

Reconciliation: A comprehensive framework for empirical analysis¹

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Reconciliation: A Comprehensive Framework for Empirical Analysis

ABSTRACT

There appears to be a rift between the theoretical and normative understandings of what reconciliation means and offers, and what people expect to happen in postconflict scenarios. Here we present a conceptual framework that captures the definitional diversity surrounding the concept of reconciliation and then operationalizes it in order to analyze responses from postconflict populations. The illustrative application of our framework to responses from a representative survey of 1,843 Colombian citizens reveals that people's convictions are just as diverse as scholars'. Nevertheless, significant proportions of respondents seem to understand reconciliation to primarily be a psychological and political process which aims to achieve the re-establishment of quotidian or day-to-day relations and cooperation; which should be preceded by the cessation of violence, dialogue, good-will, and attitudinal and emotional change; and which should be accompanied by social welfare and security. Notoriously, understandings of reconciliation as a process mediated by justice, truth and memory are scarce. The application of said framework will help to reveal differences between hopes and promises, and inform scholarly work and policy-making that is more realistically rooted.

KEY WORDS: Colombia, reconciliation, postconflict, peacebuilding, victims, ex-combatants

I. INTRODUCTION

In transitional contexts, reconciliation is a catchword that is used to encapsulate a broad range of peacebuilding activities including rebuilding infrastructure, promoting social investment, tending to the needs of refugees and internally displaced populations, overcoming ethnic divisions, making reparations to victims, and reintegrating former combatants into (sometimes hostile) communities. In the context of a certain structure of incentives and of a specific public discourse underscoring the need to involve all of society in the task of building lasting and sustainable peace, actors are prone to label all sorts of activities as synonymous with—or conducive to—reconciliation.

Nor has the academic literature made significant progress toward overcoming this lack of precision. In the literature, the term is used diffusely and is often reduced to narrow and profoundly subjective perspectives (Worchel y Coutant, 2008). And in more expansive approaches, arguments suggest that reconciliation supports overall happiness, welfare, and productivity (Enright and North, 1998, and Maltby, Day, and Barber, 2005), and that it is related to trust-building and creation of virtuous social capital (Putnam, 1994) as well as the capability to design institutions for economic development and political stability (Rodrik, 1999; Vargas, 2012).

The concomitant ambiguity in the translation of a large-scale reconciliation mandate into specific public policy may have practical implications. One central suggestion of the academic literature on peacebuilding is the need for policy to deliver palpable benefits to all of society in the short term once an end to conflict is achieved, so as to build legitimacy and viability for ongoing change and upcoming political and material costs. When reconciliation means too many things for different people, or when it means different things for society and for policymakers,

such a goal may be more difficult to attain and risks for sustainable peace may be higher. In the absence of a proper characterization, policymakers may be at a loss as to how to bridge promises and expectations related to a future reconciliation in war-torn societies, while society may feel that its fundamental needs are neither being heard nor addressed.

What do ordinary people mean by reconciliation? To what extent do definitions and contents of the term “reconciliation” as expressed by citizens reflect the dominant discourse of reconciliation policy? Does the people’s understanding of reconciliation reflect their experience with armed conflict, or, more specifically, do forms of victimization have an impact on how people envision reconciliation? And finally, to what extent do scholarly propositions on what reconciliation means differ from ordinary citizens’ expectations?

We propose a methodological tool capable of accounting for the varying forms in which reconciliation’s contours have been defined by scholars, and also to describe to what extent people’s conceptions reflect them or not. By means of a definitional analysis as developed by Gerring (1997), we have created a multidimensional typology of seven scales and sixty categories to serve as a tool to systematically analyze people’s responses to questions on what reconciliation means.

Our focus on the micro-level is coherent with a recent academic interest in understanding every-day peacebuilding (MacGinty 2014), which studies how ordinary citizens are involved in bottom-up peace and how their expectations shape the end of armed conflict and the implementation of peace agreements. The findings of this literature on local practices and challenges of peacebuilding question some of the unexamined tenets of transitional justice and peacebuilding models. Brounéus (2008), for example, examines the healing power of truth and reconciliation processes in Rwanda and finds that, instead of relief, victims encounter renewed

trauma and even ill health. Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi (2015) studied post-conflict recovery in Sierra Leone, and found mixed results: reconciliation efforts both strengthened social networks and caused depression and anxiety among individuals. On the issue of historical memory, Mälksoo (2015) suggests that the “securitization of memory” has delegitimized some forms of historical remembrances while criminalizing others. Mani (2005) argues that certain transitional justice mechanisms, such as trials and truth commissions, may deepen more than overcome social divisions. Andrieu (2010) develops a critique of top-down approaches to peacebuilding and transitional justice and proposes an approach focusing on civil society, dialogue and social relations. These examples illustrate the need to continue uncovering the complex social mechanisms and meanings that produce—or fail to produce—peace and reconciliation. As suggested by some of these examples, more structural accounts of peacebuilding that focus on large-scale institutional reform or the design of funding schemes are important but may be failing to grasp what peace and reconciliation represent for people in their daily and local practices, shaping, empowering or curtailing the possible impacts of reconciliation policy. Colombia—a country witnessing an ongoing peace process between the government and the largest remaining guerrilla group—represents an ideal case to show how conflict-affected societies assume the challenge of reconciliation. As an illustrative case, we applied our comprehensive framework to responses provided by citizens in a representative survey of 1,843 participants. Here we find that individuals’ conceptions are just as diverse as scholars’. However, significant proportions of citizens understand reconciliation to chiefly be a psychological and political process, whose aim is to achieve coexistence and acceptance; which relates to inter-group and inter-personal levels of conflict; and which should be preceded by the cessation of violence, dialogue, good-will, and attitudinal and emotional change.

We expect our comprehensive framework to translate to other transitional societies, as a methodological alternative to measure peoples' expectations in contexts of transitions from war to peace.

In the following sections, we first embark on an explanation of the difficulties of defining reconciliation and propose a new approach to deal with them, by means of a comprehensive framework, before examining how experiences of victimization affect such views. Then, we present Colombia as an ideal case to test our empirical typology and present the results of coding peoples' responses. Then, we summarize our findings in the conclusions and suggest future lines of research.

II. A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK

Rhetorical use, and abuse, of the term 'reconciliation' has led to it being sapped of a consistent, recognizable meaning. In fact, grand, overarching concepts typically suffer from over-stretching; that is, the attribution of meanings that go beyond the original formulation (Adcock and Collier 2001; Brady and Collier 2010; Sartori 1970; Collier and Mahon 1993).

Sartori (1970) proposes a careful definition of the relation between concepts in question with more encompassing others that lie higher on the ladder of abstraction, and those referring to more narrow categories. For their part, Gerring and Barresi (2003) suggest differentiating between minimal definitions—which capture the essence of the concepts and are applicable to most cases—and maximal definitions that describe specific types of cases and their attributes in greater detail.

