

Student Voices

The Multiplex Negotiations Behind the Colombian Peace Agreement

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On November 24, 2016, the 50+ year war in Colombia ended with the signing of the Colombia Peace Agreement. Ratified by the Colombian Congress on Nov. 30th, the agreement overcame many of the failures of its first iteration, which was rejected by popular referendum in October. The process of achieving this agreement offers an enlightening case of a broad, two-tier negotiation with both *below-the-line* and *above-the-line* players.

This complex, two-tier negotiation involved multiple parties dealing with both internal and external negotiations, with many contributing psychological factors. For example, the government contained both pro- and anti-negotiation factions, the latter of whom were largely left out of official channels. These anti-negotiation factions (below-the-line players) led by

former President Álvaro Uribe, felt that the deal contained too many *carrots* and not enough *sticks* ie: offering FARC amnesty with little punishment through reduced sentences and participation in government. In order to gain power, anti-agreement groups mobilized *away from the table* to decrease trust in the process, heighten emotions, and demand punishment for perpetrators of violence.

Additionally, the underlying trauma suffered from years of warfare became a psychological barrier to popular support of the deal, particularly amongst older generations. Pro-agreement negotiators attempted to address these issues at the table through a focus on the victims, as well as by bundling truth commissions, reparations, and creation of national monuments into the deal. Despite this, negotiators were largely surprised when the referendum was rejected in October – yet in hindsight, they hadn't correctly estimated the anti-negotiation faction's BATNA.

Negotiators were eventually able to bring this faction back to the table and address key concerns in the second round of the agreement. However, there remain elements that threaten to undermine this new deal's sustainability. One major threat to stability lies in the decision to ratify the second agreement by

Congressional vote, rather than by referendum. Opponents abstained from this vote, believing it illegitimate, and the agreement passed. Yet despite the ratification, these unsolved tensions within the Colombian Congress may soon surface when members pass future legislation affecting the deal's implementation or even during next year's presidential election. As we consider deal sustainability we must ask: Who benefits from this deal and how will this affect those not at the table? If negotiators fell prey to *agreement bias* and reached a deal that did not receive buy-in from relevant parties away from the table, the current peace may be short-lived. After all, deal sustainability depends as much on the anticipation of future problems as it does on addressing current ones. These questions will be key as Colombians begin implementation of this historic deal.