



## Review article

# Evolution and challenges of DDR: A policy review through the prism of Colombia's DDR experience

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## ABSTRACT

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes have undergone significant evolution in recent decades, reflecting the complex dynamics of the transition from conflict to peace. This paper presents a comparative analysis of three generations of DDR processes, illustrating the shift from a primarily security-focused approach to a comprehensive strategy that includes socioeconomic development, political participation, and community engagement. In Colombia, a country with a long history of armed conflict, the process of DDR has undergone significant changes. These changes were made to adapt to the intricate realities of war, peace agreements, and social integration. During its evolution, DDR in Colombia has encountered challenges in expanding beyond the traditional scope of disarmament and demobilization to include the crucial aspect of reintegration. This highlights the significance of addressing the varied needs of ex-combatants and ensuring their sustainable integration into civilian life. The findings emphasize the importance of flexible and context-sensitive DDR frameworks that acknowledge the distinct challenges and opportunities of each post-conflict scenario. This provides valuable insights for future peacebuilding efforts worldwide.

## 1. Introduction

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes are crucial components in peace initiatives, significantly impacting conflict resolution and post-conflict stability [1]. Although seemingly new, these processes have historical roots and have faced various challenges and approaches throughout history [2]. This analysis of DDR history shows that the difficulties of reintegrating ex-combatants into society are not a recent phenomenon. Throughout history, from ancient Rome to the aftermath of World War II, veterans have faced challenges in their reintegration. The United States recognized these challenges and made significant improvements to its demobilization practices after World War II. This included adopting a more gradual approach and providing educational support to veterans [3]. The reintegration of former combatants is a complex societal issue with significant political implications [4].

In the 1980s, international DDR programs emerged because of the limitations of earlier efforts, signifying a shift beyond the mere disarmament and demobilization phases. These international initiatives prioritized the intricate process of effectively reintegrating ex-combatants into civil society, thereby forming a new dimension of DDR practice [5].

In this context, a policy review of DDR initiatives is essential. This review aims to analyze the policies that underpin DDR efforts, their evolution, and provide critical insights into the future of DDR. This policy review comprises three key sections. The first section

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comprehensively analyzes DDR processes and their development since their implementation. The subsequent section explores the concept of DDR "generations." In this context, the term "generation" refers to the dynamic adaptations and diverse scopes that have emerged as DDR practices have responded to the changing nature of conflicts and contexts [6].

Colombia's experience with DDR offers valuable lessons for policymakers in conflict and peacebuilding scenarios. Colombia's long-standing armed conflict and subsequent peace agreements provide a comprehensive case study for understanding DDR challenges and successes. The ongoing "Paz Total" initiative further highlights the potential of DDR in achieving sustainable peace. By analyzing Colombia's past, present, and future of DDR, insights can be gained that contribute to effective DDR policies. The third section introduces Colombia as a compelling case study. Colombia has been extensively studied in the DDR literature and is arguably the only example where all three generations of DDR have been concurrently present throughout the course of its armed conflict.

This study uses a qualitative research approach to analyze the complexities of DDR processes, drawing insights from Colombia's long history of armed conflict and its efforts to transition from war to peace. By exploring the challenges in expanding DDR beyond traditional disarmament and demobilization to include reincorporation, this paper highlights the importance of addressing the diverse needs of ex-combatants for sustainable integration into civilian life.

The methodology involves a comparative analysis of three generations of DDR processes, focusing on the evolution of DDR strategies and the challenges encountered in Colombia's DDR experience. This analysis examines the shift from a security-focused approach to a more comprehensive strategy that includes socioeconomic development, political participation, and community engagement. Additionally, a review of historical trends, policy developments, and practical challenges in DDR offers insights for enhancing peacebuilding efforts worldwide.

By examining Colombia's DDR progress and the potential implementation of the 'Paz Total' policy, this study provides critical reflections on the evolution of DDR frameworks and their implications for future DDR initiatives.

## 2. Conceptual approach and evolution of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes of ex-combatants

The first operations involving DDR components were conducted in Namibia in 1989, as an initiative of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group [2,7], and in Central America by the United Nations Observer Group [8]. Subsequently, disarmament and demobilization were implemented in various latitudes, including Haiti, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, Mozambique, Angola, Sierra Leone, and the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranya, and Western Sirmia [9,10]. Since the aforementioned inception in the late 1980s, more than 60 different DDR initiatives have been implemented around the world [11].

The segmentation of knowledge generated from different experiences and applications of DDR processes, in addition to the low development of the reintegration of ex-combatants as an object of research [12], mobilized several international cooperation agents, governments, and United Nations programs to compensate for the lack of clear policies and gaps that limited the establishment of a collective approach in the implementation of DDR programs [13]. Among these international actors, we can highlight the German Technical Cooperation, the Norwegian International Defense Center, the Canadian Pearson Peacekeeping Center, and the Swedish National Defense College, which, in recognition of the importance of DDR for sustainable peace, jointly published in 2004 the handbook *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: A Practical Field and Classroom Guide*, which provided practical guidelines for effective DDR measures as an integral part of international peacekeeping operations and post-conflict reconstruction plans [10].

In line with the establishment of implementation guidelines, although more focused on the distribution of funds and the reintegration phase, the Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (SIDDR), in its final report, emphasizes the importance of multi-donor funds targeted not only at ex-combatants but also at host communities and those affected by the conflict, recognizes the role of women and children as members of armed groups, even if they were not combatants, and their right to benefit from the reintegration process, examines the lack of state capacity to meet the demands of DDR processes, and how this can be addressed through the intervention of the private sector and civil society. The report places particular emphasis on the relationship between DDR processes and transitional justice initiatives, as well as on maximizing public resources to achieve maximum inclusiveness [14].

With the aim of establishing general DDR guidelines, the United Nations developed the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) between 2003 and 2006. The IDDRS distilled lessons learned from the experiences of the 1990s to the mid-2000s and has since become the reference manual for DDR operations [8].

The descriptive terms for the components of DDR used in most of the literature and evaluation studies are based on the common United Nations definitions from the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council in February 2000 [2].

Disarmament:

Disarmament is the collection of small arms and light and heavy weapons within a conflict zone. It frequently entails the assembly and cantonment of combatants; it should also comprise the development of arms management programs, including their safe storage and final disposition, which may entail their destruction. Demining may also be part of this process.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on The Role of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Process, February 11, 2000 (S/2000/101).

Weapons surrender can be coercive or voluntary, and although it aims to reduce the number of combatants or dismantle armed units [15], it is not limited to the latter, as civilians can also be part of the process [2]. In any case, it requires monitoring by the international community [16]. In turn, it serves as a mechanism to seal the trust between the negotiating groups and is one of the last steps in the peace process. Its complexity may be intensified in countries with an armament culture (the cases of Afghanistan and Chad), but the weapons destruction phase, in addition to its practical purpose, has a symbolic connotation as a demonstration of the transformation to a new, safer, and more peaceful society [8].

Demobilization:

Demobilization is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from the armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centers to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion.<sup>2</sup>

The process of demobilization serves as a counter to recruitment [10] and involves the elimination of military structures as the beginning of the transition to civilian life, discharging them and granting them the status of ex-combatant [8,17]. Within the demobilization process, which involves support for combatants and their families, there is a phase of reinsertion. Transitional assistance provides basic needs like food, clothing, shelter, medical services, education, training tools, and employment opportunities to ex-combatants and their families. The duration of this assistance is typically up to 1 year before the longer-term process of reintegration begins [2,18]. Reinsertion programs have been implemented in various contexts such as Uganda in the early 1990s, where approximately 40,000 war veterans were successfully resettled with the help of these packages. Similar programs have also been used in Central American conflicts to support individuals transitioning back into civilian life [8].

The Escola de Cultura de Pau (2008) identifies seven types of disarmament and demobilization (see Table 1), six of which consist of the handing over of weapons and the demobilization of combatants, while only one includes the reintegration component.

