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**The Colombian Peace Deal with FARC: Effects on Tourism and Deforestation**

**by**

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**Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism has been a major source of revenue for many third world countries, and Colombia is very much one of them. For years, campaigns to raise tourism rates have been a main focus of Colombia, specifically aimed at redefining the stereotypical reputation on safety that the wars on drugs, cartels, and guerillas of the 80s and 90s has left Colombia. The growth of tourism has become a staple to many Colombians as a key sign of progress. To many citizens, more tourists mean we are succeeding at changing the image the wars of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century left on our country. This is so much so, that the president often tweets about the progress tracked on tourism with great pride. Additionally, tourism campaigns such as *Colombia is Magical Realism*, have been parts of big efforts by the government to improve and promote tourism locally and internationally. Logically, when the peace treaty was signed, my first instinct was that tourism would also rise. The Peace Deal also brought other consequences, one of which is deforestation. Deforestation is sometimes an unavoidable result of urbanization and industrialization of an area once occupied by the FARC rebels. In some cases where eco-tourism is a factor, there might be an incline to reduce deforestation to preserve the ecological factors attracting tourists to visit. I wanted to see what changes have happened, if any, in the short time since the treaty was signed, as well as in the past 10 years. I analyzed government data on tourism in Colombian departments, as well as tourism in national parks and rates of deforestation, in search for differences between departments which had guerrilla presence and those departments that did not.

## **BACKGROUND**

Colombia has been plagued by wars throughout its history. Wars with guerilla forces began in the 1960s (Renwick, Hanson), with the formation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The FARC has been the most notorious and dangerous rebel group in Colombia since the time of its formation. The FARC is made up for communist leftists, a lot of whom were peasants, who took arms against the government because they felt unrepresented. They typically gathered in rural areas in the jungles of Colombia. Their activities and main sources of income include kidnapping for ransoms, illegal gold mining and international drug trade. It is estimated that about 220,000 people have died from this conflict and almost 6 million have been displaced. A lot of displacement happened

within the country, but FARC activity has also left many Colombian refugees around the world. Some of their kidnappings have made international headlines, like that of Colombian and French national Ingrid Betancourt in 2002, who was a presidential candidate at the time of her kidnapping. In addition, FARC has been known to kidnap top executives from national companies such as Ecopetrol, the national oil company. The Colombian government estimated that FARC, along with smaller guerilla groups kidnaped about 25,000 people between 1970 and 2010 (Renwick, Hanson).

Attempts at peace have been made in the past, though corruption often got in the way. From 1998 to 2002, under President Pastrana, one of the first attempts at peace occurred. This was highly criticized and a disaster. In trying to construct a Peace Deal, Pastrana decided to grant FARC a safe haven, "*Zona de Despeje*" of about 43,000 kilometers in an area in the departments, (in Colombia states are called departments), of Meta and Caquetá (Kline). This area was meant as a show of goodwill and commitment from the government. It was agreed that this area would remain without arms. One reason this failed was because FARC did not stop their kidnappings or their drug trades. They used this safe haven granted to them by the government to freely produce the drugs they sold around the world, and never actually went through with formal peace talks (Marks).

The next president was Alvaro Uribe Velez, who is credited for great changes in Colombia. Uribe ran on an anti-FARC policy with a clear plan of action on how he would deal with FARC, stating that Colombians' lack of a sense of security was why Colombia had economic, social and political issues. (Marks) The document he released was called the *Democratic Security and Defense Policy* and it clearly called on FARC's crimes as the primary ill of Colombian society. He succeeded in many ways, Colombia did become a safer place to live

and it changed drastically. The newfound sense of safety was felt by the Colombian population, as well as by foreigners, which was shown through increase in tourism. Although Uribe's action did attack many of FARC's primary crimes, he failed at establishing an official Peace Deal.

These issues with FARC also became an important issue internationally for Colombia and one that affected foreign policy. The United States often offered aid with regard to the fight against FARC and was consistent in their support of a Peace Deal. Colombia particularly had issues with Ecuador and Venezuela's governments aiding FARC's efforts. During Chavez's controversial presidency, tensions were often high regarding his support for FARC and their communist ideals.

