

## **Terrorism, Gender, and Ideology: A Case Study of Women who Join the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)**

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For all the attention terrorism receives from policymakers, media outlets, and the public, women's involvement in terrorist activities remains widely overlooked. As Jean Bethke Elshtain reflects, "Certainly when most of us think 'terrorists' we do not *see* 'woman.' The perpetrators, or the alleged perpetrators, who have flashed across our television screens in recent years are pretty much a youthful male lot."<sup>1</sup> Prevailing understandings of men as the primary perpetrators of violence, frequently augmented by the media's portrayal of terrorism, disassociates women with terrorism. Terrorists are too often profiled as wild-eyed male fanatics.

When women are identified as terrorists, often it is as a result of their participation in violent, and hence dramatic, acts. Analysts especially scrutinized the 2002 suicide attack by Wafa Idris, as it defied the conventional wisdom that Palestinian militants employed only male suicide bombers. Similarly, the Tamil Tigers received special attention in 1991 when a young Tamil woman detonated explosives as she knelt at the feet of Rajiv Gandhi, killing the former Indian prime minister. Chechen women implicated in several acts of terror—including the Beslan school takeover in 2004—have been dubbed "black widows."<sup>2</sup> Overall, relatively little is known about female terrorists beyond their involvement in violent acts.

Fixating on dramatic acts of violence reveals little about why and how women participate in terrorist movements. As terrorism continues to strain international relations, the consequence of having inaccurate understandings of who perpetrates political violence and how they become involved in organized campaigns only grows. In order to develop a more complete understanding of women's involvement in terrorist activities, researchers and policymakers should look beyond violent acts and analyze factors that

shape women's enlistment in terrorist movements. Examining the social conditions and ideology that influence women's recruitment into and involvement in terrorist movements can reveal the more subtle origins, nature, and complexities of women's participation. With these insights, policymakers, the media, and the public may be more likely to approach and address terrorism not only as a violent political strategy, but as the product of interrelated social, cultural, political, and economic elements.

This chapter explores how women enter and function in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)—Colombia's largest terrorist movement. After outlining the history and ideology (or political vision) of the FARC movement, the chapter draws from a combination of media accounts, human rights reports, and interviews with recently demobilized female FARC members to examine the role women play in the movement. Overall, focusing on how social conditions and ideology facilitate women's involvement in the FARC reveals the ways in which ideology allows substantial and substantive contradictions to pass unexamined, as described in the chapter's conclusion.

## History and Early Ideology of the FARC

A legacy of socioeconomic inequality, sustained political violence, and Cold War tensions fueled the formation of the FARC in 1964. Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, peasants and their reformist allies fought land-owning elites over harsh working and living conditions, disputed property rights, and limited land access for smaller agrarians.<sup>3</sup> This class conflict mimicked the political divide between the Liberal Party, which was comprised of reform-minded peasants and their supporters, and the Conservative Party, which was composed of landowners, their peasants, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Decades of political violence and dispute escalated when Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a charismatic Liberal and land-reform movement leader, was assassinated in Bogotá in 1948. A period of violence known simply as *La Violencia* pitted supporters of the two major parties against each other. More than 300,000 deaths mark this period as one of the bloodiest in Colombian history.

As violence marred the countryside, squatters and poor peasants formed self-defense organizations in an effort to defend their land parcels from state and large landowners. Under the protection of these armed groups, peasant movements formed “independent republics”—plots of land organized, occupied, and cultivated by peasants. Predominantly in the southern and central regions of the country, these enclaves became centers of Liberal and Communist supporters. According to Dennis Rempe, U.S. intelligence estimated that roughly forty self-defense groups, comprised of more than 6,000 men, defended the independent republics.<sup>4</sup>

In 1958, Liberal and Conservative parties officially ended *La Violencia*

by agreeing to share public offices and alternate the presidency in a plan known as the National Front. In an effort to rebuild the country and quell continued violence in the countryside, the government invited self-defense groups to lay down their arms, disband independent republics, and reintegrate into civilian society. Groups that refused were violently removed. State military campaigns to subdue independent republics, however, yielded only mixed results, as individuals displaced by the state largely fled to the safety of other independent republics.