Reintegration

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open timeframe, primarily occurring in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance.<sup>3</sup>

The challenges to reintegration vary in their social, political, and economic nature. Stigmatization and the possibility of rejection by host communities are challenges to the social reintegration of ex-combatants. At the political level, collective or group reintegration is transformative, as it seeks to assist in the transformation of illegally armed organizations into entities that operate as political actors within the legal parameters of the government; in the same way, at the individual level, political reintegration is restorative, as it implies the restoration of their decision-making power and their status as citizens within the community [20].

The reintegration phase is the weakest and at the same time the most important phase of DDR [12]; it is open-ended and extends over several years [10]. As a vulnerable group accustomed to living with weapons, ex-combatants do not have sufficient tools to achieve economic and social integration. The purpose of this phase is to provide them with sustainable livelihoods within a range of options that may include education, vocational training, job placement in agriculture, livestock, fish farming, industrial areas, and entrepreneurial development through the creation of small and medium enterprises [2,16,18].

Since its inception, DDR has evolved not only in the definitions of each of its processes but especially in the approach taken, according to Ref. [21] DDR is continuous and involves two perspectives, ranging from an initial "minimalist" type limited to the establishment of security, to a "maximalist" perspective that represents an opportunity for development. In contrast, Banholzer (2014) considers that it contributes to the benefit of individuals but is not intended or enabled to improve economic or political contexts, while authors such as (Colletta & Muggah (2009) and (Nussio (2013) go beyond this dichotomy, classifying the available literature in different generations or waves, each of which demonstrate an evolution in the scope and specific objectives of DDR.

## 2.1. DDR generations

### 2.1.1. First-generation DDR

The first-generation DDR (see Table 2), often called "traditional DDR," follows a sequential process and focuses primarily on military and security aspects [23,24]. Initially targeting ex-combatants, this approach used standardized templates and best practices but often failed to consider local particularities [11,25]. Implemented mainly in economically disadvantaged nations, these programs often depend on external donors and operate within post-conflict settings under peace agreements [24,26,27].

Traditional DDR typically involves global organizations like the United Nations and consists of structured phases such as cantonment, disbandment, and transitional assistance, including education and vocational training [6]. The model is top-down, targeting signatory parties to facilitate the peace process and establish a secure environment but struggles to engage non signatory armed groups [25,27]. Requirements for implementation include a peace agreement and willingness from the conflict parties [25].

<sup>2</sup> Note by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, May 24, 2005 (A/C.5/59/31).

<sup>3</sup> IDDRS FRAMEWORK.

**Table 1**  
The types of disarmament and demobilization.

Type	Includes Disarming	Includes Demobilization	Benefits and incentives	
1	Yes	Yes	Return to Civil Society	No compensation
2	Yes	Yes	Return to Civil Society	Temporary benefits for the group's top management
3	Yes	Yes	Return to Civil Society	Return kit (cash payment, food, and transportation) for all ex-combatants
4	Yes	Yes	Return to Civil Society	Monthly payment for a period of time for all ex-combatants
5	Yes	Yes	Integration into State Security Forces	
6	Yes	Yes	Reintegration to society program (DDR)	
7	Mixed Model between type 5 and any other			

Source: Prepared by the author with information from Ref. [19].

Despite this, several challenges have emerged. First, the traditional DDR often lacked appropriate contextual awareness, making it difficult to adapt to the specific needs of different conflict zones. Second, the identification of target groups was often poorly executed, affecting the program's efficacy. Third, security dilemmas arose from asymmetrical disarmament, causing issues in achieving lasting peace. Fourth, the pitfalls of partial demobilization and the insufficiency of reintegration assistance have been criticized. Finally, the issue of consistent funding has also been a persistent challenge, affecting long-term sustainability [24].

While the focus has been on disarmament and demobilization, the psychosocial aspects of reintegration have often been overlooked, leading to calls for addressing the broader impact of war [25]. Criticisms highlight the need for a more holistic approach that encompasses the wellbeing of all conflict-affected communities to enhance peacebuilding [28].

### 2.1.2. Second-generation DDR

A crucial shift in DDR methodologies emerged in the mid-2000s, as stakeholders recognized that traditional DDR strategies were inadequate for the comprehensive needs of reintegration and the broader goals of peacebuilding. This shift was in response to the evolving dynamics of conflicts and political landscapes, necessitating new methods focused on sustainable reintegration and peacebuilding [6]. However, this evolution faces significant challenges, including the absence of political determination to see through the long-term commitments required for successful DDR and the problematic uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, which can fuel conflict and complicate the disarmament process.

The advent of "second-generation DDR" (see Table 3) denotes an adaptive response to these challenges, introducing concepts like "Interim stabilization" and a widened scope of security-focused initiatives. However, this generation of DDR is not immune to external pressures, such as the destabilizing impact of illicit drugs and organized crime, which can undermine the reintegration of combatants into lawful societies. Economic instability further threatens the sustainability of DDR efforts as it hampers the provision of viable livelihoods for ex-combatants.

Second-generation DDR operates synergistically with, in parallel to, or as an alternative to traditional DDR [25]. While it represents a forward-thinking approach, there is a pressing need for efficient integration and coordination mechanisms to align the diverse array of peacebuilding activities. Ayaka Suzuki, Chief of the DDR Section in the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, underscores that the term "second-generation DDR" is not intended to replace traditional DDR but rather to address its limitations or complement its efforts, especially in scenarios marked by ongoing conflicts or delicate peace processes. This approach facilitates trust building and fosters secure environments, laying a potential pathway for eventual traditional DDR [25].

Discourse on DDR now extends beyond its initial parameters, considering the complex relationship between DDR and sectors such as transitional justice, security sector reform, and state building [24]. However, the field also grapples with critical evaluations that cast doubt on the effectiveness of DDR processes, calling for rigorous evidence to validate their impact. This DDR iteration shifts the focus from individual combatants to the larger community, emphasizing sustainable peace through community security and justice measures. Such a shift is critical in contexts where traditional DDR prerequisites, such as a peace accord, are lacking, allowing armed groups to maintain their influence [11,30].

At the heart of second-generation DDR lies the Community Violence Reduction (CVR) strategy, which fosters community engagement and facilitates local reforms to diminish societal violence. Originating in Haiti in 2006, the CVR has since expanded to various conflict-affected regions, emphasizing the need for development-oriented peacekeeping efforts to combat organized violence [31]. In a context like Yemen, CVR components have been implemented as a diplomatic tool in conflict resolution and peacebuilding [23]. The integration of CVR approaches into DDR processes addresses the challenges posed by persistent community violence in post-conflict environments.

Lastly, the second-generation DDR espouses a customized approach, tailoring processes to the unique needs of countries among peace negotiations. It employs a locally sensitive, evidence-based methodology that is adaptable and subject to ongoing assessment to ensure responsiveness to changing conditions. Nevertheless, the adaptability of this approach must contend with the various outlined challenges to truly meet the nuanced demands of peacebuilding in complex conflict scenarios [25,32].

### 2.1.3. Third-generation DDR

The evolution of DDR into its third generation (see Table 4) is a direct response to the complex challenges of modern conflict zones. As practitioners navigate the difficult terrains of counterinsurgency and stability operations, they increasingly face armed and criminal groups that are not aligned with the peace process. This novel DDR paradigm, evident in regions like Somalia, Libya, Mali, Iraq, and Afghanistan, departs from the second generation by incorporating the varied entities subjected to military actions [27].

**Table 2**

Matrix first-generation of DDR interventions.

