CPS Dataverse File for Partners in Crime: Comparative Advantage and Kidnapping Cooperation

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September 30, 2024

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This document serves as the *Comparative Political Studies* Dataverse file for "Partners in Crime: Comparative Advantage and Kidnapping Cooperation," providing research documentation and data that support the findings of this study. In "Partners in Crime," I argue that explicit differences and comparative advantage explains why rebels and criminals—organizations that typically eschew collaboration—cooperate to produce violence. The article introduces what I call "black market white labeling"—cooperation that emerges when one actor buys an illicit good or service from another and re-brands it as their own. To demonstrate this phenomenon in practice and the conditions under which it occurs, I focus on kidnapping, an unexplored but common form of armed group violence. Drawing on 113 interviews with Colombian kidnappers and hostage recovery personnel from Colombia and the United States, I theorize the conditions under which rebels "outsource" violence to criminal gangs or produce it "in house."

This study's interview protocol was approved under the George Washington University Institutional Review Board Protocol # 061743; Dartmouth College Institutional Review Board Protocols # 00032606 and 00032666; and CITI Program Certification on Human Subjects Research ID: 6345108. All elements of this study conform to the "Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research," approved by the American Political Science Association Council in April 2020. The study was designed with ethical priorities in mind, adhering to protecting human subjects in recruitment, consent, participation, data management, data analysis, and publication, as described below.

Because the study relies on interview testimony from at-risk human subjects, the underlying data remains protected by the author.[1] In lieu of sharing the raw material, this file provides documentation of the interview process, discussing limitations on the data availability and my efforts to protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants.

This document proceeds as follows. First, I discuss the tension between "transparency" and other ethical considerations for qualitative research. I outline the benefits and risks of interviews as a source of evidence, with a focus on four ethical considerations: privacy, confidentiality, retraumatization, and financial support. Section 2 focuses on my research in Colombia, with information on how I identified and recruited research participants and subsequently conducted interviews. Section 3 is similarly organized and provides information about my interviews with U.S. hostage recovery personnel. The final section discusses the data analysis process for both sets of interviews: how I processed interview evidence and selected quotes for inclusion in this article.

[1]This document shares some text with "Replication Data for: 'The Logic of Kidnapping in Civil War: Evidence from Colombia' " (Gilbert, 2022a). "Partners in Crime" and "The Logic of Kidnapping in Civil War" draw on many of the same underlying interviews, and thus the research design, data-generation, and data analysis processes are similar.

1 "Replication File" for Interview-Based Research

In recent decades, political scientists have focused on the importance of transparency in published work (see, for example King, 1995; Lupia and Elman, 2014). The push toward transparency—particularly for positivist scholars using quantitative methods—has focused largely on replicability: sharing the datasets, model specifications, and code that produced research findings. But as scholars working in different methodological traditions have argued, "transparency" has divergent meanings across scholarly communities; *replicability* need not be the only relevant standard for being "open, reflexive, and analytically systematic" in our work (Jacobs et al., 2021, 172). This appendix shares the principle outlined in the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations (QTD) that while data transparency is a worthy goal, "researchers' ethical obligations to protect human participants and their communities ought to take priority over the sharing of information with research *consumers*" (Jacobs et al., 2021, 174, emphasis added).

Rather than focusing solely on *replicability*, in other words, qualitative researchers should prioritize transparency in three other ways: They should be transparent about how they generated evidence, how they reached their conclusions, and how they protected research participants from possible harms of the study (Jacobs et al., 2021, 174). I tackle each of these issues document below.

1.1 Why interviews?

"Partners in Crime: Comparative Advantage and Kidnapping Cooperation" is based on 113 interviews that I conducted between 2017 and 2023 in Colombia and the United States. There are two primary reasons that I used interviews for this research project.

First, "Partners in Crime" is an explicitly inductive, theory-building article, in which I conceptualize a form of cooperation and theorize the conditions under which it occurs. The insights in this project stemmed from another, related research design. During fieldwork in Colombia for another project (Gilbert, 2020, 2022b), interview subjects repeatedly brought up the concept of *vende de secuestrada* ("selling the kidnapped person"), in which criminal gangs would initially abduct hostages with the intention of selling them to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) or National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla groups. The security personnel and civil society leaders I spoke to described this as a unique feature of Colombian violence. However, conversations with U.S. hostage recovery personnel for another project (Gilbert and Prather, 2024) and several developments in the news suggested that this phenomenon often occurs elsewhere.

Such chance insights led me to consider writing about this particular phenomenon, which was otherwise unrelated to the projects from which it stemmed. Once research participants had told me about *vende de secuestrada* and hostage sales, I began explicitly asking subsequent research participants if they had insights on the topic to share. In this manner, I first learned about the puzzle, and only later did my questions about it take shape. This process will be familiar to researchers who engage in fieldwork: as Sean Yom writes, "Few dispute that comparativists frequently induce new hypotheses through private experiences, data anomalies, and other atheoretical desiderata.

The impetus for new research often begins at this personal level, when scholars observe things in the political world that contradict prior expectations" (2015, 625). Such was the process by which I learned of a phenomenon that had been unexplored—and at times, negated—by existing literature on criminal and political groups.