In 1964, the Colombian army undertook what would be the most notorious and disastrous attack on the independent republics—the Battle of Marquetalia. According to the FARC, more than 16,000 soldiers attacked and captured the holdout of Manuel Marulanda Velez and Jacobo Arenas, two infamous peasant leaders, only to find that it had been abandoned; Marulanda and forty-seven other combatants had fled.<sup>5</sup> No longer able to remain in fixed localities, Marulanda and his followers regrouped as the FARC and decided to shed their defensive posture in favor of a mobile guerrilla war strategy. The group describes the Battle of Marquetalia as the “seed” of their struggle for a “New Colombia.”<sup>6</sup>

The FARC’s leaders explained their early struggle as a revolutionary effort on behalf of all marginalized Colombians. In moving from a defense organization to a mobile fighting movement, the group’s goal of self-preservation and land reform, as embodied by the independent republics, evolved into a broader political strategy to capture state power. The FARC, by their own account, “arose in the course of the [Marquetalia] confrontation with a revolutionary program calling together all the citizens who dream of a Colombia for Colombians, with equality of opportunities and equitable distribution of wealth, and where among us we all can build peace with social equality and sovereignty.”<sup>7</sup>

The FARC’s call for “a Colombia for Colombians” reflects the movement’s rural origins and its close ties with the Colombian Communist Party (PCC). Initially comprised of and led by agrarians fleeing violence, the FARC understood and presented itself as a telluric movement; the purpose and legitimacy of the FARC emanated from Colombia’s legacy of inequality. Similar to the PCC, the FARC pushed a highly nationalistic, Marxist-Leninist platform of massive redistribution of land and wealth, state control of natural resources, and a substantial increase in social welfare. While scholars debate the exact influence the PCC had on the FARC, the group was founded on the principle that they would have to take up arms and combat the state in order to realize their revolutionary vision.

## The FARC’s Current Mission and Composition

After more than forty years of combat and the end of the Cold War, the FARC has drifted away from its strict nationalist, Marxist-Leninist ideol-

ogy. The movement has adopted a more elastic ideology, labeled “Bolivarianism” in reference to Simon Bolívar’s independence campaigns in the early nineteenth century. The FARC uses the term to encompass their vision for better social protection for lower classes, sweeping agricultural reform, and local autonomy. During negotiations with the government between 1999 and 2002, FARC demands included “development and economic modernization with social justice” and “democratic participation in national, regional and municipal decisions.”<sup>8</sup> These proposals reflect a recent incorporation of liberal and nationalist ideas into the FARC’s political platform. While Bolivarianism may not depart completely from classical socialist platforms, it does demonstrate an ideological flexibility unseen earlier in the FARC’s history.

The group’s ideological evolution has also altered how the FARC presents itself relative to the Colombian government. Román Ortiz notes that instead of continuing to question the legitimacy of the Colombian government, the FARC has “heightened their critique of the government’s incompetence in dealing with the country’s biggest problems (social inequality, crime, and deficient public services), while increasingly presenting themselves as a credible alternative for ‘good government.’”<sup>9</sup> Portraying the movement as an alternate public administrator has ameliorated their message of political change, particularly in remote, rural regions of Colombia where government services do not reach. In some cases, the FARC is the primary provider of social services, conflict mediation, and public order in these areas.

