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The relationships between food security and violent conflicts: The case of Colombia

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Abstract

The relationships between food security and violent conflicts are conditioned, mediated and influenced by the specific context in which they take place. In the case of Colombia, the main mechanism whereby the armed conflict has had a negative effect on food security is the mass forced displacement generated by the dispute over and control of rural territories by the armed actors. Unlike other conflicts, in the case of Colombia there is a direct relationship between territorial control and the escalation and deepening of hostilities, on the one hand, and forced displacement and food insecurity, on the other. The armed conflict has historically hinged upon control of territory and its use as a means of accumulation of wealth and social and political control. As in the majority of violent conflicts, the Colombian conflict has affected food security through its destructive and disruptive effects on production, distribution and marketing of food. However, unlike other experiences, this damage has not had a significant impact on food security nationwide but instead has been felt at the local and regional level. Damage to production was caused mainly by the strategies used to occupy and control rural territories rather than physical destruction caused by conflict and violence. This analysis shows that the effects of conflict on food security extend beyond the short term. Therefore, we stress the need to supplement immediate action with comprehensive policies aimed at bringing about structural changes that contribute to achieving food security in the medium and long term. Taking into account the high priority given to food security and the fight against malnutrition in the Peace Accords, we suggest that food security policies and measures should be framed within the general context of implementing the Comprehensive Rural Reform envisaged in the Peace Accords, which must, in turn, be in line with the national development strategy implemented from the centre.

Keywords: internal armed conflict, food security, displaced population, peace accords, Colombia.

JEL codes: F51, H56, I31, I32, Q15, Q18

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1 Introduction

Colombia has had one of the most long-lasting and complex internal armed conflicts in the world. Over the last 50 years it changed in many ways with different and varying degrees of intensity. Diverse legal and illegal armed groups have been involved, including guerrillas, paramilitary forces, criminal gangs, drug traffickers, private agents and the state through the Armed Forces. External forces have also intervened, in particular the United States, which during some phases has supported the Colombian Army in its fight against drug-traffickers and guerrillas.

In addition to the vast cumulative economic damage caused,¹ more than 7.6 million people have been victims of the conflict; 6.4 million people have been displaced, around a million have been killed and there are around 160 000 people who have disappeared or gone missing (UNDP, 2015). This particular pattern of victimisation has caused great food insecurity among the conflict's victims and has made Colombia one of the countries with the most internally displaced people.

Now that the country is immersed in a peace process, as a result of the agreement signed by the national government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP), Colombia is facing the enormous challenge of effectively complying with that agreed and aiding the victims of the armed conflict. These include a vast number of people and communities suffering from food insecurity.

Below we analyse the relationships between food security and violent conflicts in Colombia. The report is structured into three parts. The first presents a description of the general context in Colombia, emphasising the aspects and features that have had the greatest effect on food security over the last half-century. This part also includes analysis of the main characteristics of the armed conflict, which are relevant to understanding the specific forms relationships between food security and conflict have taken in the case of Colombia. In the second part, we present the main relationships between conflict and food security (and vice versa) and identify the transmission mechanisms and triggering factors that explain the various relationships between the two variables. In the third part, we present the study's conclusions and make policy recommendations aimed at enhancing and strengthening food security in Colombia in the post-war phase.

¹ According to various studies, conflict and violence have decreased growth by 1 to 2 percentage points per year, especially during the 1993–2005 period (Salamanca, Rojas and Hernández, 2013; CHCV, 2015; Rubio, 1998).

2 Distinctive features of Colombia and the internal armed conflict

Relationships between food security and violent conflicts do not occur in a vacuum but instead are conditioned, mediated and influenced by the specific context in which these phenomena take place, in particular by the structural characteristics of countries and regions; the length, nature, scope and intensity of the conflict and the kind of victims it causes; the history of food security in each particular case; and the public policies implemented during the period of hostilities, among other factors. Therefore, before analysing the relationships between food security and armed conflict in Colombia, below we present some of the distinctive features of the country and conflict that help us understand the type, scope and effects of the relationships between these variables.

2.1 Distinctive features of Colombia's society and economy

Colombia is a high-middle-income country, which is multicultural in terms of its regions and ethnic groups,² with an estimated population of 48.2 million inhabitants, 77.6 percent of whom live in urban areas, while the remaining 22.4 percent live in rural areas. Continental Colombia is more than a million square kilometres in size. Its geography is extremely complex, which has influenced the development and length of the conflict and makes it costly to provide public services, including defence and security. Over the last half-century, i.e. during the period the hostilities were ongoing, the country underwent major structural transformations, including the shift from a rural society to an urban society, and from an economy based on coffee and agricultural production to an extractive and service economy. This has involved a major relocation of the population and production centres, as well as a significant reduction in the agricultural sector's share of the national economy to such an extent that it now only accounts for 6.8 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), although in terms of direct and indirect job creation, agriculture is still very relevant.³

There have also been changes in the agricultural sector in Colombia, including an increase in production and land under permanent cultivation due to the development of commercial agriculture (in particular rice, African palm, sugarcane and flowers) and a decrease in temporary or short-cycle crops. The decrease in the production of some cereals, such as cotton, barley, yucca, wheat, soya and sesame is particularly significant (Machado Cartagena, 2009; Jaramillo, 2002; NCHM, 2016; Vásquez, Cardona and Rincón, 2013). However, some temporary crops such as potato, beans and traditional maize have not been affected by these changes and the area sown has even increased. According to some authors, this shows that peasant farmers adapted to and more effectively tackled the negative effects of the conflict and the opening up of the economy to foreign trade in the 1990s. There was a significant increase in the production

² 10.6 percent of Colombia's population (4.3 million) identify as being of African descent, and the majority of them live in geographically-isolated areas. There are also 1.4 million indigenous people, 3.4 percent of the total population. 40 percent of them are under 15 years old and 78.4 percent live in rural areas. While there is no agreement regarding the number of indigenous peoples, there are certainly more than 85 such groups (UNDP, 2011).