Examining 176 scientific articles, books and reports published between 1997 and 2014,² we identify at least five common approaches to the concept:

- As a rhetorical resource, where no concrete meaning is defined;
- As a synonym of neighboring terms such as peace, harmony, etc.;
- As a multivocal term, and then authors simply abstain from choosing one definition over the many existing ones;
- As a goal, where reconciliation is described as the endpoint of all manner of peace-building efforts;
- As a process, which does not necessarily lead to a concrete outcome.

How do we come to terms with such diversity? Instead of arriving at a new best definition, we propose a new approach. By means of building a comprehensive framework, we conduct a definitional analysis (Gerring 1997) through which we can distinguish the essence of the concept from the variety of attributes attached to it by authors in a nonsystematic way.

With a precise description of the core issue and related attributes, we propose an operative multidimensional typology, one that captures the concept through the use of seven different scales: perspective, understood as the disciplinary emphasis in use; axis, addressing the presence or absence of references to the recent past or near future; level, referring to who should reconcile; context, which provides a particular, given setting; depth, which refers to how far reconciliation should go; mechanisms, understood as what conditions are to be met before

² We include in the analysis 113 articles published in journals indexed by ISI Thomson Reuters or Scopus between 2004 and 2014, as well as 50 books published by major editorial houses referenced in the Book Citation Index, and specialized reports issued by well-known academic institutions since 1997.

reconciliation can be possible; and assessment, which captures whether or not people believe in reconciliation as an achievable goal.

TABLE 1 HERE

While some works have provided narratives to account for the variety of definitions available (Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse 2003; Bloomfield 2006; Brunéaus 2003; Meierhenrich 2008; Nadler 2012), here we make use of the seven dimensions, and the categories they encompass, in order to systematically describe the way the literature approaches the concept.

1. Perspective

Many works reflect the influence of religious perspectives in their understanding of what reconciliation means. Usually, this influence takes the form of references to elements such as *forgiveness* (Brewer et al. 2010; Chan and Arvey 2011; David and Choi 2006; Martz 2010; Mukashema and Mullet 2013; Staub 2005; Tam et al. 2008), *apologies* (Gibson 2006; Rigney 2012; Staub 2006; Verdeja 2010), *repentance* (Amstutz 2006; Lederach 1999), or *guilt* (Behrendt and Ben-Hari 2012; Lu 2008; Wüstenberg 2009); or direct advocacy for a role for religious leaders in reconciliation processes (Clark 2010; Horn 2010).

Meanwhile, psychological perspectives typically link reconciliation to processes of *attitudinal* and/or *emotional change* (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004; Brounéus 2009, Bruneau and Saxe 2012, Kaufman 2006; Long and Brecke 2003; Mukashema and Mullet 2010; Nadler, Malloy and Fisher 2008; Poitras 2010); as well as *personal healing* (Abu-Nimer 2001; Brouneus

2010; Duncan 2009; Hirsch 2012), that should ideally affect postconflict behavior and personality traits and conditions.

Philosophically, some authors discuss the inherent difficulties of defining the logical contours of the term (Bhargava 2012; Lingis 2011; Schaap 2006). In literature with a juridical leaning, reconciliation is usually seen as the endpoint of a process mediated by elements such as *justice, truth, reparation* or *memory* (Aiken 2010; Arenhovel 2008; Du Bois and Du Bois 2009; Clark and Kaufmann 2009; Gellman 2008; Humphrey and Valverde 2008; Huyse and Salter 2008; Isaacs 2014; Kelsall 2005; Quinn 2009; Rettig 2008; Rushton 2006; Szablowinski 2008; Ure 2008). Closely related to this, historical perspectives also stress the need to come to terms with the recent past of violence, but not necessarily with juridical ends (Encarnacion 2008; Kwak and Nobles 2013; Suh 2010; Shi and Chen 2010). Economic perspectives tie reconciliation to the creation of new contexts of insertion and fair competition in a labor market, especially for affected populations (Fearon 2009; Zorbas 2004).

Political reconciliation, for its part, entails co-existence with adversarial groups within a commonly accepted political system, such as democracy. This understanding usually implies inter-group *dialogue* and sometimes the building of a vision of common future (Chen 2010; Kohen, Zanchelli and Draken 2011; Dembinska and Montambeault 2015; Gibson 2007; Murphy 2010; Raftopolous 2004; Schaap 2004, 2005; Schiller 2012; Verdeja 2012; Whittaker 1999; Zyangyu et al. 2012). Going even further, some authors suggest this understanding implies a transformation of ideologies, beliefs, narratives and identities better suited to a postconflict setting (Moon 2006; Rigby 2001; Theidon 2006; Verdeja 2009).

2. Axis

Most works are situated on a horizontal axis; that is, referring to a present-time relation between individuals, groups or societies as a whole. However, some works specifically define reconciliation as coming to terms with the past and/or projecting a common future (Lederach 1998; Rigney 2012; Rushton 2006; Staub 2006), along what is described as the vertical axis.³

3. *Levels*

Most works focus on *intergroup* and *individual*-level reconciliation. However, at higher levels of abstraction, some authors describe reconciliation between *states* or nations (Dingli 2010; Funabashi 2003; Horne 2009; Pratt 2006; Suh 2010; Ripsman 2005; Yang 2003). And immediately below, some works present reconciliation as a national, *societal*-level task (Bornman 2006; Brounéus 2008; Siani-Davis and Katsikas 2009; Verdeja 2010) in which official apologies are sometimes necessary.

4. *Context*

We confine our definition to four types of comparable settings. While reconciliation as a concept may be applicable to a wider array of social interaction spaces (e.g. family, work, organizations, etc.), we are interested in cases where societies attempt to overcome a recent past of violence and division. Post-internal armed conflicts provide the most common context from which empirical evidence is collected, but there are also works derived from contexts of post-mass violence or genocide (Amstutz 2006; Clark and Kaufman 2009; Kohen, Zanchelli and

³ Other definitions of the ‘vertical axis’ describe it as the relation between segments in a hierarchy, or between citizens and institutions. See Valji (2009) and Hazan (2009). We code these relations here as part of the political reconciliation, in the perspective scale.

Drake 2011; Gellman 2008; Ishiyama 2011; Mukashema and Mullet 2010, 2012; Rettig 2008; Staub et al. 2005), post-international wars (Bakke 2009; Dingli 2010; Funabashi 2003; Horne 2009; Kwak and Nobles 2013; Maoz 2009), and post-authoritarian regimes (Arenhovel 2008; Encarnación 2008; Gibson 2005; Horn 2010; Humphrey and Valverde 2008; Moon 2006; Pisani, Reinhardt and Lindeke 2010).

