed a lot of people, or who bears responsibility for it i.e. whether the group's leadership is responsible. All three mechanisms could plausibly

explain why violence committed by some groups has a less negative impact on public attitudes toward perpetrators than violence committed by other groups.

I test this theoretical framework with a factorial survey experiment fielded online in Colombia in which respondents are presented with a news article about a recent act of violence committed either by FARC dissidents or the Colombian Armed Forces. They then respond to a series of questions about how morally wrong the violence is, how much punishment the perpetrators should receive, whether the violence was militarily necessary, how severe the violence was, and whether the group's leaders are responsible. I examine whether people do indeed believe that violence committed by some armed groups is less morally wrong and merits less punishment than violence committed by other groups, as existing literature would suggest. Next, I consider whether people's beliefs about the causes of, consequences of, and responsibility for the violence vary based on whether they prefer the perpetrator over the perpetrator's opponent. I also consider whether these effect sizes vary based on the strength of people's preference for one armed group over the other. Lastly, I examine whether people who believe that the violence was necessary, that it wasn't very severe, or that the group's leadership is not responsible are less likely to believe that the violence is morally wrong and its perpetrators should be harshly punished.

The results suggest that people support less harsh punishment for their preferred armed groups but do not characterize such violence as less morally wrong than violence committed by armed groups they oppose. People characterize violence by their preferred armed groups as less severe and less likely to be the responsibility of the organization as a whole. Furthermore, individuals characterize less severe violence and violence which is not the responsibility of group leadership as less morally wrong and deserving of less harsh punishment. However, respondents do not describe violence by their preferred armed organization as more necessary for military gains. These results suggest that people justify lighter punishments for members of their favored armed groups by characterizing the violence these groups commit as less severe and less organized but not as less militarily necessary.

2 Theory

In theorizing about the mechanisms whereby perpetrator identity influences public responses to civilian targeting, I make two assumptions which define the scope conditions for the theory elucidated below. Firstly, I assume that violence against civilians is a valence issue, meaning that people have the same position on the issue and see it as negative (e.g. Stokes 1963; Congleton, Grofman and Voigt 2018). This is a plausible assumption given the wide range of literature about how civilians oppose violence against civilians (e.g. Wood 2003; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007) and have internalized many norms of international law, which includes prohibitions on direct targeting of civilians (e.g. Wallace 2019; Dill and Schubiger 2021). Indeed, according to a Red Cross 2016 survey, 78 percent of people living in countries affected by armed conflict believe that it is wrong to attack enemy combatants even “in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many civilians would be killed” (ICRC 2016, p. 7). Disapproval of direct targeting of civilians is likely even higher. Because I assume that civilian targeting is broadly seen as negative, I exclude cases of genocide or ethnic cleansing from this theory; in such cases, many people may see civilian targeting as normatively positive. Secondly, I focus on conflicts in which violence against civilians is widespread and publicized because I assume that neither armed groups nor civilians can plausibly deny that violence has occurred. In summary, I focus on conflicts in which there is extensive civilian targeting but no genocide or ethnic cleansing.

I define civilian preferences as fundamentally attitudinal, meaning that they are a matter of private preferences rather than public behaviors (e.g. Kuran 1998). When someone prefers one group to another, they are more supportive of that group than the alternative one. In other words, preference is not a matter of absolute levels of support for a group but rather a matter of relative levels of support for one group compared to another. While many conflicts in reality feature more than two armed groups, for simplification purposes I model individual preferences within a simple two-party conflict.

I follow existing work in arguing that people are less likely to think that civilian targeting

is morally wrong and its perpetrators should be harshly punished when the violence has been committed by their preferred armed group. I further argue that there are three possible mechanisms which could explain these relationships; perpetrator identity could shape beliefs about the causes of the violence, i.e. whether it is militarily necessary, consequences of the violence, i.e. whether it harms a lot of people, or attribution of responsibility for the violence, i.e. whether the armed group as a whole is responsible. This argument implies two distinct sets of hypotheses. Firstly, people are more likely to believe the violence is militarily necessary, less likely to believe it is severe, and less likely to believe that the the armed group as a whole is responsible when the violence is committed by their preferred armed groups in comparison to when it is committed by other groups. It is also possible that these effects are larger among those with a stronger preference for one armed group over the other. Secondly, people who believe that violence is necessary and less severe, as well as those who do not think the group as a whole is responsible, are less likely to see the violence as morally wrong and to believe that its perpetrators should be harshly punished.

2.1 Perpetrator Identity and Responses to Violence

Several studies focusing on countries in which fighting is occurring have examined how perpetrator identity shapes the impact of civilian victimization on public support for armed groups. For example, Lyall, Blair and Kosuke (2013) utilize an endorsement survey experiment in Afghanistan and find that, while violence against civilians inflicted by the ISAF results in increased support for the Taliban, Taliban violence does not prompt increased support for the ISAF. These authors do not directly examine attitudes toward the violence itself but rather evaluate support for armed groups among individuals living in areas that have experienced varying levels of violence. Similarly, Condra and Shapiro (2012) utilize geo-coded data on violence in Iraq to examine whether killings of civilians by one group predict higher subsequent levels of violence by the other side. While these scholars do not directly survey or interview civilians, they hypothesize that violence perpetrated by one side causes local civilians to share more information with the other side, resulting in a greater number of

attacks perpetrated by that other side. They find that anti-insurgent reactions are limited in Sunni areas, where the insurgency is popular, and anti-Coalition reactions are limited in religiously mixed areas. Additionally, Balcells (2012) utilizes semi structured interviews about civil war and dictatorship in Spain to conclude that victimization only leads to a rejection of the perpetrator along cleavages that were salient during the war. She does not directly ask respondents about their perceptions of the violence but instead focuses on correlations between past familial victimization and current political affiliation. These three papers together provide strong evidence that violence against civilians has differential effects on support for armed groups depending on the perpetrator identity. While none directly focuses on perceptions of violence, perpetrator characteristics must shape people's perceptions of violence in order for perpetrator identity to moderate the impact of violence on these other outcomes. Indeed, there is one piece that does directly examine this topic. Silverman (2019) finds, in a study of violence committed by American and Pakistani troops in Pakistan, that perpetrator identity affects approval of military strikes.

But what is it about “perpetrator identity” that affects the ways in which people respond to civilian targeting? I suggest that what underlies these findings is differences in prior levels of support for various armed groups. In other words, people react less negatively to Pakistani violence than to American violence because they are more supportive of the Pakistani armed forces than American ones. I remain agnostic here about the reasons that people may be more supportive of one group than another one. I theorize that anyone who prefers one group over the other will think that violence committed by his or her preferred group is less wrong than identical violence committed by the other armed group, but it is also possible that people with stronger preferences are more biased. This suggests that the effect size will vary based on preference strength. Therefore, I hypothesize the following generalized hypotheses:

- *Moral Wrongfulness Hypothesis 1*: People are less likely to believe that violence against civilians is morally wrong when it is committed by their preferred armed group in

comparison to when it is committed by an armed group they oppose.

- *Moral Wrongfulness Hypothesis 2:* The stronger an individual's preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.

The studies summarized above also suggest that people actively turn toward supporting those armed groups which oppose the perpetrator, for example by sharing more information with the other group. In doing so, people effectively punish the perpetrators of violence against civilians by engaging in behavior which imposes costs on the perpetrator and makes the group's defeat more likely. This retaliatory behavior is unsurprising in light of a broader literature on violence and punishment. For example, victims frequently support violence against those who have hurt them as a way not only to achieve peace but also to seek revenge (Vinck et al. 2007; Sonis et al. 2009). Similarly, psychological research suggests that people think that offenders ought to be punished as retribution for their crimes (Carlsmith 2006; Carlsmith and Darley 2008; Osgood 2017). People are even willing to punish out-group members who not have directly participated in the violence. For example, individuals react to threats of violence by supporting policies such as aggressive retaliation against out-groups (e.g. Gordon and Arian 2001; Skitka, Bauman and Mullen 2004), and exposure to violence hardens attitudes toward out-groups (for a summary, see Bauer et al. 2016). Although this wide range of literatures suggest that people seek to punish actors who hurt or threaten them, it is important to note that not all punishment is identical. More precisely, punishment is generally proportional to the violation or harm it seeks to remedy. Therefore, acts that are seen as more wrong require harsher punishment. If people think that violence committed by their preferred group is less morally wrong, they are likely also to think that the perpetrators should be less harshly punished. Among those who prefer a given perpetrator group, those whose preference for that group is particularly strong will be even less likely to support harsh punishment for the perpetrators. This logic can be formalized as follows:

- *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.

