

# Moral Disengagement in Emerging Adults' Attitudes towards the Colombian Peace Accords\*

## Desconexión moral en las actitudes de adultos emergentes frente a los acuerdos de paz en Colombia

Received: 11 July 2018 | Accepted: 02 November 2019

MARIA FERNANDA PARRA GRAJALES<sup>a</sup>

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Colombia  
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3417-1137>

ESTEFANÍA ZAMORA VÁSQUEZ

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Colombia  
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7804-9379>

MARÍA CLARA CUEVAS JARAMILLO

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Colombia  
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7427-4966>

### ABSTRACT

In the framework of Colombia's peace process, we explore the moral disengagement in the attitudes of Colombians from Cali towards the first version of the Peace Accords. To achieve this, we conducted 12 in-depth interviews with emerging adults. Participant characteristics considered in the study include how they voted in the 2016 peace referendum, age, sex, socioeconomic status and educational level. The transcripts were analyzed through a content analysis applying consensual qualitative research (CQR) guidelines and considering the identity markers mentioned above. The results show that most participants' discourse presented moral disengagement mechanisms. However, the morality in their attitudes is not adequately comprehended by only analyzing traces of moral disengagement. Other moral elements must be considered, especially since morality appears to be an important aspect of the participants' attitudes towards topics related to the peace accords. Social implications are discussed.

### Keywords

moral disengagement; moral reasoning; attitudes; peace accords; armed conflict.

<sup>a</sup> Correspondence author. E-mail: [mafe.894@gmail.com](mailto:mafe.894@gmail.com)

### RESUMEN

En el marco del Proceso de Paz en Colombia, se explora la desconexión moral en las actitudes de algunos colombianos en relación con la primera versión de los Acuerdos de Paz. Para lograr este objetivo, se realizaron 12 entrevistas en profundidad a adultos de la ciudad de Cali que fueron invitados a participar de acuerdo a su voto en el "plebiscito por la Paz", teniendo en cuenta edad, sexo, estrato socioeconómico y nivel educativo. Las transcripciones se analizaron mediante un análisis de contenido llevado a cabo bajo los lineamientos de la Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), teniendo en cuenta los marcadores identitarios de la muestra. Los resultados indican que, en el discurso de la mayoría de los participantes, se evidenciaron mecanismos

*How to cite:* Parra Grajales, M. F., Zamora Vásquez, E., & Cuevas Jaramillo, M. C. (2019). Moral disengagement in emerging adults' attitudes towards the Colombian peace accords. *Universitas Psychologica*, 18(5), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy18-5.mdea>

de desconexión moral. Sin embargo, la moralidad en sus actitudes no se puede comprender adecuadamente únicamente con el análisis de la desconexión moral. Se deben tener presentes otros elementos morales, especialmente considerando que la moral parece ser un aspecto importante de las actitudes de los participantes hacia temas relacionados con los Acuerdos de Paz. Se discuten implicaciones sociales.

**Palabras clave**

desconexión moral; razonamiento moral; acuerdos de paz; actitudes; conflicto armado.

Currently, Colombia is implementing the Peace Accords that were signed in November 2016. These accords are a shorter and modified version of the accords that were signed two months earlier and submitted to a referendum. This agreement is meant to put an end to the 50-year-old conflict with one of the country's largest and oldest armed groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, in its Spanish acronym), and to build a stable long-term peace solution (Presidencia de la República & Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, 2016). However, ending such a conflict, which has left more than 8,900,000 victims (Red Nacional de Información, 2019), in a country of abundant violence and building peace is a difficult task, especially considering that 50.21% of the referendum voters rejected the initial Peace Accords and 63% of citizens entitled to vote abstained from voting (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, 2016). Despite this, the Accords are being implemented and so it is imperative to comprehend the nation's attitudes towards these accords to facilitate their implementation and achieve the consolidation of peace with the FARC; a process that has been so far described as conflictive (Tiusabá & López, 2019).

There have been several attempts to explain people's attitudes and their vote in the referendum, particularly from national and international media that carried out polls and interviews and analyzed them. One of the most highlighted factors was the lack of trust in the political institutions and mechanisms and their commitment to complying to the agreements

made (Los 10 argumentos, 2016; Gallón, 2016; Qué dice de Colombia, 2016). Also, people's resistance to forgive, the perception that the justice proposed is not "strong enough" and crimes will remain completely or partially unpunished and the massive campaign that the opposition executed (Los 10 argumentos, 2016; Los 10 argumentos con los que ganó el NO, 2016; Gallón, 2016; Miranda, 2016; Por qué ganó el no, 2017). Moreover, some authors attribute the strong rejection to the lack of efficient strategies to educate the citizens about the Accords that resulted in largely misinformed voters; the low educative, scientific and technical level of the population, which limits their reasoning; and the exploitation of these circumstances, by some political parties, to induce fear and hate among civilians (Tiusabá & López, 2019). To the point that they claim that the freedom of the people to autonomously decide upon their agreement with the Accords was annulated.

