

Women's Participation in Peace Processes: Colombia

A new CFR Interactive Report presents compelling evidence about the value of women's contributions to peace processes around the world. The Peace Process Series is a collection of in-depth case studies of current and past peace processes that offer insight into how women participate in peace processes—whether in official negotiating roles or through grassroots efforts—and why their inclusion advances security interests.

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Last week, Colombia marked the one-year anniversary of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), which ended fifty years of armed civil conflict that resulted in over two hundred thousand deaths and the displacement of nearly seven million people across the country. Here is a look back at how Colombian women participated in the peace negotiation and the contributions that they made to this landmark agreement.

Women's Role in the Peace Process

The 2016 comprehensive peace agreement set an international example for women's involvement. When formal talks opened in Cuba in November 2012, only one of the twenty negotiators was female. In 2013, civil society leaders organized a National Summit of Women and Peace to demand an inclusive peace process, and by 2015, women comprised 20 percent of the government negotiating team and 43 percent of FARC delegates (a level consistent with the percentage of women fighters in the guerrilla group). Women also contributed to the peace process at all levels, including through official subcommissions—notably the first-ever Gender Subcommission—and through influential roles in the government's Office of the High Commissioner for Peace. Women's participation on both sides of the formal negotiating table and in civil society helped ensure the success of the years-long Colombian peacemaking effort with the FARC.

Effects of Women's Participation

Broadened the agenda. Women used their seats at the table to address some of the primary grievances of affected communities, including land restitution and the right to justice and reparations for victims. They successfully included provisions in the agreement on the rights of women, girls, and indigenous populations that sought to

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secure equal access to rural property for women, promote women's political participation, create measures to prevent gender-based violence, and rebuke amnesty for crimes of sexual violence committed during the conflict.

Negotiated local cease-fires. Over the course of the years-long peace process, women improved the security situation in towns across the country by mediating local cease-fires; convincing guerrillas to lift roadblocks preventing the passage of people, food, and medicine; and negotiating the release of hostages. This mitigated the ongoing cycle of violence and lessened the external pressure on negotiating parties.

Increased accountability. Because of the demands made by female negotiators and civil society members, the FARC undertook confidence-building measures that increased the likelihood of a peace deal, including initiation of an apology process and release of child soldiers. Furthermore, victims of violence perpetrated by both sides of the conflict—including thirty-six women in a landmark intermediation—offered direct testimony to formal negotiators, securing the issue on the negotiating agenda.


Built public support. Women in civil society organizations played an instrumental role in building coalitions and rallying public support for the commencement and continuance of talks. They repaired relations in communities torn by the conflict, laying the groundwork for the peace-building efforts necessary for the agreement's long-term success.

Post-Conflict Status

The peace agreement with the FARC addressed many issues critical to Colombia's post-conflict recovery, but delays in its implementation have led to rising tensions ahead of the 2018 elections. Following the FARC's successful disarmament, one of the next tests of the peace deal is the reintegration of thousands of FARC militants into civic life, including women members: although 40 percent of the FARC (and 25 percent of the

ELN) is female, the government historically has provided little support to demobilized female combatants. Another test is transitional justice: Colombia's new war tribunals will prosecute human rights violations committed during the brutal decades-long civil war, and in a step that reflects progress toward women's inclusion in public life, female judges will assume more than half of the new court's seats (27 of the 51 positions). In political life, women continue to play prominent roles, including as the FARC's 2018 nominee for vice president, and as members of a committee tasked with monitoring implementation of the peace agreement's gender provisions. However, the durability of peace remains uncertain, with significant challenges including land reform, illicit drug trade, and insecurity. Meanwhile, in October 2017, the government reached a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the second-largest insurgent group, the ELN, as negotiations proceed toward a separate peace accord.

The interactive report includes additional in-depth case studies, as well as the first-ever index tracking women's participation in formal roles in peace processes from 1990 to present, profiles of women who have contributed to peace processes around the world, and tools for policymakers to support the inclusion of women in peace processes. Explore the interactive report at [cfr.org/women-peace](https://www.cfr.org/women-peace).

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