- *Punishment Hypothesis 2*: The stronger an individual's preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.

2.2 Mechanisms

If either or both of the above key hypotheses (*Moral Wrongness Hypothesis 1*, *Punishment Hypothesis 1*) are supported, I argue that there are three possible mechanisms which could explain how perpetrator identity alters the effect of violence against civilians on individuals' attitudes toward the violence and its perpetrators. Firstly, perpetrator identity could shape perceptions about the cause of violence i.e. whether it is necessary for military purposes. Secondly, perpetrator identity could affect beliefs about the consequences of the violence i.e. how harmful it is. Thirdly, it could influence who people attribute responsibility to i.e. whether they blame the armed group as a whole.

All three of these mechanisms are forms of motivated moral reasoning. Motivated reasoning occurs when an individual's goals or motives affect his or her reasoning. People can be motivated by either directional or accuracy goals; when people have directional goals, they are "motivated to arrive at a particular conclusion" (Kunda 1990, p. 482). To reach this conclusion, they process information in a biased manner, searching for evidence which confirms their preferred conclusions, selectively criticizing unwelcome evidence, and establishing assessment criteria which emphasizes favorable evidence (Kunda 1990; Baumeister and Newman 1994; Ditto, Pizarro and Tannenbaum 2009). Motivated reasoning affects political attitudes, including the ways in which people react to wrongdoing by politicians (e.g. Taber and Lodge 2006; Fischle 2000). Motivated moral reasoning is a particular form of motivated reasoning in which judgement is driven by the goal of reaching a particular moral conclusion (Ditto, Pizarro and Tannenbaum 2009). In the context of evaluating civilian targeting, I suggest that the desirable moral conclusion is that a preferred armed group was

less morally wrong in engaging in such abuse and therefore should be punished less. I argue that there are three possible ways people could reach such a conclusion.

Firstly, perpetrator identity could impact whether people think that the violence is necessary for victory. Lyall, Blair and Kosuke (2013) suggest but do not directly test a similar theory, building on a long-line of research into intergroup bias (Hewstone, Rubin and Willis 2002; Tajfel and Turner 1979). They argue that negative actions by one's in-group are seen as situational in nature, meaning that the actors were forced to be bad; in contrast, negative actions by out-group members are seen as the result of inherent traits. In the context of conflict, the "situation" forcing a preferred armed group to engage in normatively objectionable behavior would be the need to win. As a consequence, supporters could believe that the abuse is necessary for the achievement of military goals. But, if the same violence were committed by a non-preferred group, it would be seen as gratuitous rather than necessary. Indeed, actors are seen as less blameworthy when they have "valid" reasons for engaging in normatively wrong behavior (Monroe and Malle 2019). For example, people are more likely to support torture portrayed as effective (Kearns and Young 2020). Relatedly, Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe (2014) argue that not having an obligation to prevent wrongdoing mitigates moral blame for wrongs committed. In the context of conflict, people could think that armed groups do not have an obligation to limit civilian targeting if engaging in such violence allows them to achieve a greater good, such as winning the war or defeating the enemy. Thus, I hypothesize that perpetrator identity shapes the degree to which people see violence against civilians as helpful for military goals, and I argue that people who see violence against civilians as militarily necessary are less likely to think that it is morally wrong and worthy of harsh punishment.

- *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.

- *Cause Bias Hypothesis 2:* The stronger an individual's preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.
- *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:
 - *a:* the violence is morally wrong
 - *b:* its perpetrators should be strongly punished

Another possibility is that perpetrator identity shapes beliefs about the severity of the violence i.e. how much harm it causes. Because wrongdoing is condemned proportionally to the perceived harm that is done to the victim (Gray, Waytz and Young 2012; Schein and Gray 2018), violence which causes less harm is seen as less wrong. Importantly, people can characterize the severity of violence differently even if the number of victims is constant. For example, in a study of attitudes toward the American government's performance in Iraq under the W. Bush administration, although most people correctly identified the number of casualties, Democrats tended to interpret the number of casualties as "large" rather than "small," like Republicans (Gaines et al. 2007). Similarly, in a study of Pakistan, Silverman (2019) finds that military operations are seen as twenty-four percentage points more indiscriminate when they are carried out by the United States compared to when they are carried out by Pakistan. Thus, even if the number of victims of violence is constant, people could think that the violence committed by their preferred armed group is less wrong because it doesn't cause as much suffering or harm. I thus hypothesize the following:

- *Consequences Bias Hypothesis 1:* People are less likely to believe that violence against civilians causes extensive harm when it is committed by their preferred group compared to when it is committed by an armed group they oppose.
- *Consequences Bias Hypothesis 2:* The stronger an individual's preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.

- *Consequences Bias Hypothesis 3*: People who believe that violence against civilians causes more harm are more likely to believe that:
 - *a*: the violence is morally wrong
 - *b*: its perpetrators should be strongly punished

Lastly, perpetrator identity could shape beliefs about whether the group as a whole or the individual perpetrator is responsible for the violence. Importantly, not all violence against civilians in conflict results from a deliberate strategy of an armed group. In fact, some violence is merely tolerated by the leadership although it is not adopted as an organizational policy (Wood 2018). Some violence occurs against the wishes of leadership because the organization does not engage in consistent discipline and political education (Hoover Green 2016). If an armed group did not have control over an instance of violence against civilians, people may think that the organization is not as responsible for it and thus should not be punished for it. Indeed, individuals with a lot of control over a negative outcome are judged more harshly than those who have less control (Alicke 2000; Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe 2014). Those who lack control are seen as lacking intentionality (Quillien and German 2021), which also mitigates blame (for a summary, see Malle 2021). While there has been limited work on how people attribute responsibility for violence specifically, research into the public's responses to poor government performance suggests that, even when it is not possible to dispute the facts about something bad that has occurred, people can minimize the responsibility that they attribute to their preferred actors (Rudolph 2006; Bisgaard 2019). I thus hypothesize the following:

- *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.
- *Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 2*: The stronger an individual's preferences are for an armed group, the larger the effect size hypothesized above will be.

- *Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 3*: People who believe that the armed group as a whole is responsible for the violence are more likely to believe that:
 - *a*: the violence is morally wrong
 - *b*: its perpetrators should be strongly punished

3 Research Design

3.1 Case Selection

Colombia has been affected by conflict involving rebel groups, paramilitary groups, and criminal organizations since the mid 1960s. The country serves as an excellent case to test the theory because it is deeply divided over the conflict, in which many civilians have been killed. Civilian targeting continues and remains highly salient today despite a 2016 peace agreement between the government and the largest rebel group, the FARC.

A 2013 report from the National Center of Historic Memory concludes that over 81 percent of the victims of the armed conflict, more than 177,000 people, were civilians. All armed groups engaged in a deliberate strategy of indiscriminate violence (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013). The abuses continued after this report was published and even after the peace agreement was signed in 2016. For example, social leaders have continued to be assassinated at alarming rates since the peace accord. In fact, between the signing of the peace agreement and August of 2020, 1000 social leaders were killed (Indepaz 2020; Espectador 2020). Furthermore, there were 91 massacres¹ perpetrated in 2020, causing the deaths of 381 people (Indepaz 2021). One important reason for continuing abuses is that the war didn't end with the 2016 peace agreement. The ELN didn't demobilize with the FARC in 2016, and there are also FARC fighters who did not demobilize or have remobilized since the peace agreement. These combatants are commonly referred to as dissidents of the FARC. In addition to guerrillas, the largest paramilitary group operating today, the Autodefensas

¹Indepaz defines massacres as the intentional and simultaneous homicide of three or more people protected by international humanitarian law.