Nonetheless, as far as we know, there has not been a serious effort to analyze the morality in the attitudes towards the Peace Accords and these attitudes must imply some moral reasoning considering that the Accords and the Peace Process have an inherent strong moral component. To begin with, the morality of this document can be evidenced in its purpose, the content of the agreement and their human rights-based approach that promotes and protects peaceful cohabitation and the rights of the actors involved in the agreement (including citizens). Therefore, studying the morality in Colombians' attitudes represents an important step towards thoroughly comprehending attitudes regarding the Peace Accords. This study approaches the matter through Bandura's moral disengagement theory because the data presented by surveys, interviews and previous research suggests the existence of moral disengagement mechanisms in these attitudes, as will be explained further on.

## Moral disengagement

Bandura's theory of moral agency departs from an interactionist morality that is relative to the particularities of the moral situation being judged and was developed due to Bandura's interest in not only moral thinking (as he criticized his contemporary morality scholars) but also moral behavior (Bandura, 1991, 2016; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). He proposed that moral self-regulation mechanisms that act in accordance with moral criteria learned through different socializing experiences are what allow us to behave morally, while the inhibition of these mechanisms through moral disengagement allow us to behave immorally or to execute, allow or support actions or ideas that mildly or profoundly contradict our morality.

Moral disengagement is a process by which one or several of the 8 different disengagement mechanisms inhibit the moral agent's self-regulation in a moral situation. According to Bandura (1991, 2016), these mechanisms are as follows: 1) *Moral justification*: the agent judges the behavior as moral, because he or she is convinced that it has a socially and morally valued goal. 2) *Euphemistic labeling*: the agent uses discursive tools (such as a technical or scientific vocabulary or a passive voice) in the description of the behavior to reduce its negative perception and make it seem more respectable and acceptable. 3) *Advantageous comparison*: the agent compares the behavior with a more immoral past behavior of the victim so that the agent can obtain a more positive evaluation. 4) *Displacement of responsibility*: the agent attributes the responsibility of the behavior to the mandate of another person or to social pressure. 5) *Diffusion of responsibility*: the responsibility is disseminated because the behavior was carried out or decided by a group or with the help of different people. 6) *Minimizing, ignoring or misconstruing the consequences*: the negative consequences of the behavior are selectively minimized, ignored or misconstrued while its social benefits are highlighted. 7) *Dehumanization*: the victim is divested of his or her human attributes and qualities such as

emotions, feelings, hopes and concerns that are typical in people, or the victim is conferred with animal, inhumane or subhuman qualities. 8) *Attribution of blame*: the agent considers him or herself a victim that has acted in defense against an attack initiated by the other person; thus, the other person is to blame for provoking the agent's behavior.

Through the review of empirical research on moral disengagement, several points stand out. First, it has been investigated internationally in different contexts and in relation to different topics, especially militarism (Bandura, 1990; McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006; Piñuela, 2014), school bullying (Bandura et al., 1996; Haddock & Jimerson, 2017; Thornberg & Jungert, 2014) but not in relation to peace accords or peace processes. On the other hand, research on the subject in the context of Colombia is quite rare and has developed mostly in relation to school bullying and parenting (Martínez, Robles, Amar, & Crespo, 2016; Valega, Canchila, & Hoyos, 2018). Only one recent study explores the use of moral disengagement in the context of Colombian armed conflict but in the communiqués of FARC and a paramilitary group (AUC, in its Spanish acronym), not in the general population (Villegas, Flórez, & Espinel, 2018). Second, some international studies suggest that women (Bandura et al., 1996; Howard, Shegog, Grussendorf, Stelzig, & McAlister, 2007; McAlister et al., 2006) and people with a higher level of education (Jackson & Sparr, 2005; McAlister et al., 2006) are more resistant to moral disengagement. Additionally, the mechanism of dehumanization has been associated with an increase in the perception of threat and an increase in discrimination against the victim (Demoulin, Rodríguez et al., 2004; Pereira, Vala, & Leyends, 2009 as cited in Piñuela, 2014), as well as with opposition to reparation policies amid political conflicts (Zebel, Zimmerman, Tendayi Viki, & Doosje, 2008). The attribution of blame mechanism has been considered a trigger for other mechanisms and for violent behaviors (Bandura, 1990). Finally, most of this research is quantitative

and uses attitudinal questionnaires to evaluate moral disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996; Caravita, Gini, & Pozzoli, 2012; Caravita, Sijtsema, Ramabaran, & Gini, 2014; Haddock & Jimerson, 2017; McAlister et al., 2006; Piñuela, 2014; Thornberg & Jungert, 2014; Valega et al., 2018). The latter is reasonable if, as some authors propose, attitudes are the result of a psychological process; therefore, the use of a moral disengagement mechanism will necessarily be manifested in the form of an attitude (Jackson & Sparr, 2005).