³ According to the *Misión para la Transformación del Campo* [Countryside Transformation Mission] (2015), 30.4 percent of the Colombian population lives in rural areas and the agricultural sector accounts for an average of 6.1 percent of total GDP and creates 16.3 percent of the country's employment. Meanwhile, the UNDP (2011) argues that Colombia is much more rural than it appears to be, since 32 percent of its inhabitants live in the countryside and in three quarters of the country's municipalities, which cover the majority of the national territory, relationships characteristic of rural societies predominate.

of some products, such as vegetables and potatoes, during this period (Kalmatovitz and López, 2006; NCHM, 2016).

Food production in general saw sustained growth during the conflict from 1960 to 1990, including staples, in particular production of vegetables, potatoes and cacao, and products of the poultry (chickens and eggs), pork and livestock industries, aquaculture and cattle (Martínez Ventura, 2006, Jaramillo, 2002). In fact, a study produced at the end of the 1980s by the *Misión de Estudios del Sector Agropecuario* [Farming Industry Studies Mission] (1988) found that the country had achieved high levels of self-sufficiency in food, in particular in tubers, vegetables and meat products, all of which had coefficients of 100 between 1960 and 1987. However, this situation changed from the 1990s onwards. In this period agricultural production in general, and food production in particular, fell significantly. This was offset by a significant increase in food imports and while this increased dependence on food from abroad, it maintained the availability of food at national level.⁴

The decrease in agricultural production after 1990 was the result of the interplay of several factors, including the deepening and widening of the internal armed conflict, adverse weather conditions,⁵ a fall in international prices for agricultural products and the application of economic measures to further open up the economy to international trade and deregulate the economy.⁶ Although no one disputes that the first three factors had adverse effects on production, there is great controversy regarding the net effect of measures to open up the economy. Some see them as the prime culprits for the slowdown in agriculture due to their negative impact on local production.⁷ Others see external openness as having had certain specific costs but in general having benefited agricultural production as it contributed to better allocation of resources, encouraged the production of some crops and boosted industrialised poultry and pork production and aquaculture. It also made some staple foods cheaper through higher production.⁸

Colombia's ability to import food and so supplement national production is bound up with its success in generating sufficient foreign currency through its export sector. In recent decades, there have been major changes here, the most important being a decrease in the weighting of coffee exports, which was offset by extractive industry (oil, ferronickel) and agroindustry (African

⁴ Between 1990 and 2001 per-capita production of staple foods fell by 13.2 percent and the Food Self-sufficiency Coefficient fell from 0.91 in 1990 to 0.64 in 2001 (Giraldo, 2015; Machado Cartagena, 2009).

⁵ In 1992 and 1998, for example, the country was struck hard by “El Niño” (NCHM, 2016). Additionally, between 1998 and 2011, excess precipitation and La Niña (2010–11) together caused agricultural losses equivalent to 2.1 percent of GDP, as well as other damage and deaths (IFAD, 2016). According to a recent study (DNP, 2015b), climate variability in recent decades has had major negative impacts on food security, as it has affected both food production and distribution and sale. In other words, it has had a negative effect on food availability.

⁶ The measures were implemented during the Gaviria Administration (1990–1994) as part of the *Bienvenidos al Futuro* [Welcome to the Future] Plan and included a reduction in the average tariff; a simplification of the tariff structure; a decrease in the number of tariff positions subject to prior import permits and simplification of the exemption and exception systems (Kalmanovitz and López Enciso, 2006). In addition, throughout the decade other measures were implemented that affected the agricultural sector, including a decrease in political support such as development credit and price controls. Several government bodies that had supported the agricultural sector were closed down (NCHM, 2016).

⁷ In the last 25 years the Colombian agricultural sector has undergone a strong deceleration with a growth rate of just half of the rate of the national economy and far less than in the 1980s (UNDP, 2011; IFAD, 2016).

⁸ Those who argue that external openness and free trade agreements have harmed agriculture include Darío Fajardo, 2015; Giraldo 2015; Garay *et al.*, 2015; Estrada Álvarez, 2015; Echavarría, 2001; Rocha 2001. Those who argue that external openness had positive effects include Martínez Ventura, 2006; Jaramillo, 2003; Kalmatovitz and López, 2006; Machado Cartagena, 2009. A more moderate and cautious position regarding the effects of openness can be found in NCHM, 2016.

palm, rice) exports. This ability to generate foreign currency has allowed Colombia to maintain notable macroeconomic and financial stability, which was only interrupted by external shocks that affected the entire region. Even during episodes such as these, the country displayed greater resistance and recovered from the crisis more quickly than other countries. In spite of an active currency policy, in recent decades Colombia has had moderate, well-controlled inflation compared with its neighbours to the south. However, there have been cases of price rises as a result of internal and external economic and non-economic shocks, including droughts, floods, rises in the international prices of oil and foodstuffs, among others.