DDR Generation	Features	Institutions Involved	Approach	Responsibles	Challenges	DDR Processes
First Generation (1989–2006)	Development of common standards based on lessons learned and condensed in manuals. Interventions had a minimalist approach, prioritizing security and military and police concerns. Implementation occurred in post-conflict contexts where peace agreements or ceasefires had been negotiated or signed. There was a lack of any visible element focused on the reintegration process for former combatants. Instead, these individuals received humanitarian assistance through various organizations.	German Technical Cooperation. The Norwegian International Defense Center The Canadian Pearson Peacekeeping Center The Swedish National Defense College Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sweden UNDDR UNHCR	The primary emphasis is on former combatants involved in military structures	Practitioners Military Peacekeeping forces Policy makers Scholars	No contextual awareness Identification of target groups. Security dilemmas. Partial demobilization, Insufficiency reintegration assistance. Funding.	Mozambique: (1992–1997) Uganda: (1992–1995) Cambodia: (1991–1993) Djibouti: (1993–2002) Eritrea: (1993–1997) Somaliland: (1993–2008) El Salvador: (1992–1996) Haiti: (1994–1996) Angola: (1995–1997) Bosnia and Herzegovina: (1995–2003) Mali: (1995–2003) Liberia: (1996–1997) Sierra Leone: (1996–2004) Guatemala: (1997 –) Rwanda: (1997–2001) Tajikistan: (1997 –) Kosovo: (1999 –) Guinea-Bissau: (2000 –) Uganda: (2000 –) Cambodia: (1999–2005) Somalia: (2000 –) Eritrea: (2001–2006) Ethiopia: (2000–2005) Congo, Republic: (2000 –) Angola: (2002–2006) Solomon Islands: (2002–2003) Rwanda: (2002–2005) Afghanistan: (2002–2006) Burundi: (2004–2008) Liberia: (2002–2009) Papua New Guinea: (2003 –) Haiti: (2004 –) Central African Republic: (2004–2006) Congo, Democratic Republic: (1999 –) Sudan: (2004 –)

**Table 3**  
Matrix second generation of DDR interventions.

DDR Generation	Features	Institutions Involved	Approach	Responsibles	Challenges	DDR Processes
Second Generation (2006–2015)	<p>Prioritize extensive development-oriented activities.</p> <p>Explores the intricate correlations among transitional justice, security reform, and development.</p> <p>Acknowledge DDR as an integral part of the broader political process.</p> <p>Address and decrease the diverse types of violence.</p> <p>Establish connections with local communities.</p> <p>Incorporate evaluation techniques to oversee the detection of incipient security risks and recognize deficiencies within the DDR</p>	<p>Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)</p> <p>The United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG)</p> <p>Civil society organizations</p> <p>Private sector organizations</p> <p>World Bank</p>	<p>Contextual influence on outcomes (Nussio, 2013).</p> <p>There is a change in perspective from helping individuals to benefiting the entire community (Piedmont, 2015)</p>	<p>Practitioners</p> <p>Scholars</p> <p>Inter-governmental organizations</p>	<p>No political determination</p> <p>Uncontrolled use of natural resources</p> <p>Illicit drugs</p> <p>Organized criminal activities.</p> <p>Economic instability</p> <p>Doubts about the effectiveness of the DDR processes.</p>	<p>Haiti: (2004-Present)</p> <p>South Sudan: (2011–2023)</p> <p>Liberia: (2003–2008)</p> <p>Democratic Republic of the Congo: (2010–2023)</p> <p>Ethiopia: (2013–2015)</p> <p>Afghanistan: (2006–2011)</p> <p>Côte d'Ivoire: (2004–2017)</p>

Source: Prepared by the author with information from Refs. [6,11,22,22,24,25,29,33].

**Table 4**  
Matrix third generation of DDR interventions.

DDR Generation	Features	Institutions involved	Approach	Responsibles	Challenges	DDR Processes
Third Generation (2015 – present)	<p>It distinguishes between a DDR program, which refers to specific activities over a period of time, and the DDR process, which is inherently personal and varies according to an individual's abilities, needs, and limitations.</p> <p>Use a combination of punishment and eventually incentives to target groups that may not be direct parties to a future peace agreement.</p> <p>DDR activities are being reevaluated as dynamic political processes rather than isolated or infrequent endeavors.</p> <p>Represents a shift from isolated interventions to activities integrated into national development plans.</p> <p>Conflicting groups are often linked to organized crime and terrorist networks.</p> <p>There is increasing recognition that each DDR intervention must be tailored, negotiated, and executed on the basis of the unique and evolving circumstances on the ground.</p>	<p>Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)</p> <p>The United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG)</p> <p>Civil society organizations</p> <p>Private sector organizations</p> <p>The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)</p>	<p>Aims to provide ex-combatants with a more sustainable economic, social, and political alternative to conflict (IOM, 2019).</p> <p>Individuals are the ultimate solution to peacebuilding challenges (Nussio, 2013).</p>	<p>Practitioners</p> <p>Scholars</p> <p>Inter-governmental organizations</p> <p>Involves experts from various fields, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and political science.</p>	<p>Reintegration in volatile situations</p> <p>Ongoing conflicts</p> <p>Nonstate armed groups</p> <p>DDR in the absence of a formal peace agreement</p> <p>Uncertain legal and political frameworks</p>	<p>Somalia: (2013-present)</p> <p>Libya: (2015 – present)</p> <p>Mali: (2019 – present)</p> <p>Central African Republic: (2016 – present)</p> <p>Yemen: (2017-present)</p> <p>Colombia: (2017-present)</p>

Source: Prepared by the author with information from Refs. [6,11,22,25,37].

Contemporary conflict environments have rendered traditional DDR approaches insufficient, prompting a transition toward what is now termed “third-generation political reintegration” This paradigm shift has led the UN Security Council to adapt its mandates, acknowledging the realities of terrorism and the intricate web of violent extremism. Such an environment demands the integration of measures to counter violent extremism with DDR strategies, marking a significant shift on a global scale [29].

Recognizing the multifaceted needs for reintegration, the third-generation DDR asserts that enduring success rests on the pillars of economic, social, and political reintegration. Notably, ex-combatants demonstrate a propensity for political involvement post-demobilization, necessitating programs that move beyond economic incentives to address broader sociopolitical goals [27,34]. As DDR processes interlace with military and counter-terrorism efforts, they become more sensitive and politically charged, reflecting a move away from purely socioeconomic models to ones that embrace a more comprehensive approach to reintegration [35].

In today’s landscape, DDR extends beyond the post-conflict phase and stretches across the entire peace continuum from prevention to resolution and from peacekeeping to sustainable development. Programs now operate before the formal end of conflict and the signing of peace accords, and fit together with initiatives in transitional justice, security sector reform, and national development strategies. This expanded scope signifies a departure from a one-size-fits-all programmatic approach to a more adaptable, context-sensitive DDR process [32,36].

This modern iteration of DDR acknowledges that traditional prerequisites may not always be present, prompting the United Nations to prioritize adaptability and tailor interventions to the unique and ever-changing realities on the ground. It distinguishes between the DDR “program,” a set of activities over a given period, and the DDR “process,” a personalized journey influenced by individual experiences, skills, and needs [8,11]. The third generation therefore views ex-combatants as active agents in post-conflict scenarios, who, with their distinctive insights and capabilities, can contribute significantly to the broader peacebuilding narrative [22].

Such a comprehensive DDR strategy is critical given the nature of modern conflict groups, which often lack clear political objectives, possess volatile command structures, and are prone to fragmentation. Moreover, their interactions with organized crime and terrorism necessitate a DDR framework capable of operating within the gray zones of conflict, where peace agreements may be nonexistent and the lines between criminality and insurgency are blurred [11]. As such, UN peace operations are increasingly required to address conflicts where traditional peacemaking strategies may be inadequate, highlighting the intricate work of third-generation DDR in complex conflict ecosystems [35].

### 3. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) in the Colombian armed conflict

#### 3.1. War and peace in Colombian armed conflict

The roots of the Colombian armed conflict can be attributed to factors common to other post-colonial nations and have been examined in the literature on peace studies. Miguel Angel Centeno’s analysis specifically highlights how wars in Latin America did not uniformly lead to the formation of strong nation-states and how the outcomes of these conflicts have shaped the region’s path toward peace and stability [38] In Latin America, violence predominantly manifested internally as power struggles within states rather than conflicts between nations. This internal nature of violence influenced post-conflict power consolidation and impeded the formation of robust centralized states [39]. Insufficient territorial control has limited the state’s capacity to implement laws, deliver justice, and safeguard its citizens nationwide, resulting in the spread of unlawful activities, circumvention of the law, and fragmentation of authority [40].