It is clear then that it is feasible and innovative to study moral disengagement mechanisms in the attitudes of Colombian adults in relation to the peace accords, but it may not be wise to do so. After a careful revision of the available research regarding Colombian people's opinions or attitudes towards the peace accords and/or the peace process, there is enough evidence to support an inquiry about moral disengagement in the context of people's evaluations of these topics. The results of several national and regional surveys indicate a marked preference for punitive or rejecting measures against the agents of the armed conflict over measures of negotiation, reparation and reconciliation, even if it means sabotaging the peace process (Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2012; Fundación Social, 2009; Palou, 2014; Universidad del Valle, 2016). Such attitudes refer to a notion of human rights, justice and the wellbeing and dignity of people. Thus, they are embedded with a moral reasoning that is not acknowledged in these types of surveys or other research about this subject, and we think it is important to understand how and why people are adopting these sorts of attitudes. Furthermore, since moral disengagement enables a person to tolerate, propose or support behaviors that harm others without activating the self-sanction that is generally elicited by such behaviors, it is possible that these mechanisms are being used in association with the attitudes documented in these surveys. For instance, in one case almost half of those surveyed stated that they thought military intervention was the right strategy to solve the armed conflict (Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2012), and this type

of militarism has been strongly associated with moral disengagement (Jackson & Sparr, 2005; McAlister et al., 2006; Piñuela, 2014).

Given the importance of the issue, the limited investigations and the evidence of moral disengagement mechanisms in Colombian's opinions of the Peace Accords, we question ¿how is moral disengagement present in the attitudes towards these Accords? Thus, the objective of the present study is to explore moral disengagement in the attitudes regarding the Peace Accords signed in September 2016 of a group of emerging adults in Cali. To do so, we first briefly describe the attitudes of the participants towards the peace accords and the related peace process; then, we describe how the moral disengagement mechanisms were used; and third, we identify attitudes associated with the stronger or weaker presence of moral disengagement in these adults.

## Method

Given the absence of qualitative research on the matter and the important information that this method could deliver, we conducted a qualitative investigation (Álvarez, 2003) with a phenomenological design (Salgado, 2007) so that people's attitudes and discourse were interpreted in light of their subjective experience and perspective. Therefore, participants were individually approached with an in-depth interview, which develops as a conversation that is built with the participant based on topics and possible questions that are previously established (Taylor & Bogdan, 1992). The results were analyzed through a content analysis and with the aid of the software, Atlas ti (Aignerren, 1999; Bardin, 2002). In the content analysis (Bardin, 2002), the universe consisted of the transcripts of the interviews, the units were defined thematically, and the rule of enumeration was the presence/absence of the indicators for each subcategory. The categories were "attitudes" and "moral disengagement", and then the category "moral engagement" emerged during the investigation. We will understand

attitudes as “a form of experience that (a) refers to specific objects, events, people or issues, and (b) is primarily evaluative” (Eiser & van der Pligt, 2015) and as such they can have a positive or negative valence. The subcategories of the category “attitudes” for the purpose of this study were the main topics that the attitude referred to: peace process, peace accords, plebiscite, the FARC and politicians. The subcategories for “moral disengagement” were the different mechanisms described in the theory. The emerging category will be explained later.

### Participants

The sample comprised 12 emerging adults (20-30 years old) from the city of Cali, who were chosen through a quota sampling approach according to their votes (in the 2016 plebiscite), sex and socioeconomic status (low: 1-2; high: 5-6) linked to education level (high school or lower; higher education). The composition of the final sample can be viewed in table 1. These demographic characteristics were considered based on previous research on moral disengagement and people's opinions on or attitudes towards the Peace Process; and were taken into consideration so as to have a maximum variation that enriches the information collected and the posterior analysis. Since Cali is geographically organized according to socioeconomic levels half of the participants were selected from institutions in a neighborhood with the highest socioeconomic status (private university and a country club) and the other half from two neighborhood with the lowest low socioeconomic status. The sampling was also done by criterion; the exclusion criteria included radically changing one's attitudes towards the peace process (e.g., changing from support to oppose) since the plebiscite and living outside the country for the 4 years prior to the data collection for this research.

**Table 1**

*Sample description (N = 12)*

Variable	Characteristic	N (%)
Sex	Female	6 (50)
	Male	6 (50)
Socioeconomic status	1-2	6 (50)
	5-6	6 (50)
Education level	High School	6 (50)
	University	6 (50)
Plebiscite Vote	Yes	4 (33.3)
	No	4 (33.3)
	Abstention	4 (33.3)
Age	Mean	24
	SD	2,6
	Age Range	21-29

### Procedure

The investigation was developed in 8 phases that began in February 2016 and ended in January 2017: 1) elaboration of the research problem, 2) definition of the method, 3) development of the instrument: writing and piloting of the in-depth interview script (Taylor & Bogdan, 1992), 4 and 5) data collection: interviewing the 12 participants in 1-3 encounters, 6) interview codification following the consensual qualitative research approach (Juan, Gómez, Etchebarne, & Roussos, 2011), 7) analysis of the results and subsequent discussion and 8) dissemination of results.

The entire investigation followed the ethical and legal principles stated in the 8430 Resolution (Ministerio de Salud, 1993) and the Law 1090 (Congreso de la República, 2006).