5. Depth

Our scale is composed of ten ordered categories that capture a range from a minimal—i.e., mutual *recognition*—to a maximal depth of reconciliation—i.e., *inter-dependence*. Each of these categories is found in the literature under review and reflects the level of demand imposed by authors in order to consider a relation to be restored, and that reconciliation has taken place.

6. Mechanisms

This is a 30-category scale that reflects the varying answers to the question ‘What needs to happen in order to achieve reconciliation?’ Some literature reflects notions according to which restoration of a relation based on a cessation of violence amounts to a minimal form of reconciliation (Bouandel 2004, Duncan 2009; Gellman 2008; Rushton 2006). At the other extreme, reconciliation is conceived of as a concept that falls just short of peace. In between, authors assume a number of pre-conditions for and consequences of a reconciliation process, on which they remain far from consensus.

Thorough reflections on what reconciliation means do not lead to naïve conceptions in which, ideally, every mechanism should be put into motion in order to achieve a maximal level

of reconciliation. In fact, there are a good number of authors that call into question the assumption that elements such as truth help reconciliation, and suggest ways in which it might even impede it (Brounéus 2010; Clark 2012; Mendelof 2004). Another group of authors points out the dangers of some forms of memory, as they may lead to stirring up negative emotions counterproductively and thus pull antagonists even farther apart (Clark 2013; Neff 2005; Rieff 2011; Robben 2012), not to mention the potential backlash in response to mechanisms of punitive justice (Vrbetic 2013) or even attempts at reparation (Immler 2012; Vogel 2005). Going even further, Eastmand and Selimovic (2012) propose silence—rather than explicit interaction—as a legitimate form of reconciliation, while MacGinty (2014) defends the idea of escaping conflict in everyday life.

7. Assessment

Our final scale reflects either a positive, skeptical or openly negative perception as to the possibilities of reconciliation in real life. By definition, all authors here reviewed assume reconciliation as a feasible process or goal, with varying degrees of skepticism. In the tradition of Hanna Arendt (1998 [1958]), however, we could also argue that in the presence of ‘radical evil’, reconciliation is simply impossible.

From most of the cited literature, we can infer a common attribute shared by different authors and disciplines: relations. Some texts describe reconciliation as establishment or re-establishment of fractured relations between individuals, groups, societies or even institutions. From here, we conclude that a core definition of reconciliation that is consistent with most literature and could be broadly applied to most works is: “(r)establishment of relations between

former antagonists”. Different maximal definitions might use this as starting point in order to better suit policy or scholarly interests.

A methodology of projection

While there has been some criticism of nominal-scale typologies, particularly regarding their suitability for use in old-school quantitative analysis, their empirical contribution remains uncontested (Collier, Laporte and Seawright 2012).

Our proposed typology departs from ideal types in order to devise an operative tool that might be put to use in empirical works. Each of our seven scales can be considered collectively exhaustive—accounting for most definitions—but only partially exclusive; that is to say, a definition might fall in more than one category simultaneously (Collier, Laporte and Seawright 2008 Oxford), in recognition of the complexities of different understandings of the concept.

Our comprehensive framework is applied here as an exploratory projection technique that aims to gather information about individuals’ cognitive associations. Projective techniques have been used in cognitive and non-cognitive psychology in order to explore personality traits or emotions. Although there is some controversy as to whether projective techniques are scientifically reliable (Lilienfeld, Wood and Garb 2000), they are nevertheless acknowledged as methodologically useful to generate hypotheses to later be tested more systematically (Soley and Smith 2008; Storey, Gappen and Sacco 2014). Hence, here we opted not to make use of any specific clinical projective technique intended to generate precise diagnoses (Hibbard 2003), but rather a free associative task by which individuals spontaneously link the concept of ‘reconciliation’ with the variety of attributes abovementioned. We assume that the ambiguity of the concept itself helps to better reflect the respondents’ inner personality (Leichtman 1996).

Conversely, a more structured approach where all categories would be presented beforehand to respondents could trigger strong social desirability biases, limiting the quality of information we could derive from individuals.

In the case of our Colombia-based survey, presented as an illustrative case in the following section, our framework is used to code responses provided by our sample to two free-association oriented questions: ‘When you think of reconciliation with former members of armed groups, now demobilized, what comes to mind?’; and: ‘In your opinion, what is required so that the country can advance with a reconciliation process?’

III. COLOMBIA AS EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY

The Colombian armed conflict has left a legacy of social wounds and broken relations in need of reconciliation. About 5.7 million people were internally displaced in Colombia between 1958 and 2010; another 220,000 were killed, 80% of them civilians. There have been approximately 11,000 landmine victims; about 30,000 people were kidnapped; and as of 2013, 27,000 people were still classified as forcibly disappeared (CNMH 2013).

Governmental efforts to put an end to armed conflict have included a set of material and financial incentives encouraging paramilitaries and guerrillas to demobilize. Between 2003 and 2015, about 35,000 paramilitary and 15,000 guerrilla fighters demobilized and resettled in communities, where social tension has been on the rise (Prieto 2012; Nussio 2011). Ex-combatants and war victims—primarily the internally displaced—tend to resettle in communities that are already violence-affected and marginalized. Even though some rapport is established between them due to social proximity (Rettberg and Prieto 2010), ideological identities and war-

related stereotypes usually remain.⁴ Ex-combatants and victims feel stigmatized by the communities that receive them, while members of those receiving communities fear and distrust them. These three segments, in turn, demonstrate clear signs of resentment and distrust toward the state institutions that are typically blamed for their grievances (Ibáñez and Velásquez 2009; Nussio, Rettberg and Ugarriza 2015; Rettberg 2014).⁵

In spite of an ongoing peace process between the government and the main guerrilla groups in the country underway since 2012, the armed conflict persisted. However, postconflict windows—time- and space-bound opportunities during which the conflict remains inactive and thus peace-building measures can be pursued—enabled the Colombian government to draw up and implement strategies aimed at moving toward a postconflict scenario. This strategy included: the passing of legislation (the Justice and Peace Law and Transitional Justice Law in 2005 and 2010 respectively) that aimed to provide judicial benefits to demobilized ex-combatants; a Victims Law in 2011 to pursue land restitution and compensation to displaced persons; a functioning reintegration program for about 55,000 voluntarily demobilized ex-combatants, under the purview of the Colombian Agency for Reintegration since 2006; and a Victims Unit charged with assisting about 6 million people registered since 2012.

Within this context, in 2012 the National Center for Historical Memory (CNMH in Spanish) led a consortium of researchers to conduct a representative, original survey about people's perceptions on peace and justice.⁶ The survey included 90 items, including questions

⁴ Ex-combatants tend to remain divided along ideological lines long after their demobilization, despite asserting a common identity when confronted with other social segments. See Ugarriza (2009) and Ugarriza and Craig (2013).

⁵ A recent survey shows that 41% of members of receiving communities are afraid of ex-combatants, and 82% distrust them (CNC 2011). Likewise, ex-combatants constantly accuse communities of marginalizing them and not giving them an opportunity to atone (Ugarriza and Nussio forthcoming).