In terms of economic growth, Colombia is also in a unique situation since despite the enormous cumulative costs and negative effects of the conflict on growth (as noted in the introduction), long-term economic performance has been positive and has even been better than in neighbouring countries, albeit below its long-term potential (Echeverry, Salazar and Navas, 2001). This has enabled Colombia to achieve a sustained increase in per-capita income and be a high-middle-income country in spite of the lasting conflict. This atypical situation is due to the fact that, historically, the illegal armed groups, in particular the guerrillas, have not had the military capacity to be able to significantly affect the country's economic apparatus and the conflict has taken place mainly in rural areas. There were periods where the guerrillas managed to extend the conflict to urban areas, albeit without significant disruption of economic activity (see Section 1.2).

In social terms, Colombia historically has faced serious problems, in particular in rural areas. During the conflict period, the country made progress in its fight against poverty and made major improvements to social indicators and expanded basic public services.⁹ However, the country continues to have high levels of poverty and food insecurity, especially in rural areas among peasant farmers, indigenous people and those of African descent.¹⁰ Partly due to the above-mentioned socio-economic problems, food insecurity and malnutrition have been constant problems in Colombia, though in recent decades food security has improved. Colombia's inequality coefficient measured according to the Gini Index is 52.2. This makes it one of the most unequal countries in Latin America and the world.

In Colombia, the issues of poverty, inequality, food security, armed conflict and violence are historically linked with its agrarian structure. This has undergone major changes in the last half-century (Machado Cartagena, 2009; NCHM; 2016). There is still a high concentration of land ownership and use as well as serious problems with the formalization and legalization of property rights. According to various studies, the Gini Coefficient in terms of land area and land holdings exceeds 0.80 (with some regional differences) and has been on an upward trend in the last two decades (UNDP, 2011). This has accentuated the bimodal structure as there has been an increase in large landholdings in few hands, median ownership has deteriorated and there has been a great increase in the number of smallholdings (Machado Cartagena, 2009). The factors that explain the increased concentration in landholding include a rise in extensive cattle-raising and permanent crops requiring extensive land-use such as African palm, the (legal and illegal) development of extractive industries and, mainly, the strategic role that control of

⁹ Social spending rose from 8 percent of GDP in 1992 to 13 percent in 2001, as a result of the enactment of the New Constitution in 1991. This envisaged an increase in social spending, greater provision of public services and enhanced social protection mechanisms for the poor (Galindo, Restrepo and Sánchez, 2009).

¹⁰ According to the multidimensional poverty index, the national poverty rate in 2015 was 27.8 percent and the poverty index in rural areas was 40.3 percent. This is a considerable improvement on 2008, when the multidimensional poverty index in rural areas was 56.6 percent (IFAD, 2016).

territory and appropriation of land has played in the armed conflict (Duncan, 2006; Galindo, Restrepo and Sánchez, 2009; Reyes, 2007; NCHM, 2016; Vásquez, Cardona and Rincón; 2013). As far as lack of legal security is concerned, 47 percent of property lack title deeds (Pécaut, 2015) and just 36.4 percent of rural households have access to land, while 75 percent of those who do have access are in possession of fewer than 5 hectares and 59 percent of these are informal owners (DNP, 2014).

The final characteristic feature of Colombia that has played a central role in the configuration and development of the conflict and food security is the state's institutional weakness in rural areas, especially in parts that are more isolated and distant from urban centres, where historically the state has barely, if at all, been present. This weakness is expressed in various ways, the most important being poor provision of basic public services, in particular electricity, road infrastructure, education, health, security and justice, among others. This situation stands in stark contrast to the existence of a strong central state and a strong institutional framework provided by the state in urban areas.

In recent decades, the institutional framework provided by the state in rural areas has weakened still further due to the deepening of the conflict and its extension to most of the country, which has hindered (and in some cases prevented), the work of state institutions in the territories most affected by the presence of armed groups. In certain areas, they have replaced the state in various roles, including security and justice. This weakening has also contributed to the improvised policies applied in recent decades, lack of a long-term vision and the dismantling of state institutions supporting the agricultural sector in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. This included closure of a large part of the institutional programmes set up in past or recent decades, such as *Desarrollo Rural Integrado* [Integrated Rural Development] (DRI), *Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación* [National Rehabilitation Plan] (PNR) and agrarian reform; the weakening of municipal agricultural technical assistance units (Umatas) and free technical assistance for smallholders, as well as the successful research experience of the national programme for the transfer of agricultural technology (Pronatta) (UNDP, 2011). According to the same source, the shrinking of the state in the countryside definitively took place in the 2000s with a drastic institutional adjustment in the agricultural sector during the first term of President Álvaro Uribe, which combined four bodies into one.