### Results

We created a profile of each of the participants to better understand their attitudes, so first a brief summary of these profiles will be presented. Then we will present the results, organized into categories and subcategories. Please note that the interviews were conducted in Spanish and, therefore, the quotes had to be translated into

English which means they could have suffered slight modifications.

#### *Participant's Profile*

The profiles are organized according to the participant's vote in the 2016 referendum.

#### *Lina (Subject 1)*

This 23-year-old woman is a student in a private university and has a socioeconomic status no. 6. She states that she was clearly in favor of the accords but did not vote because the matter was not important enough for her since it did not affect her life directly.

#### *Camilo (Subject 2)*

He is a 21-year-old man who also studies in a private university and belongs to the highest socioeconomic status. He did not vote because he thinks that the peace accords and the peace process are "stupid", that they don't thoroughly solve the issue and that the accords' implementation was too difficult because of practical matters and because of the government's corruption. His mother and her family were victims of the armed conflict (forced displacement), but he doesn't consider himself a victim of it. He had a strong negative attitude towards the peace accords that was evidenced in his vocabulary, voice tone and gestures during the interview.

#### *Sofi (Subject 9)*

She is 23 years old, has a low socioeconomic status (2) and her highest education level is high school. She has met several victims of the armed conflict. Regarding the peace accords, she believes that they won't solve the armed conflict issue because there are other armed groups involved besides FARC and she rejects

some aspects of it. She did not vote because she thinks her vote wouldn't have made a difference.

#### *Gerónimo (Subject 11)*

He is 24 years old and graduated from a public high school (socioeconomic no. 2). He doesn't consider himself a direct victim of the armed conflict, although he feels it has affected him indirectly in economic aspects. He thinks the peace accord will benefit the country in the long term but that some of the "benefits" given to the FARC group are "ridiculous". He did not vote because he thinks that the government won't take the voting results into account when they decide whether to implement the accord or not. He doesn't believe in Colombian democracy.

#### *Daniela (Subject 5)*

She is 25 years old and graduated from a prestigious public university, though she has a high socioeconomic status (6). She doesn't feel affected directly by the armed conflict but knows people who were. She voted "Yes" because she thinks that conflicts should be resolved through negotiations and because she agrees with most of what has been accorded. She considers the peace accords a very important matter and tried to be as informed of it as possible.

#### *Carlos (Subject 6)*

He is 28 years old and graduated from a private university in Bogotá, being from a high socioeconomic status (6). He thought the Accords marked a historic moment and voted "Yes" because he believes that through the accords there will be peace in Colombia. He considers that the conflict affected him directly because as a child he constantly feared that his father would be kidnapped.

*Alejandra (Subject 7)*

She is 24 years old and her highest academic level achieved is high school. She lives in a neighborhood that belong to a low socioeconomic status (2). She doesn't consider herself a victim of the armed conflict but she met a FARC member that was in the process of reintegration and felt compassion for him. She voted "Yes" because she thinks the accords seem like an effective solution for the armed conflict issue, though she believes the best solution relies on education.

*John (Subject 10)*

A 27-year-old high school graduate with a socioeconomic status no. 1. He voted "Yes" because he believes that we need to reconcile in order to end the violence in Colombia and he sees the peace process as an "improvement plan" for the country. John says he tried to read the accords but couldn't understand them so his voting decision was made based on what the people around him said. This can account for some of the misinformation he provided during the interview. He does not consider himself a victim of the armed conflict.

*Diego (Subject 3)*

He is 29 years old, has a high socioeconomic status (5) and graduated from a private university. Diego think that the accords could help the country but he voted "No" because he is against Colombia's corrupted government and doesn't trust them to implement the peace accords transparently. The only way he feels that the armed conflict has affected him is because of the insecurity it created in the whole country.

*Sara (Subject 8)*

She is 22 years old and graduated from a private high school but for economic reasons she could not carry out her studies at a professional level.

Sara lives in a residency is in socioeconomic status no. 2. She described her position regarding the Peace Process as "of total rejection". Also, she believes that the armed conflict "has no solution" and that this process is "crap", that "it's useless" because the government will give "more privileges to the FARC than to the country".

*Ana (Subject 4)*

She is a 21-year-old university student with a high socioeconomic status (6). She encountered a FARC group once during a family road trip and thought they were going to kidnap them but they didn't. She also visited a community victim of FARC's crimes and comments that she was very moved by this experience. She thinks that the peace process is an important step to solve the armed conflict but she doesn't agree with some of the points of the accords and some aspects of the peace process, nor does she trust the government's intentions with the peace process. Hence, she voted "No".

*Max (Subject 12)*

He is 23 years old, a high school graduate with a low socioeconomic status (2) and voted "No". Although he thinks that the armed conflict should be solved through a negotiation, he thinks that the accords benefit the FARC group too much and that the money that the peace process requires could be used to help other poor people in need. He doesn't think he is a victim of the armed conflict but he was offered to be part of guerrilla groups.