In 2012 though, with the beginning of Juan Manuel Santos' Presidency, FARC and the government both started to take the peace treaty much more seriously, as it was seen both sides were more willing to negotiate. To show they were serious and committed to looking into a peace deal, FARC announced they would stop kidnappings in 2012. The talks proceeded, and an initial plan was announced in 2012 in Havana, Cuba. There were five main points which included land reformation, participation in politics by FARC, drug trafficking, victim's rights and disarmament (Renwick, Hanson). The treaty had various implications that were controversial, including a level of amnesty for those willing to confess to crimes under FARC. Some of the opposing voices urged the government to allow for prison sentences for those who had committed crimes while working in FARC. This was the main reason for which the national referendum in 2016, with the public voting on the treaty, was unsuccessful. Additionally, the treaty allowed FARC to establish themselves as a political party, thereby angering a lot of Colombians, especially those directly affected by FARC's actions in the past. This is one of the aspects of the treaty which could have dramatic future ramifications in the government. After a

couple of edits to the final deal, the Peace Deal was officially signed in 2016 after being passed through congress. Later in 2016, the president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to restore peace in Colombia (New York Times, 2016).

## **LITERARY RESEARCH**

There has been some research previously done with the relationship between other countries' conflict affecting tourism. Aliza Fleischer & Steven Buccola wrote an article in 2010 focusing on conflict and tourism in Israel. This article analyzes the effects that individual terrorist-related events have on the hotel industry and how hotels respond to those events. Andrew Lepp and Heather Gibson researched and wrote about how perceived risk affects the rates of tourism. Their research proves that international tourists are overall risk-adverse. This applies to my thesis research topic; the perceived risk of traveling to Colombia has gone down, and therefore tourism overall has increased, whether this has affected areas where FARC operated or not is to be determined in this thesis, but data shows the overall rate of foreigners coming into Colombia has steadily increased since the Peace Treaty was signed. There has also been a lot of work done relating to the connection between tourism and deforestation. For example, Gerardo Budowski wrote a paper relating the two and finding that if tourists expect a certain level of biodiversity in places where they travel, it can lead to a better level of conservation in that area. This is what the Colombian government seems to be hoping for. If people want to see an existing level of biodiversity in Colombian national parks and eco-attractions, it will discourage high rates of deforestation.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

There are three central hypotheses related to economic and environmental outcomes. Originally, I believed that the peace treaty would have positive economic effects on tourism and negative effects on deforestation. It was thought that the disarmament of FARC would encourage tourism into war-plagued areas by both Colombian local tourists and foreign visitors. In addition, I believed that deforestation would increase because of industrialization and urbanization in the land previously occupied by the rebels. I expected to find significant increase in tourism in areas previously occupied by FARC as well as significant deforestation.

The first hypothesis is that tourism will increase due to the improved security environment. Part of FARC's revenue stream relied on eliciting ransoms from kidnapped foreigners, so tourism is a particularly relevant outcome of the Peace Deal. Since FARC has stopped kidnappings and have been disarmed, tourism should increase in areas where they previously operated, and which were once seen as dangerous. Additionally, areas in which they operated would now be open to industrialization and therefore, deforestation rates should increase. This leads to the second hypothesis which is that deforestation will also increase since forest land in areas previously controlled by FARC will be safe to develop for farming and other purposes. One reason why deforestation may not increase is that the increased revenue from tourism will create an incentive for rural populations to preserve the environment. Deforestation is an important issue to examine because removing forest land has implications for the local environment including water quality as well as global ramifications on carbon sequestration. As a result, I hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 1A:* Tourism rates in Group 1 (FARC-activity departments) will show an increasing trend after the year 2016 compared to Group 0 where FARC did not operate.

*Hypothesis 1B:* National parks in departments occupied by FARC in the past will increase in visits after the year 2016, compared to national parks in non-FARC departments (group 0).