The issue of land ownership, which is characterized by unequal distribution and access, has generated initial confrontations, and continues to be a central element of the conflict. These land disputes relate to broader economic issues, such as control over agriculture, mining, and energy. Illegal activities like drug trafficking further complicate these economic concerns. This confluence of factors not only perpetuates the conflict but also alters the dynamics and structure of the armed groups [41].

The armed conflict in Colombia has been ongoing for six decades, making it the longest active conflict in the world after Myanmar (1948) [37]. Over time, conflict has evolved significantly, shaped by a diverse assembly of actors and the complex nature of violence. The conflict initially manifested as bipartisan violence, but it has since evolved to encompass guerrillas, paramilitaries, and state forces, each contributing to the conflict through their distinct approaches and tactics. This shift reflects a transition from traditional warfare to a more complex and multifaceted struggle, involving various groups in broader war strategies that intertwine violence with political and economic objectives [41].

Limited political participation and continuous pressure on political figures also perpetuate the conflict, pointing to broader governance issues in Colombia [41]. Particularly in rural areas, the historical lack of a strong governmental presence has allowed armed groups like the FARC and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) to fill power vacuums, establishing quasi-governmental structures and gaining significant territorial control. Additionally, the state’s failure to effectively govern these rural areas allows guerrilla and paramilitary groups to operate almost without opposition, maintaining their influence over local populations and prolonging the conflict.

The Colombian National Center of Historical Memory (CNMH) identifies four periods in the evolution of the Colombian armed conflict. The first period (1958–1982) marks the transition from partizan to subversive violence, with the proliferation of guerrilla groups and the rise of social mobilization. The second period (1982–1996) is characterized by the growth of the guerrillas, the emergence of paramilitaries, the crisis of the state, the expansion of drug trafficking, the 1991 Constitution, and peace processes with ambiguous results. The third period (1996–2005) marks the intensification of the conflict, with the simultaneous expansion of guerrilla and paramilitary groups, political radicalization toward a military solution, and the link between drug trafficking and terrorism. The fourth period (2005–2012) marks a readjustment of the conflict, with a state military offensive weakening the guerrillas, although they



restructured, while the failed negotiation with the paramilitaries led to rearmament and fragmentation, influenced by drug trafficking [41]. In addition, Trejos and Badillo stated that after the peace agreement with the Farc-Ep in 2016, there was a transition to a new context of armed violence (2017–2023), characterized by a constellation of violent actors with different criminal capacities in a framework of multiple armed conflicts, de-ideologized but with political content [42].

Colombia stands out as one of the most extensively researched countries due to its prolonged conflict and significant demobilization efforts [27]. The Colombian government has engaged in multiple peace negotiation processes with various armed groups since the 1980s. These negotiations occurred under different administrations, including Belisario Betancur (1982–1986) during the "La Uribe" process with the FARC-EP, Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986–1990) resulting in M – 19 demobilization, César Gaviria (1990–1994) through the Tlaxcala and Caracas dialogs involving the FARC-EP, ELN, EPL, and Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) during his tenure in El Caguán. The demobilization of the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) also holds significance as it occurred from 2002 to 2006 under Álvaro Uribe's government and contributed to experiences regarding demobilization and amnesties [32].

The last peace process carried out by the Colombian government was during the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018) and the FARC - EP, this process is still in the implementation phase, and its main characteristic feature is the inclusion of ex-combatants in the design of the reintegration policy.

### 3.2. Viability of past DDR programs in Colombia

According to the United Nations, DDR programs are only viable when certain requirements are met: 1) The signing of a negotiated ceasefire or a peace agreement that outlines the framework for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; 2) Confidence in the peace process; 3) Willingness of the parties to the armed conflict to participate in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; 4) A guarantee of minimum security [36].

Upon examining the DDR programs in Colombia from the 1980s to the early 2000s (see Table 5), it is observed that these prerequisites for viability were not completely fulfilled in any of the DDR programs during this timeframe.

Understanding the DDR processes that Colombia has experienced in terms of generations allows us to identify the viability of the peace strategies implemented by different governments before the 2016 peace agreement, which is still being implemented.

### 3.3. The first-generation DDR in Colombia's armed conflict

Political challenges and lack of institutional support hampered the first efforts in the 1980s, without an agenda for the political and social reintegration of ex-combatants, who were the sole beneficiaries of these interventions, without considering the host community.

The peace accords signed during the presidencies of Barco (1986–1990) and Gaviria (1990–1994) were notable for the importance of political reintegration, especially of former M – 19 guerrilla fighters, but with regard to social and economic reintegration, a technical approach was maintained that replicated models implemented in the 1980s, based on assistentialism and independent of the context in which the reintegration process was carried out, especially due to the lack of security conditions for the signatories, which led to what has been called in the literature on the Colombian armed conflict the genocide of the political party Unión Patriótica [43].

The individual amnesty process of the mid-1990s, on the other hand, lacked a collective identity on the part of the demobilized population, which had no decision-making power in the implementation of the reintegration strategy. The DDR processes of the 1980s and 1990s (see appendices A, B and C) represented important attempts to end the Colombian armed conflict. However, in line with the first-generation DDR, these efforts were characterized by a limited focus on security and disarmament, minimal attention to the causes of the conflict, and temporal and spatial limitations in the implementation of DDR processes.

**Table 5**  
Viability of DDR programs in Colombia (the 1980s to the early 2000s).

Viability conditions for the DDR	Bilateral truces of the 1980s	Peace pacts in the 1990s	Pardon and reintegration of guerrilla deserters in the mid-1990s	Demobilization and reintegration agreement with the AUC (2002–2006)
Signing of a negotiated peace agreement	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Trust in the peace process	No (No support by civil society, economic associations, or military forces)	Yes	No	No (Less than two percent of the signatories ratified the process)
Willingness of the parties	No (No political backing)	Yes	No	Yes
Minimum guarantee of security	No (The amnestied denounced the lack of guarantees for their personal protection)	No (Thousand ex-combatants assassinated)	Yes	Yes

Source: Prepared by the author using information from Ref. [43].

### 3.4. Second-generation DDR in Colombia's armed conflict

The demobilization and reintegration agreement with the AUC between 2002 and 2006 marked an important turning point. This process can be considered a transition to second-generation DDR because it focuses on more comprehensive reintegration, including cross-cutting issues such as transitional justice and youth, and establishing links with local communities and victims [6].

The process with the AUC (See appendix D) required a different approach than the previous processes, considering the nature of the population to be reintegrated, which was not part of a guerrilla and whose origins and motivations for taking up arms were different from the political project of the groups that were part of the previous processes; however, the strategy used was again based on an individualistic and unilateral reintegration model, although it was a collective demobilization [44].

The characteristics of the DDR process with the AUC place it within the spectrum of second-generation DDR as it was carried out in the context of an active armed conflict and the population to be demobilized was linked to different types of violence. However, the approach excluded second-generation tools such as the Community Violence Reduction, nor was a reintegration model adapted to the context applied; instead, a first-generation model was replicated, focused on economic issues and with limited outcomes, resulting in few signatories and high recidivism in criminal activities. In turn, the extension of the benefits of the process to the victim community was truncated by the extradition of the high commanders of these organizations, affecting access to truth and reparations [45].

### 3.5. Road to third-generation DDR in Colombian armed conflict

Third-generation DDR emphasizes that successful reintegration requires economic, social, and especially political support. Since ex-combatants often seek political participation after demobilization, reintegration programs must go beyond economic incentives and address broader social and political changes.

#### 3.5.1. DDR process of former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP)

On November 24, 2016, the Santos government, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP) ended a conflict lasting over half a century through a comprehensive Peace Accord (see appendix E). The agreement, which was the result of four years of public dialog in Havana, Cuba, included provisions for the disarmament and demobilization of the FARC-EP as well as the long-term reintegration of demobilizing combatants [46].