⁶ Universidad de los Andes and Fundación Social also participated in the design and implementation of the survey. Descriptive results of the quantitative data collected by the survey were published in CNMH (2012).

about forgiveness, truth-seeking, historical memory, prosecution, and victim reparations.⁷ A total of 42 municipalities in the six Colombian macro-regions were selected to conduct the survey, before five households in each selected block were randomly surveyed. These procedures resulted in a total sample size of 1,843 respondents.⁸

Two open-ended questions on reconciliation were included in the survey. Question One is: ‘When you think of reconciliation with former members of armed groups, now demobilized, what comes to mind?’ Question Two is: ‘In your opinion, what is required so that the country can advance with a reconciliation process?’ The following section describes our methodological strategy used to apply the comprehensive framework to responses in our representative survey. Results describe the general way in which ordinary citizens conceive of reconciliation within the wide array of conceptual options offered by scholars.

IV. METHODS AND RESULTS. WHAT DO PEOPLE EXPECT TO HAPPEN?

A group of eleven codifiers undertook the task of using our comprehensive framework in order to codify the qualitative responses of the 1,843 respondents.⁹ For each dimension, coders pre-classified the exact wording of respondents according to whether it resembled each category in every dimension. In cases where exact wording coincided between our framework and a respondent, coders would code ‘1’ for the given category, and would assign ‘0’ to the remaining ones. When respondents’ wording was not the same but came close enough to one or more categories, coders selected the less ambitious option (e.g., ‘recognition’ rather than ‘harmony’) in

⁷ Surveys lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours, and were conducted by 98 enumerators hired by the private consulting agency Ipsos-Napoleón Franco.

⁸ An additional 138 interviewees refused to participate in the survey.

⁹ Coders were research assistants at the Human Rights Research Group, Universidad del Rosario.

order to keep a conservative and replicable coding scheme. In a few cases, coders marked more than one category in each dimension, when responses clearly encompassed them.

Reliability tests

A number of reliability tests were applied to the final coding. Procedures for these tests included the following steps:

- Five randomly-selected respondents from the survey were blind-assigned to all coders.
- For each coder, we estimated the number of matches with the codes assigned by the remaining ten coders.
- Then, we estimated the proportion of matching codes between the given coder and the rest.
- Finally, we estimated an average proportion of matching codings between each coder and the remaining ten.

We repeated this procedure until each coder had an estimated matching average. Table 2a shows matching averages for each coder for a total of 270 coding decisions on answers provided by the five randomly-selected respondents to Question One. Also, we disaggregate averages for each reconciliation dimension. The last rows present an average of averages—Rate of Inter-Coder Agreement, RCA—for the full set of codes, and for each dimension. We include Cronbach's alpha and Cohen's kappa as additional measures of how close each coder tended to assign categories with respect to others.

TABLE 2A HERE

In general terms, our reliability measures show that codes assigned by the coders are relatively close to one another. We observe, for instance, that according to the RCA the eleven coders on average tended to assign the same codes in 90 percent of the cases. We also notice that one out of eleven coders had problems with the category ‘axis’—coder 3—and her codes fell significantly apart from those assigned by her partner confederates. Thus, we later decided to re-submit this sub-set of codes to a new round of coding. The most difficult codings were ‘level’ and ‘assessment’, where the levels of subjectivity were comparatively higher. Table 2b presents an analogous exercise applied to answers provided to Question Two.

TABLE 2B HERE

Again, we see that our RCA, Cronbach’s alpha and Cohen’s kappa measures suggest a slight variation between coding decisions among our eleven coders. But also we observe that coder three had problems with the ‘axis’ category, and therefore this sub-set was re-submitted to a new round of coding. In the case of Question Two, the most difficult codings were those for the ‘level’ and ‘assessment’ dimensions, although we can see they are fairly reliable.

Descriptive results

Subsequently, we present descriptive results of our coding scheme, disaggregated for the six dimensions under study.¹⁰ In each case, a series of graphs displays the frequency of codes ‘1’ assigned to each of the categories in each question, and then the aggregated frequencies for both questions.

FIGURE 1 HERE

As seen on Figure 1, when asked Question One, referring to reconciliation with former members of armed groups, people tended to associate the concept with the need for attitudinal and emotional change. When asked Question Two, referring to reconciliation in general terms, people conceived of reconciliation as a political process related to a new functioning of state institutions, and the promotion of dialogue and a civilized exchange of ideas. According to the composite measure, most respondents assumed reconciliation to be primarily a psychological and political process.

FIGURE 2 HERE

Figure 2 shows that only a small fraction of respondents associate reconciliation with the challenge of coming to terms with the recent past of violence. That is, most respondents assume reconciliation as a horizontal, rather than vertical, process.

FIGURE 3 HERE

¹⁰ A seventh dimension, ‘context’ is not analyzed here, since all responses correspond to a context of post-armed conflict.

According to Figure 3, there is a great variation in how people think of the level on which reconciliation with ex-combatants should take place: as a societal goal, as an intergroup process, and as an interpersonal challenge. However, in the case of Question Two, people describe reconciliation mainly as an intergroup process, which is also the tendency according to the composite measure.

FIGURE 4 HERE

On Figure 4, we see there is a wide variety of conceptions regarding how far to go in a process of reconciliation with ex-combatants. However, most participants would go no further than cooperation, falling short of attempting to achieve cohesion, empathy, harmony, affective bonding or interdependence. Asked about reconciliation in general terms, people conceive of it as a process of re-establishment of relations and cooperation, rather than recognition, tolerance, co-existence, or any other attribute. This latter result is highlighted by the composite measure.

FIGURE 5A HERE

When opining on how to achieve reconciliation with ex-combatants, people mention the need for undertaking personal transformation and attitudinal and emotional change, a cessation of violence, showing of good-will, and ultimately attaining peace first. This is shown in Figure 5a. When explaining how to achieve reconciliation as a general concept, most respondents mention the same elements, adding dialogue. This element draws further attention in the composite measure. An additional mechanism, structural change, is analyzed separately in Figure 5b.

FIGURE 5B HERE

All three measures in Figure 5b show that large proportions of respondents consider the establishment of security conditions and social welfare—education, health, housing, and state transparency—as the principal conditions for reconciliation to take place, with security conditions coming close. About half of respondents cited at least one of these two categories.

FIGURE 6 HERE

As shown in Figure 6, only a minority of respondents to the two questions assume a pessimistic stance, according to which reconciliation is simply not feasible. Conversely, those who express that reconciliation is hard to achieve (skepticism) or who have an optimistic stance (hope) are a majority.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented here offer a replicable route of interpretation and a set of theoretical categories of individuals' views and opinions on the vast concept of reconciliation based on their local practices and expectations. They may support other scholars' endeavors to better understand the social context and mechanisms in which transitional justice mechanisms and reconciliation efforts are implemented and must take root. In this sense, they contribute to a growing effort to empirically ground and support transitional justice policy design and academic production (van der Merwe, Baxter, and Chapman, 2009, Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi, 2015). Based on these results, hypotheses can be generated to operationalize reconciliation and turn it

into an effective tool for understanding and eventually overcoming some of the obstacles to sustainable peace in transitional countries.