Gaitanistas de Colombia, was estimated to have 7,000 members in 2017 (Casey and Jakes 2019; Espectador 2017, 2021*b*). Even as these abuses of civilians continue, the country's history of violence against civilians plays a prominent role in national discourse. Transitional justice mechanisms, including trials and a truth and reconciliation commission, are ongoing and are prominently covered in news coverage (e.g. Institute 2019; Tiempo 2021; Transición 2021), as are hearings in international institutions concerning Colombian violence against civilians (e.g. Espectador 2021*a*).

Amidst this ongoing violence and continuing reckoning with past abuses, the citizens of Colombia remain bitterly divided. The key cleavage of the conflict was primarily ideological. The major rural rebel groups, at least at the outset of the conflict, advocated for a range of leftist ideologies (Palacios 2006), and ideology has remained important to the internal dynamics of these rebel groups (Ugarriza and Craig 2013; Gutiérrez Sanín and Wood 2014; Oppenheim and Weintraub 2017). Yet, the Colombian public writ large is very unsupportive of these leftist armed groups. For example, in 2018, less than 6 percent of all Colombians had confidence in the FARC, and fewer than a quarter of Colombians agreed that demobilized FARC fighters who were not commanders shouldn't have to go to jail if they confessed to their crimes (Dugand, García and Sánchez 2018). At the same time, supporters of the state are also divided over the conflict. Every year from 2004 through 2018, 50 to 70 percent of the Colombian population was supportive of a negotiated end to the conflict with the FARC (Dugand, García and Sánchez 2018). Yet, a 2016 national referendum on the peace agreement did not pass. Furthermore, the current president ran on a platform of modifying the peace agreement to ensure stricter punishment for FARC war criminals; his proposed changes did not pass in the legislature (Grattan 2019). Although the FARC is far more unpopular than Colombian state institutions, only 53 percent of Colombians had confidence in the armed forces in 2018 (Rivera, Plata Caviedes and Rodríguez Raga 2018). Colombians are also as divided over punishment for armed forces as they are for punishment of guerrillas. For example, less than a third of Colombians in 2018 agreed that demobilized members of

the armed forces who were not commanders shouldn't have to go to jail if they confessed their crimes (Dugand, García and Sánchez 2018). Thus, not only is the country divided between guerrilla and state supporters, but it is also divided between strong and weak supporters of the state as an actor in the armed conflict.

3.2 Experimental Procedure

Methodologically, this project consists of an online survey experiment in Colombia with 1,587 respondents, of whom 1,511 finished the survey. The survey was fielded by the firm Dynata.² The design was approved by Duke University's IRB with protocol number 2021-0609, and the survey was fielded July 28th, 2021. All hypotheses were pre-registered in a pre-analysis plan.³ In the survey, respondents are first asked a series of demographic questions as well as a set of three questions designed to discern their attitudes toward the Colombian military. They are then presented with a vignette concerning an instance of violence against civilians; this vignette randomly varies whether the violence was committed by the Colombian Armed Forces or by FARC dissidents. Respondents then answer a series of questions about the violence described in the vignette. The order of these follow-up questions is randomized, and each outcome measure is designed to examine one or more hypotheses. Lastly, respondents answer a series of questions about their broader political attitudes.

I assume that, on average, the sample is more supportive of the government as an armed actor than of the FARC dissidents or other leftist guerrillas. This is a reasonable assumption given Colombian politics and the nature of online samples in the country. In 2018, less than 6 percent of all Colombians had confidence in the FARC (Dugand, García and Sánchez 2018). This public attitude is one explanation for the FARC's resounding electoral defeats in 2019, in their first elections since the peace accord (Anadolu 2019). Support for guerrillas

²Dynata recruited participants from their Colombian proprietary panel of respondents. The respondents from Dynata's pool who took this survey were randomly selected from among those Colombian respondents over the age of 18 who logged into the Dynata online system while the survey is being fielded. In order to continue to the survey, respondents had to consent and indicate that they were a Colombian citizen. Given the sensitive topic of the survey, respondents were able to skip any question.

³The pre-analysis plan is available at <https://osf.io/myktb>.

is likely even lower within online survey samples because of limited internet penetration in rural areas, where the FARC have historically found support. 43 percent of Colombians have access to the internet (DANE 2018), but internet penetration in rural areas is less than 10 percent (Tiempo 2020). Thus, the sample for this experiment is likely to have far more supporters of the state than supporters of the guerrillas.

Nonetheless, some respondents could be much more avid state supporters. Thus, to measure intensity of preference for the state as an actor in the armed conflict, I ask respondents three questions concerning their security-related policy preferences. Firstly, I ask them how much they agree with the statement that “the peace accord was necessary to end the conflict with the FARC-EP,” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Responses are reverse coded so that a 5 indicates a hawkish attitude toward the guerrillas i.e. a strong preference for the state as an armed actor in the conflict. Secondly, I ask them, on a scale of 1 to 5, “to what degree do you have confidence in the Armed Forces?” This question comes from LAPOP. Thirdly, I ask respondents, “what should happen to the budget of the Ministry of Defense?” Response range from “it should be decreased a lot” (1) to “it should be increased a lot” (5). NAs are coded as 3. I then create an additive index from all three questions which ranges from 3 to 15; this variable is rescaled from 0-1 for ease in interpreting the interactions.⁴ This index will be referred to as **preference intensity**. A 0 indicates a weak preference, and a 1 indicates a strong preference for the state as an armed actor in the conflict. In robustness checks, I also run the models with each of the three original questions on a 0-1 scale rather than with the index (Tables A7, A8, A9). These questions about preference for the state were asked before treatment in order to avoid priming effects.

It is important to briefly discuss why I use these three questions rather than a more explicit one about support for guerrillas or a broader one about ideology. Because the country is still beset by violence and civilian supporters of the FARC’s former political party were once violently targeted for supporting for the group (Steele 2017), it would be unethical

⁴Note that this rescaling was not discussed in the pre-analysis plan. The change does not affect the substance of results.

to ask respondents whether they are more supportive of leftist guerrillas or the armed forces. Similarly, questions about ideology or presidential vote are not precise enough; respondents could identify with an ideology or vote for a specific candidate for a wide range of reasons which are unrelated to their attitude toward the conflict. The three questions chosen instead provide a measure of the degree to which respondents are supportive of the state as an armed actor. Importantly, indicating support for the peace accord, supporting decreasing the military budget, or signaling a lack of confidence in the armed forces does not mark respondents as guerrilla supporters. Colombia is a multi-party state, and politicians regularly run on and express distinct perspectives on both the peace accord and the armed forces (e.g. Daniels and Vulliamy 2018; Espectador 2019, 2021 *a*). Additionally, Colombians feel comfortable expressing disapproval of the armed forces; from 2004 to 2018, 30 to 50 percent of all Colombians indicated that they did not have confidence in the armed forces (Rivera, Plata Caviedes and Rodríguez Raga 2018). Therefore, respondents can safely express their opinions on these topics, and the questions are sufficiently specific to capture attitudes toward the state as an armed actor.