The peace agreement created a three-party monitoring and verification system comprising the Colombian government, the FARC-EP, and the United Nations. The UN Verification Mission in Colombia was established in July 2017 to authenticate the implementation of sections 3.2 and 3.4 of the peace agreement by the Government and the FARC-EP [47].

The FARC-EP has requested the avoidance of terms such as Reintegration and Demobilization in the new agreement. Instead, they propose the use of Reincorporation and Disarmament, which better reflect their desire to distinguish their processes from previous demobilization in which their enemies participated [32]. In the case of "Reincorporation," this technical term emphasizes the communal aspect of the process and the involvement of former combatants in creating their own strategies for reintegration with society. Regarding the implementation of the term "Disarmament" instead of "Demobilization," the FARC EP believes that the process would not dissolve them as a group, but rather transition them from an armed military movement to a democratic and political one [48].

The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the extinct FARC-EP subscribes to the advances of third-generation DDR, highlighting its comprehensiveness and recognition of the heterogeneity of the population to be reintegrated, including cross-cutting issues such as women, gender, children, disability-inclusive and youth, present in the latest version of the IDDRS. However, the viability of its implementation is conditioned by various factors inherent to the context in which it is developed, the most determining factor being the continuity of the armed conflict in which threats to the signatories of the agreement persist.

The conformation of territorial spaces for training and reintegration (AETCR) included in this last peace agreement breaks with some paradigms already expressed in the literature on DDR, among which: reintegration does not imply the return to the places of origin of the former combatants, and the skills and social capital generated during the war can play an advantage in situations of community reintegration [49]. The importance of the context becomes more relevant in the implementation through the AETCR, where each of these spaces represents a scenario with its own dynamics that may favor reintegration, depending on the security conditions, access to infrastructure, productive resources, and communication organization.

#### 3.5.2. The Paz Total - total peace policy

The "Paz Total" policy represents a comprehensive and ambitious approach by the current Colombian government to address the long-standing issues of armed conflict and violence in the country. This policy aims to extend beyond traditional disarmament and demobilization strategies by incorporating a broader perspective on peacebuilding and conflict resolution [50–53]. "Paz Total" is not just a strategy for negotiating with and demobilizing armed groups but also a framework for addressing the root causes of conflict. The policy aims to create a stable and enduring peace by integrating various armed groups, including the ELN and FARC-EP dissidents such as *Estado Mayor Central* (EMC) and *Segunda Marquetalia* (SM), into the social and political fabric of the nation [50,51]. One of the key aspects of "Paz Total," as highlighted by Janetsky (2023) and Valencia Agudelo (2022), is its emphasis on a legal and policy framework that enables negotiations with these groups. This approach underscores the Colombian government's recognition of the need for a legal and structured process to effectively manage the complexities of demobilization and reintegration.

Trejos & Badillo (2023) and Indepaz (2023) provide insights into how "Paz Total" is designed to address the socioeconomic disparities and historical injustices that have fueled the conflict. This includes tackling issues like land distribution, rural development,

and the drug trade, which are integral to the perpetuation of violence in Colombia. The Paz Total initiative in Colombia represents a significant advancement in the policy and practice of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of ex-combatants. This comprehensive approach underscores the intricate relationship among peace negotiations, socioeconomic reforms, and DDR processes.

Negotiations with armed groups, including politically motivated entities like the ELN and FARC-EP dissidents, as well as criminally oriented organizations, are a key element of the policy. This highlights the necessity of distinguishing between various motivations of armed groups in DDR processes and tailoring approaches accordingly [50,51]. Such nuanced negotiations, which are crucial for effective disarmament and demobilization, also underscore the complexity and diversity of contemporary conflict environments, posing unique challenges to DDR efforts. The legal and policy frameworks supporting "Paz Total" reflect the importance of a robust legislative environment in facilitating DDR processes. Laws and policies that enable negotiations, safeguard rights, and promote the reintegration of ex-combatants are fundamental to the sustainability and effectiveness of DDR [52,53].

The socio-economic integration of ex-combatants is another critical aspect [55]. Addressing issues such as land distribution, economic inequities, and the illicit drug trade is essential for long-term peace and stability, demonstrating that socio-economic development is an integral part of DDR strategies. Furthermore, political and social inclusion of ex-combatants is vital for DDR success. The policy's emphasis on providing opportunities for political participation and social acceptance is crucial for the successful reintegration of ex-combatants and reducing the risk of recidivism into armed conflict.

The policy's acknowledgment of the distinct challenges and needs of rural and urban areas affected by conflict reflects an understanding of the varied environments in which DDR must operate. This geographical differentiation is vital for addressing the root causes of conflict and ensuring successful reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life, especially in rural regions where land reform and rural development are essential [50–52,54]. Badillo & Trejos (2023) and Bosack (2023) provide insight into the questions and criticisms surrounding the policy, including the challenge of differentiating between politically motivated and criminally oriented armed groups, as well as the feasibility of implementing such a comprehensive policy. The challenges in implementing "Paz Total," including skepticism about its viability and the government's capacity, underscore the importance of realistic planning, resource allocation, and continuous monitoring in DDR initiatives [56,57].

In contrast to past DDR processes, where armed groups came to the negotiating table weakened by military offensives, the current situation presents different conditions. For instance, organizations such as the ELN have expanded their operations in Venezuela recently [58]. Meanwhile, groups such as the *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* (AGC) have the largest number of members and a significant reach in important urban areas [59]. They also generate significant income from criminal activities. The participation of FARC-EP dissidents in the negotiations depends on the impact on the implementation of the 2016 Accords. The Paz Total policy carries significant political weight and exerts considerable influence on the negotiations. It is a pillar of Petro's government and generates pressure on the government to accelerate negotiations. This pressure could impact planning and minimum conditions such as disarmament before demobilization.

### 3.6. Transformation of Colombia's policies because of the armed conflict

The relationship between armed conflict and political change is the result of a constant evolution in the dynamics of confrontations between states and illegal actors. As in other global scenarios, conflicts lead to political changes that affect the society of the affected governments. This phenomenon has been extensively studied by authors such as Korstanje, whose thesis states that terrorist acts can influence political decisions, security measures, and societal responses, affecting the balance between national security and civil liberties [60–62].

The Colombian armed conflict has prompted the implementation of various policies that have had a profound impact on society. These policies have affected several areas, including the political sphere. One notable example is the peace process with the M – 19 Guerrilla, which represented a significant turning point in the history of the conflict. For the first time, a guerrilla group was converted into a political party and participated in the constitutional reform of 1991 [63]. In the military and security field, the unsuccessful negotiations of El Caguán between the government of President Pastrana and the FARC-EP led to an increase in military spending and the displacement of the political approach for a counterinsurgency one with the military and anti-drug strategy called Plan Colombia, which was supported by the U.S. government [64].

The process with the AUC resumed the path toward the demobilization of combatants through political solutions. However, the results were not as expected. In contrast, humanitarian achievements were forged through the creation of transitional justice mechanisms such as the 2011 law on victims and land restitution, which served as a tool for recognition and compensation for the victims of the armed conflict.

In the evolution of the DDR processes between the Colombian government and the armed groups, the political component assumes greater relevance in accordance with the parameters of the third-generation DDR. This is evidenced by the various policy changes that have come into effect since the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, including the presence of the emerging political party Comunes in the legislative bodies and the incorporation of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) to reinforce the rights of victims to justice, truth, and reparation.

In the long road toward the end of the armed conflict, the DDR processes carried out between the Colombian state and guerrilla groups such as the M – 19, the FARC-EP, and the AUC influenced the reconfiguration of Colombian policies. These processes shaped constitutional reforms, transitional justice, security sector reform, and economic development frameworks on land distribution, contributing to the search for more inclusive governance with recognition of human rights and a strategic approach to security for the well-being of citizens.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. What needs to be done to make the DDR process with the FARC-EP and Paz Total policy viable and fit into a third-generation DDR model?