*Attitudes*

The data were categorized according to 5 themes: peace process, peace accords, plebiscite, the FARC (including categories for chiefs, low ranking members and the group as a whole) and politicians (including a subcategory for Juan Manuel Santos, the current president). Detailed information regarding the results for

the participants' attitudes will be presented in another publication. For the purposes of the present study, a summary of the information will suffice. The aspects that received more negative attitudes were: Colombian politicians, the FARC leaders, the political and judicial benefits given to the FARC and the value of the subsidiary monthly income that will be given to the FARC (The participants were misinformed about this value.) Despite that, there was a general acceptance of the social reintegration of the FARC members to Colombian society and, to a lesser extent, the negotiations with FARC to put an end to the armed conflict. In general, participants had both positive and negative attitudes towards the peace accords and the corresponding peace process, regardless of their vote in the plebiscite. Although, people who voted "yes" tended to have consistently positive attitudes during the entire interview.

#### *Moral Disengagement*

Palliative comparison, displacement of responsibility and diffusion of responsibility were not identified in the discourse of any of the participants.

**Moral justification:** this was the most frequently used mechanism (by subjects 2, 5, 6 and 11). Males used it when supporting military intervention as a more efficient solution for the armed conflict or as a strategy to aid the peace process, while the female participants used it when arguing that people who have committed crimes against humanity deserve equally violent penalties.

*For example, just like with the conflict. Em: let's say a rapist, people like that, that rape # um, What should # be done with them? well, they should be raped right? Something like that. A firmer justice. (Subject 5, Daniela)*

**Dehumanization:** This mechanism was identified in the discourse of participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Some participants argued that the leaders or chiefs of the FARC and people who voluntarily joined are abnormally

maliciousness, and they contaminate others and should be sent for psychiatric help (subjects 1, 6 and 7). Others (subjects 4, 2, 8 and 9) described FARC members in general as "heartless" and/or "soulless". However, the most frequent description employed was "rats". Dehumanization was used to portray FARC members as a threat to civilians, especially when discussing reintegration and political participation.

*There are some that do surrender. 'Well I want to come and kill people, let's do it.' No, those are some sons of bitches, too, rats. (Subject 8, Sara)*

**Euphemistic language:** Only subjects 5 and 2 (with a high socioeconomical level) used this mechanism when justifying military intervention against armed groups such as the FARC. The participants minimized the effect of words that refer to homicide by replacing them with technical expressions such as "eradicate", "they died", and "death for the country". Immediately after, subjects used another mechanism: Subject 2 used dehumanization, and subject 5 used moral justification.

*Em: people who rape for pleasure, well I think those people should be eradicated, hopefully! (Subject 5, Daniela)*

**Attribution of blame:** This was used by two male participants (subjects 2 and 11) who were against the implementation of the accords and in support of military interventions against the FARC. The participants argued that the FARC attacked the country and that military intervention is the only way of protecting it.

*I understand that life isn't easy in this country, but to go and kill and kidnap and go against the people, the least they deserved was armed intervention by the government, it was something that was getting out of our hands, either the State is defended or the country fell by the hands of the guerrilla men. [...] I think they are responsible for this#. Besides, they were the ones who chose violence first# ¿right? (Subject 11, Gerónimo)*

**Distortion of the consequences:** This was used by subject 2 on two occasions regarding the

idea of military intervention against the FARC. The participant minimized the negative effects of the increase in military force against guerrilla groups during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe (such as the false positives and all the military losses) while maximizing the positive effect of perceived tranquility among many citizens.

*I do not agree with Uribe in many things, but when you were with Uribe you could (trave::l) on the roads, you found a lot of tranquility, yes, # there were the false positives, there were a million things (3.0) but at least the guerrilla hid. I have friends that own sheds, farms and they say, we're not lying, with Uribe, we visited our farms peacefully, we were not robbed, we were not blackmailed (Subject 2, Camilo).*

### Possible Moral Disengagement

This was an emerging subcategory that comprised moral reasoning regarding a behavior that sought to harm another human being, but that behavior could not be clearly identified as a detrimental behavior, because it is socially acceptable in specific circumstances as a form of justice. For instance, denying political participation as a form of criminal justice. In the results, the types of comments that are possibly applying a moral disengagement mechanism were evidenced in subject 2 and 9. Subject 2 stated that they should not be allowed to reintegrate, because that would increase crime rates, which could be considered an attribution of blame; and on another occasion, he made the same argument and justified it with claims that the FARC members will not change and will continue misbehaving and harming society (moral justification) as is shown below.

Yes, we reintegrate them, we give them two years to be a part of society, we help them become bakers (Eh::), to weave, I mean, ¡It's not going to happen! ¿you know? Because it's too damn hard that if you are used to doing things the wrong way, that you suddenly change your mentality like hey, stop killing and let people live their lives as they please, struggle, be stressed because you have no food to feed your children, knowing that, if you do not work eight hours a day you won't be

able to live in your house ¿you know? That's why I say that those solutions that the government gave, that there won't be anymore guerrilla, I mean ¡That's never going to happen! (subject 2, Camilo)

He also argued that they should be denied political participation, because that will not help the country, which can be considered a moral justification. Subject 9 morally justified the denial of any amnesties. Hence, all of this comments propose an action that deprive FARC members of their rights as a punishment or protective measure against crimes that the participants think the FARC will commit in the future. Whether this is fair or moral is debatable.