*Hypothesis 2:* Rates of deforestation will increase dramatically in the year 2016 as a result of increasing urbanization in departments where FARC operated, compared to departments where FARC did not operate.

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

I obtained data on foreign and domestic tourist visits as well as spending and national park visits from Colombian government sources including the center for Tourism Information of Colombia (CITUR), The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism and the Ministry of the Environment. To study the environmental impacts of the Peace Deal I collected satellite data on deforestation from Global Forest Watch. I combined the tourism and tree cover loss data along with historical journals such as *El Espectador*, a Colombian newspaper, which has done thorough analysis on where FARC operated. It is essential to my research to distinguish Colombian departments (states) and national parks which had heavy FARC presence from those who did not.

All data have observations for each Colombian department over time, which enables an econometric analysis using panel data regression models. This method divides the Colombian departments into two groups and two periods in a difference-in-difference analysis. The treatment group is comprised of regions where FARC was active before the



peace deal and the control group represents regions where they were not active. The treatment period is defined as all years after the peace deal was signed and control period is assigned to years prior to the peace deal. The logic behind this framework is that the peace deal should primarily have an effect in areas that previously had a strong FARC presence. The observations of interest are locations where FARC operated (treatment group) after the peace deal (treatment period). Importantly, this setup controls for potential confounding effects within states and over time by using indicator variables for states and years.

In order to calculate the changes in tourism rates I utilized government sources from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism. Specifically, I gathered data provided on the Center for Tourist Information (CITUR). I analyzed data from each Colombian department and the main national parks in order to analyze effects on eco-tourism.

Each department was labeled either group 1 or group 0, depending on whether FARC worked in that department before the peace deal. Group 1 meant the department had FARC activity while group 0 meant it did not. This allowed me to differentiate between rates of tourism and deforestation increase in departments with FARC activity and those without FARC. There were twenty-one departments out of thirty-two total Colombian departments, which had FARC activity (El Espectador). These were all labeled Group 1.

The data provided by the Colombian government dated from 2013 to 2017, so I had to differentiate between the years before the peace deal and after the deal. There were three categories which were deemed important to showing the growth of tourism: number of passengers on domestic flights, number of foreign visitors, and hotel rooms available. This is

what I used the period variable for, I labeled each year of data either period 1 or 0. period 1 meant the year was after the peace deal (2016 and 2017) and all other years were labeled period 0.

The national parks were dealt with in a similar way to observe changes in eco-tourism. If the park belonged to a war-prone department where FARC operated, it was labeled group 1 and if not, it was group 0. Of the twenty-seven parks listed on the national ministry of tourism website, thirteen were in departments which had FARC activity.

For deforestation, the data available only went to the year 2016, the year in which the peace treaty was signed. Even though there was only data for one year for Period 1, this data could still show significant differences since in 2016 FARC were disarmed, and disbanded, making their usual hiding places open to urbanization.