The second reason for employing interviews is that interviews represent the most plausible way to study this phenomenon, because of its criminal nature and elision in quantitative measures of kidnapping. As described in the article, Colombia's *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica* database of 39,058 kidnappings does not record or reflect hostage transfers between kidnapping organizations. Instead, the dataset records the perpetrator as the group that ultimately held each hostage and used the leverage of a human captive to coerce concessions (CNMH, 2013a). Thus, there is currently no quantitative data that can be used to study this phenomenon. As importantly, I chose to conduct interviews because I wanted to know not just that something has happened, but *why* and *how* it transpires. Speaking to those intimately involved provides a way to understand kidnapping as a process, moving beyond correlates to explore motivation and mechanisms. Given that kidnapping violates both national and international law, it would also be difficult to study using other research methods that might help access perpetrator rationale, including surveys, experiments, or analysis of archival records.

The decision to conduct interviews, however, introduces a range of other challenges, related to ethics, reliability, and sampling (Mosley, 2013). Next, I outline concerns in four areas of research: privacy, confidentiality, trauma, and financial compensation/ conflict of interest. Sections 2 and 3 of this appendix explain the strategies I used to mitigate harm.

1.2 Ethical considerations for research participants

Research with human subjects (here, "research participants") should be guided by the ethical principles laid out in the Belmont Report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Research, 1978). *Respect for persons* requires that researchers honor the autonomy of research participants (and protect those whose autonomy is diminished); this principle determines the process of informed consent, whereby participants enter research willingly and with an understanding of the potential benefits and harms of participation. *Beneficence* concerns mitigating the potential harms, and maximizing the potential benefits, of research participation. Finally, *justice* requires that the opportunity to participate in research—and the chance of receiving its benefits—be distributed according to some notion of fairness. The first two (respect for persons and beneficence) are most relevant in considering my research design; they imply considerations regarding privacy, confidentiality, trauma, and financial support.

Privacy

Privacy refers to measures that ensure that research participants have control over who knows about their participation in research. A violation of privacy occurs when a subject's participation

in the study is revealed, even in the absence of their connection to specific evidence or conclusions. Sharing a list of interview participants without their explicit consent would constitute a violation of privacy, for instance; so too would allowing participants to be seen entering a location associated exclusively with the study. All aspects of the research design—from recruitment to participation to publication—prioritized participant privacy, as described in Sections 2 and 3.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to measures that ensure that research participants have control over whether they are explicitly connected to any resulting data from the project, including quotes from interviews. Attributing quotes to specific interlocutors *who have not consented to public attribution* would constitute a violation of confidentiality. Moreover, the maximally transparent approach of posting interview transcripts—even with names redacted—would risk violating confidentiality: It is impossible for a researcher to know whether the full context of an interview would risk identifying a particular interlocutor based on the specific experiences and knowledge shared in an interview. Moreover, posting interview transcripts would violate the promises I made to both the participants in this research and to the Institutional Review Boards at George Washington University and Dartmouth College that approved my research protocols.

As discussed below, I provide blanket confidentiality to all research participants in categories deemed "higher than minimal risk." For those Colombian public figures who participated in research, I provided them the option of confidentiality. Providing such confidentiality also helps protect data quality. Especially in discussing sensitive and illegal matters, research participants may be willing and able to share better information if they do not fear public association with the underlying data.

Trauma

Even when participants' identities are safeguarded, research can pose emotional and psychological harm to participants. In the case of kidnapping, talking about past violence—whether as perpetrator, target, or victim of said violence—has the potential for re-traumatization. Indeed, some research participants cried during our conversations, even as they affirmed that participating in an interview helped them reclaim agency about their experiences. Participants may experience emotional or psychological discomfort discussing past violence or victimization, and my duty as an ethical researcher is to minimize harm.

Financial support and compensation

A final set of ethical concerns arise from the role of financial support, compensation, and conflicts of interest. Such concerns reflect the importance of transparency *toward research participants*, and not only toward research consumers. As such, I disclosed my funding sources to research participants and throughout the publication process, as I do here: This research was supported by

a Peace Scholar Award from the United States Institute of Peace and Minerva Research Initiative; a World Politics and Statecraft Fellowship from the Smith Richardson Foundation; a Cosmos Scholars Award from the Cosmos Club Foundation; the George Washington University; and the Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College. Due to the risks associated with participation, there was no financial compensation paid to research subjects for participating in the study. Offering compensation would undermine autonomy and justice.

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With these concerns in mind, the rest of this document outlines the data-generation and data-analysis processes employed in this study. In the absence of sharing interview transcripts, I share extensive details about the research process: identifying, accessing, and recruiting research participants; the nature of my interactions with interview participants; coding procedures and data analysis; and the efforts I made to protect research participants throughout.

2 Kidnapping in Colombia

Over four trips to Colombia in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2023, I conducted 91 interviews in research sites in five Colombian departments: Atlántico, Bolívar, Cundinamarca, Santander, and Tolima [departments marked 1, in dark blue, in Figure 1].