In establishing a more flexible ideology and new political profile, the FARC has come to embrace women in their cause. The group depicts women as vulnerable to the same inequality, exploitation, and injustice that the movement is combating. FARC publications about women regularly reference statistics about poverty, forced displacement, and violence disproportionately affecting women. In an undated article detailing women’s exploitation and suffering in capitalist systems, the FARC cite statistics about homicide being the leading cause of violent death for women, sexual violence being perpetrated against women and young girls, and women heading the majority of displaced households.<sup>10</sup> These statistics are treated as evidence of how Colombian women—regardless of their class, ethnicity, or age—are oppressed. This portrayal is captured in a FARC leader’s explanation of why women join the FARC: “A woman perceives injustice through every pore in her body; from the moment she is born, she is discriminated against.”<sup>11</sup>

In light of the systematic hardships women face, the FARC presents itself as a relief from everyday discrimination and a solution for women committed to solving inequality. The group describes its political project as a means for women to fight for equal treatment and the protection of their rights. In a statement denouncing the discrimination women face, the FARC “invites [all women] to participate in our just revolutionary fight for the

New Colombia with social justice, for better living, dignity and independence.”<sup>12</sup> Emblematic of its vision of equality, the FARC bills itself as a community where men and women are equal. A press release marking the International Day for Women (8 May) explains, “In our organization, women and men acquire the same duties and rights in the fight to take political power for the people.”<sup>13</sup> The FARC’s ideology of equality between men and women is consistently marshaled when the FARC discusses women’s involvement in the movement.

The development of an ideology of equality coincides with a noticeable shift in the FARC’s composition. In 1964, only two women were among the last 48 fighters resisting government forces at the Battle of Marquetalia. This group would later form the nucleus of the FARC. While noted historian Arturo Alape has documented women’s involvement in the early forms of the FARC, recent growth in the movement has seen women’s participation reach unprecedented levels. Several estimates suggest that upwards of 40 percent of the 18,000-member movement are women, with some units approaching 50 percent.<sup>14</sup> Although it is uncertain how the development of a political platform about women influenced the increase in women’s enlistment, it is reasonable to believe that the two are closely related. The agenda likely facilitates women’s enlistment by asserting that, as members, women can and do contribute to achieving the FARC’s vision of a “New Colombia.”

With this review of FARC’s history, ideology, and demographics in mind, it is useful to focus on the experiences of women in FARC. Media accounts, human rights reports, and interviews with recently demobilized female combatants reveal four inter-related dimensions of activity—recruitment, training, discipline, and relationships—that illustrate how social conditions and ideology shape women’s recruitment and involvement in the FARC.<sup>15</sup> In particular, interviews with women indicate that FARC offered them a life of adventure and meaning, as well as a sense of gender equality (in both training and the enforcement of discipline), that could not be found in civilian society. However, as discussed toward the end of this chapter, it is important to recognize how terrorist movements’ ideologies allow these promises to pass unquestioned and unfulfilled.

## Recruitment

At age thirteen, Laura<sup>16</sup> left her home in a rural region of the Department of Arauca to join the FARC. After describing her childhood as boring and uneventful, she recalls the moment when a contact in the community told her and her sister about the opportunities that awaited:

[A]n older man told us about a uniformed man, that would give us schooling and all this other stuff. Since we were in my mother’s house and she didn’t

give us education or anything else, I joined the group with my sister, but she died there.<sup>17</sup>

It is not certain what Laura's contact promised her when she joined, or whether Laura faulted her mother for her lack of education, but she clearly perceived that joining an armed group—despite the accompanying uncertainties and inherent dangers—offered more opportunities than she could find by staying in her community. Human Rights Watch points out that the voluntary decision to join irregular military forces may be more of a reflection of the dismal opportunities available to children in rural Colombia than an exercise of free will.<sup>18</sup> Together with her sister, Laura decided to pursue the promises of a recruiter.

The recruiter's pledges were bolstered by his persistence and selective message. While Laura only described him in vague terms, the recruiter's attempts to enlist Laura and her sister seem sustained:

Well, then every time he came to our house he asked us whether we would go [to join the movement]. We decided to go because he said it would give us an education that staying at home wouldn't. So we left.<sup>19</sup>

The regular recruiting pitch and community presence seems to have reinforced the potential benefits of joining the group. But sustained recruiting did not completely familiarize Laura with the movement. Interestingly, Laura initially did not know what group she was joining and only learned that she was a new member of the FARC when she arrived for training.