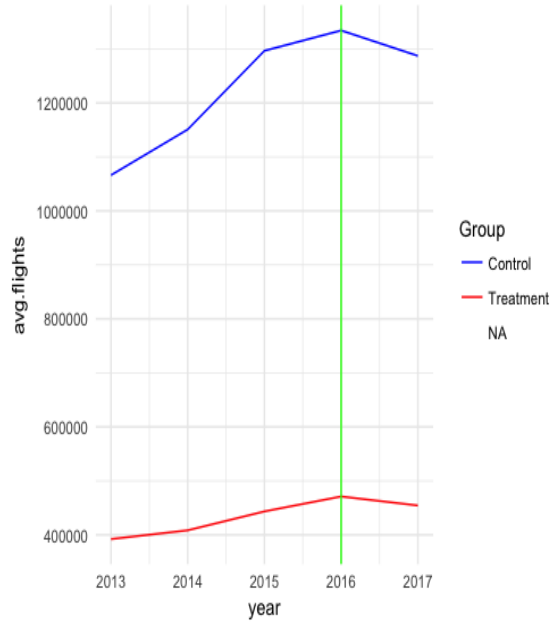
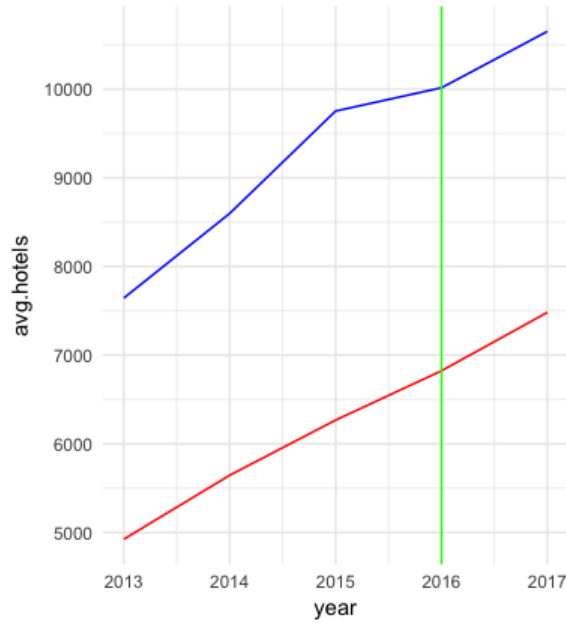
This data was then all input into R Studio, a program that economists use to analyze regressions and economic data. R Studio provided graphs and told us whether the differences between the control group 0 and group 1 were significant enough after the year 2016 (Period 1).

## **RESULTS**

There were several categories of data which applied to the rates of tourism in each department. The data used came from the Colombian Ministry of Tourism and it was: number of passengers arriving on domestic flight, number of foreign visitors, and number of hotel rooms available. These three categories would show significant increases if the rates of tourism were to increase, more domestic passengers would come into the department as well as more foreign visitors and hotel rooms available would need to increase to accommodate a growing tourism industry. I also used data for number of visits to each Colombian National Park from the same

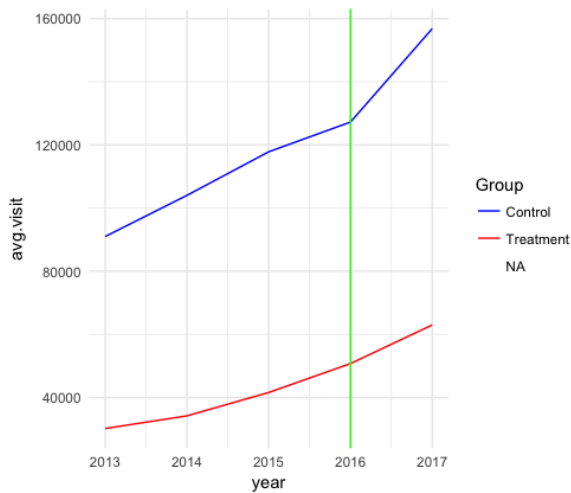
cite (CITUR) and deforestation data from Global Forest Watch. All of the data was input to R-Studio in order to run regressions and generate graphs to analyze the data.

I was looking to observe differences in difference, which means I wanted to see if the differences in these three categories varied significantly between the two groups, FARC and no FARC, after the treatment period, 2016 when the Peace Deal was signed. With respect to the three areas we targeted in terms of rates of tourism, the results from our data, see figures below, prove that the trends did not significantly change between groups 1, the treatment group, and 0, the control group. The red line shows group 1, the departments which had FARC presence. The blue line is the departments which did not, group 0. Both groups have an upward increasing trend after the year 2016, when the peace deal was signed. Item 1 shows the results number of hotel rooms available, item 2 shows the number of passengers on domestic flights incoming into each department and item 3 shows the results for the foreign visitors incoming into each department per year. Here, I noticed a discrepancy, the number of hotel rooms rose in both the control and treatment groups, while the number of passengers on domestic flights decreased in both groups. This could be as a result of people feeling it is now safer to travel by land (cars, busses, etc.).