Respondents next read a vignette simulating the first paragraph of a newspaper article about a recent instance of violence against civilians. The treatment is whether the violence was allegedly committed by the Colombian Armed Forces or FARC dissidents. The variable **treatment** takes a value of 0 if FARC dissidents are the perpetrator and a value of 1 if the Colombian Armed Forces are the perpetrator. There are several design decisions to note about this vignette, which can be found below. First, the text references a massacre, a form of violence in which multiple civilians are killed at the same time. A wide variety of armed actors have engaged in such violence, making it plausible that either FARC dissidents or the Armed Forces were responsible (e.g. Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013; Castellanos 2020; Justicia 2021). However, in order to limit social desirability bias, the vignette does not use the term “massacre.” Second, the vignette is set in the *El Tiempo* newspaper; it is the largest newspaper in the country and is relatively centrist. Third, Antioquia was chosen

as the site of the violence because it is plausible that a range of victims and perpetrators could be involved in violence there. 25 municipalities in Antioquia are a part of the Program for Territorially Focused Development (PDET), meaning they have been prioritized by the Colombian government after the peace accord because of their history of conflict. Since the peace agreement, FARC dissidents have been active in the department (JEP 2021*b*). At the same time, Antioquia includes a large city with a robust state presence in comparison to the countryside: Medellín. Additionally, a range of massacres have occurred in Antioquia over the past few years (Indepaz 2021). Fourth, the vignette features four deaths because that is the average number of victims of massacres in both 2020 and in 2021 through April 27, as identified by the Indepaz think tank (Indepaz 2021). While these details have been chosen deliberately, the vignette says very little about the victims in order not to suggest a specific kind of perpetrator. For example, if the vignette noted that the victims were campesinos, respondents may infer that the violence occurred in a rural area in which non-state groups were fighting over territory. The full text respondents see will read as follows:

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*).”

Respondents then answer a series of questions about the vignette, all of which are presented to them in a random order. Variable names precede the questions below, but respondents do not see these labels. Note that the range of punishments are based off possible punishments established in the peace accord. The exceptions are pardon and life imprisonment, which are more lenient and more harsh, respectively, than those included in the accord (Roccatello and Rojas 2020; JEP 2021*a*). Colombia does not allow the

death penalty, so that is not included among the options. Note also that the phrasing in the **responsibility** question refers to “the leaders of the organization” rather than to the “armed group as a whole,” as in the hypotheses. Given that leaders make the armed group’s policy and strategy, it is plausible to assert that the two are equivalent. But it is easier for respondents to understand what it means for leaders to be responsible than to understand what it means for an entire organization to be responsible. The full text of the relevant questions is below:

1. **Wrongfulness:** 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?
2. **Punishment:** What degree of punishment should the perpetrators of the violence described in the above article receive?
 - No punishment/pardon
 - 2 years of house arrest
 - 5 years of house arrest
 - 5 years of imprisonment
 - 15 years of imprisonment
 - Life imprisonment
3. **Necessary:** 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.
4. **Severity:** 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?
5. **Responsibility:** 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.

Following the experiment, the survey includes a range of other questions about the degree of confidence respondents have in the national government, their ideology, whether they had family victimized in conflict and by which armed group(s), the quality of municipal services, their security from assault or robbery in their neighborhood, their vote in the second round

of the 2018 presidential election, and their opinion about which armed group was primarily responsible for the violence. Full question wording can be found in Appendix 8.

All regressions are OLS. **Treatment** takes a value of 0 if FARC dissidents are the perpetrator and a value of 1 if the Colombian Armed Forces are the perpetrator. Given that this is a randomized experiment and a balance table suggests that there are not significant demographic differences across individuals in the control and treatment group (Table A11), no control variables are used in the main analyses. Nonetheless, robustness test in Tables A3 and A4 indicate that the results are robust to including a range of control variables. The survey includes one attention check: a reverse-coded question about the size of the area that the respondent lives in. The main analyses include those respondents who fail the attention check, though a robustness check indicates that the results are robust to excluding them (Tables A5 and A6). Table 1 summarizes how each hypothesis will be tested and provides a preview of whether the evidence supports each hypothesis.

Table 1: **Operationalized Predictions**

Hypothesis	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Sign	Support
Moral Wrongfulness Hypothesis 1	Wrongfulness	Treatment	-	No
Moral Wrongfulness Hypothesis 2	Wrongfulness	Treatment x Preference Intensity	-	No
Punishment Hypothesis 1	Punishment	Treatment	-	Yes
Punishment Hypothesis 2	Punishment	Treatment x Preference Intensity	-	Yes
Cause Bias Hypothesis 1	Necessary	Treatment	+	No
Cause Bias Hypothesis 2	Necessary	Treatment x Preference Intensity	+	No
Cause Bias Hypothesis 3a	Wrongfulness	Necessary	-	Yes
Cause Bias Hypothesis 3b	Punishment	Necessary	-	No
Consequences Bias Hypothesis 1	Severity	Treatment	-	No
Consequences Bias Hypothesis 2	Severity	Treatment x Preference Intensity	-	Yes
Consequences Bias Hypothesis 3a	Wrongfulness	Severity	+	Yes
Consequences Bias Hypothesis 3b	Punishment	Severity	+	Yes
Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 1	Responsibility	Treatment	-	No
Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 2	Responsibility	Treatment x Preference Intensity	-	Yes
Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 3a	Wrongfulness	Responsibility	+	Yes
Responsibility Bias Hypothesis 3b	Punishment	Responsibility	+	Yes

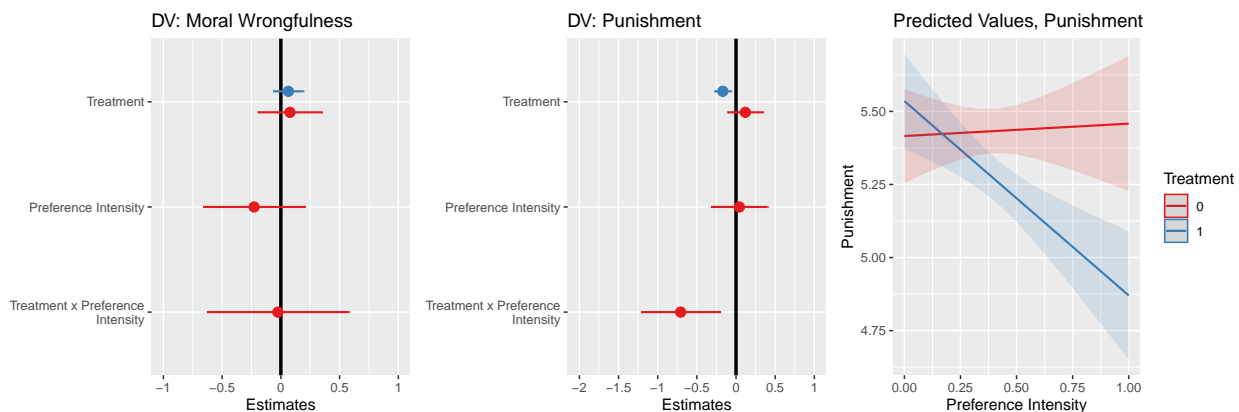
4 Results

The results visualized in Figures 1 through 5 suggest that perpetrator identity affects assessments of appropriate punishment for violence against civilians but not evaluations of the moral wrongness of civilian targeting. In other words, people think less harsh punishments are appropriate for their preferred armed actor, particularly when they have a strong preference for one armed group over the other, but they do not judge violence by their preferred group as less morally wrong. These findings suggest that evaluations of morality may follow a different logic than assessments of appropriate punishment. Regarding mechanisms, the results indicate that people characterize violence by their preferred perpetrators as less severe and less likely to be the responsibility of the organization as a whole; the sizes of these effects depend on the strength of individuals' preference for one group over the other. Furthermore, less severe violence and violence which is not the responsibility of group leadership is characterized as less morally wrong and less deserving of punishment. This suggests that the *Consequences Hypotheses* and *Responsibility Hypotheses* are correct: people justify violence by their preferred armed groups by characterizing it as less harmful and less organized. In contrast, there is not a correlation between preference and characterizations of how militarily necessary the violence was, contradicting the *Cause Hypotheses*. Numerical results can be found in Tables A1 and A2. The results are robust to including controls (Tables A3 and A4), to removing people who failed the attention check (Table A5 and A6), and to using each of three the variables which make up the **preference intensity** index rather than the index itself (Tables A7, A8, A9).