The recruiter's continued and choice presentation did not convince everyone that joining the movement was the best option for Laura and her sister. Laura acknowledges that her mother did not share her daughters' excitement, and disapproved of their enlistment:

The day [sister] and I told our mother that we were joining she cried and told us that we should not go to the [movement] because it was a very harsh life, but we did not listen to her. We said no, that we would go [to the movement] because they would give us an education . . . and well, she did not say anything else. Mom would come looking for us but the group would deny that we were there.<sup>20</sup>

In trying to prevent her daughters' recruitment, and in her subsequent attempts to convince them to return home, Laura's mother demonstrates the relative nature of the FARC's glamour. Perhaps because they are more impressionable and desperate for opportunities than older people, young women appear to be more exposed to the FARC's message, while those more familiar with the legacy of Colombia's armed movements may be more likely to discount the benefits of taking up arms. Part of the mother's

disapproval could also stem from her knowledge and understanding of the group. Knowing with whom to speak or where to reach them in order to bring her daughters home suggests some familiarity with the FARC's local presence. Subtly, Laura's description also speaks to the movement's determination to retain its recruits. In addition to deflecting pleas from parents such as those of Laura's mother, according to several reports the FARC issues dire warning to any combatant caught deserting.<sup>21</sup>

For some young women, joining the FARC may be less an issue of recruitment and more about flight. After growing up with her grandmother and serving as an informant for the FARC, María Clara joined the movement when she was thirteen. When asked why she joined, María Clara is clear about her difficulties with her grandmother:

I left because I wasn't raised by my mother, but by my grandmother. She locked me up often and told me that she didn't want me around. And one day my grandmother gave me a real beating so I left there and entered [the FARC].<sup>22</sup>

María Clara portrays joining the FARC as a deliberate, if not calculated, decision. She identified the FARC as an escape from the hostility and abuse she regularly suffered while living with her grandmother. Like María Clara, some potential recruits—especially those in rural villages—might consider joining the FARC as a way to ensure their safety. The uncertainty and risk that accompanies an armed movement, for some, may not compare to the constant violence at home.

The FARC's appeal provides more than a potential for escape and new opportunities. The perception of danger and violence that surrounds the movement may deter some potential recruits, while attracting others with a mystique not found in rural life. After having some connection with the movement, María Clara still saw the FARC as a vehicle for achieving her dreams. María Clara was resolute about her aspirations, and saw the FARC as the best way to achieve them:

I wanted to be a doctor. But I was not able to because I didn't have the means. I did not have a mother and because of this, I made the decision to leave [for the FARC]. When I was there everything seemed cool.<sup>23</sup>

María Clara realized that staying in her community would not allow her to achieve her dream of becoming a doctor. While the FARC may not lead directly to medicine, joining the group did depart from her seemingly certain fate of a life of poverty. As María Clara clearly states, at least in the FARC she could lead an exciting or "cool" life. No accounts have yet been published about how young girls perceive FARC members;<sup>24</sup> however, one can speculate that girls may be attracted to the movement's lifestyle, par-

ticularly if they experience boredom or abuse at home. When recruiting young girls, the FARC likely exploits the monotony of domestic life in rural settings by embellishing the image and ideology of the movement to fulfill their recruits' desires.

## Training

Training appears to be one of the first contexts shaped by the notion of the FARC being a space of equality between men and women. Both sexes receive the same basic training upon entering the movement. In their interviews, the women emphasized the arms training they received in preparation for combat. Laura explains the training as an accelerated process:

When I entered, they gave me little training because, for example, they often put a six month training course into three months. It also depends on your intelligence, because if one learns quickly like that you finish. But no, I [received] about three months and then I was off to combat.<sup>25</sup>

Some may attribute men and women sharing training to the equal demands the FARC claims to place on both genders. It should not be assumed, however, that men and women have equal opportunities to receive advanced training. As Laura mentioned, training "depends on your intelligence." However, it is not clear how prepared trainers are to recognize a woman's excellence and recommend her entrance into more advanced leadership positions. While training may be presented as one early example of equality in the FARC, the rigor of advanced training may sustain a tradition of men filling most leadership positions.