### Moral Engagement

Another emerging category is moral engagement. This category does not refer to a theoretical concept (there is no such concept in Bandura's theory), but merely to those fragments of discourse that were embedded with a moral argumentation that have no moral disengagement. The subcategories were shaped based on how the participants determined what is good or bad, right or wrong, that is, the orientation that their arguments took.

**Nature of the behavior:** All the participants, except subject 1, defend an attitude in favor of the peace accords or an attitude against an aspect of the peace accords, because they believe that it is coherent or incoherent with a value or principle that they considered to be right or good, for example, solving a conflict peacefully, forgiveness, the freedom to decide about one's life, tolerance and justice. Justice was understood by the participants as equity. An example of this is Daniela's argumentation in favor of using peace accords as the means to end this civil war:

*[...] if there is disagreement, the best way is to make an agreement. And that for me is- you state the points, in which- what's the root of our disagreement and let's try to find a way to (.) well to reconcile. That for me is the best way to solve a conflict (0,2) armed or otherwise. (Subject 5. Daniela)*

**Consequences of the behavior:** Participants (subjects 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12) approved or defended aspects of the peace accords, because they believed they would have positive consequences, such as: benefits to the country (less violence or helpful new political proposals) or because they believed that it was necessary to prevent wrongdoings (like the crimes continually committed by ex-FARC members). For instance, Diego thinks that the accords are positive because, if rightfully implemented, they would bring positive consequences for Colombia. Nevertheless, it must be stated that he doubts that they will be rightfully implemented.

*If everything that is on the paper is true [...] it would be something very cool that help enrich our country and that well helps us grow as a nation (Subject 3, Diego)*

**Concern for the other person:** Participants defended their attitudes through an argumentation in which they tried to think from the other person's position or about the other person's rights or preferences and feel empathy or compassion towards the other person. When they showed concern for the FARC members they argued that they are as human as anyone else (subject 5 and 12); that they had difficult lives that led them to a violent path (subjects 1, 4, 5, 7 and 9); and that they *deserve* social reintegration (subject 1), less punitive penalties (subject 1, 6 and 12) and more years of freedom, because everyone wants to be free and have a second chance in life (subject 1, 3 and 5). Participants who showed concern for the victims evidenced empathy towards their situations and made moral judgments based on the moral judgments they thought the victim would make.

An example of an argument based on concern for FARC members is as follows:

*Yes, there were people who acted under orders, and disobeying an order from the FARC meant being shot, so it was either their lives or following an order that they perhaps many did not agree with, because I'm not saying that they are people without feelings and that they are monsters, no, they are humans and I think that they suffer too and cry and go through*

*the same things we do, so I think that not all of them, because most of them, if you think about it, few of them are the ones in charge. The rest are like, say, pawns that follow orders, right? Therefore, either they could go to jail with minor sentences or they have certain benefits, because well, it did not depend on them, let's say (Subject 12, Max)*

**Mix of "orientations":** On a few occasions, regarding the same moral object, a few people (subject 1, 5 and 11) reasoned with two of the different orientations explained above, which eventuated in conflict. In all cases, it was an argument based on justice (nature of the behavior) versus an argument based on positive consequences (consequences of the behavior), and in the end, they all considered the latter as more important. In other words, they preferred to support something that would bring a social benefit, even though it could be considered unfair (in terms of equity) from some point of view.

*So it can be said that they were all involved in that, like I'm saying because of my way of thinking, yes, yes, they should all pay with jail time, but I don't know if the government, let's say, what it thinks, or who they think should pay and who shouldn't [...] from my point of view, I think it's a maneuver from the government and maybe from the FARC too, to end the armed conflict; that is what's most important, the most important thing is to end the war. (Subject 11, Gerónimo)*

## Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to analyze moral disengagement in the attitudes manifested by a group of emerging adults from Cali regarding the first peace accords (signed in September 2016) and related topics. Regarding their attitudes, it can be concluded that participants' vote in the plebiscite were not strictly defined based on whether they agreed or disagreed with the different points of the peace accords. Other elements were taken into consideration, such as their confidence in the public servers and institutions directly involved in the Peace Accords as was proposed by the media (Los 10 argumentos, 2016; Gallón, 2016; Qué dice de

Colombia, 2016). Also aligned with the analyzes found in some media articles was the perception that stronger forms of justice were needed (Los 10 argumentos, 2016; Los 10 argumentos con los que ganó el NO, 2016); and indeed the declarations of this sort presented moral disengagement mechanisms as we predicted.