2.2 The distinctive features of the armed conflict in Colombia

Colombia's armed conflict is the longest and most complex in the recent history of Latin America and one of the longest lasting in the world. Its origins date back to the beginning of the 1960s and over this period of more than fifty years there have been various changes and levels of intensity brought about by the political and military strategies followed by the actors involved and their response to changes in the national and international context. For this reason, there is fierce debate about how it should be categorised to the extent that one very influential book was titled "*Nuestra Guerra sin Nombre*" [Our Nameless War] (Pécaut, 2005).¹¹

One aspect of the Colombian conflict is the great number and diversity of armed actors involved for different reasons: from political and ideological motives to purely economic and rent-seeking

¹¹ The Colombian conflict has been categorised in several ways such as "armed social conflict; civil war, war, irregular conflict". The Peace Accords recently signed by the government and the FARC-EP use the name "internal armed conflict".

interests. The main armed actors that have been involved include different guerrilla forces,¹² various paramilitary groups,¹³ many different criminal gangs,¹⁴ groups linked to drug trafficking, so-called “opportunistic third parties”¹⁵ and the Colombian army. Also, during some periods, the conflict has taken on an international dimension mainly due to the intervention of the United States in support of the government and the Colombian Army in their fight against drugs and guerrillas.¹⁶

Table 1 Main actors in the armed conflict, their motivations and their interactions with food security

Main actors	Main motivations for participation in the conflict	Actions affecting food security	Mechanisms
Guerrillas	Political and structural changes, accumulation of power and wealth.	Sabotage of economic infrastructure and private property, extortion, use of mines, kidnapping, eviction and plundering of families and communities, control of territory and appropriation of land and natural resources, confinement of families and communities.	A decrease in local food production, destruction of local food distribution systems, networks and marketing channels, forced displacement of families and communities, decreased income, loss of land and goods, and movement restrictions preventing adequate access to food.
Paramilitaries	Defence of the status quo, accumulation of power and wealth.	Massacres, extortion, eviction and plundering of families and communities, control of territory and appropriation of land and natural resources, confinement of families and communities.	A decrease in local food production, destruction of local food distribution networks and marketing channels, forced displacement of families and communities, decrease in income, loss of land and goods, and movement restrictions preventing adequate access to food.

¹² The most important guerrilla groups include the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP); the National Liberation Army (ELN); the 19th of April Movement (M-19); the People's Liberation Army (EPL); the Quintín Lame Movement; the Ricardo Franco Front; the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT); the Workers' Self-defence Organization (ADO) and the Revolutionary Integration Movement - Free Fatherland (MIR-Patria Libre), among others.

¹³ The most important paramilitary groups arose in the 1980s and joined together in an organization called the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC).

¹⁴ To many people these groups are the continuation of the paramilitary groups. According to data from the Colombian Ombudsman (*Defensoría del Pueblo*), in the first half of 2014 they were operating in 27 of the 32 departments and 168 of the 1,098 municipalities in the country. During that same period, more than 1000 criminal gangs were identified, mostly associated with small-scale trafficking (UNDP, 2015).

¹⁵ This name refers to criminal organizations, political agents, local economic elites and transnational companies that have been involved in the conflict's dynamics for their own benefit (Pécaut, 2015; CHVC, 2015).

¹⁶ The United States' involvement intensified from the end of the 1990s, when it redefined its Colombian aid policy. This allowed aid to be used for counterinsurgency and not only in the war against drug trafficking, as had been the case since 1998 (NCHM, 2014). Therefore, some authors consider the United States to have been one of the central actors in the conflict and a substantial factor in its “globalisation”.

Main actors	Main motivations for participation in the conflict	Actions affecting food security	Mechanisms
Drug traffickers	Accumulation of wealth and power regionally and locally	Eviction and plundering of families and communities, control of territory and appropriation of land and natural resources.	Forced displacement of families and communities, decreased income, loss of land and goods, and movement restrictions preventing adequate access to food.
Criminal gangs	Accumulation of wealth	Extortion, eviction and plundering of families and communities, control of territory and appropriation of land and natural resources.	Forced displacement of families and communities, decreased income, loss of land and goods, and movement restrictions preventing adequate access to food.
Opportunistic third parties	Accumulation of wealth and power regionally and locally.	Eviction and plundering of families and communities, appropriation of land and natural resources.	Forced displacement of families and communities, decreased income, loss of land and goods.
Colombian Army	Defence of the status quo, maintaining public order	Control of territory and communities, eviction of families and communities, bombardment and aerial fumigation.	Destruction of food production, disruption of food distribution and marketing networks, loss of income and local jobs, forced displacement of families and communities, environmental damage.
The United States	Fighting drug trafficking and weakening the guerrillas, especially the FARC due to considering it a terrorist group	Physical destruction of illegal crops	Destruction of food production, loss of income, forced displacement of families and communities, environmental damage.

Source: compiled by the author.

A second relevant feature of the Colombian armed conflict is that during the fifty years it has been going on there have been different paces and degrees of intensity, it has taken place in different territories and, consequently, the degree of its territorial, economic and social effects has varied. During the initial decades of the conflict (1960s and 1970s), it was very low intensity and restricted to remote rural areas where the guerrillas exercised territorial and social control but did not carry out much military activity. It therefore had practically no impact nationally and mainly affected the local and regional economy and the rural population who lived and worked in the territories that were rear-guard or strategic areas or under the control of the guerrillas (Granada and Sánchez, NCHM, 2014; Gutiérrez, 2015). As stated by the National Center for Historical Memory, at that time the guerrillas were not very combative, kept quiet and were practically hidden on the periphery (NCHM, 2014). The conflict during this period, especially in the 1960s, has therefore been described by some as an “imaginary war” (CHVC, 2015, Gutiérrez, 2015).