The consequences of training extend beyond the actual instruction. Training involves imparting authority, prestige, and identity upon new recruits. Laura's description of training focuses on arms and tactics: "They show you, for example, how to handle arms, a way of chasing, how to maneuver when in combat . . . how to throw grenades, how to shoot a rifle, everything."<sup>26</sup> According to Serena, a friend of Laura who also recently left the FARC, the training taught new recruits "how you have to take it out on the enemy in combat so they don't kill you . . . [and] how to defend ourselves."<sup>27</sup> The effect of receiving training in weapons, tactics, and self-defense should not be underestimated nor considered the same for all women. In the case of Laura and Serena, their arms training may have been the first formal vocational training that they shared with men. While accelerated, FARC training provides a certain responsibility and authority. For many new recruits, a "military uniform" can help reverse a loss of self-esteem and, for some, can even serve as a form of empowerment. The spe-



cific knowledge imparted during training is part of a greater induction into the movement and exposure to the movement's beliefs.

Training also raises issues of physical capacity. Men and women are expected to fulfill the same physical demands during training. Women interviewed for this study expressed a mixture of pride and disbelief when describing their ability to withstand the rigors of military training. Serena surmised that life in the countryside pales in comparison to the movement. She concludes, "[The FARC] is worse I say. It is harder [in the movement] than the work one does in the country; they work one much harder in the [FARC]." <sup>28</sup> She noted that even though she was fourteen upon joining FARC, she was expected to keep pace with the training, marching, and other strenuous activity. The physical demands of the FARC surprised some of the interviewees. María Clara recalls,

I spent three months in one [location], and three months in another and this was very hard on me. [The training] cut my feet until they bled, like open flesh. I slept without blankets or anything else. <sup>29</sup>

The physical demands faced by men and women are closely linked to an understanding of equality among FARC combatants. Although combatants' strength varies biologically (according to sex), these women's testimonies suggest that performance expectations are the same for men and women. <sup>30</sup> Part of the women's sense that performance expectations do not vary may be due to the inherently physical nature of the lifestyle. The level of self-sufficiency in carrying one's gear, keeping pace with the group, and maintaining order may contribute to the impression that training demonstrated a level of gender equality in the movement.

## Discipline

In reflecting on the differences between civilian and FARC life, the women interviewed for this research identified a slight, but important, difference relative to discipline. Although they noted that they were subject to "orders," the penalties they faced for disobedience at home did not compare to those in the FARC. Serena explains the difference in a realistic generalization:

[When] one is at home and your mother tells you [to do something], then one might be brave and leave . . . but when one arrives [at the movement] they force you to submit to everything they say, it is an order. For example, they order you to make a hole and if you don't do it, the first time to their satisfaction, [or] if you do not fulfill more than five orders, they beat you [to the point of death] and bury you in a polyester bag. <sup>31</sup>

Serena seems to trust that punishment that accompanies disobeying an order—or not fulfilling it to a commander’s satisfaction—acts as a measure against impunity. Unlike many areas of civilian society, both public and private, all combatants could expect an immediate consequence for breaking established rules. The discipline of the FARC may be understood as helping to ease, or perhaps even erase, the notion of male superiority found in civilian society by maintaining a sense of equality among all men and women in the basic functioning of the movement.<sup>32</sup> By extension, perhaps the FARC’s emphasis on the equality of discipline enforcement, regardless of gender, helps women find a greater sense of self as equal to their male counterparts—an unusual experience, considering the male-dominated culture found in much of Latin America.