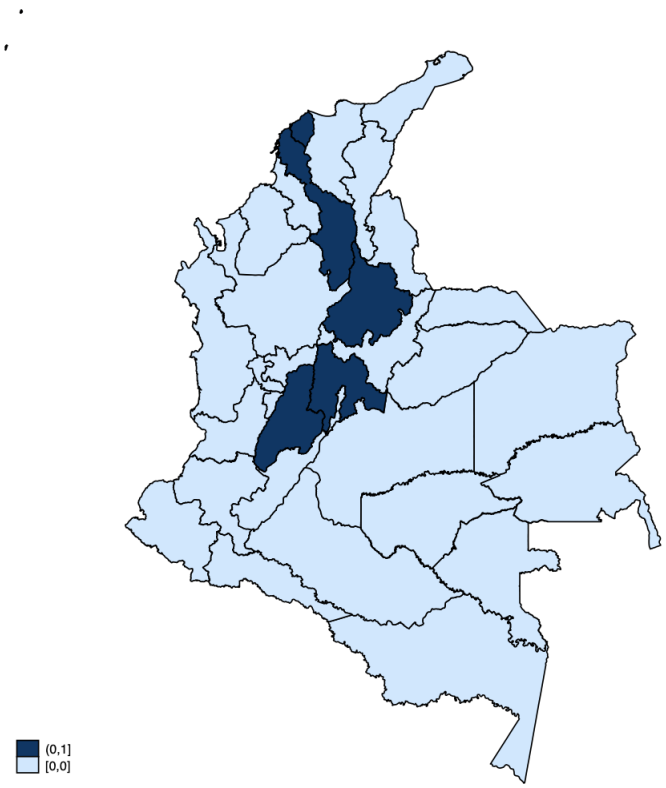

Figure 1: Colombian Departments – Fieldwork Sites

2.1 Identifying and recruiting participants

Two primary challenges shaped the process of identifying and recruiting interview participants. First, I sought to interview members of rare (and variably private) populations: former perpetrators, victims, and targets of kidnapping violence. Following Cohen and Arieli (2011), snowball sampling would be an appropriate way to select interview partners from rare populations, such as those I wished to study. Also known as "chain referral sampling" or "respondent-driven sampling," snowball sampling works by asking interviewees for recommendations for future interviewees (Lynch, 2013).

However, the populations I wished to interview were not only rare; they were also vulnerable. Despite its popularity in interview research, "snowball sampling" presents inherent dilemmas for privacy: asking participants to provide names of former perpetrators or victims could violate privacy before people even consent to participate in research. Instead, I asked research participants if they would pass along *my* contact information to others who might be willing to speak with me. Upon

receiving consent, initial contacts, including scholars, journalists, military officers, and kidnap & ransom insurance personnel facilitated introductions to a wide range of security personnel, civil society actors, and ex-combatants. Thus, while I relied on what might be considered a "snowball sampling" design, my subtle adaptation was designed to protect participant privacy throughout the study.

In this manner, early contacts helped make connections: A relative's friend introduced me to a senior military official, who then helped me connect with the army and police *Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal* ("GAULA," the special anti-kidnapping and anti-extortion units); a journalist connected me with a group of ex-combatants, who then shared my contact information with others; an American kidnap & ransom insurance executive shared my contact information with Colombian hostage negotiators; experts at the United States Institute of Peace connected me with scholars and policymakers in Colombia. I ended every interview with a request for more introductions. I sought every opportunity and said yes to every invitation.

I also worked to mitigate bias by engaging in a range of sampling methods and deliberately drawing on varied data. Beyond "snowball sampling," I used "purposive sampling"—a "form of non-random sampling that involves selecting elements of a population according to specific characteristics deemed relevant to the analysis," yielding a sample that is roughly "representative" of the population (Lynch, 2013, 41). Specifically, I sought out participants who had experienced the different facets and roles of kidnapping in Colombia: victims, perpetrators, and their communities; police, military, and government officials; and subject matter experts, ranging from the chief security officers of major multinational corporations to judges from Colombia's transitional justice court.

This was undoubtedly an unpredictable process with the potential for bias based on the contacts I was able to make. To the best of my ability, I sought a wide variety of unrelated sources, to limit the bias that could affect any small-n, non-random selection. To my surprise, I heard remarkably consistent perspectives on kidnapping and armed group cooperation from antithetical sources, including from the highest- and lowest-ranking ex-combatants of the FARC and ELN; ex-combatants who deserted and those who participated in the peace negotiations; scholars who spent their careers studying these organizations and officers who spent their careers fighting them.

Below, I include information on the 91 interviews I conducted with and about former perpetrators, victims, and subject matter experts on the Colombian civil war. All ex-combatants, and any other subjects who wishes to remain anonymous, are identified with a first name alias. Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 provide information on interview subjects by name or alias, role and organization, and date; they are organized by category of participant.