As the first panel of Figure 1 indicates, people are no more or less likely to judge violence as morally wrong when it is perpetrated by the government compared to when it is perpetrated by guerrillas. More technically, the relationship between **treatment** and **wrongfulness** is not statistically significant, meaning that people do not think violence by their preferred armed group is less morally wrong. Because the interaction between **treatment** and **preference intensity** is similarly insignificant, this is true regardless of

how intensely people prefer the state over the guerrillas. However, the second panel shows a negative and statistically significant correlation between **treatment** and **punishment**; this finding indicates that people believe that state perpetrators should be less harshly punished than guerrilla perpetrators. In other words, armed group preference shapes attitudes toward punishment. Furthermore, the interaction between **treatment** and **preference intensity** is negative in the regression about **punishment**, as visualized in the third panel of Figure 1. This interaction suggests that stronger supporters of the state have larger gaps in their punishment preferences between state and guerrilla perpetrators. Overall, these results do not provide support for either of the *Moral Wrongfulness Hypotheses* but do provide support for both of the *Punishment Hypotheses*.

Figure 1: Wrongfulness and Punishment

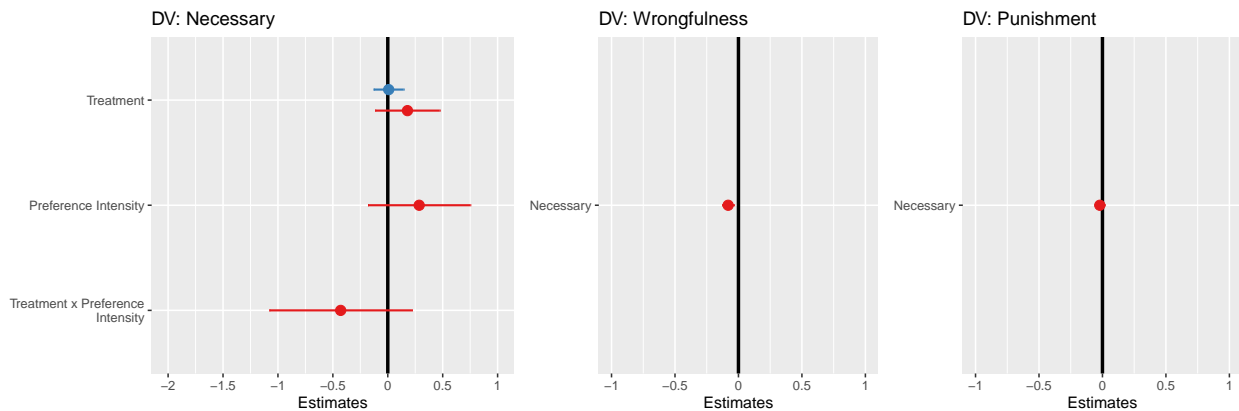


Note: No control variables are used in these regressions, and numeric results can be found in Table A1. The interaction visualized in panel 3 comes from model 4 in Table A1; the coefficients of this model are visualized in panel 2.

Next we will consider which of the three possible mechanisms discussed above could explain why people think their preferred armed actors deserve less harsh punishment. Figures 2, 3, and 4 display the relevant coefficients for analyses examining the cause of the violence, i.e. how necessary it was; the consequences of the violence, i.e. how many people it harmed; and the responsibility for the violence, i.e. whether the armed group as a whole was responsible. Figure 5 displays the significant interactions between **treatment** and **preference intensity**.

As the first panel of Figure 2 shows, the relationship between **treatment** and **necessary** is not statistically significant. Similarly, there is no significant interaction between **preference intensity** and **treatment** in evaluations of how **necessary** the violence was. In other words, people do not characterize violence by their preferred armed group as more militarily necessary, regardless of how strong their preference is for that armed group. The second and third panels indicate that, while there is a substantively small negative correlation between estimates of how militarily **necessary** the violence was and its moral **wrongfulness**, there is no relationship between perceptions of military necessity (**necessary**) and preferred severity of **punishment** for the perpetrators. Overall, these results do not provide strong support for the *Cause Bias Hypotheses*. This finding suggests that people do not justify violence by their preferred group by evaluating it as more militarily necessary and thus less gratuitous, as suggested by Lyall, Blair and Kosuke (2013).

Figure 2: Cause

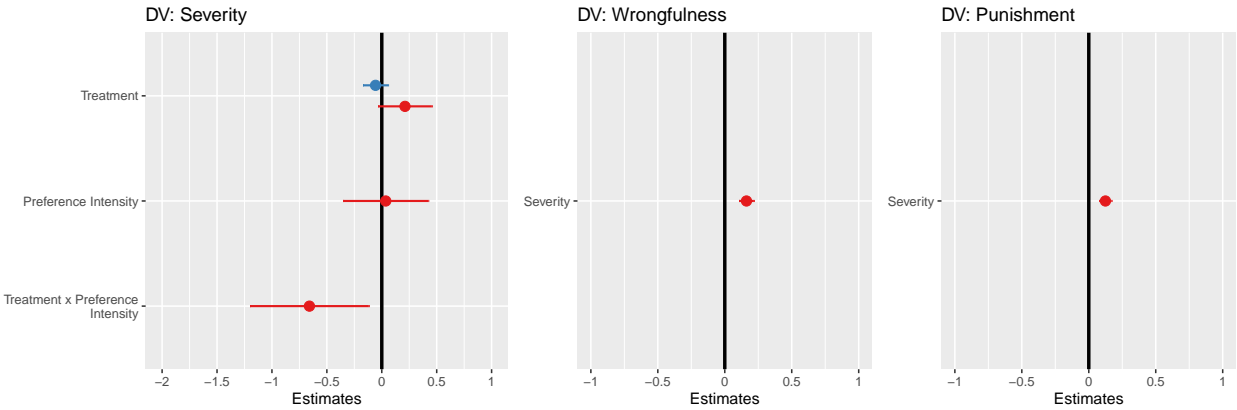


Note: No control variables are used in these regressions, and numeric results can be found in models 1-4 of Table A2.

In contrast, the evidence in Figures 3 and 5 suggests that people interpret the consequences of violence differently depending on the responsible armed group and, furthermore, that these altered evaluations of consequences shape differing perceptions of appropriate punishments for perpetrators. While the correlation between **treatment** and **severity** is not significant, as seen in panel 1 of Figure 3, the interaction between **treatment** and **preference intensity**

is negative and statistically significant. This interaction is visualized in panel of 1 of Figure 5; it shows how, when people have a strong preference for the state, they characterize violence by the state as harming fewer people than when the same violence is committed by guerrillas. At lower levels of preference for the state, the difference in the perceived severity of violence when it is perpetrated by state and guerrilla violence is smaller. In fact, at very low levels of preference for the state, people may actually characterize state violence as more severe than guerrilla violence; this would explain why the correlation between **treatment** and **severity** is not statistically significant. It also suggests that there may be respondents who do not support the state more than the guerrillas, as was assumed in the design of the experiment. As panels 2 and 3 of Figure 3 suggest, when people see violence as more severe, they characterize it as more morally wrong and its perpetrators as more deserving of punishment. In summary, the results provide support for the *Consequence Hypotheses*; preferences for the state shape attitudes toward the severity of violence, which in turns shapes attitudes toward wrongfulness and punishment.