Living under a military hierarchy, however, is not without sacrifices. Many of the simple freedoms of civilian society are absent in the FARC. From his research on FARC, Arturo Alape quotes a woman named Rubiela as she explains having sacrificed civilian freedoms:

Here [in the FARC] everything is different, even going to the bathroom or any other place—you have to ask permission for everything. There is an internal order that must be followed and it’s for everyone; you start to butt heads, you know? Because you can’t go wherever you want when you want and come back when you want . . . no, you have limited time and you have to follow the rules. From the time you join they explain these norms to you, and if you promise to follow the norms and statutes that guide it, then you have to do it.<sup>33</sup>

The regimen of the FARC is an abrupt change from civilian society. As a collective of combatants—one in which order is integral for the survival and success of the group—members must relinquish part of their individuality and subscribe to shared rules. Strictly read in these terms, the disciplinary mechanisms present a picture of equality in the movement.

## Relationships in the FARC

To mitigate the impact of sexual relationships on the organization and on combat readiness, FARC attempts to regulate intimate relationships between men and women. According to a number of personal and journalistic accounts, commanders must approve all intimate relationships.<sup>34</sup> Laura explicitly mentioned the commanders’ oversight as a primary difference between relationships in the FARC and civilian society:

[T]he difference is, for example, if you are my partner, and I leave for the front, I ask [a commander] to stay the night with you. But [I could only stay] Sundays and Wednesdays.<sup>35</sup>

Regimenting combatants' sexual relationships is not inconsequential. In effect, the commanders' supervision serves as a median between combatants as revolutionaries and combatants as individuals. Overseeing relationships provides some assurance that relationships do not detract from (or perhaps complicate) combatants' involvement in the FARC's revolutionary struggle, while also helping combatants manage their relationships. Although it is not clear how vigilant commanders are in supervising relationships, it is reasonable to presume that in order to ensure healthy relationships, their presence and potential intervention exceeds what might be found in civilian society.

For many women, the FARC's oversight of relationships may be a welcomed change from civilian society. In his research on women in the FARC, Alape notes that the treatment of relationships allows women a certain level of agency in their relationships that could not be found in the civilian society.<sup>36</sup> When asked whether she "feels like a fulfilled woman in the [FARC]," Sonia (a woman identified as a commander) replies,

I do because you have what you need, they give you what you want, you have your rights. If you want to have a partner, you get one, then in that sense you feel fulfilled. Plus, you don't have to take orders from your partner. In the [movement] love is secondary, the struggle is primary.<sup>37</sup>

Sonia's assessment of relationships in the FARC presents an interesting comparison to civilian society. While female FARC members may not have to follow their partners' rules in the FARC, they do have to follow the FARC's orders. As Sonia infers in her comments, however, the FARC's orders are issued under the auspices of the greater "struggle" for revolutionary change, which includes a better status for women. The overarching understanding of the social and intimate relationships of men and women belonging to a revolutionary struggle furthers the notion of equality in the FARC. Contrary to civilian society, where men and women are treated differently, in the FARC (as Sonia explains), "We treat each other like brothers and sisters in arms."<sup>38</sup>

The ideology of equality between men and women is central to the recruitment, training, and deployment of women in the FARC. However, despite the FARC's stated commitment to gender equality, incongruities between ideology and practice are apparent. Examining the more insidious sides of the FARC's activities reveals how its ideology of gender equality allows these incongruities to pass unquestioned.

## **Ideology Shrouding Reality**

Contrary to the FARC's assertions of men and women enjoying equal status in the movement, many women are exploited by the same power struc-

ture that purports to maintain equality. In her account of women's lives in the FARC, Sandra Jordan observed that "foot soldiers must lead blameless, disciplined lives, while their leaders get drunk, gamble and kill indiscriminately."<sup>39</sup> Within the FARC's military structure, the hierarchy of power and authority (e.g., commanders being the superiors of combatants) may not always respect the ideology of equality between men and women. Studies support claims that the incongruence between combatants and commanders may be as dramatic as Jordan suggests.<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch reports that male commanders used their authority to arrange "sexual liaisons with under-age girls."<sup>41</sup> In the same report, Andrea, a sixteen-year-old, testified that "her relationship with an older commander saved her from being killed when she was suspected of collaborating with the army."<sup>42</sup> While the other accused girl was put to death for the offense of "robbing the movement," Andrea was sentenced to three months of digging trenches.<sup>43</sup> In many ways, women may join the FARC in order to escape violence in civilian society, only to encounter similar manifestations in the group itself. The power dynamic between commanders and combatants can quickly replicate unequal power relations found in civilian society. With the majority of higher-level positions filled by men, it is likely that sexual exploitation of women continues, but is omitted from discussions about equality in the FARC.