Moving on to the moral disengagement present in their attitudes, the mechanisms that were most common were moral justification and dehumanization. The former functioned to validate punitive measures against the guerrilla members by appealing to justice, based on equality and retribution, or the welfare of the country. The latter functioned to confer qualities such as “evil”, “heartless”, “soulless” or “rats” that divest guerrilla members of their human emotional abilities and human dignity and portray them as threats to civilians. However, dehumanization was not always used to reject an aspect of the peace accords as could be expected from Zebel's et al. (2008) statements that associated dehumanization with opposition to conflict solution policies. In the views of participants who favored the accords, dehumanization was directed towards specific guerrilla members: those who the participants believed enjoy harming others (commanders and voluntary militants). This shows that this moral disengagement mechanism is present in both participants in favor of and against the accords but that there are some differences in how it is used by these two groups.

Euphemistic language, attribution of blame and consequence distortion were also used. It is noteworthy that Daniela and Camilo, participants at the highest socioeconomical level, were the only ones who used euphemistic language. We speculate that having greater financial resources enables a higher education level, which can provide participants with more linguistic resources to implement euphemistic language. Additionally, this mechanism was used to defend military intervention towards the FARC.

Unlike the conclusions drawn from several other investigations (Bandura et al., 1996; Howard et al., 2007; Jackson & Sparr, 2005;

McAlister et al., 2006), in the present study men and participants with a lower educational level did not demonstrate more moral disengagement than women and participants with a higher education level. In contrast, an attitude of moral disengagement manifested less often in the comments of people with a lower level of education (Alejandra, Sofi, John, Max y Gerónimo). This contrasts as well with what Tiusabá and López (2019) argued, that the low level of education of the population biased them towards rejecting the Accords. At least from a moral disengagement perspective, the educational level did not seem to hinder their reasoning. Could it be that the cognitive abilities encouraged through higher education (e.g., critical thinking, logical reasoning, argumentation, sense of common welfare) that should favor an “engaged” moral reasoning are being used for the opposite purpose? And if so, why?

When comparing people's attitudes regarding their use of moral disengagement, it is interesting that the two people who presented more morally disengaging comments were the participants that showed a stronger negative attitude towards the creation and content of the peace accords (Camilo and Sara). These attitudes were characterized by a distinct negative emotional tone, derogatory statements and foul words (such as “stupid”, “shitty” and “buffoonery”) when describing the Peace Accords or elements associated with them. However, not every negative attitude implied a moral disengagement mechanism. Additionally, the two people (Alejandra and Lina) who presented the least moral disengagement comments were participants that manifested strong positive attitudes towards the peace accords, although one of them did not vote. They showed negative attitudes solely towards the leaders of the FARC and some politicians.

On the other hand, we noticed that the 3 people that did not present any moral disengagement had very different attitudes (Diego, John y Max). While one voted “Yes” in the referendum, two of them voted “No”. The two who voted “No” agreed with the idea of

the accords and the Peace Process, but they did not trust the government to implement them or they wanted some modifications to be made to the Accords. Hence, the only similarity identified was that they were not radically against the accords like some other participants. However, it can be noted that two of them gave very concise answers, which limited the opportunity to show moral disengagement, in comparison to the other participants.

The participants' moral disengagement appeared most often when talking about the Peace Process in a general way and while justifying punitive solutions to the armed conflict. One may ask, then, why is it easier to disengage when reasoning about the general peace process than the specifics of the peace accords? What does this imply for the peace process and the peace accords? Is it more difficult to disengage morally when reasoning about the latter because they are morally well-founded, or is it due to something else? More research is needed to clarify this issue.

Although the presence of moral disengagement does not seem to be associated with a vote or a positive or negative attitude towards the peace accords or process, the increased presence of moral disengagement in the two participants with a more hostile negative attitude suggests that moral disengagement might be related to some elements of the participants' attitudes or perhaps to some personality traits or reasoning that facilitates this type of attitude. Along those lines, it is important to question what differentiates these participants. How do they reason morally in other situations? Do they tend to disengage easily in other moral situations, in comparison to other people?

Although the objective of the investigation was to study moral disengagement in the attitudes of the participants, it was impossible to ignore the other parts of their discourse that evidenced moral reasoning without moral disengagement. Hence, the category of "engagement" was created along with the subcategories of "the nature of the behavior", "consequences of the conduct", "concern for the other person" and "mix of orientations" (a

combination of the other categories). These subcategories resemble or include the moral orientations proposed by authors like Kohlberg (1992) and Gilligan (1982). For instance, the comments categorized as "consequences of the conduct" show what Kohlberg proposes as a moral orientation based in *utility consequences*; the comments categorized as "nature of the conduct" exemplify the moral orientation based on *justice* and the orientation based on the *ideal self*; and the category "concern for the other person" reflect Gilligan's moral orientation based on care. Therefore, the participants' discourse is embedded with different moral criteria and moral reasoning, which demonstrate the complexity of morality and its study.