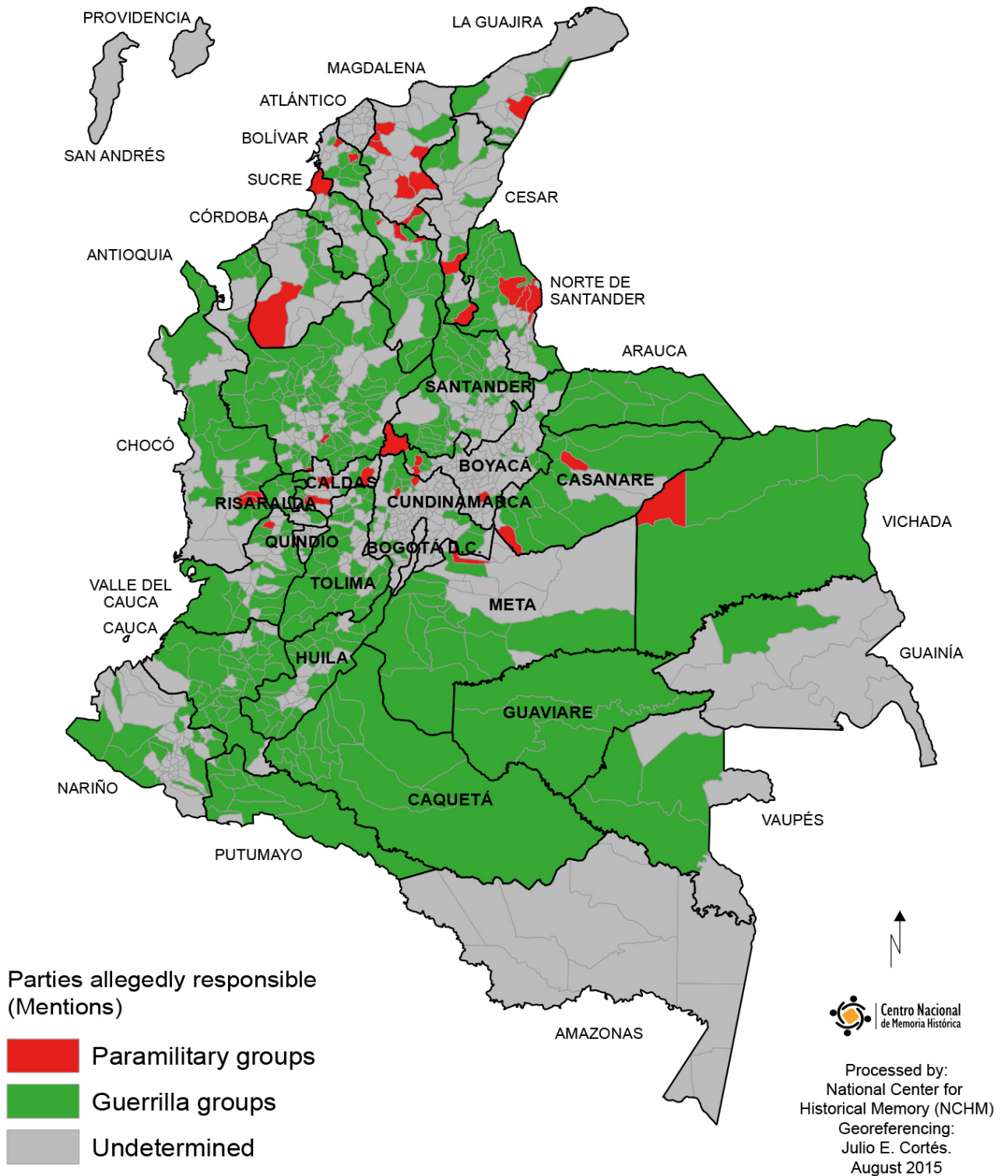
From the 1980s to the middle of the 1990s, the conflict significantly developed due to the strengthening and expansion of the guerrillas, the appearance of paramilitary groups and the spread of drug trafficking. According to some authors, the latter is the major factor in the changing and worsening of the conflict since it financially strengthened the majority of illegal actors, including paramilitaries and guerrillas (Pécaut, 2015). As the UNDP has stated (2011), the armed conflict has followed the strategic logic of war and the dynamics of the illegal economy in the form of the drug trade. The vast profits have fuelled the expansion and worsening of the conflict. During this period, the conflict deepened and broadened, affecting a larger number of territories and a greater population, including some urban areas.

From the second half of the 1990s to 2002, the conflict reached its maximum intensity, causing the highest number of victims and spread to the majority of the country, including urban areas. This is due to the fact that in this period there was an unprecedented expansion and strengthening of the state apparatus (in part due to US aid through the Colombia Plan), paramilitary activities steadily increased and guerrillas grew stronger and expanded operations to the majority of the country¹⁷ (NCHM, 2016; Gutiérrez, 2015, Pécaut 2015; Molano, 2015). As stated by the NCHM (2016), during this period the confrontation mercilessly increased the suffering of the civil population, who were caught in the crossfire between insurgents, paramilitaries and state agents in a context of progressive deregulation and worsening of the war.