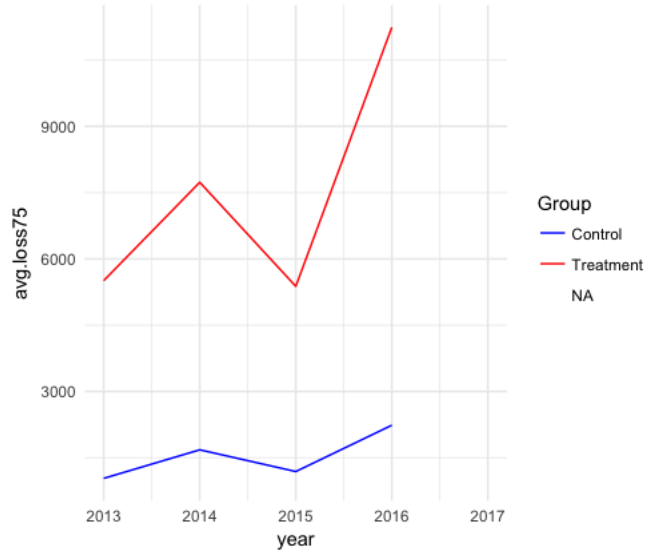
**Item 1**

**Item 2**



**Item 3**

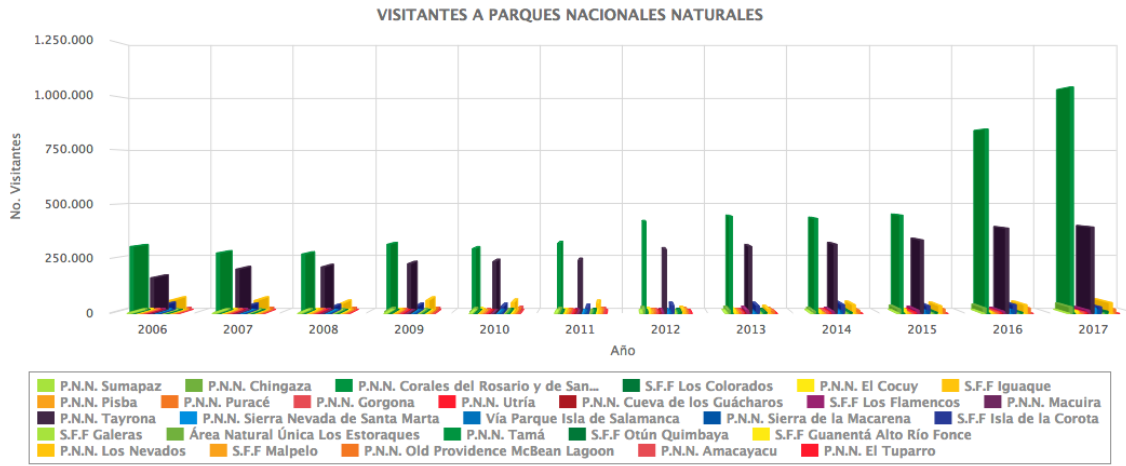
In deforestation, however, the results were in accordance with the hypothesis. This graph (Item 4) shows the results for cover loss of over 75%. It shows that leading up to and during 2016, areas where FARC operated showed a dramatic increase in deforestation. From 2015 to 2016 we see a dramatic increase in deforestation in the treatment group, a lot more than what is observed in the control group.