All participants produced at least one "engagement" comment, which means that regardless of their demographic characteristics, they all exhibited this type of reasoning at some point. Additionally, there were more examples of moral engagement in their discourse than there were of moral disengagement. However, the participants who expressed more comments categorized as "engagement" were in favor of the accords, and the participants who expressed these comments the least frequently were against them. It must be clarified that although most comments in this category showed a positive attitude towards the accords, there were also some that showed attitudes against them; so, we are not claiming that all comments expressing some rejection of the accords were devoid of moral engagement. However, there could be some relation between supporting the accords and a higher frequency of moral engagement comments. Could this mean that people in favor of the accords give more importance to moral arguments in their discourse while people that rejected the Accords give less importance to this? Or are there some characteristics in the moral reasoning of these two groups of people that influence them to take this precise posture towards the accords?

Furthermore, Camilo and Sara, the participants that exhibited more moral disengagement in their discourse, expressed very few comments categorized as "engagement".

On the other hand, Max, the participant that exhibited the most comments in this emerging category, did not present a single moral disengagement comment. However, this relation between their exhibitions of moral disengaging comments and engagement comments is not as clear in the rest of the participants. Either way, it is possible that moral reasoning with more moral "connections" discourages moral disengagement, although this should not be taken for granted.

## Conclusion

The different findings discussed above suggest that moral reasoning constitutes an important aspect of the construction and comprehension of the participants' attitudes regarding the Peace Accords and the Peace Process, since it is a constant element present in their discourse that supports many of their argumentations. By this, we mean moral reasoning, not just moral disengagement, as an "engaged" moral reasoning was more common. Despite such a claim, the relation between moral reasoning and Colombian's attitudes towards this socially relevant topic remains unclear, for another type of study is necessary to investigate that. It seems that the participants build their general attitudes towards the implementation of the Accords based on the interaction of several elements, such as their perceptions of the politicians responsible for that process and their knowledge or ignorance of the content of the Accords, among other elements of which morality is just one; an important but not determinant factor. These results support the claims that other authors made about these two factors being crucial in the construction of Colombian's attitudes regarding these Peace Accords (Los 10 argumentos, 2016; Gallón, 2016; Miranda, 2016; Por qué ganó el no, 2017; Tiusabá & López, 2019; Qué dice de Colombia, 2016).

From a more practical view, a positive forecast may be made regarding citizens' (from Cali) behavior towards reintegrated FARC members. An acceptance of their reintegration appears to be likely, based on the results of this research.

Furthermore, the country would benefit from effective pedagogical strategies aiming to guide people in the Peace Process and prepare them for the post-agreement period. A moral approach in these strategies could be helpful to promote a positive attitude towards the Peace Accords and their implications, or at least some aspects of it. For example, promoting the humanization of the FARC members and highlighting the benefits that the Peace Accords will have for Colombia can encourage citizens to be more compassionate and caring and less vengeful in the context of the Accords.

Lastly, this research produced qualitative data about phenomena that had been studied almost exclusively from a quantitative perspective, which allows some new aspects of attitudes in relation to the Colombian peace accords and of moral disengagement to be explored. Additionally, the relation between attitudes regarding the peace accords and moral disengagement could be studied; though this presented some difficulties. There is not enough clarity on what is considered a detrimental behavior. There are no lines drawn between what is and is not detrimental, and there is no operational definition of detrimental behavior (e.g., Bandura, 1990, 1991; Bandura et al., 1996; Haddock & Jimerson, 2017; Jackson & Sparr, 2005; Jackson & Gaertner, 2010; McAlister et al., 2006; Martínez et al., 2014; Martínez et al., 2016; Piñuela, 2014; Thornberg & Jungert, 2014; Zebel et al., 2008). Hence, in this case, it was difficult to categorize some comments as evidencing moral disengagement since, although the form of the argument or train of thought matched a moral disengagement mechanism, this thought was not linked to an explicitly violent behavior, but to behaviors that, although they harm someone in some way, have been socially validated and justified. For example, wanting an offender to be incarcerated for the rest of his or her life or, more specific to the context of the peace accords, denying political participation to ex-FARC members. In either of these situations it is important to question, when does justice become vengeance? Can either be a sign of moral disengagement, depending on the circumstances

of the case (nature of the crime, intentions of the person desiring this outcome for the offender, characteristics of the offender, etc.)? Perhaps a detrimental behavior can be defined as such not only based on the behavior itself but more so based on the intentions of the person proposing or executing the behavior.

Some methodological limitations of the investigation were that, because of limited time and resources, the interviews were evenly distributed by the two investigators so that each interviewed 6 different participants. Thus, there were differences in the interviews inherent to the investigators.

Finally, as major recommendations for future investigations, we suggest continuing to study morality in different matters relevant to Colombian society, because this is a topic that has not been widely investigated and that could be important for the comprehension of local phenomena, as has been shown in the attitudes related to the peace accords. Additionally, we recommend studies of not only moral reasoning but also moral agency, which is directly related to moral conduct, and so it is imperative in a country with as much violence as Colombia. Additionally, we recommend that researchers study moral disengagement in relation to new phenomena or topics and in new populations to broaden the comprehension of this concept, and lastly, we recommend an increase in qualitative research and mixed methods research in the social sciences, because it enables a more complete and integrative perspective within any matter of study.

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## Notes

- \* Research article.