There is a number of specific lessons that could be potentially extracted from a comprehensive framework-based analysis of reconciliation, as the Colombian case illustrates. Above all, this framework contributes to answer the question on what comes to people's minds when asked about reconciliation. The findings presented here for the case of a representative sample of Colombian citizens illustrate that individuals appear to adopt psychologically- and politically-minded perspectives much more frequently than historically- or judicially-focused ones (Figure 1). In fact, only a few respondents explicitly explained reconciliation as a process of dealing with the past -or the future- (Figure 2). Added to that, references to justice, truth or memory are relatively scarce in comparison with other requirements for reconciliation to take place (Figure 5a).

In addition, the findings suggest that citizens seem to prefer initiatives aimed at working with specific groups, more than national approaches that lump together regionally and sectorally distinct experiences with violence and victimization (Figure 3). In terms of the depth of social relations associated with reconciliation (Figure 4), people stop short of idealistic visions of cohesion and harmony, reflecting a down-to-earth approach focusing on peaceful coexistence. People demand improvements in social welfare and security in order to provide the material underpinnings of reconciliation (Figure 5b). This underscores the need to not only work at the level of individual psychological traits, but also to account for the structural conditions in which postconflict reconciliation needs to occur; that is, people expect reconciliation to address aspects of general local or territorial development, besides specific peacebuilding policies for reparations for victims, and the reintegration of former combatants. And overall, despite the conflict's long

duration, people's responses are very hopeful overall (Figure 6), and convey trust that reconciliation can and will occur.

These findings are important for many reasons. First, they suggest that for the Colombian population, reconciliation is tied to concrete action in terms of bringing individuals and communities together, adopting political reform, and providing the material (structural) underpinnings for such change. Digging deep into the historical past does not figure prominently among people's concerns, while prospection towards a shared future appears to be much more relevant. As suggested by these findings, people pin their hopes on reconciliation as a practical instrument to overcome structural and institutional deficits that will improve their daily lives and those of others.

Second, the findings point to a healthy pragmatism among the Colombian population where reconciliation is concerned. Perhaps as a result of how a conflict of such duration has worn down idealistic or retributive desires, the findings point to a positive disposition towards reconciliation or to accordance much more than towards a perpetuation of pain and vengeance. This may also be the result of prolonged frustration with efforts to end the confrontation, a context in which it is more likely for people to abandon demands for comprehensive reforms and change in exchange for an end to the violence. In this sense, periodic repetition of surveys such as the one analyzed here may reveal progressive change in people's demands and perceptions. This has also been suggested by the experience of other countries, in which each new generation following mass violence has developed different approaches to dealing with the past.

Third, the current institutional context for transitional justice in Colombia—or in many other countries—does not seem to correspond with what people believe is necessary for reconciliation. Whereas the current policy framework and debate is based on the assumption that

historical memory and the pursuit of truth and justice-writ-large will bring long-term healing to society, respondents to the survey appear to demand a foundation for peaceful and productive coexistence among social groups. Notably, the findings fail to suggest any significant difference between victims and non-victims in terms of their opinions and preferences, a finding that we also arrived at in an earlier work (Nussio, Rettberg, and Ugarriza, 2015) and which suggests that either the violent experience of armed conflict impacts people's opinions on transitional justice mechanisms less than previously expected, or permeates the general population in a spill-over effect to such extent that it levels people's preferences.

The answers provided for the Colombian case are a good starting point for a future systematic comparison with other postconflict contexts. Will people in other societies coincide or differ in their views on who should reconcile, to what extent and through which mechanisms? What has the experience of other countries been in terms of dealing with the apparent schism between the normative transitional justice prescriptions and local practices and beliefs? How can scholarly work and public policy design better grasp the complexities that mark transitional contexts? Of course, the fact that there appears to be a mismatch between public opinion and the theoretical and normative framework is not a reason in and of itself to alter the latter to suit the former. One of the principles of modern democracy and of most judicial systems is to prevent the tyranny of the majority, and, especially, to resist the tides of public opinion. However, knowing that people's expectations may go counter to the prevalent wisdom and discourse of reconciliation offers important insights to policy-makers seeking to sow the seeds of lasting peace and implement politically- and financially-costly peace agreements.

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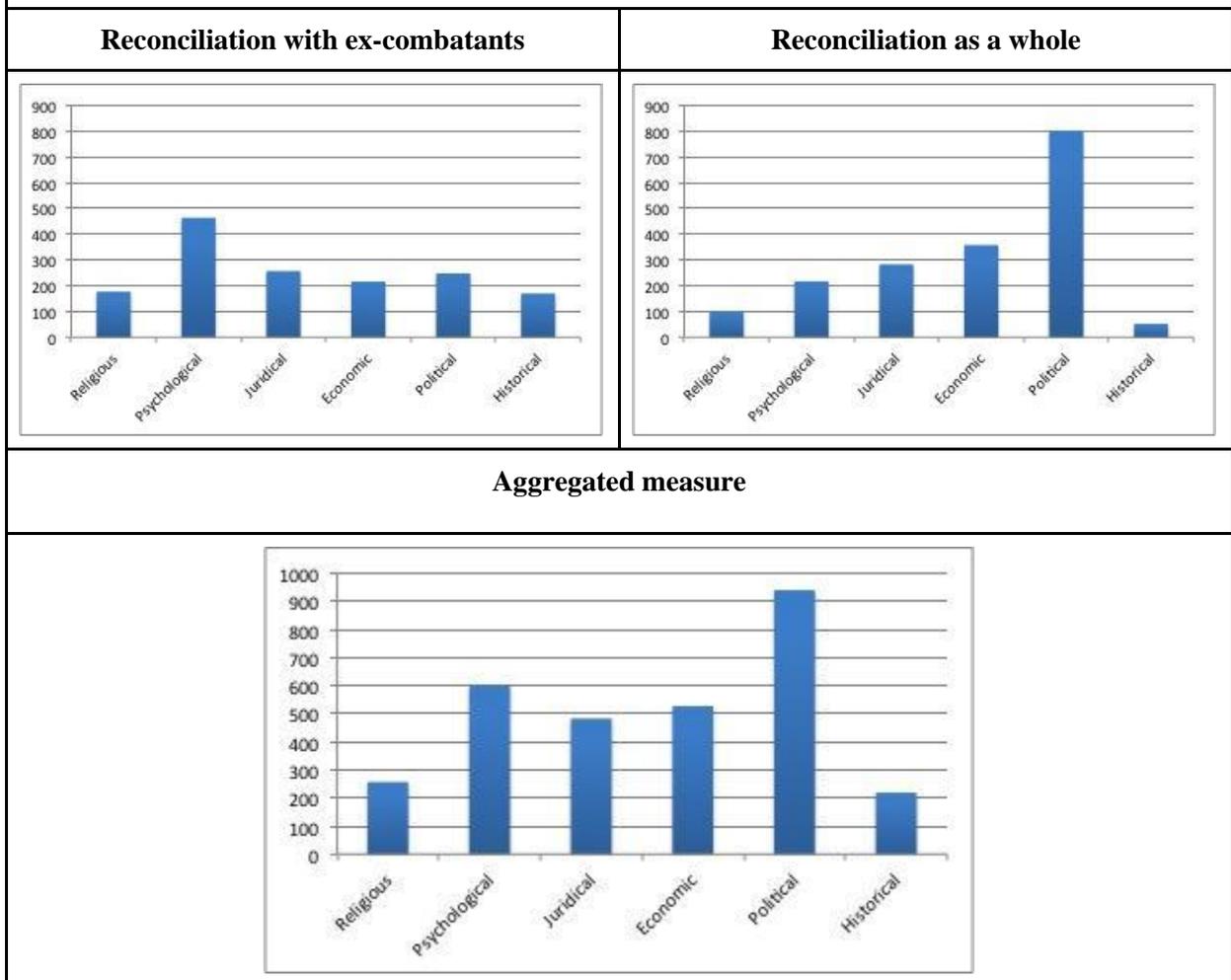
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Figure 1. Perspective (Disciplinary Emphasis)