When it comes to the process of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), its effectiveness largely depends on how well it can be adjusted to the ever-changing and multifaceted situations encountered in real-world scenarios [27]. Clearly, the approaches and methods used in DDR programs can show considerable differences, even among communities within a single country [26]. The varied nature of situations highlights the necessity of adaptable strategies in DDR initiatives. This is reflected in the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), which are more akin to a “collection of fundamental concepts and guidelines” rather than a strict set of rules [30].

Colombia, which is frequently regarded as an exemplary case of DDR, presents a distinctive context. Colombia stands out as one of the more economically prosperous countries to engage in DDR efforts [65]. Nonetheless, the achievements in Colombia regarding DDR have encountered obstacles, notably in terms of public opinion. A study conducted within the country indicated that a considerable number of residents “feared” (41 percent) and “distrusted” (82 percent) former combatants [65]. Moreover, the reluctance to associate with ex-combatants does not necessarily stem from a direct dislike of them. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the population exhibited a degree of apprehension regarding the potential risks associated with proximity to ex-combatants. This apprehension is based on the view that ex-combatants are not inherently dangerous; rather, they are likely the targets of aggression [66].

Economic reintegration is a crucial component of DDR programs. Regrettably, numerous former combatants face challenges in obtaining formal jobs or accessing loan services. Their chances are further restricted because of their experiences of marginalization and segregation [67]. Additionally, ineffective economic reintegration not only hindered the social acceptance of ex-combatants but also fueled their widespread stigmatization. Discussions and surveys revealed that a minority’s involvement in domestic violence and criminal acts led to the general perception of ex-combatants as security risks, with entire groups being mistrusted and collectively blamed for crimes [68]. Theoretical approaches to reintegration commonly advocate that the reengagement and community acceptance of former combatants reinforce security perceptions and lower re-offending rates, with these processes intrinsically tied to the revelation of ex-combatants’ identities. This presents a stark contradiction in practice, as hiding an ex-combatant’s identity contradicts reintegration strategies, which in Colombia are inclined toward identity exposure rather than maintaining anonymity [44].

In the Colombian context, individuals who have experienced or observed the impacts of war firsthand often adopt more balanced views. Numerous victims, when discussing ex-combatants, expressed the sentiment that “judgment should be avoided.” They frequently referenced severe conditions like extreme poverty, threats to life, and motivations for revenge as compelling reasons that can drive individuals to involuntarily become part of armed groups [66]. Moreover, understanding the motivations and backgrounds of ex-combatants is essential for effective reintegration and reconciliation, a process that requires viewing them as individuals with diverse and complex histories [69].

The initiation of reintegration efforts at an early stage can significantly motivate a more authentic and lasting process of disarmament and demobilization, which may be scheduled for a later period. In circumstances where there is minimal political backing for disarmament, initiating reintegration activities could prove beneficial [25]. 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 perspective highlights the key role of social integration, community acceptance, and relational networks in facilitating a successful transition from combatant to civilian life [70–74]. In Colombia, the vital role of social reintegration is evidenced by the fact that a substantial 97 % of former combatants surveyed identified active engagement in community life as a fundamental step toward their full reintegration [70].

Furthermore, incorporating the voices and perspectives of ex-combatants in the formulation of DDR programs enhances community engagement and fosters more effective reintegration outcomes. Studies from regions like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Colombia highlight that a participatory approach in DDR processes not only improves relations within communities but also contributes to the overall success and sustainability of these programs, particularly in addressing the unique needs of diverse groups, including female ex-combatants [32,75,76]. In Colombia, the integration of ex-combatants into social service projects is increasingly recognized as a dual mechanism of ensuring reparations and fostering a collective commitment to a shared future. As highlighted in various development and reintegration initiatives, this approach not only addresses the stigma associated with ex-combatants but also actively involves them in community rebuilding efforts, symbolizing a reparative step toward societal healing and a unified future [70,77,78]. In the field of DDR, entrepreneurship is emerging as a fundamental bridge to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants into society. This approach not only helps them overcome the many challenges they face but also amplifies the positive impact of their entrepreneurial endeavors. Moreover, it provides ex-combatants with a distinctive opportunity to redefine and adapt the skills they acquired during their time in armed groups for new, socially beneficial applications in the entrepreneurial sphere [79].

In the context of DDR, ex-combatants’ wartime experiences often give them significant social capital, which can be either beneficial or detrimental in their post-conflict lives [80]. Notably, in Colombia, having connections with fellow ex-combatants does not necessarily result in increased recidivism. Communities with active civil society organizations tend to support the reintegration of these individuals by diminishing their need for separate organizational structures. This fosters smoother reentry into civilian life [70].

The evolving landscape of DDR in Colombia, shaped by the dynamic interplay of economic, social, and psychological factors, highlights the necessity of a comprehensive and inclusive approach. To effectively navigate the complexities of reintegration, it is essential to integrate ex-combatants into the fabric of society through participatory DDR programs, community engagement, and entrepreneurial initiatives. Such a multifaceted strategy not only mitigates the challenges posed by societal stigma and limited formal

employment but also leverages the unique skills and experiences of ex-combatants. Ultimately, fostering a sense of community belonging and acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of these individuals are key to achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation. Adherence to this comprehensive approach aligns with the third-generation DDR, promising a more successful integration of ex-combatants into civilian life and contributing to Colombia's long-term stability and development.

#### 4.2. *A true reintegration process*

The peace processes negotiated by the Colombian government with various guerrilla groups from the 1980s until the mid-2000s, including the AUC, were deemed unviable because of the maintenance of a reinsertion strategy instead of a reintegration phase. This reinsertion strategy was individual, assistance-based, and unilateral, failing to consider the specific nature of the population to be reintegrated. As evidenced by this study, it was part of the demobilization phase. Reinsertion was a state strategy during the war to reduce the number of armed groups. Its effectiveness indicators are based on the number of demobilized combatants. It also represents the state's disengagement by providing economic resources without considering the ex-combatant's medium and long-term future.

The implementation of individual reinsertion within collective reintegration processes, such as with the AUC, has resulted in high rates of recidivism, transformation of criminal organizations, and formation of new armed groups. This is because of the lack of flexibility, adaptation, and absence of participant involvement in the reintegration process, which has contributed to the persistence of the armed conflict.

Colombia has undergone a transformation in the names and approaches of various state agencies, culminating in the current Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN). This change seeks to overcome the short-term and welfare-oriented focus of preceding initiatives, such as the Program for Reincorporation into Civilian Life (PRVC), by adopting a sustainable, long-term approach in line with IDDRS guidelines. The challenge for ARN is to move away from traditional reinsertion practices and embrace the demands of comprehensive reintegration.

Existing literature on DDR identifies one of the main obstacles to the reintegration phase as the perception of it as a program rather than a process [49]. This issue is evident in several aspects of the implementation of the Final Agreement reached at the negotiation table in Havana. The most notable problem is the lack of clarity regarding the period established for the reintegration phase, which initially did not align with the complexities involved in implementing the agreement. Another challenge is distinguishing between reinsertion measures and reintegration strategies. For instance, the annual renewal of monetary subsidies, which are still in effect, contradicts the IDDRS recommendation that such subsidies should be limited to one year.

The establishment of Territorial Spaces for Training and Reincorporation (AETCR) represents a significant step in the reinforcement of community-based reintegration. However, the implementation of this strategy has revealed certain gaps that impact comprehensive reintegration encompassing economic, political, and social dimensions. Initially envisioned as temporary facilities for housing and training, aligning with a reinsertion perspective, the expectation was that ex-combatants would transition back to civilian life within two years. This reflects a misunderstanding of social reintegration and overlooks the reality of many former FARC-EP members who, after years in rural combat, have lost connections to their origins and may find adapting to urban life challenging due to the social isolation experienced during the conflict.

The initial divergence between the government and the FARC-EP regarding the use and purpose of designated territories for disarmament led to the transformation of temporary spaces into permanent ones. This shift has caused a novel reintegration model called community reincorporation. This model involves establishing new communities inhabited by peace agreement signatories and their families, who co-exist with neighboring populations. In this way, the objectives of the peace agreement are achieved not only for ex-combatants but also for Colombian society as a whole. Community reincorporation facilitates the socioeconomic and, when necessary, political reintegration of community members, with the goal of extending these benefits to neighboring territories.