Table 1: Ex-Combatant Interview Subjects

Alias	**Role**	**Organization**	**Date**
"Jhon"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	8.4.17
"Cesár"	former commander	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	8.8.17
"Laura"	spokesperson	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	8.8.17
"Rober"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	8.8.17
"Jose Luis"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	1.31.18
"Fernando"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2.8.18
"Raúl"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2.8.18
"Jeni"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2.28.18
"Joanna"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2.28.18
"Machito"	ex-combatant	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2.28.18
"Jeronimo" *	former commander	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	5.22.19
"Santiago"	former commander	National Liberation Army	5.22.19
"Barba"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Belino"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Camilo"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Culebro"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Duane"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Erika"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Karen"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Kevin"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Marco"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Yierley"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.29.19
"Camila"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.30.19
"Daniela"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.30.19
"Ernesto"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.30.19
"Jimena"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.30.19
"Jonatan"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.30.19
"Julian"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.30.19
"Yorly"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	5.30.19
"Hernan"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army/ FARC	5.30.19
"Luis Alberto"	ex-combatant	April 19th Movement	6.1.19
"Medardo"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	6.1.19
"Miguel"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army	6.1.19
"Gerardo"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army/ FARC	6.1.19
"Valeria" *	former commander	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2.9.23
"Mathias"	ex-combatant	National Liberation Army/ FARC	2.16.23
"Emmanuel" *	former commander	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	2.22.23

* indicates that the participant was also a government or political party official

Table 2: Government Interview Subjects

Name/Alias	**Role**	**Organization**	**Date**
Alberto Mejia	General, Commander	National Army of Colombia	7.18.17
Samuel Salinas Valencia	Coronel, National Director	Military GAULA	7.26.17
Ivan Ricardo Zorro Pinzon	GAULA Coordinating Prosecutor	Attorney General of Colombia	8.4.17
Fernando Araújo *	Former Foreign Minister	Government of Colombia	8.12.17
Gustavo Camargo	Coronel	Police GAULA	3.5.18
Andres Pastrana *	Former President	Government of Colombia	3.6.18
Gerson Arias	Director, Technical Secretary	Colombian Truth Commission	5.16.19
Daniel Garcia-Peña	Former High Commissioner	Colombian Peace Commission	5.28.19
Gina Cabarcas	Director	Search Unit: Armed Conflict's Disappeared Persons	6.5.19
Rand Beers	Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State	International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs	11.1.22
William Brownfield	Former Ambassador to Colombia	Government of the United States	11.22.23
Francisco Santos *	Former Vice President	Government of Colombia	2.14.23
Franklin Hernandez	Coronel	Police GAULA	2.17.23
Julieta Lemaitre	High Court Magistrate	Special Jurisdiction for Peace	2.23.23
Andres Bernal	Auxiliary Magistrate	Special Jurisdiction for Peace	2.24.23

* indicates that the official was also formerly a hostage. In addition to being held hostage and serving as the Vice President of Colombia, Francisco Santos also founded *Fundación Pais Libre*, an anti-kidnapping NGO.

Table 3: Hostage/Target Interview Subjects

Name/Alias	**Role**	**Date**
"Cristian"	Target	multiple
"Emiliano"	Hostage	7.13.17
"Juan David"	Hostage	2.16.19
Fernando Araújo *	Hostage	8.12.17
Andres Pastrana *	Hostage	3.6.18
"Thiago"	Family member	2.7.23
"Arturo"	Hostage	2.8.23
Francisco Santos *	Hostage	2.14.23
"Valentina"	Family member	2.14.23
Fernando Araújo Jr. *	Family member	2.27.23
"Samuel"	Target	3.10.23
"Jorge"	Hostage	7.21.23
"Andres"	Family member	7.21.23
David Rohde	Hostage	4.6.24

* indicates that the hostage or target was also a government official

Table 4: Private Sector Interview Subjects

Name/Alias	**Role**	**Organization**	**Date**
"Alice"	K&R insurance executive	(redacted)	5.17.17
"Fred"	Director, Crisis Response	(redacted)	9.29.17
"David"	Founder	Colombian security firm (redacted)	2.5.18
Martin Burye	Security Director, Americas	Mars Global Security	2.7.18
"Simon"	Director of Operations	International security company (redacted)	2.8.18
"Cristian"	Executive	(redacted)	2.13.18
Hernán Périco	Security Chief for Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru	Phillip Morris	2.13.18
Luis Mozas	Director for Security	Abbott	2.13.18
Ben Hockman	Head of Crisis Consultancy	D4C	2.21.18
Sergio Guzman	Former Colombia Lead	Control Risks	2.21.18
"Nicolas"	Chief of Security	(redacted)	2.22.18
Pablo Enciso	President	Overseas Security Advisory Council	2.26.18
Alvaro Gomez	Global Security Advisor	Pfizer, GE, Exxon Mobil	2.26.18
Jared Genser	Managing Director	Perseus Strategies	1.19.19
"Jose Luis"	Chief Executive Officer	Global insurance firm (redacted)	6.4.19