Note: 'Religious' included references to God, pardon, repentance, guilt, and apology. 'Psychological' included references to attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. 'Juridical' included references to truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition. 'Economic' included references to personal or social opportunities and employment. 'Political' included references to the State, institutions, dialogue, and exchange of ideas. 'Historical' included references to the recent past. No response was coded as 'Philosophical', where a reflection on the logic behind the term was referenced.

Figure 2. Axis (References to Past or Future)

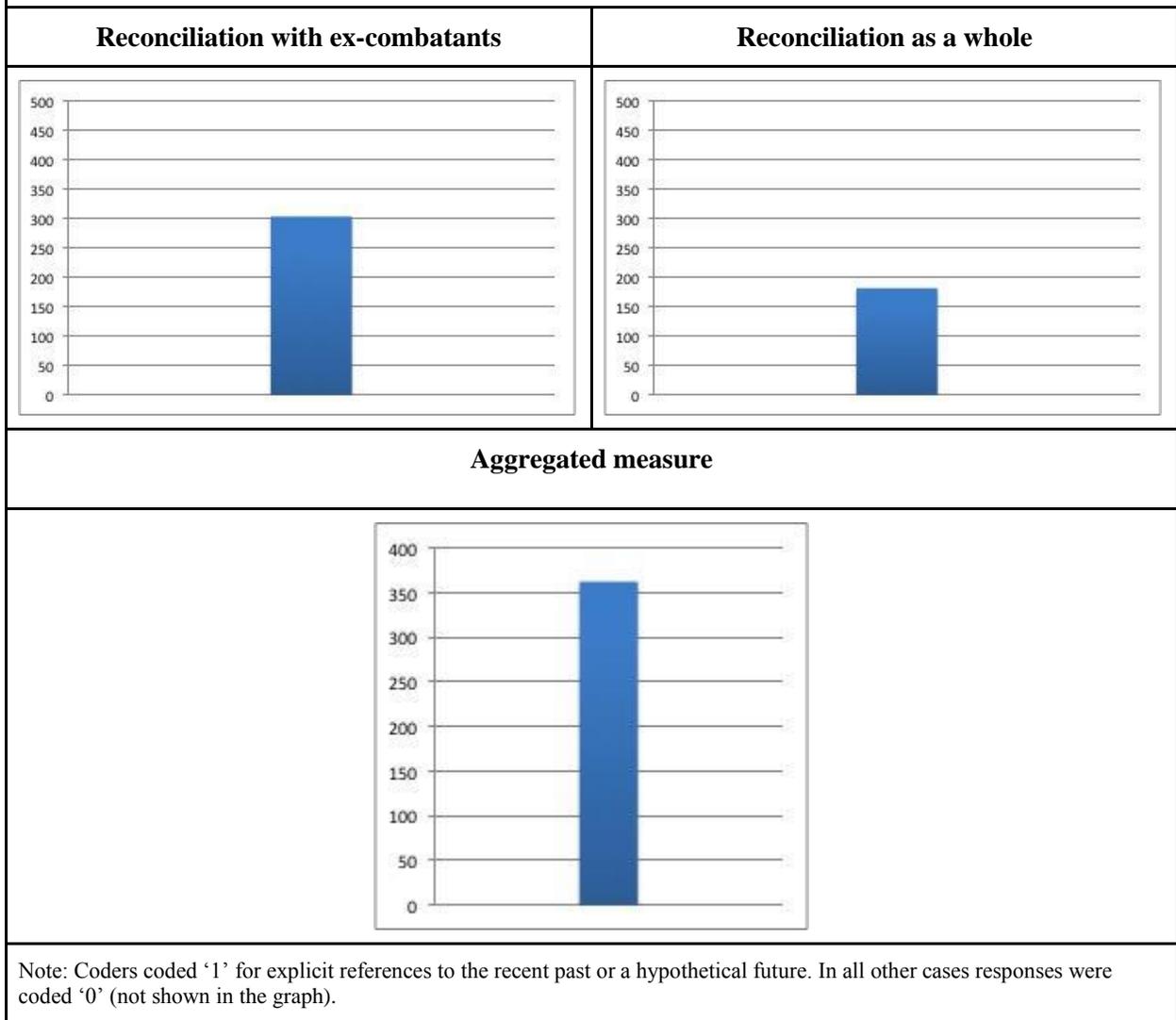
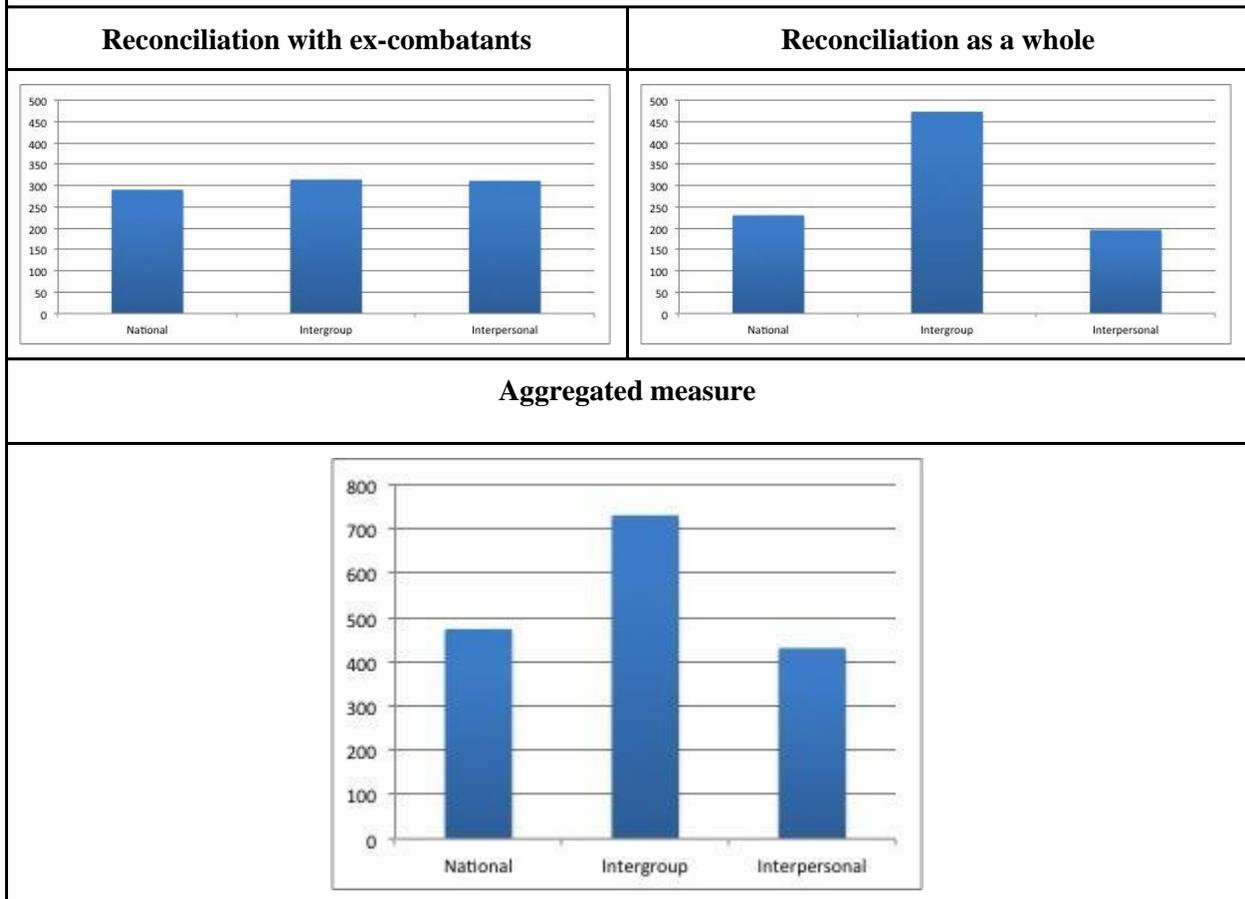