Finally, from 2003 to the present, there has been a notable decrease in the conflict's intensity and extent. Territory has been won back by the state through the Patriot Plan and the Consolidation Plan, paramilitaries have been demobilised and guerrilla groups have retreated to their strategic positions in remote rural areas (NCHM, 2014, 2015, 2016; Restrepo and Aponte, 2009; Calderón Díaz *et al.*, 2016; Pécaut, 2015; Gutiérrez, 2015).

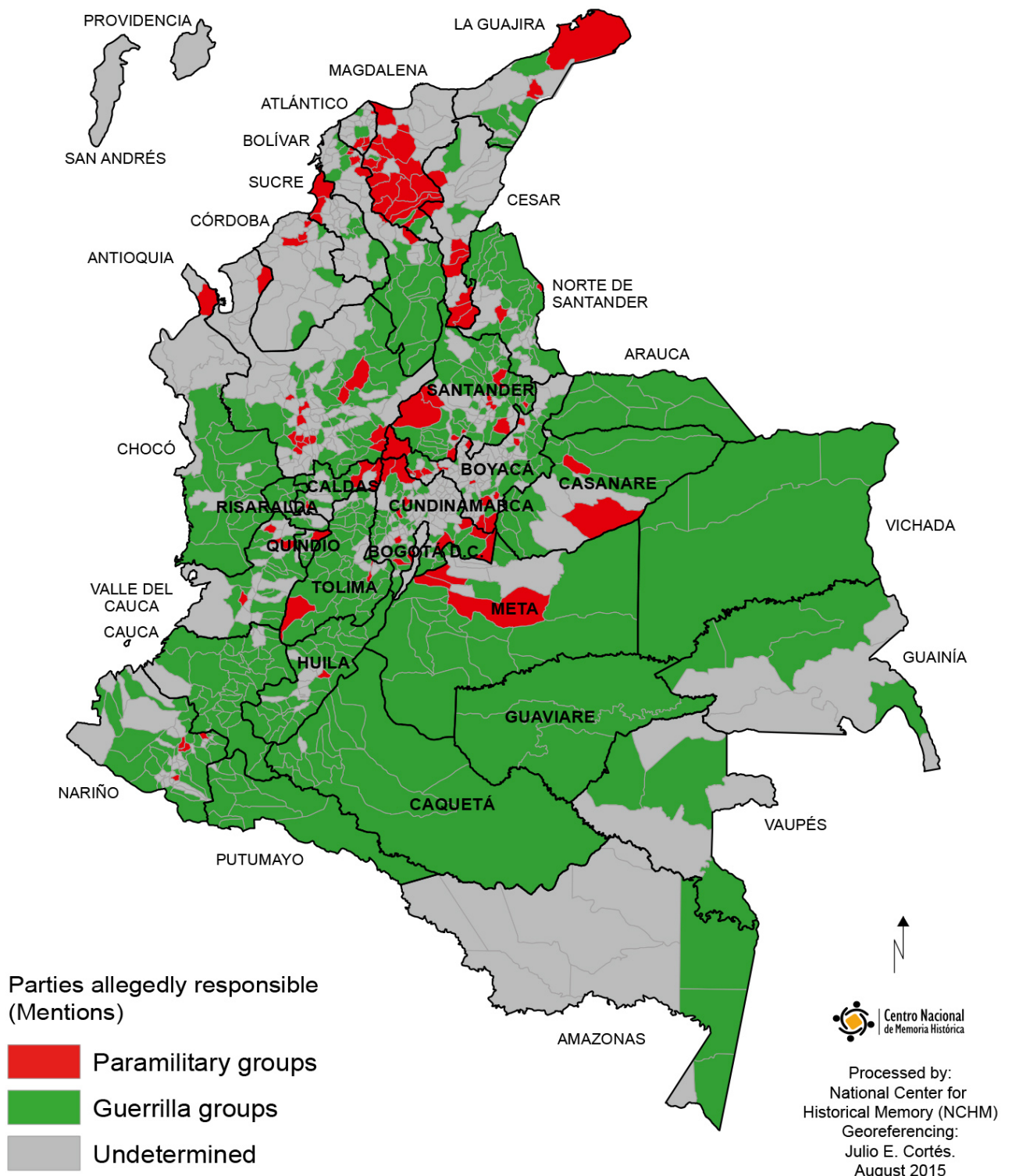
¹⁷ At the end of the 1990s, 30 of the country's 32 departments and more than 600 municipalities out of a total of 1 092, including the country's main cities and the major agroindustry centres were affected by the presence and actions of armed groups, in particular the guerrillas and paramilitary groups (Santamaría Salamanca, Rojas Delgadillo and Hernández Díaz, 2013). According to Granada, Restrepo and Sánchez (2009), by 2002 the guerrillas were operating with violence in 500 municipalities out of the country's 1 119, affecting 700 out of 1 000 inhabitants.