Table 5: Civil Society Interview Subjects

Name/Alias	**Role**	**Organization**	**Date**
Christoph Harnish	Bogotá Mission Chief	International Committee of the Red Cross	7.27.17
Olga Lucia Gomez	Former Executive Director	Pais Libre Foundation	8.3.17
Herbin Hoyos	Journalist and Founder	Voces de Secuestro radio program	1.31.18
Richard McColl	Independent journalist	Casa Amarillo	3.5.18
Victor de Currea-Lugo	Professor	National University of Colombia	5.10.19
Luis "Lucho" Celis Méndez	Advisor	Redprodepaz	5.13.19
Sergio Guarín León	Executive Director	Corporación Reconciliación Colombia	5.20.19
"Natalia"	Lawyer and advocate	(redacted)	5.23.19
Mat Charles	Journalist	The Guardian	5.24.19
Ariel Avila	Deputy Director	Fundación Paz y Reconciliación	5.25.19
Alvaro Villarraga	Former Director	Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica	6.5.19
Viviana Arias	Project Manager	Cifras y Conceptos	2.7.23
César Caballero	Director	Cifras y Conceptos	2.24.23

2.2 Conducting interviews

Kidnapping is illegal in Colombia. As a "crime against individual liberty," *secuestro extorsivo* (kidnapping for extortion) occurs when someone "seizes, extracts, withholds or hides a person with the purpose of demanding a benefit or any utility for their freedom, or for something to be done or omitted or for publicity purposes of a political nature" (Bernate Ochoa and Sintura Varela, 2019, 52). But it is not only perpetrators who are criminalized in Colombian law; the government also penalized the *targets* of kidnapping. In 1993, Law 40, *Estatuto Nacional Contra el Secuestro* ("National Statute Against Kidnapping") criminalized paying ransoms directly or through insurance intermediaries.[2] While portions of Law 40 have since been repealed, most targets I met had faced kidnapping violence at a time when paying ransoms had been against the law.

The illegal nature of kidnapping meant that participation in an interview likely entailed revealing knowledge of or participation in crimes. Doing so could be risky for participants if there were any way that the information they share with me could be used to harm them or others—whether as evidence in criminal investigations or as fodder for extra-legal revenge (Balcells, 2017; Bateson, 2021). Despite the fact that most crimes had passed their statutes of limitations (and FARC ex-combatants were granted a form of amnesty in the peace process), it was nonetheless crucial for me to design the interviews to minimize potential risk to participants for sharing their knowledge of illegal behavior.

To ensure that participants' statements about illegal behavior would not cause harm or other repercussions, I designed my interviews with the utmost attention to protecting participant confidentiality. Across the study, I took measures to prevent identification of participants asked about illegal behavior. For example, I conducted nearly all of my interviews alone. Before we began the interview, I explicitly told participants not to mention any details of specific crimes. Instead, I asked them to focus on general knowledge that any member of the group would have. With the exception of former commanders, currently serving in public roles, absolutely no identifying information about former combatants was recorded at any time. Finally, because I never knew most ex-combatants' real names, it was easy to use aliases in my writing. Participants (including ex-combatants, former hostages, and some security personnel) are identified by a single, first-name alias, along with their organization (i.e., "ex-FARC combatant"), general titles that could not be used to identify any individual's participation in the study. Of course, using aliases presents a hurdle to "replication"—neither I nor future researchers would be able to replicate or verify the precise quotes from specific participants. Nevertheless, I judged the obligation of minimizing risk to research participants as a solemn commitment to conducting ethical research on criminal phenomena, and a commitment that supersedes the legitimate interest in replicability (Jacobs et al., 2021).

Other aspects of the research process could pose a risk to participant privacy. For instance, the Belmont Principle of "respect for persons" dictates that human subjects provide informed consent

[2]Law 40 of 1993, "Por la cual se adopta el estatuto nacional contra el secuestro y se dictan otras disposiciones." Online at http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co.

for participating in research—which is central to reducing re-traumatization. But consent can violate privacy if at-risk participants must sign documents that the researcher subsequently saves. That is, there was an inherent tension in the ethical principles I sought to uphold. To sidestep this tension while maintaining necessary protections, I obtained a university exemption to conduct oral (rather than written) informed consent with all research project participants. I spoke with participants about the risks of research and asked for their affirmative, verbal consent to continue, at which point all participants had the opportunity to ask questions and/or opt out of the study.

Privacy concerns also influenced where I conducted interviews. I worked with interview participants to find locations that prioritized their privacy while maintaining my own safety, including parks or quiet corners of coffee shops, or when relevant, in a participant's office or home. Twice, I secured access to official demobilization sites run by the Colombian government and international organizations—one for former FARC combatants, one for former ELN combatants—where I conducted multiple interviews across several days.

Finally, I focused on kidnapping's sensitivity in conducting the interviews. I followed a semi-structured interview design, crafting a flexible list of questions and topics to discuss. I started nearly all interviews with a few questions to help make the subject comfortable before asking questions specifically related to my research. For example, I asked all ex-combatants about how, when, and why they joined their guerrilla group, and what roles they had held in the group. I asked private security personnel to tell me about their professional trajectory and the focus of their current work. I also ended all ex-combatant interviews by asking what they learned in the organization and what they have learned since demobilizing.

Semi-structured interviews beneficially allow unexpected paths in the conversation, as participants took the interview in an unexpected direction and elaborated on a topic I had not thought to raise. The semi-structured design also allowed me to be sensitive to the participant's experience of the interview, steering away from clearly uncomfortable subjects, and toward whatever the subject wanted to discuss. One notable drawback of this approach is that it prevented systematic comparison across interviews, as I did not ask all subjects the same questions. Ultimately, however, the dual imperatives to avoid re-traumatizing interview participants and to recruit a diverse research population was better suited to the more flexible approach. Throughout, I clearly conveyed that participants could stop the interview at any time or refrain from answering any question that made them uncomfortable. During the interviews, I found that former combatants and victims alike were quite eager to share their perspective with an outside observer.