#### Item 4

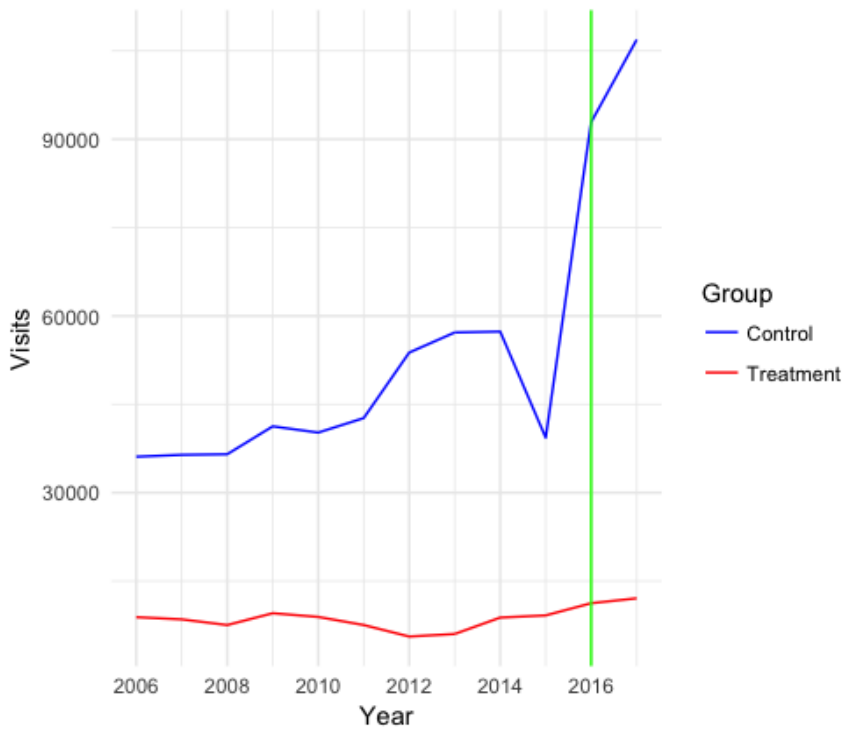
National Park visits have been growing steadily over time (see Item 5 below from CITUR.gov.co) But has the growth in visits differed between departments with a FARC presence and those without? The national parks data shows similar results as those of the tourist data. Item 6 is the graph depicting the differences between the control and treatment groups with regards to the national parks. There has been a dramatic increase in national park visits, but these are mainly in the national parks in the control group. Although this goes against my hypothesis, it is reasonable. It might be that both foreign and Colombian tourists feel that the country is safer to travel through in general, but they are still not comfortable with travel in previously FARC-occupied areas. It might also be that it will take local tourism organizations a bit longer to advertise the parks and sites in the treatment group areas. Tourists might honestly not yet be

aware of these places.



Fuente: USESPN- Cálculos OEE- MINCIT (2017-12)

**Item 5: CITUR-MINCIT**



**Item 6**

Next, I ran regressions using the R-Studio program. The table below shows the results of these regressions. The most important row is the 'treat' row. The first three columns are the

aspects of tourism, the fourth column is the deforestation, 'loss 75' and the last is visits to national parks. The values assigned to each of the columns for the 'treat' row show how the data for FARC controlled area (the treatment group), from the year 2016 (the treatment period) changed. For example, there were an average of 127.665 less hotels in these areas after the year 2016. There were also about 52,216.21 less people visiting national parks in these previously FARC-controlled areas after 2016. The stars assigned to each of these values show statistical significance. These are values which show the probability that you would get a value at least as high as your coefficient due to random chance alone. One star is 10%, two is 5% and three is 1%, none means the data is statistically insignificant. Three stars shows the most statistical significance, this data is the most precise. As you can see below, the most statistically significant data comes from the high rates of deforestation, which increased significantly, and the visits to national parks, which decreased significantly.