While arguably less troubling than being complicit with sexual exploitation, the FARC's oversight of relationships raises complex questions about their understanding of healthy relationships. In the name of their revolutionary mission, the FARC mandates that all women use birth control. Human Rights Watch reports that Norplant contraceptive implants, contraceptive injections, birth control pills, and condoms are most frequently used.<sup>44</sup> The organization also reports that even young girls are required to use contraception, often by having an intrauterine device (IUD) inserted by FARC nurses.<sup>45</sup> Although compulsory use of birth control may be interpreted as the prioritization of "the struggle" before relationships between combatants, testimonies of young women suggests a grimmer picture. In an interview with Human Rights Watch, a young woman identified as Angela explains that when she joined at age twelve, "They put in an IUD the day I arrived. That was the only birth control I ever used."<sup>46</sup> The use of IUDs is not simply a single event in women's adjustment to the FARC but a regular part of women's lives in the FARC. Another young woman in a Human Rights Watch study claims that she had an IUD inserted eight days after she arrived, and a nurse regularly checked the contraceptive.<sup>47</sup>

In the event that women do become pregnant, abortions—whether by choice or by force—are common. Laura and Serena felt that the FARC does not waver in denying women the opportunity to have children while in the movement. In her interview with Human Rights Watch, Angela flatly states, "If you get pregnant, you have to have an abortion. Lots of women get pregnant. I had two friends who got pregnant and had to have abortions.

They cried and cried. They didn't want to lose the baby."<sup>48</sup> The FARC may even employ deception in order to exercise authority over the women's reproductive health. An unidentified woman admits to Human Rights Watch, "The worst thing is that you can't have a baby. Two years ago, in 2000, I got pregnant. They gave me an abortion but they didn't tell me in advance that they were going to do it. They told me they were checking on it. I wanted to have the baby."<sup>49</sup> In many ways, the inclusion of women in FARC is predicated on intervening in women's biological capacity for reproduction, either through forced contraceptives and abortions. Controlling pregnancies within the movement allows FARC leaders to maintain some control over the actions and decisions of their fighters. This control, however, comes at the expense of women's autonomy over their bodies. Although as combatants women place their bodies and lives at risk, the FARC lays a greater claim on women's bodies by forcefully employing contraceptives and abortions. Instead of recognizing women's capacity to make responsible (or at least informed) decisions, the FARC pre-empts the issue in order to maintain the notion of equality within the revolutionary movement. Forcefully preventing wanted or unwanted births does not create equality within the movement. This practice is a control exercised exclusively over women, while the consequences for men are only incidental.

Contradictions within the ideology of the FARC as a place of equality are not limited to sexual politics. Beneath the questions of sexual harassment, forced contraception, and abortion lie fundamental questions, such as whether positions of authority are equally accessible to men and women, how authorities conceptualize healthy relationships between men and women, and whether roles from civilian society are selectively reproduced in the movement. These broader questions are largely left unaddressed by analyses and policies that do not consider the social and ideological forces behind women's involvement in the FARC.

## Conclusion

Several interrelated factors hamper our understanding of women's involvement in terrorist movements. Men are overwhelmingly presented as the only perpetrator of political violence. When women are recognized as terrorists, it is largely only as a result of their participation in violent and dramatic acts. While these acts are scrutinized, particularly because of their deplorable nature, they reveal little about why and how women join terrorist movements. This chapter argues that understanding the origins, nature, and complexities of women's participation requires that researchers and policymakers look beyond women's involvement in perpetrating political violence. Instead, we must examine the social situations that women leave behind and the ideology of the movement they join, as these can re-

veal important subtleties of women's involvement and can inform future policy decisions. However, only through more research, particularly of a regional and comparative nature, can researchers better understand how and why women participate in terrorist organizations worldwide.