In conceiving a list of possible interview questions, I divided interview participants into the following categories:

- Class A = former combatants
- Class B = government and private sector security personnel
- Class C = other subject matter experts (academics, NGOs)

I asked questions related to several overarching topics: armed group goals, kidnapping practices, targeting, and combating kidnapping.

Group goals/ kidnapping practices (Class A)

1. What were the goals of your group? What did your group hope to achieve?
2. Why do people join your group? How did recruitment work?
3. How did your group fund its activities? Did this change over time?
4. Did your group kidnap?
5. If so, what was a typical kidnapping like?
6. Can you tell me about the work required for a kidnapping?
7. At what level (i.e. how senior) were decisions to kidnap made?
8. Was kidnapping spontaneous? Planned?
9. What kind of people were taken? What did the group demand?
10. Were kidnappings made public? Kept secret?

Similarly, I asked a set of questions to Classes B and C about the armed groups' kidnapping practices:

1. What did the average kidnapping look like when perpetrated by the FARC, ELN, M-19, or other groups?
2. How consistent were the characteristics of kidnappings?
3. What was the average ransom? How were ransom funds used?

Targeting (Classes A, B, C)

1. Who is the ideal hostage? What were important targets?
2. Did kidnapping put groups' relationship with the local populations at risk? Why or why not?
3. How did groups think about kidnapping foreigners, journalists, and aid workers?
4. Do groups treat different types of hostages differently (i.e. more violence, longer captivity, larger ransoms, depending on the hostage)?

Combating kidnapping (Classes B and C)

1. What are the differences between the security and political imperatives in combating kidnapping?

2. What were the most dangerous periods of kidnapping? Why?

3. What is the best way to prevent kidnapping?

4. What were the biggest successes? Failures?

3 U.S. Hostage Recovery Personnel

"Partners in Crime" also draws on evidence from 22 interviews with American policymakers and servicemembers responsible for hostage recovery. In 2023, I traveled to Washington, D.C. and also conducted subsequent interviews via phone and Zoom. These interviews were conducted primarily for another project (Gilbert and Prather, 2024), but I included one or two questions about kidnapping cooperation in each interview in order to probe the generalizability of my findings from Colombia.

3.1 Identifying and recruiting participants

Between January and July 2023, I interviewed current and former officials from the Hostage Response Group (HRG): the office in the White House National Security Council that make high-level hostage recovery decisions; the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell (HRFC): an interagency, operational body housed at the FBI; and the office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs (SPEHA): the State Department's chief diplomat for hostage cases. I also interviewed senior Congressional staff responsible for hostage recovery legislation, as well as senior military officers who participated in hostage recovery missions. I conducted interviews by phone, Zoom, and in person. Given the sensitive nature of this subject, and the fact that many interview participants are currently serving in government, I guaranteed all interview participants confidentiality as a condition for participating in interviews. Moreover, due to the small size of these offices and the limited number of officials who have ever served in these roles, I do not specify whether quotes are attributed to current or former officials, nor which office they served, as this would almost certainly identify individual participants by a process of elimination.

I used a combination of convenience sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling to reach current and former officials from the population described above. These three sampling methods I use are appropriate for obtaining interviews from a non-random sample (Lynch, 2013; Mosley, 2019). First, *convenience sampling* entails gaining information from interview participants who are convenient or accessible for the interviewer. In this case, I had pre-existing, professional relationships with several of the interview subjects, given my prior research in this issue area. I reached out to those contacts and asked to interview them; all accepted the invitation. Second, *purposive sampling* entails identifying interview participants because they have characteristics needed for the sample. I used purposive sampling to make sure that I had reached each relevant office across each administration. So, for instance, had I not had pre-existing contacts with anyone from the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell during the Biden Administration or the Special Presidential Envoy's office during the Trump Administration, I targeted interview invitations accordingly, reaching out to individuals via LinkedIn or through contact information provided by other interview participants. In this manner, I reached all relevant entities across all relevant administrations, branches, and political parties. Third, *snowball sampling* entails asking interview participants to help identify additional subjects. At the end of every interview, I asked if the participant had any recommenda-