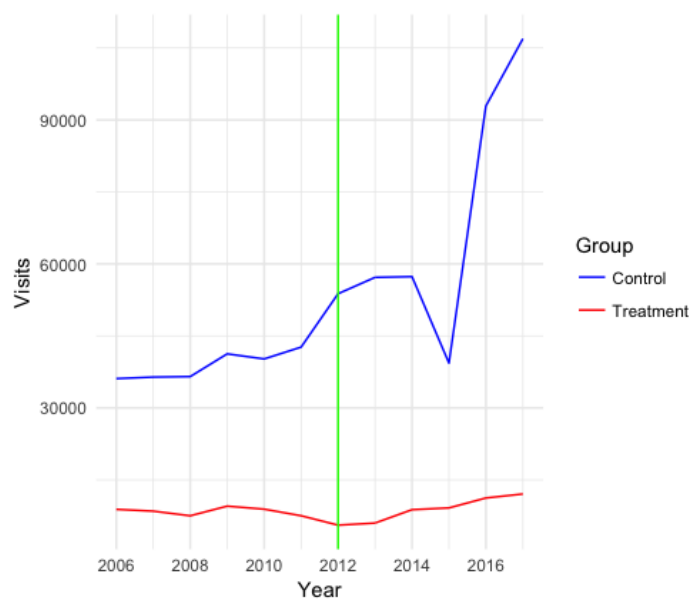
Dependent variable:					
	hotels (1)	flights.domestic (2)	visit.foreign (3)	loss75 (4)	visits (5)
treat	-127.665 (451.580)	-91,412.540** (45,155.650)	-16,193.400 (13,952.590)	4,098.899*** (1,063.228)	-52,216.210*** (1,368.862)
group	-13,470.730*** (883.235)	-722,083.000*** (83,404.990)	-15,246.240 (27,289.540)	-4,208.975** (1,769.415)	-36,045.200*** (1,886.948)
period	2,802.362*** (442.532)	175,341.500*** (44,778.170)	55,107.980*** (13,673.040)	1,486.223 (932.399)	63,395.030*** (1,411.996)
Constant	13,238.160*** (657.459)	758,741.700*** (62,390.200)	3,508.087 (20,313.690)	4,633.937*** (1,305.359)	40,342.800*** (1,575.128)
Observations	165	155	165	128	324
Adjusted R2	0.965	0.992	0.959	0.890	0.972

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## Item 7

After researching the peace deal history and its beginnings, I noticed that FARC announced they would stop kidnappings in the year 2012, which was also the year FARC and the Colombian government met in Havana, Cuba to establish the beginnings of the Peace Deal. I wanted to look into the differences in tourism rates since 2012, seeing as though many could

have felt it was safer to travel once FARC stopped kidnappings. Since the government only starts providing information on tourism rates by department in the year 2013, it wasn't possible to do an analysis on the departmental data in the three chosen categories, so I chose to look into the national park data. All this involved was simply changing Period 1 to include the years 2012-2015 in the data involving national parks. The graph below (Item 8), marks 2012 and shows that there were significant differences in the control group since 2012, large decreases and even larger increases after the Peace Deal was signed. The treatment group though shows smaller but consistent increases since 2012. There was a decreasing trend in visits to those parks in FARC-prone areas until the year 2012 where tourism started increasing and has not decreased since.



**Item 8**

## CONCLUSION

It is likely that this data will show different results as time goes on. The Peace Deal is very recent, and although I did not see significant change in tourism rates in FARC-controlled



areas, this could change in years to come. It's likely that although foreign tourists now view Colombia as a much safer destination, they are still wary of going into previously FARC-controlled areas. It's also likely that they do not know about what is in such areas since there is likely much less advertisement for parks and attractions where FARC used to be. The same could apply to local tourists. Colombians have been used to the idea of not going into certain parts of the country for over fifty years of war time. It could take a lot longer than two years to change their minds about such places and spark curiosity in visiting these areas. Deforestation rates are rising alarmingly causing concern in the government, since this was not their intention. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, outgoing Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said in an interview with *El Tiempo* that his biggest regret during his presidency was that he did not accomplish his goal of decreasing deforestation rates, instead they have risen. There are several government programs that are aiming to restore forests and decrease deforestation like *Bosques de Paz*, Forests of Peace, which is aiming to protect forests which were zones of armed conflict before the Peace Deal, and to educate the locals in the area as well as the public, on their environment and its preservation. Colombian tourism is expected to grow by 3.2% in 2018 according to research by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), and with effort from the government and other local tourism organizations, it's likely some of that growth will be in areas where FARC used to operate. There is a lot of room for improvement, and it is likely many changes will come to Colombian tourism soon. This research shows that the Peace Treaty hasn't had as high of an impact on tourism as the government hoped. The results display a lot of room for growth on the tourism side and warns the government of the dangerous rates of deforestation currently taking place in departments where FARC previously operated.

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