Figure 3: Consequences

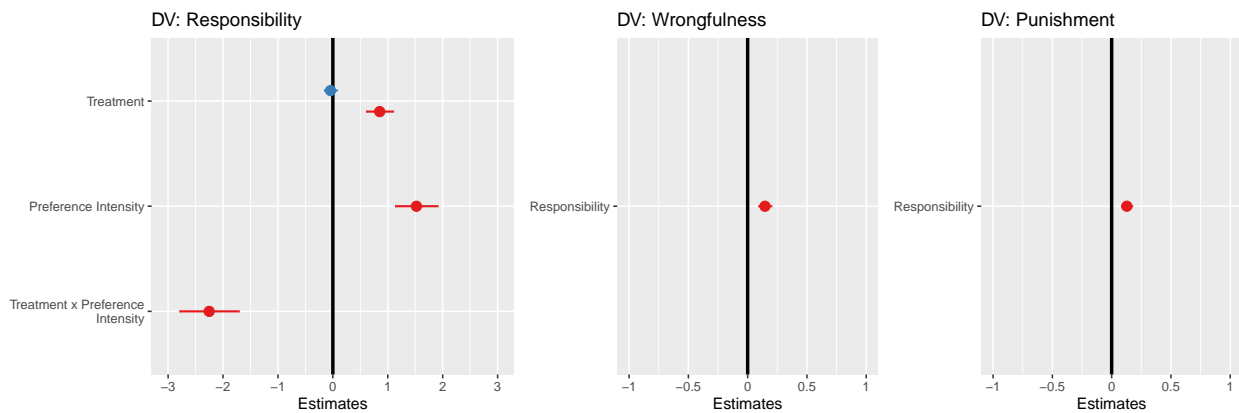


Note: No control variables are used in these regressions, and numeric results can be found in models 5-8 of Table A2.

The findings shown in Figures 4 and 5 provide support for the *Responsibility Hypotheses*. There is no statistically significant correlation between **treatment** and **responsibility**, but the interaction between **treatment** and **preference intensity** is negative and statistically

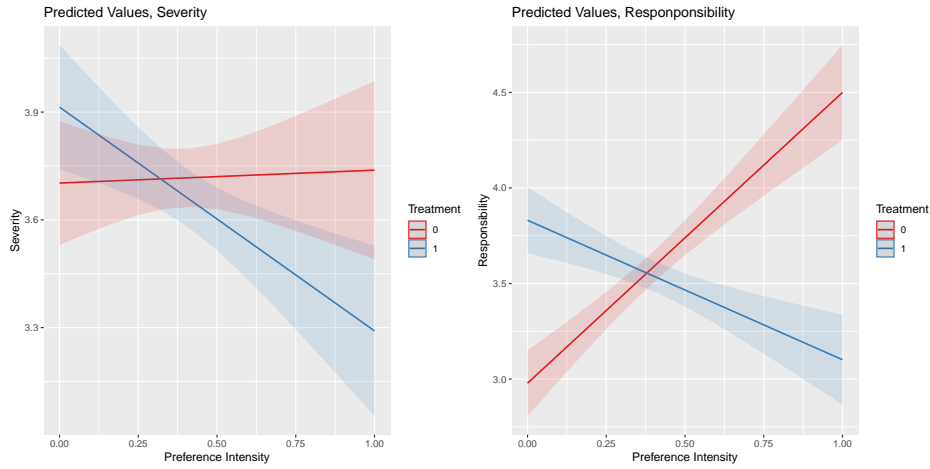
significant as well as substantively large. This interaction is visualized in panel 2 of Figure 5. The interaction indicates that people with a strong preference for the state characterize state violence as less likely to be the responsibility of armed group leaders compared to guerrilla violence. On the other hand, people with the weakest preferences for the state characterize state violence as more rather than less likely to be the responsibility of armed group leaders. This could why **treatment** and **responsibility** are not correlated: the portion of the sample that doesn't prefer the state is too large. Furthermore, as panels 2 and 3 of Figure 4 indicate, higher levels of attribution of **responsibility** to group leaders are correlated with increased perceptions of moral **wrongfulness** and increased severity of desired **punishment** for perpetrators. Overall, these results indicate that people see violence committed by their preferred armed group as less organized and systematic than violence committed by armed groups they oppose; violence which is not organized by group leadership is viewed as requiring less punishment and is seen as less morally wrong.

Figure 4: Responsibility



Note: No control variables are used in these regressions, and numeric results can be found in models 9-12 of Table A2.

Figure 5: Interactions Between Treatment and Preference Intensity



5 Exploratory Analyses

5.1 Wrongfulness

Given that neither of the *wrongfulness hypotheses* are supported, it is important to consider what is shaping perceptions of moral wrongfulness, if not armed group preference. Indeed, the correlation between **wrongfulness** and **punishment** is only .08, although these two variables should be highly correlated based on existing literature and the theory elucidated above.

It is unlikely that social desirability bias affected responses to the **wrongfulness** question because the mean response is 3.5 on a scale from 1 to 5. Thus, the average respondent indicates that they neither agree nor disagree that the violence is morally wrong. As [A3](#) suggests, relatively few demographic control variables have an impact on perceptions of wrongfulness, with the exceptions of income and age. Familial victimization, whether by the government or by guerrillas, is also not correlated with **wrongfulness**. In contrast, with the addition of these control variables, **preference intensity** is marginally negatively correlated with **wrongfulness**. This suggests that strong state supporters see violence against civilians as less wrong, regardless of the perpetrator. Given that stronger supporters of the Colombian state are more conservative, this finding aligns with existing research

suggesting that conservative Americans are more supportive of torture than liberal ones (Wallace 2013; Kearns and Young 2020) as well as with work suggesting that American and Israeli conservative voters are more supportive of the use of force involving civilian casualties (Sagan and Valentino 2017; Bloom et al. 2020). Alternatively, although this study cannot test this argument, Cushman (2008) has found that assessments of wrongness and blame follow distinct logics; he argues that evaluations of blame and punishment are sensitive to the harm that an individual causes, while judgements of wrongfulness are more sensitive to what an individual intends. Malle (2021) also argues that wrongness judgements are distinct from blame judgements. However, he posits that wrongness judgements are causally prior to blame judgements, making it unclear how blame could occur without judgement of moral wrongfulness. Further research is necessary to explain why judgements about moral wrongfulness do not align with assessments of appropriate punishment in evaluations of violence against civilians.

5.2 Social Desirability

It is necessary to briefly discuss whether respondents were comfortable indicating that perpetrators of violence against civilians shouldn't be punished or that the violence was not morally wrong. I took several steps to limit social desirability bias in the design of the survey. For example, questions integrated uncertainty in order to give respondents more cover to express their opinions. For example, respondents did not have to say with surety that the violence was militarily necessary; they could only indicate that it was "very likely" necessary. Additionally, several questions included the following language: "even if you are unsure of your answer, please do your best to respond." Furthermore, the vignette did not include any graphic descriptions of violence in an attempt not to exacerbate social desirability bias. Nonetheless, there are two ways which social desirability bias could have affected the results: people could have skipped questions, or they could have falsified their answers. However, a brief analysis of the data suggests that it is unlikely that either of these scenarios occurred to a large enough degree to affect the results.

Regarding missingness, the five dependent variables used in the analyses above have between 59 and 63 NAs each, out of 1,587 respondents. There were only 76 respondents who did not complete the survey, so most of these NAs come from dropoffs. Indeed, the correlation between NAs on various questions is extremely high (See Table [A12](#)). This suggests that there are not questions which make respondents particularly uncomfortable. However, there may be some kinds of respondents who are more unwilling to engage with the experiment writ large. Indeed, balance tables [A13](#) and [A14](#) suggest that demographics matter for who drops off. Higher income respondents are more likely to skip both the **punishment** and **necessary** questions. Additionally, more educated respondents are more likely to skip the **punishment** question, as are individuals with a less intense preference for the state. However, respondents are not more likely to skip these two questions if they are in the **treatment** group i.e. are presented with a vignette about state forces instead of guerrillas. They are also no more likely to skip these questions if they have been victimized in the conflict. Because victims could be more reluctant to answer questions which could make them recall their own victimization, and because people could be scared of expressing their opinions about an armed group which is in control of their area, these two sets of nulls indicate that missingness is unlikely the result of varying levels of social desirability bias. Missingness is more likely the result of demographic differences between respondents.

Social desirability bias may also have prompted respondents to falsify their answers. However, the mean response to **punishment** was a 5.347 out of 6, and the mean response to **wrongfulness** was a 3.482 out of 5. In other words, the average respondent indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed that the violence was morally wrong, and the average respondent supported a punishment of 15 years in prison for the perpetrators. 6 percent of respondents indicated that the perpetrators should receive no time in prison, and 24 percent of respondents indicated that disagreed that the violence was morally wrong. Thus, many respondents were clearly willing to express opinions about violence which might be considered distasteful.

