

Review of: "Evolution and Challenges of DDR: A Policy Review Through the Prism of Colombia's Three-Generational Experience"

Alexander H. Hay¹

¹ University of Toronto

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is a well-written and thoughtful paper providing a commentary on the evolution of DDR. It is not so much a direct contribution to the body of knowledge as an invaluable foundation for focused investigation. It takes the reader on a journey that incrementally informs and feeds their understanding of its complexities and nuances. It is comprehensive, but therein lie challenges in presenting an argument in something so complex.

In a few places, I found some of the sentences too long and momentum can be lost as one re-reads a paragraph. There are also a few points where statements are left hanging, begging for expansion or explanation there and then, even though they are resurrected later in the paper. For example, the inclusion of host communities in the discussion in Section 2 would be the logical place to reference the considerable work on widowed households and community rehabilitation. Both elements are directly relevant to the later *Paz Total* discussion and were observed over many decades. Similarly, just before describing the DDR generations, ex-combatants are described as a vulnerable group accustomed to living with weapons, which can be true, but is an over-simplification for what follows. Primarily, combatants are institutionalized with all that entails, and there can be an ingrained social framework that is often misaligned with the host community. Once again, this aspect is touched on later (including the critical social capital aspect) in the paper but deserves expanding when first raised. In this, I find the discussion reflects the very issue the article is highlighting: reintegration is societal and far more complex than addressing isolated symptoms/issues out of context.

Please reformat Table 2; a vast expanse of empty space does little to convey the message. Structurally, the balance in Tables 3 and 4 works perfectly.

Section 2.1.3, Third Generation DDR, is a really important transition in the argument, almost like presenting an international epiphany. I would have liked to see some examination of the effect of a return to violence, even if not a return to conflict, impeding reconstruction, etc., within the broader rehabilitation. It is the context in which these concepts become reality. Similarly, the opening sentence of the fourth paragraph that begins "In today's landscape, ..." makes such an important point, but it is wrong that this should be the first time we read it. There needs to be earlier reference to it in the introduction and possibly the abstract.

Section 3 brings us to the Colombian example. It is both a curious example to choose because each successive round of DDR was followed by a return to violence. Only when *Paz Total* is presented does the rationale become clear, and it

would be useful to better introduce why the Colombian example is the perfect vehicle for this journey of understanding, but it needs to be better introduced. Yet at the start of the second paragraph of Section 4.1, “Colombia, often recognized as an effective DDR example, ...” How so, given the cycle of DDR followed by a return to violence?

Another extraordinarily important statement is later in the same section. “Emerging research underscores that the success of ex-combatants’ reintegration into society is increasingly influenced by the quality of relationships they establish in their host communities, rather than merely financial assistance.” This could have been written during the first period of the UN High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina. It could have been said by Lord Ashdown, who spoke at length on such aspects. There are many such echoes and connections to other theatres and decades, which could be exploited in this paper to add a further layer of international currency.

The recommendations might be better presented as bullets.

To conclude, this is a great paper and serves an important purpose, namely to provide a firm foundation for further focused study. I shall watch *Paz Total* with keen interest over the coming years. Thank you.