This community reincorporation must align with the advancements of the International Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), ensuring that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of each territorial space. This includes considerations of infrastructure, security, accessibility, community organization, relations with neighboring populations, land availability, and productivity. As such, social reintegration will be conditioned by the dynamics of the armed conflict, from disarmament to the present, allowing for a nuanced approach that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities within each community.

#### 4.3. *Comparisons between reinsertion and community reincorporation and their impact on social economic, and political reintegration processes*

Before the 2016 Final Agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP, reinsertion processes encouraged ex-combatants to sever ties with armed organizations and often suppressed their experiences and skills gained during the conflict. The community reincorporation model promotes group cohesion toward legality, recognizing that certain skills acquired during conflict can be valuable in civilian life, particularly in rural production settings, given the peasant origins of many agreement signatories.

Economic reincorporation must extend beyond simply providing financial assistance and should support productive projects initiated during the reintegration phase. The peace agreement with FARC-EP entitles each ex-combatant to a "basic income" (initially for 2 years, now extended to 7 years), plus a one-time economic aid for the development of productive projects. To truly achieve reintegration and move away from dependency and the standardization of reinsertion programs, these financial supports should be accompanied by ARN representatives throughout all stages of the project. Moreover, when preferred by the ex-combatant, collective economic projects should be prioritized because they enhance the business fabric of the areas and foster commercial relationships with

surrounding zones. Monitoring and supporting such projects within the AETCR are more feasible and demand less from the ARN than individual projects, especially those developed outside these spaces.

The relationship with neighboring communities will impact the political reintegration of peace signatories. For the former FARC-EP, now represented by the political party Comunes, the Peace Agreement granted them political representation with five seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. However, given the results of past elections, it is unlikely that Comunes will retain this number of seats. Therefore, their engagement with communities near the AETCRs is crucial for exercising citizens' rights and gaining local and regional political representation. This process is gradual and relies on projects with the communities, whose benefits extend beyond the territorial spaces of training and reincorporation.

#### 4.4. Paz Total policy and associated scenarios of political fragmentation

The peace agreement with the FARC-EP, which for the first time included the armed group in the negotiation and formulation of the reintegration strategy, represents the most comprehensive effort in Colombia's recent history. Although implementation has been slow, it has succeeded in disarming ex-combatants and seeking a political solution to the conflict with this extinct guerrilla group. Currently, in the context of the Paz Total policy, the negotiation conditions are less favorable for the State than in previous processes. This is due to the military strengthening of the groups and the incentives for illegal activities that exceed the government's political offers. Additionally, the political agenda of the Petro government, which seeks to move forward with the Paz Total policy, puts additional pressure on the negotiations, diminishing state influence in the ceasefire and disarmament talks.

In past DDR processes, the political context, military strength of the armed groups, and economic incentives shaped the conditions for disarmament. During the negotiations of the 1980s and 1990s, the Colombian government largely imposed these conditions unilaterally, following military offensives that weakened the armed groups and compelled them to negotiate. However, the disarmament process with the AUC in the mid-2000s did not lead to the complete disarmament of its members. This failure resulted in the formation of new criminal gangs and an increase in violence.

The contemporary context significantly differs from that of previous eras. In its pursuit of peace, the National Government may have compromised security through its Paz Total policy, which allowed armed groups to expand their territorial control. Bilateral ceasefires, focused solely on suspending confrontations between the state and these groups, have enabled these groups to redirect their resources toward confronting their rivals. Consequently, this may increase violence among the illegal groups themselves [81]. This compromises the security of the civilian population in areas under armed control.

The concept of "political access" posits that democracies can mitigate insurgency by providing channels for political participation. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that some radical groups may not be inclined to integrate into the political system [82]. This situation can disrupt existing power structures and trigger new conflicts [83].

In Colombia, the exclusion of political and armed actors has significantly impacted the negotiations and implementation of the peace agreements. The absence of Uribismo (center-right) in the Havana negotiations with the FARC-EP served to consolidate them as the main opponents of the process [81]. This underscores the necessity of including all relevant political actors to ensure the legitimacy and success of the negotiations. Currently, the Uribismo and leaders of the Centro Democrático Party are engaged in negotiations with the ELN and the EMC, which have been instrumental in advancing the Comprehensive Rural Reform component of the agreement with the FARC-EP [81].

The current dynamics of armed actors in the context of Paz Total illustrate how the thesis of political access manifests in Colombia. Despite its military setback, the ELN has gained ground in the political arena. However, it faces internal divisions among its factions, with some engaged in negotiations, others outside them, and still others in Venezuela [81]. The AGC, which possesses considerable military capacity and has expanded its territory, is perceived primarily as a criminal and drug-trafficking organization by President Petro. This perception prevents the AGC from being politically recognized and possibly from being excluded from negotiations. In contrast, the EMC has been able to advance its territorial position and consolidate its position within the political sphere. This has been achieved through the implementation of dialog and peace policies, which have served to increase the country's public visibility and strengthen its structure. Despite its limited military capacity, Segunda Marquetalia has made progress in the political arena [84].

With two years remaining in his term and in the absence of tangible results from the Paz Total policy, President Petro's administration is faced with the decision of continuing with multiple peace processes or pursuing independent negotiations with each group. The group with the most progress has been ELN. However, the broad range of topics discussed in the negotiation rounds indicates that there are no forbidden subjects or strict limits in the negotiations [85]. Nevertheless, the ELN's statements about resuming the practice of kidnapping could undermine public support and the legitimacy of these negotiations [86]. Similarly, the attacks by the Segunda Marquetalia against civilians during the negotiations could distance this group from the Paz Total policy [87].

The Paz Total policy offers an opportunity to capitalize on the progress made in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process with the FARC-EP and to address the shortcomings in its implementation. However, if the negotiations fail to achieve their objective, there is a risk that the cycles of violence that have characterized the past will be repeated. This could lead to a shift in the state's orientation, with a preference for military solutions over negotiations, which would intensify the conflict and jeopardize the implementation of the Teatro Colón Accords.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper outlines the historical evolution of DDR, highlighting its initial focus on disarmament and demobilization and the eventual incorporation of reintegration as a crucial component. The role of various international actors in refining and standardizing

DDR processes is emphasized, and their contributions to the field are acknowledged. The first part of the study found that DDR has moved from a minimalist approach that prioritized the establishment of security to a maximalist perspective that views DDR as a vehicle for broader development and societal transformation. This shift underscores the growing recognition of the complex socio-political dimensions inherent in DDR processes.

Section 2 examined the evolution of DDR, which signifies a growing recognition of the complex realities of conflict and post-conflict scenarios. The shift toward more comprehensive approaches emphasizes the need for DDR programs that are adaptable, context-sensitive, and integrated into broader peacebuilding efforts. The emergence of DDR's third generation highlights the significance of addressing ex-combatants' diverse needs, including their sociopolitical reintegration and potential role in peacebuilding processes.

After a thorough review and analysis of the first two sections, this article reviews Colombia's journey with the DDR, which has evolved through multiple negotiations with various armed actors. It is evident that the Colombian DDR processes, specifically the FARC-EP and the broader "Paz Total" policy, represent a significant advancement in the third generation of DDR models. The 2016 peace agreement focused on community-centered "reincorporation" and transformation from an armed movement to a political entity. The comprehensive approach of Paz Total exemplifies a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in sustainable peacebuilding and reintegration. The Colombian case highlights the importance of context-specific approaches that go beyond traditional disarmament and demobilization. The emphasis on socioeconomic and political factors, the involvement of ex-combatants in the design of their reintegration strategies, and the incorporation of broader socioeconomic reforms demonstrate a sophisticated approach to addressing the root causes of conflict and ensuring long-term peace and stability.

The evolution of DDR in Colombia's armed conflict presents a framework that integrates DDR with political transformation and socioeconomic reforms. This model acknowledges the diverse nature of ex-combatants and emphasizes the importance of customized reintegration strategies. It departs from a universal approach and promotes the active involvement of ex-combatants in their reintegration, with a focus on community engagement and development.