Figure 3. Levels (Who Should Reconcile)



Note: 'National' included reference to the nation, society as a whole, everyone, etc. 'Intergroup' included references to specific social groups. 'Interpersonal' included explicit references to the individual level.

Figure 4. Depth (How Far Reconciliation Should Go)

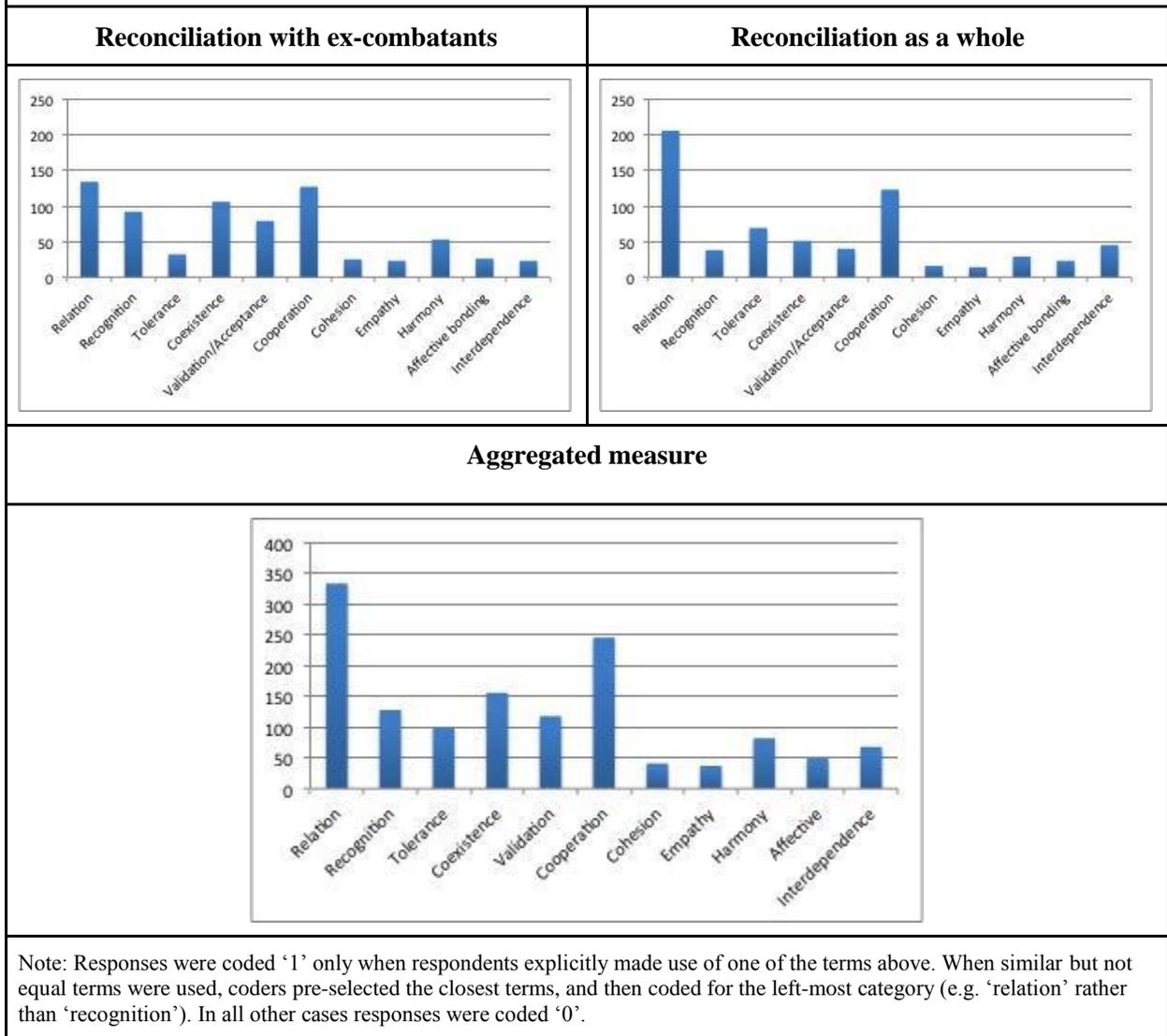
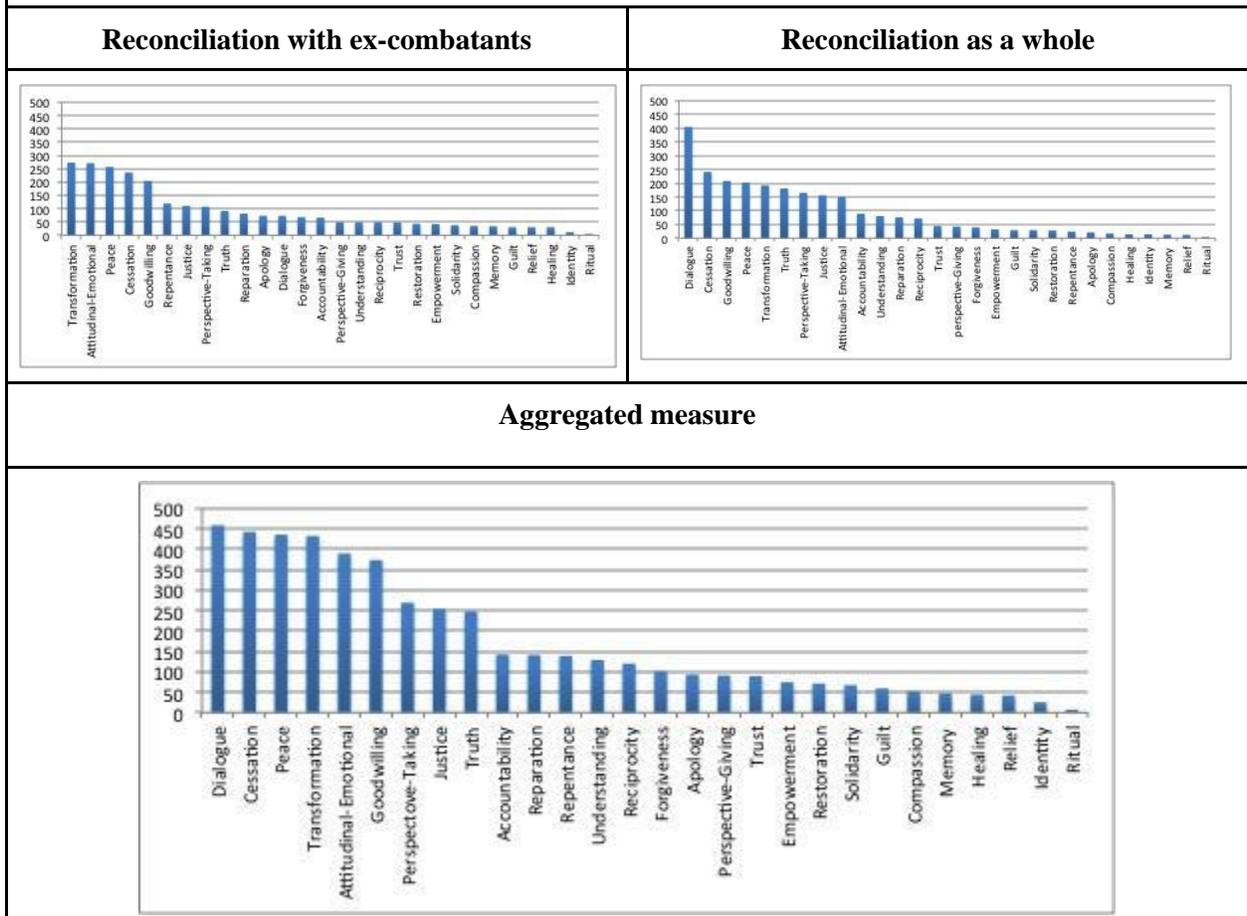
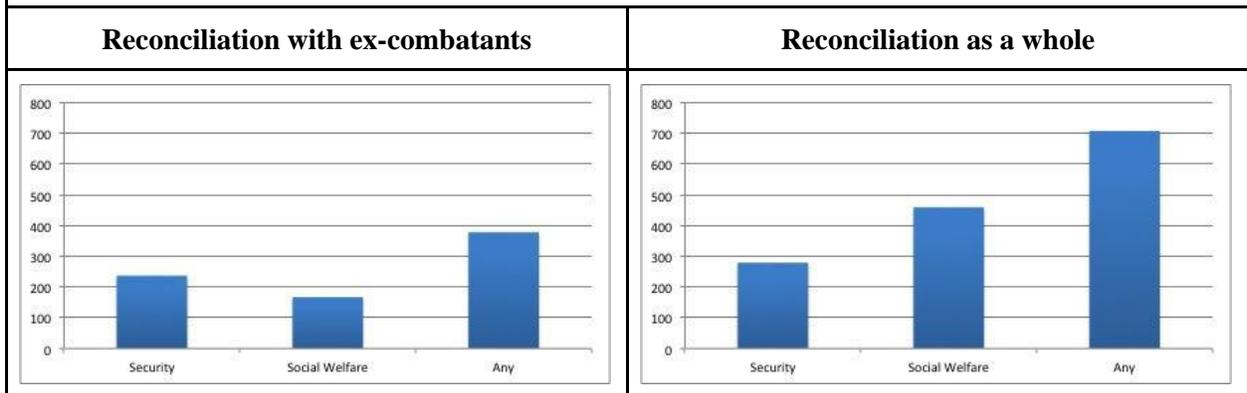


Figure 5a. Mechanisms (What are Conditions for Reconciliation)

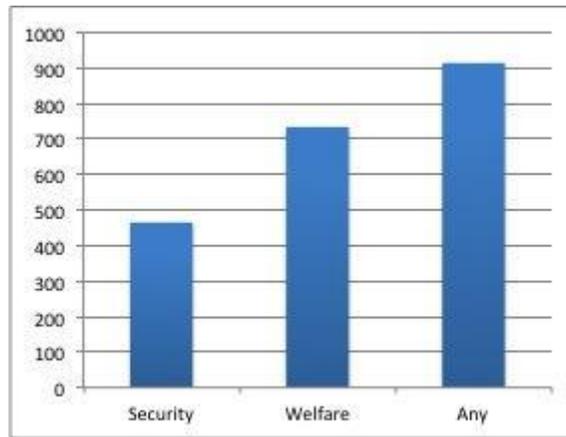


Note: Responses were coded '1' only when respondents explicitly made use of one of the terms above. In all other cases responses were coded '0'.

Figure 5b. Structural Change



Aggregated measure



Note: 'Security' included references to any form of criminality. 'Welfare' included references to education, health, housing, infrastructure, and overall social spending. 'Any' included references to either security or welfare categories.

Figure 6. Assessment (How Achievable is Reconciliation)