Figure 1 Historic change in the territorial consolidation of the predominant actors allegedly responsible for the exodus, 1980–1988 period



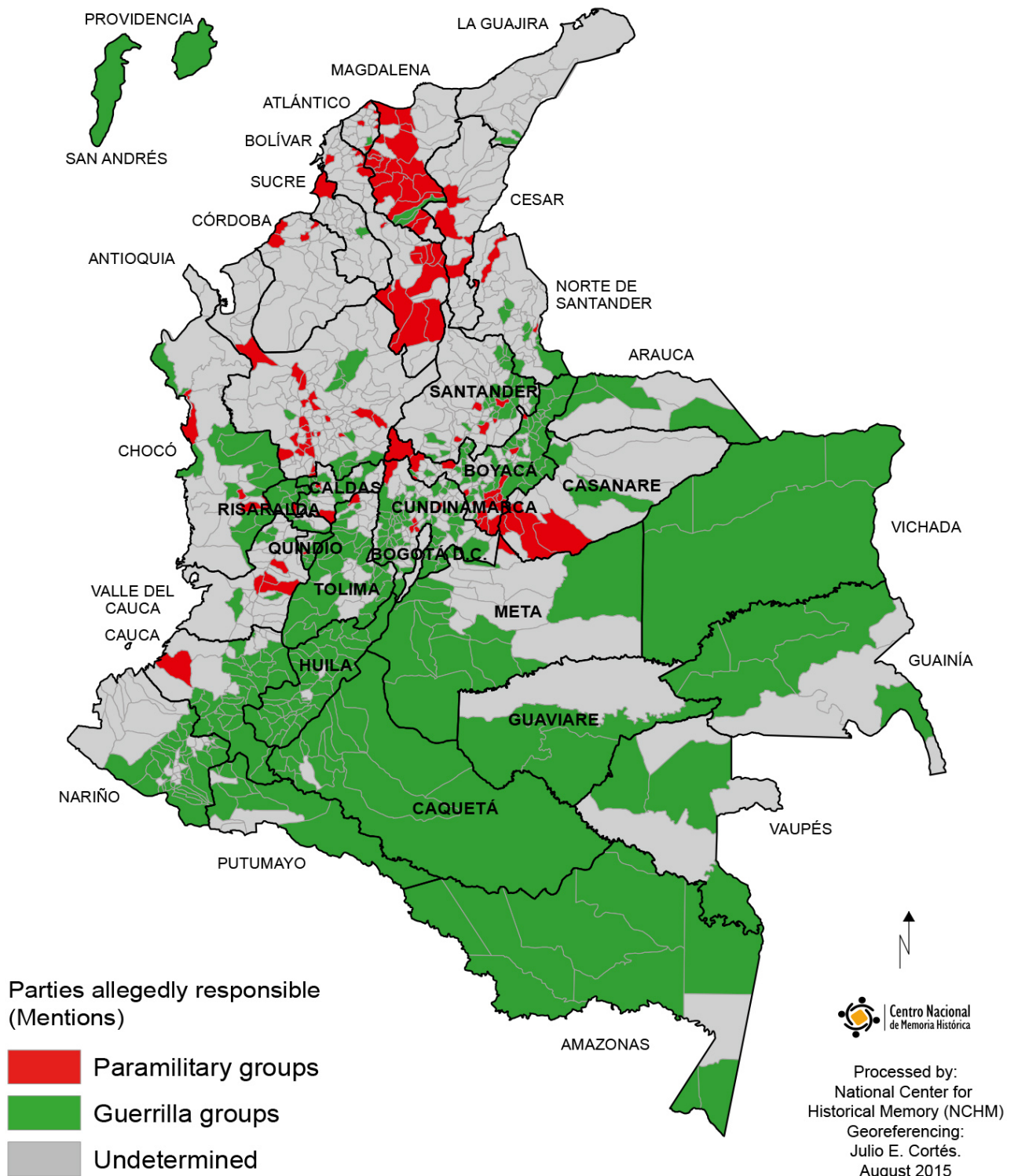
Source: National Center for Historical Memory, 2015, p. 326.

Figure 2 Historic change in the territorial consolidation of the predominant actors allegedly responsible for the exodus, 1989–1996 period