This study concludes that DDR interventions until the mid-2000s lacked a genuine reintegration component and instead focused on a reinsertion stage corresponding to demobilization. Although the implementation of the Teatro Colón Agreement aims to address and steer efforts toward true reintegration, its execution reveals a tendency to persist in a reinsertion route, marked by a lack of long-term support commitments for ex-combatants. These factors must be considered to achieve the socioeconomic and political reintegration of ex-combatants.

The Paz Total policy presents a challenge in the contextualization of DDR processes according to the groups to be reintegrated. For instance, the ELN employs a third-generation community reintegration approach, which entails addressing the origins of the conflict with this organization, including issues such as land disposition and political reintegration. In contrast, for groups such as the AGC, the focus would be on first- or second-generation DDR, prioritizing economic and individual reintegration. This approach often involves replacing illegal income with an urban approach that can be adapted to a community violence reduction strategy. Therefore, one generation of DDR is not necessarily superior to another, nor is it necessarily an evolution. Its viability depends on adaptation to the context. Even within the same population undergoing community reincorporation, there may be individuals who have signed the peace agreement but who seek their own individual paths and prefer the traditional DDR model as an alternative.

The Colombian DDR processes should be highly adaptable to the challenges posed by different armed groups and the diverse motivations of combatants. Considering these findings, several policy recommendations emerge. First, DDR strategies should be adaptable and tailored to the unique political and social landscape, addressing the specific needs of diverse groups such as women, children, and indigenous communities. Second, DDR should be integrated into a broader peacebuilding framework and closely coordinated with development programs and initiatives aimed at strengthening governance and the rule of law.

In addition, the involvement of local communities in the DDR process is essential to ensure sustainable reintegration and reconciliation. Long-term support and monitoring of DDR initiatives are crucial for their success, requiring continuous evaluation and adaptation of strategies to respond to evolving conditions. Building the capacity of local institutions to manage DDR processes through training, resource allocation, and fostering partnerships among government, civil society, and international organizations is also essential.

The fact that this study focuses on Colombia may limit the applicability of its findings to other contexts. It would be worthwhile to analyze the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) experiences of other countries. Future research should focus on comparative analyses that incorporate multiple case studies of active armed conflicts around the world. This expanded framework could contribute to the development of context-specific strategies, thus improving the effectiveness of DDR processes.

The current research employs a qualitative approach; however, integrating quantitative methods could substantially enhance the study. Developing quantitative analyses based on existing material would allow for a more thorough evaluation of different DDR strategies. For instance, statistical analysis could assess the success rates of reintegration initiatives by focusing on the outcomes of both individual and collective ex-combatant productive projects within designated reincorporation zones.

It is crucial to emphasize the role of local communities in the DDR process. Future studies should explore community-based approaches that facilitate reintegration and reduce the stigma against ex-combatants. Additionally, understanding the determinants of successful community reincorporation, particularly the role of social capital, could aid in designing DDR programs oriented toward collective reintegration processes.

Furthermore, future research on the Colombian context should evaluate the current reincorporation processes to determine whether they have merely repeated the cycles of previous initiatives, which were limited to economic reinsertion strategies, or have achieved a comprehensive transformation toward a holistic reintegration strategy that includes social, political, and economic components.

## Data availability statement

Data generated or analyzed during this study are provided in full within the published article and its supplementary materials.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**José Miguel Rodríguez-Castellón:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## Appendix A

### *Bilateral truces in the 1980s, amnesties to guerrillas, and reintegration programs (1984)*

Participating Groups	Beneficiary Population	Characteristics of the DDR Intervention
FARC, M – 19, EPL, ELN (Did not subscribe to the truce), ADO (Demobilized)	1423 Guerrillas benefiting from amnesty	Benefited from land delivery programs, rural housing support, credits, and social support commitments.

Source: Prepared by the author using information from Ref. [43].

The peace dialogs initiated by various guerrilla groups and the government of Belisario Betancur were a groundbreaking event, representing a new precedent: the coexistence of both governmental and insurgent parties at the negotiation tables for discussing peace. Initiated by various guerrilla groups and the government of Betancur, the dialogs, while historic, generated considerable controversy due to perceived failures. Multiple stakeholders, driven by their own interests, often overlooked the substantial charge civil society had during the ongoing conflict [88]. However, these dialogs faced challenges rooted in political dynamics. The Peace Process encountered hurdles due to limited support from traditional parties and Congress for the presidential initiative. Between March and August 1984, the Peace Commission successfully negotiated cease-fire agreements with major guerrilla groups, although not universally embraced, opting instead for a truce over a specific period [89].

## Appendix B

### *Peace pacts in the 1990s and reintegration of guerrilla and militia organizations*

Participating Groups	Beneficiary Population	Characteristics of the DDR Intervention
M – 19, EPL, MQL, PRT, CRS, Popular Militias of Medellín, MIR COAR	6500 demobilized combatants	Demobilized individuals received amnesty, initial sustenance aid, healthcare, access to productive credits, and technical assistance.

Source: Prepared by the author using information from Ref. [43].

This process took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the governments of Virgilio Barco (1986–1990) and César Gaviria (1990–1994), it was characterized by facilitating the political participation of the armed groups involved. Among these, the proposals and objectives achieved by the Movimiento 19 de Abril (M19) and the Ejército Popular de Liberación EPL (Popular Liberation Army) stand out [90]. The political success of the M – 19 as an electoral phenomenon contributed to the promulgation of a new Constitution and allowed one-third of the National Constituent Assembly to belong to the party that emerged from this Guerrilla [91].



## Appendix C

### *Decree 1385 of 1994, pardon and reintegration of guerrilla deserters during the administrations of Presidents Gaviria, Samper, and Pastrana*

Participating Groups	Beneficiary Population	Characteristics of the DDR Intervention
Former combatants from the FARC-EP, ELN, and other smaller guerrilla groups, on an individual basis and without the condition of being part of a peace agreement.	4000 pardoned deserter ex-combatants	This reintegration phase is based on a personal decision and is more of a desertion rather than a demobilization.

Source: Prepared by the author using information from Ref. [43].

Decree 1385 of 1994 provided an opportunity for insurgents to voluntarily and individually renounce their weapons in exchange for socioeconomic benefits contingent upon their legal status [92]. In contrast to previous instances, the reintegration of ex-combatants in this case did not arise from a collective negotiation as part of a peace agreement or group disarmament. Instead, former combatants from various guerrilla organizations such as the FARC-EP and ELN pursued their individual reinsertion voluntarily by abandoning their armed groups and availing themselves of the benefits provided through pardon mechanisms. However, it should be noted that these individuals have limited opportunities to engage in political endeavors with a shared identity due to certain restrictions on collective participation [43].

## Appendix D

### *Demobilization and reintegration agreement with the AUC (2002–2006)*

Participating Groups	Beneficiary Population	Characteristics of the DDR Intervention
United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)	Initially 15,000 combatants, with the inclusion of collaborators and associates, it escalated to 36,455.	The reintegration phase was characterized by promoting individual desertions, military offensives, and demanding that all illegal armed groups unilaterally cease hostilities under a condition for amnesty.

Source: Prepared by the author using information from [43].

From 2003 to 2006, the Uribe administration undertook a demobilization initiative targeting the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), a conglomerate of paramilitary groups in Colombia. This effort included the implementation of Law 975 of 2005, known as the Justice and Peace Law, which was designed to oversee both demobilization efforts and transitional justice measures [32]. However, only a small fraction, approximately 2 %, of the more than 30,000 demobilized combatants affiliated with the former AUC endorsed their application of this law [45].

## Appendix E

### *DDR process of former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP)*

Participating Group	Beneficiary Population	Characteristics of the DDR Intervention
Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP)	14,024 Former FARC-EP members	First peace process to include the government counterpart,

Source: Prepared by the author using information from Ref. [43].

Since the end of 2006, the agreement is still being implemented.

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