6 Conclusion

This study has examined the ways in which perpetrator identity shapes public responses to wartime violence against civilians. I have argued that people characterize violence by their preferred armed group as less morally wrong and deserving of less severe punishment. There are three possible mechanisms which may explain this. Depending on whether the perpetrator is affiliated with their preferred armed group, people may differentially evaluate the causes of the violence, i.e. whether it is militarily necessary; the consequences of the violence, i.e. whether a lot of people were victimized; and who bears responsibility of the violence, i.e. whether the armed group as a whole bears responsibility. An online survey in Colombia which presents respondents with an instance of civilian targeting committed either by state armed forces or leftist guerrillas indicates that people justify lesser punishment for their preferred perpetrators by characterizing the violence as less severe and less organized but not as less militarily necessary. However, individuals' preferences are not correlated with their judgements about the moral wrongfulness of violence.

These results indicate armed groups may be best able to persuade people to continue supporting them despite their violence against civilians by portraying the abuse as committed by rogue individuals within the organized or as harming relatively few civilians. On the other hand, portraying the abuse as necessary to win the war may not be convincing. Conversely, transitional justice institutions may be best able to convince civilian supporters of armed groups that punishment is necessary for its perpetrators by emphasizing the organized nature of the violence or the large numbers of victims. Further research should more directly examine how information or propoganda from armed groups, transitional justice institutions, and other actors about violence against civilians affects people's judgements about conflict-related abuse. Future research should also investigate how judgements of the moral wrongfulness of violence against civilians differ from assesments of appropriate punishments for perpetrators.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Main Results, Tables

Table A1: Main Results, Wrongfulness and Punishment

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Wrongfulness	3. Punishment	4. Punishment
Intercept	3.45*** (0.05)	3.54*** (0.10)	5.43*** (0.04)	5.42*** (0.08)
Treatment	0.06 (0.06)	0.08 (0.14)	-0.17** (0.05)	0.12 (0.12)
Preference Intensity		-0.23 (0.22)		0.04 (0.18)
Preference Intensity x Treatment		-0.03 (0.31)		-0.71** (0.26)
R ²	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.02
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01
Num. obs.	1527	1527	1527	1527
RMSE	1.27	1.27	1.06	1.06

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

Table A2: Main Results, Mechanisms

	1. Necessary	2. Necessary	3. Wrongfulness	4. Punishment	5. Severity	6. Severity	7. Wrongfulness	8. Punishment	9. Responsibility	10. Responsibility	11. Wrongfulness	12. Punishment
(Intercept)	2.72*** (0.05)	2.61*** (0.11)	3.70*** (0.07)	5.41*** (0.06)	3.72*** (0.04)	3.70*** (0.09)	2.89*** (0.11)	4.89*** (0.09)	3.58*** (0.04)	2.98*** (0.09)	2.96*** (0.10)	4.89*** (0.09)
Treatment	0.01 (0.07)	0.18 (0.15)			-0.06 (0.06)	0.21 ^o (0.12)			-0.04 (0.06)	0.85*** (0.12)		
Intensity		0.29 (0.24)				0.04 (0.20)				1.52*** (0.20)		
Treatment x Intensity		-0.43 (0.33)				-0.66* (0.28)				-2.25*** (0.28)		
Necessary			-0.08*** (0.02)									
Severity				-0.02 (0.02)			0.16*** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.02)				
Responsibility											0.15*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.02)
R ²	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.05	0.02	0.02
Adj. R ²	-0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.02	0.02	-0.00	0.04	0.02	0.02
Num. obs.	1525	1525	1523	1523	1528	1528	1525	1525	1524	1524	1522	1522
RMSE	1.36	1.36	1.26	1.06	1.14	1.13	1.25	1.05	1.15	1.13	1.26	1.05

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ^o $p < 0.1$

7.2 Main Results with Control Variables

Table A3: Main Results with Controls, Wrongfulness and Punishment

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Wrongfulness	3. Punishment	4. Punishment
(Intercept)	11.94 ^o (6.37)	15.23* (6.50)	16.27** (5.25)	19.00*** (5.34)
Treatment	0.02 (0.07)	0.00 (0.15)	-0.17** (0.06)	0.15 (0.12)
Gender	0.08 (0.07)	0.08 (0.07)	0.11* (0.06)	0.11* (0.06)
Education	0.00 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)
Year Born	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 ^o (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)
Income	0.02** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Rural	0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Victimized by Government	-0.13 (0.15)	-0.18 (0.15)	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.22 ^o (0.13)
Victimized by Guerrillas	0.04 (0.10)	0.07 (0.10)	0.01 (0.08)	0.03 (0.08)
Preference Intensity		-0.44 ^o (0.23)		-0.01 (0.19)
Treatment x Preference Intensity		0.06 (0.32)		-0.79** (0.26)
R ²	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.04
Adj. R ²	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03
Num. obs.	1408	1408	1408	1408
RMSE	1.27	1.27	1.05	1.04

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ^o $p < 0.1$

Table A4: Main Results with Controls, Mechanisms

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
	Necessary	Necessary	Wrongfulness	Punishment	Severity	Severity	Wrongfulness	Punishment	Responsibility	Responsibility	Wrongfulness	Punishment
(Intercept)	-9.03 (6.85)	-10.84 (7.00)	11.35° (6.35)	15.86** (5.27)	12.65* (5.69)	15.50** (5.80)	10.12 (6.32)	14.46** (5.22)	8.55 (5.77)	5.20 (5.77)	12.05° (6.33)	14.66** (5.23)
Treatment	0.01 (0.07)	0.17 (0.16)	0.07 (0.07)	0.10° (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)	0.13 (0.13)	0.07 (0.07)	0.10° (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	0.07 (0.13)	0.07 (0.07)	0.10° (0.06)
Gender	-0.14° (0.07)	-0.14° (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.10° (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.05 (0.06)	0.10° (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	0.07 (0.07)	0.10° (0.06)
Education	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.04)
Year Born	0.01° (0.00)	0.01° (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.00° (0.00)	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00° (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.01° (0.00)
Income	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01° (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Rural	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)
Victimized by Government	0.10 (0.17)	0.12 (0.17)	-0.10 (0.15)	-0.15 (0.13)	0.28* (0.14)	0.23 (0.14)	-0.15 (0.15)	-0.18 (0.13)	-0.36* (0.14)	-0.34* (0.14)	-0.06 (0.15)	-0.10 (0.13)
Victimized by Guerrillas	0.19° (0.10)	0.17° (0.11)	0.05 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.08)	0.01 (0.09)	0.03 (0.09)	0.04 (0.10)	-0.01 (0.08)	0.16° (0.09)	0.13 (0.09)	0.02 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.08)
Preference Intensity		0.40 (0.25)				-0.13 (0.21)			1.36*** (0.21)			
Treatment x Preference Intensity		-0.42 (0.35)				-0.54° (0.29)			-2.17*** (0.29)			
Necessary			-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)								
Severity							0.16*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.02)			0.14*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.02)
Responsibility												
R ²	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.06	0.03	0.03
Adj. R ²	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.05	0.03	0.03
Num. obs.	1405	1405	1404	1404	1409	1409	1407	1407	1404	1404	1403	1403
RMSE	1.37	1.37	1.26	1.05	1.14	1.13	1.26	1.04	1.15	1.12	1.26	1.04

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

7.3 Main Results Removing Respondents Who Failed the Attention Check

Table A5: Excluding People Who Failed Attention Check, Wrongfulness and Punishment