Several key lessons emerged from examining women's participation in the FARC. For potential recruits, the movement's political objectives may be secondary to the perceived opportunities of joining a terrorist movement. This investigation revealed that, even for young adolescents, joining a violent movement can be a calculated decision. While inflated expectations and recruitment rhetoric influence these decisions, some women may view terrorist movements as offering opportunities that are otherwise unattainable. In some cases, the difficulties and risks women face in civilian society may exceed those inherent in joining a terrorist movement. For others, terrorist organizations might be perceived as a relief from seemingly inescapable boredom. Further study of women's involvement in terrorist movements can expose how broader social issues are intimately linked to success of these organizations.

Additionally, the sense of purpose instilled by enlisting in a terrorist group may be heightened for women. As a distinct departure from civilian society, the training women receive—even when comparable to that of men—could elicit a special sense of importance for them. The physical and political training that terrorist movements provide may not only be the most sustained formal training women receive, but it also has immediate application for a cause greater than themselves; upon completing the training, women enter a political and social structure in which they have new, specific responsibilities and functions. In a way, a terrorist group validates the potential of a woman in a manner that civilian societies may not recognize.

Lastly, ideology is integral in concealing contradictions between recruitment rhetoric and reality. Developing compelling interpretations of society, values, and symbols that claim to address the concerns of women aids and legitimizes terrorist organizations' efforts to incorporate women into their activities. Creating and sustaining an ideology that appeals to women is particularly important given that prevailing understandings do not associate women with violent projects. Simultaneously, employing ideological visions allows terrorist leaders to deflect (or at least suspend) questions about whether the recruits' expectations are met or recruiting promises fulfilled. Recognizing the manner in which ideology influences women's participation in terrorist movements is vital to understanding terrorist movements and reducing their ranks.

The policy implications for these conclusions are considerable. Stemming the recruitment of women by the FARC requires the Colombian government to adopt a multifaceted strategy, one that addresses the complex conditions that contribute to women's recruitment and combats the FARC's political

message. Addressing the interrelated factors that contribute to women's entrance into the FARC requires a concerted effort to generate new educational and professional opportunities, especially for women in rural and impoverished areas. Local mentorship or federally funded scholarship programs could support women as they pursue their studies or return to school to complete their degrees. Vocational training and microlending programs that reach out to women could generate rewarding entrepreneurial opportunities. Entirely new programs may not be necessary; ensuring that women have access to (and are adequately served by) existing state-sponsored social services could prove effective. Additionally, it is important that the Colombian government commit resources to reducing domestic abuse against girls and women. Ensuring the safety of girls and women is central to reducing flight to the FARC. Recognizing and responding to the conditions from which women are recruited into the FARC should be a primary focus of any attempt to reduce women's entrance into the FARC.

Besides providing otherwise unattainable opportunities, social and political programs can complement efforts to combat the FARC's political message. This chapter highlights cases in which women studied the benefits, for themselves and possibly their communities, of entering the FARC. While it is impossible to understand all the factors influencing their decisions, presumably, the women could also have chosen to not enter the group and pursue other engagements. The Colombian government needs to highlight, perhaps through public awareness campaigns, how its citizens, particularly women and young people, have the potential to make valuable, constructive contributions to their communities. Without compromising individuals' safety, the government could recognize and even support these efforts to underscore the choice individuals have to not take up arms. Affirming that Colombian citizens even in the most desperate conditions have a choice powerfully undermines the allure of the FARC's political message.

In conclusion, the Colombian government should strive to formulate and implement policies that relieve the lack of opportunity for women that the FARC's ideology preys upon. This attainable, albeit ambitious, goal is key to reducing the involvement of women in the FARC and certainly integral to building a lasting peace in Colombia.

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