Table 6: Interview Dates and Format

Interview	Date	Format
01	12.13.18	In-person, hand-written notes
02	03.06.20	In-person, hand-written notes
03	01.20.23	Zoom, recorded and transcribed
04	01.23.23	Zoom, notes typed simultaneously
05	01.23.23	Phone, notes typed simultaneously
06	01.24.23	In-person, notes typed simultaneously
07	01.26.23	In-person, recorded and transcribed
08	01.27.23	In-person, hand-written notes
09	01.27.23	In-person, recorded and transcribed
10	01.27.23	In-person, recorded and transcribed
11	01.30.23	Zoom, recorded and transcribed
12	01.30.23	Zoom, recorded and transcribed
13	02.03.23	Phone, notes typed simultaneously
14	02.06.23	Zoom, recorded and transcribed
15	02.15.23	Zoom, notes typed simultaneously
16	03.03.23	Zoom, recorded and transcribed
17	03.03.23	Zoom, recorded and transcribed
18	03.21.23	Phone, notes typed simultaneously
19	04.03.23	Phone, notes typed simultaneously
20	04.04.23	Phone, notes typed simultaneously
21	05.04.23	In-person, hand-written notes
22	07.11.23	Zoom, recorded and transcribed

tions for others to interview; every participant made at least two recommendations. In some cases, I had already identified or spoken to the people they recommended; when they provided a new name, I asked the interview participant if they would be willing to make an introduction. In doing so, I reached the majority of key players in the hostage recovery enterprise over the last decade.

Interview participants comprise principals and senior staff from all relevant entities across the U.S. Federal Government tasked with hostage recovery policy and operations, spanning political parties, military branches, and the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations (2009–2024). Of the 18 non-military interview participants, 10 served or currently serve in principal- or director-level positions in the hostage recovery enterprise. Many of my interview subjects have also served in other, relevant roles in the hostage recovery enterprise. As an instructive example regarding the relevant organizations, the Deputy Directors of the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell are purposefully drawn from relevant positions in the State or Defense Department; principals in the HRG and SPEHA offices have previously served in Special Operations units in the military (see "Past" affiliations in Table 7.) Thus, many of the individuals in this space have worked in multiple relevant positions across institutions and teams.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics: Interview Subjects by Affiliation

Organization	**Primary**	**Past**
Department of Defense (hostage recovery personnel)	3	4
Department of State (Presidential Envoy, Hostage Affairs)	6	1
Department of State (Consular Affairs)	-	5
Federal Bureau of Investigations (Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell)	3	1
White House (National Security Council/ Hostage Response Group)	5	
U.S. Congress (hostage policy staff)	4	
Total	21	

3.2 Conducting interviews

Compared to the research population in Colombia, there was less concern for participant privacy among the American hostage recovery personnel at the recruitment stage, as all were current or former senior policymakers or servicemembers, speaking to me in their official capacity. Still, I privileged protecting participant privacy in obtaining consent and conducting interviews. As with my interviews in Colombia, I sought a waiver from Dartmouth's Institutional Review Board that allowed me to obtain oral, rather than written, consent, lest a signed consent form pose a potential risk to participant privacy. Fourteen of the 22 interviews took place by phone or zoom, thus negating any risk of inadvertently violating participant privacy. The other eight interviews were conducted in person, alone. Even when I met with participants in person, our meeting would not betray their participation in the study, given my pre-existing relationships with many of the study participants in a public engagement capacity.[3]

While there were fewer concerns about privacy for this project, protecting participant confidentiality remained paramount. Not only did I guarantee all participants confidentiality (I would quote them verbatim, but not attribute quotes to identified individuals); I insisted on employing it universally, even if someone was willing to speak with me "on the record." I made this determination because of the limited size and intimate nature of the research population: by naming even a few key individuals, it might reveal who other participants were.

Where a participant and the situation allowed, I recorded the conversation to ensure accuracy and to allow me to pay more attention to my interlocutor during our conversation. Several of the interviews were not recorded, as they took place in an office within a sensitive, compartmented information facility (SCIF), meaning I could not bring any electronic equipment. For those in-

[3]For example, I have previously been invited to present my findings from other projects in events convened by the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the State Department and the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell at the FBI. I have appeared in public events with representatives from these offices at the Aspen Ideas Festival and the Wilson Center. Several years before these interviews, I consulted with numerous congressional staffers as they wrote the Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act. And since early 2023, I have served as a member on the CSIS Bipartisan Commission on Hostage Taking and Wrongful Detention, https://www.csis.org/programs/brzezinski-chair-global-security-and-geostrategy/csis-commission-hostage-taking-and.

terviews, I took simultaneous notes by hand, and immediately typed them up to the best of my recollection as soon as I was reunited with my computer. Quotes from those interviews (interviews 01, 02, 08, and 21) should be understood as my closest possible estimation of the participants' words, based on simultaneous hand-written notes and subsequent review.

As described above, I conducted these interviews primarily for another project, so the bulk of prepared interview questions are irrelevant to the material at hand. Since I recorded some of the interviews, however, I have a record of the questions that I asked that generated insights included in this paper:

- (Interview USG-12) In another project, I'm looking at what happens when one group picks somebody up and transfers them, sells them, to a larger organization. This seems to happen a lot in Colombia, but I don't have experience with it in other parts of the world. Does this happen elsewhere, and if so, where?
- (Interview USG-12) Is it a demand or a supply story? Do the smaller groups initiate, or do the larger groups "task" the smaller groups to do this?
- (Interview USG-22) You've mentioned in a couple of the cases we're discussing that the hostage was initially abducted by a criminal group, which then sold them (or attempted to sell them) to JNIM or other organizations. How often is this the case? In your experience, does this happen more often in certain parts of the world?