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Wrongfulness	3. Punishment	4. Punishment
Intercept	3.47*** (0.05)	3.56*** (0.11)	5.45*** (0.04)	5.51*** (0.09)
Treatment	0.06 (0.07)	0.11 (0.15)	-0.17** (0.06)	0.04 (0.12)
Preference Intensity		-0.24 (0.24)		-0.13 (0.20)
Preference Intensity x Treatment		-0.13 (0.33)		-0.50 ^o (0.27)
R ²	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.02
Adj. R ²	-0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01
Num. obs.	1278	1278	1278	1278
RMSE	1.27	1.27	1.04	1.04

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ^o $p < 0.1$

Table A6: Excluding People Who Failed Attention Check, Mechanisms

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
	Necessary	Necessary	Wrongfulness	Punishment	Severity	Severity	Wrongfulness	Punishment	Responsibility	Responsibility	Wrongfulness	Punishment
(Intercept)	2.72*** (0.05)	2.61*** (0.12)	3.72*** (0.08)	5.44*** (0.07)	3.74*** (0.04)	3.76*** (0.10)	2.73*** (0.12)	4.95*** (0.10)	3.58*** (0.05)	3.00*** (0.10)	2.93*** (0.11)	4.97*** (0.10)
Treatment	-0.02 (0.08)	0.14 (0.16)			-0.05 (0.06)	0.22 (0.13)			-0.01 (0.06)	0.92*** (0.13)		
Preference Intensity		0.28 (0.26)				-0.05 (0.22)				1.49*** (0.22)		
Treatment x Preference Intensity		-0.40 (0.36)				-0.64* (0.30)				-2.33*** (0.30)		
Necessary			-0.08** (0.03)									
Severity				-0.03 (0.02)								
Responsibility							0.21*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)			0.16*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)
R ²	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.05	0.02	0.01
Adj. R ²	-0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.03	0.01	-0.00	0.05	0.02	0.01
Num. obs.	1277	1277	1276	1276	1278	1278	1277	1277	1276	1276	1275	1275
RMSE	1.36	1.36	1.26	1.05	1.12	1.12	1.24	1.03	1.15	1.12	1.25	1.04

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ^o $p < 0.1$

7.4 Components of “Preference Intensity”

Table A7: Confidence in the Military Instead of Preference Intensity

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment	3. Necessary	4. Severity	5. Responsibility
(Intercept)	3.46*** (0.08)	5.42*** (0.07)	2.62*** (0.09)	3.67*** (0.08)	3.13*** (0.08)
Treatment	0.01 (0.12)	0.02 (0.10)	0.06 (0.13)	0.12 (0.10)	0.50*** (0.10)
Confidence in Military	-0.02 (0.14)	0.02 (0.12)	0.21 (0.15)	0.10 (0.13)	0.91*** (0.13)
Treatment x Confidence in Military	0.12 (0.20)	-0.39* (0.17)	-0.11 (0.21)	-0.35* (0.18)	-1.10*** (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.	1527	1527	1525	1528	1524
RMSE	1.27	1.06	1.36	1.14	1.14

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

Table A8: Peace Accord Unnecessary Instead of Preference Intensity

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment	3. Necessary	4. Severity	5. Responsibility
(Intercept)	3.67*** (0.07)	5.42*** (0.06)	2.74*** (0.08)	3.76*** (0.07)	3.42*** (0.07)
Treatment	0.04 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.09)	0.13 (0.11)	0.04 (0.09)	0.33*** (0.09)
Accord Unnecessary	-0.58*** (0.15)	0.03 (0.12)	-0.04 (0.16)	-0.10 (0.13)	0.40** (0.13)
Treatment x Accord Unnecessary	0.11 (0.20)	-0.22 (0.17)	-0.28 (0.22)	-0.21 (0.18)	-0.92*** (0.18)
R ²	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02
Adj. R ²	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02
Num. obs.	1527	1527	1525	1528	1524
RMSE	1.26	1.06	1.36	1.14	1.15

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

Table A9: Military Budget Increase Instead of Preference Intensity

	1. Wrongfulness	2. Punishment	3. Necessary	4. Severity	5. Responsibility
(Intercept)	3.35*** (0.07)	5.43*** (0.06)	2.65*** (0.07)	3.70*** (0.06)	3.34*** (0.06)
Treatment	0.14 (0.09)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.06 (0.10)	0.04 (0.08)	0.26** (0.09)
Budget Increase	0.32* (0.16)	0.00 (0.13)	0.23 (0.17)	0.05 (0.14)	0.77*** (0.14)
Treatment x Budget Increase	-0.27 (0.22)	-0.34° (0.18)	-0.17 (0.24)	-0.30 (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.	1527	1527	1525	1528	1524
RMSE	1.27	1.06	1.36	1.14	1.14

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

7.5 Data

Table A10: Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	N (1,587 total)	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Pctl(75)	Max
Year Born	1,504	1,987.862	11.276	1,945.000	1,981.000	1,997.000	2,011.000
Woman (1/2)	1,538	1.501	0.500	1.000	1.000	2.000	2.000
Education (0-4)	1,553	3.199	0.827	0.000	3.000	4.000	4.000
Income (0-16)	1,497	10.656	4.937	0.000	8.000	15.000	16.000
Rural (1-5)	1,552	3.538	1.275	1.000	3.000	5.000	5.000
Accord Unnecessary (0-1)	1,587	0.405	0.317	0.000	0.250	0.500	1.000
Confidence Military (0-1)	1,587	0.486	0.323	0.000	0.250	0.750	1.000
Budget Ministry of Defense (0-1)	1,587	0.315	0.294	0.000	0.000	0.500	1.000
Intensity (0-1)	1,587	0.402	0.208	0.000	0.250	0.500	1.000
Wrongfulness (1-5)	1,527	3.482	1.267	1.000	3.000	5.000	5.000
Punishment (1-6)	1,527	5.347	1.063	1.000	5.000	6.000	6.000
Necessary (1-5)	1,525	2.724	1.360	1.000	1.000	4.000	5.000
Severity (1-5)	1,528	3.688	1.138	1.000	3.000	5.000	5.000
Responsibility (1-5)	1,524	3.554	1.155	1.000	3.000	4.000	5.000
Ideology (1-10)	1,505	5.439	2.310	1.000	4.000	6.000	10.000
Victimized (0/1)	1,437	0.315	0.465	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000
Victimized by Government (0/1)	1,587	0.054	0.225	0	0	0	1
Victimized by Guerrilla (0/1)	1,587	0.141	0.348	0	0	0	1

Table A11: Balance Table, Treatment

Variable	Treatment=0	Treatment =1	Difference
	Guerrilla Perp	State Perp	
Education	3.21	3.19	- .02
Woman	1.49	1.51	.02
Income	10.5	10.8	.30
Rural	3.52	3.55	.03
Victimized	.303	.327	.024

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

Table A12: Correlation between Missingness in Dependent Variables

	Wrongfulness NA	Punishment NA	Necessary NA	Severity NA	Responsibility NA
Wrongfulness NA	1	0.965	0.949	0.956	0.941
Punishment NA	0.965	1	0.949	0.956	0.941
Necessary NA	0.949	0.949	1	0.957	0.942
Severity NA	0.956	0.956	0.957	1	0.949
Responsibility NA	0.941	0.941	0.942	0.949	1

Table A13: Balance Table, Punishment Missingness

Variable	Not NA	NA	Difference
Education	2.87	3.21	.34*
Woman	1.63	1.50	-.13
Income	8.42	10.7	2.28*
Rural	3.27	3.54	.27
Victimized	.5	.315	.185
Preference Intensity	.439	.401	-.038*
Treatment	.533	.506	-.027

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

Table A14: Balance Table, Necessary Missingness

Variable	Not NA	NA	Difference
Education	2.91	3.21	.3
Woman	1.55	1.50	-.05
Income	8.18	10.7	2.52*
Rural	3.18	3.54	.36
Victimized	.667	.315	-.352
Preference Intensity	.430	.401	-.029
Treatment	.532	.506	-.026

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

8 Full Survey Text, 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?

- Very small
- Small
- Neither small nor large
- Large
- 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?
- 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?

- No
- Yes

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

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?

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

- 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 youve 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