4 Data Analysis

In addition to questions about ethics and sampling, interviews about kidnapping may pose questions about research reliability, or the "confidence we can place in a given instrument of measurement" (Mosley, 2013, 24). Retrospective interviews with former combatants can provide an interesting, personal, and novel source of data, but they are not without their methodological flaws (Fujii, 2017). One risk comes from reflecting on the past: The distance of time and weakness of memory inevitably obscure or distort important details and events (Metelits, 2009; Cohen, 2016; Daly, 2016). Subjects may also intentionally misrepresent information. Social desirability bias—or the tendency of research subjects to underreport taboo, illegal, or anti-social activities—could lead them to rationalize prior atrocities and minimize former crimes (Krumpal, 2013). Both combatants and security personnel may wish to diminish or aggrandize the state of violence, to rewrite the record in their favor; former targets might seek to hide careless or illegal behavior of their own. Across these potential distortions—both inadvertent and intentional—interview participants cannot help but speak about the past through the lens of the present, in which they are keenly aware of kidnapping's interim legacy.

As described above, I considered it crucial to seek a wide range of perspectives and stories. I spoke to ex-combatants with diverse perspectives, as well as government officials, military and private sector security personnel, scholars, NGO leadership, and former hostages and their families, who might be expected to offer competing perspectives. Thus, as subjects from different backgrounds corroborated the same story, it added reliability and internal validity to the explanation presented. Still, minimizing bias and harm in conducting interviews does not guarantee the reliability of data analysis.

This final section describes how I analyzed evidence collected for this study. After taking precautions to mitigate bias in participant recruitment, I implemented processes to transcribe and code interviews and subsequently select quotes for inclusion in the article.

4.1 Processing interviews

After conducting interviews and typing up notes, I uploaded all interview transcripts and notes into NVivo qualitative analysis software. As described above, this project primarily draws on interviews originally conducted for my PhD dissertation and book project (see Gilbert, 2020, 2022b). To date, I have established 97 separate "codes" in NVivo for this set of studies: each code represents a theme, topic, dynamic, or keyword in the interviews. Once the interview transcripts and notes were uploaded, I re-read each file, selecting relevant text and tagging it with the appropriate code. Some of the relevant codes for this project include "Cities," "Communication," "Costs," "Differences among groups," "Difficult to hold hostages," "Group objectives," "Guards," "Intelligence," "Logistics," "Marching," "Official policy," "Operational security," "Partnerships," "Planned," "Role specialization," "Selling information," "Success," and "Territorial control." I also established a code for "Black market white labeling" for any explicit mention of *vende de secuestrada* or similar

sales. Once all transcripts and notes were coded, it was possible to open a new file that compiled the tagged excerpts from all interviews together.

While processing the transcripts and reviewing my notes, I connected codes with the observable implications of my theory: the existence (but lack of a quantitative record) of *vende de secuestrada*; group strategy; the capabilities required for kidnapping; the costs of kidnapping; comparative advantage across territory; transaction costs in cooperation; and shifts in the decision to "make or buy" over time. At that point, I turned to selecting the quotes to include in the article text.

4.2 Selecting quotes

One question that skeptics pose about interview research is whether quotes have been "cherry picked," that is, whether the author has only selected quotes that are helpful to their argument, strategically excluding evidence to the contrary. To combat this potential, I established criteria for selecting quotes; to the best of my ability, I selected those that were pertinent, representative, specific, and diverse. I explain each turn.

Pertinence

First, I selected quotes for *pertinence*: those in which an interview participant's comments spoke about a dynamic most relevant to conceptualization or the observable implications of either my argument *or* plausible alternatives. Doing so helps avoid the "cherry picking" often lobbed as a criticism of interview-based research. I considered and included quotes that not only supported my theory, but also those that would challenge my argument—but all had to be pertinent to the topic at hand. Selecting for pertinence also meant that I did not include in this article quotes about other dynamics of kidnapping that were irrelevant to the phenomenon of interest.

Representation

Second, I selected quotes that struck me as *representative* of the broader interview population: In general, would other interview participants agree with the sentiment expressed? Across participants, there was little disagreement that this phenomenon occurred, or that groups demonstrated comparative advantage in kidnapping; I would confidently assert that the quotes featured in the article are representative of the broader interview population.

On one specific aspect of the argument, there was disagreement across research participants: the question of *how* such partnerships form in the first place. I explicitly note this disagreement in the article and provide examples of the divergent perspectives.

Specificity

Third, I selected quotes for their *specificity*: those in which participants offered words or details that most specifically and vividly spoke to the dynamics at hand. Conversely, where an interview participant spoke about relevant dynamics, but did so without using precise language (or explained

dynamics over remarks too long to constitute a quote), I would cite the interview without a verbatim quote.

Diversity

Finally, I selected quotes for *diversity*, both across and within projects. Regarding the former, I prioritized interview quotes for this article that I have not already selected for other projects and publications. Regarding the latter, I strove to incorporate as many different voices from among interview participants as space would allow. When several participants made similar (or identical) comments, as happened quite often in this study, I would always prioritize including a quote from a participant I had not yet quoted elsewhere. Diversifying quoted participants also protects against "cherry picking" by demonstrating that participants with different motivations, backgrounds, and experiences converged on the same dynamics.

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