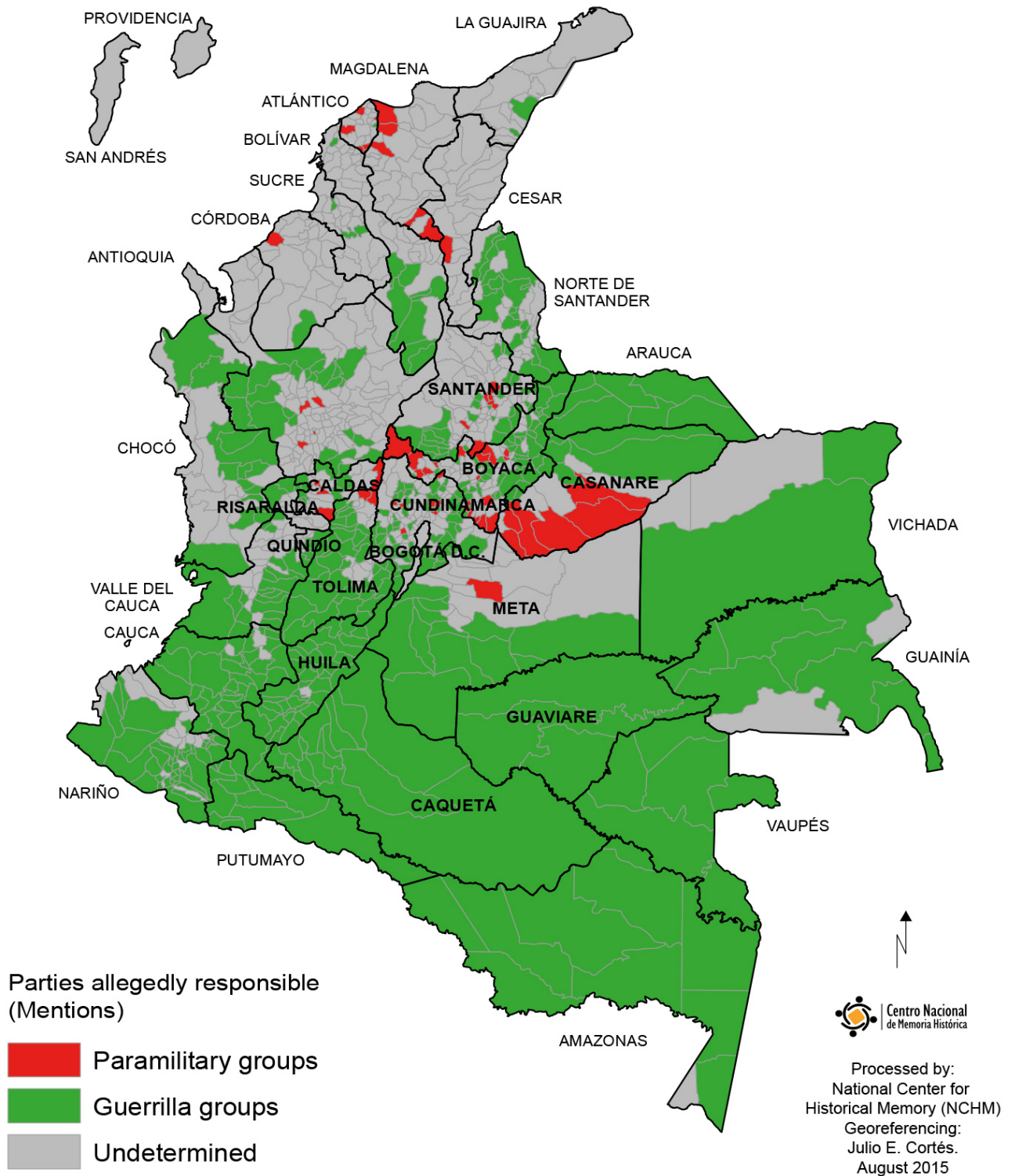
Source: National Center for Historical Memory, 2015, p. 327.

Figure 3 Historic change in the territorial consolidation of the predominant actors allegedly responsible for the exodus, 1997–2004 period



Source: National Center for Historical Memory, 2015, p. 328.

Figure 4 Historic change in the territorial consolidation of the predominant actors allegedly responsible for the exodus, 2005–2014 period



Source: National Center for Historical Memory, 2015, p. 329.

The intensification of the conflict and its spread from the more remote and isolated areas of the country (the so-called colonisation zones) to the rest of the country was a gradual process, albeit accelerated in some periods, which contributed to widespread expansion of violence,¹⁸ especially in rural areas (see Figures 1 to 4). In the case of urban areas, the impact of the conflict was felt mainly through the negative effect of sabotage of public physical infrastructure (powerlines, pipelines, etc.) and private property (estates, machinery and equipment, vehicles), attacks on public and private organizations (banks, shops), land piracy against goods and passenger transport, extortion and kidnapping.

In spite of the vast social effects and the high cumulative economic costs, even in its most intense stages, the Colombian armed conflict has never seriously affected the short-term economic and macroeconomic functioning of the country and the guerrillas' actions have never jeopardised the status quo. Meanwhile, the state has also been unable to militarily defeat the guerrillas or eradicate criminal gangs and drug trafficking. This specific feature, together with the fact that violence and its effects have taken place mainly in rural areas, largely explains the long length of the conflict and its increasing deterioration.¹⁹ Furthermore, it also explains the apparent paradox that macroeconomic performance and everyday life in cities have not been seriously affected by the armed conflict, so the urban population, especially that residing in the metropolitan area of Bogota, has not been aware of the extent of the troubles.

From another perspective, the long length of the Colombian armed conflict and its enormous complexity has to do with the central role that the various armed actors assigned to rural territories in military and political terms and as a source of financing and wealth accumulation (Giraldo, 2015; UNDP, 2011; Duncan, 2015; Pécaut, 1997, 2015; NCHM, 2014; 2016; Reyes, 1988). In addition, control of territory has been a strategic objective of the economic elites and transnational companies, since such control is fundamental for the development of their capital accumulation processes (Machado Cartagena, 2009; NCHM, 2013, 2015, 2016). In fact, military, economic, social and political control of rural territories has enabled the guerrillas and, on occasion, paramilitaries, to secure their strategic rear-guard zones, obtain the financial resources they need to maintain and ensure the growth of their armies and expand their military operations into wider areas, accumulate vast wealth from their involvement in illegal activities such as drug trafficking and illegal mining, and exercise social and political control over rural populations.²⁰ In addition, rural territories have strategic importance for economic and international actors interested in investing in agro-industrial and extractive businesses and for groups linked to the illegal drug economy, for whom control of drug trafficking routes and appropriation of land for illegal crops is fundamental. Control of rural territory has also been fundamental for state forces in their fight against the guerrillas and to shift the balance of the war in their favour.

The consequences of this situation have been enormous in terms of perpetuating and deepening the conflict, as well as in social and human terms. The conflict has generated a

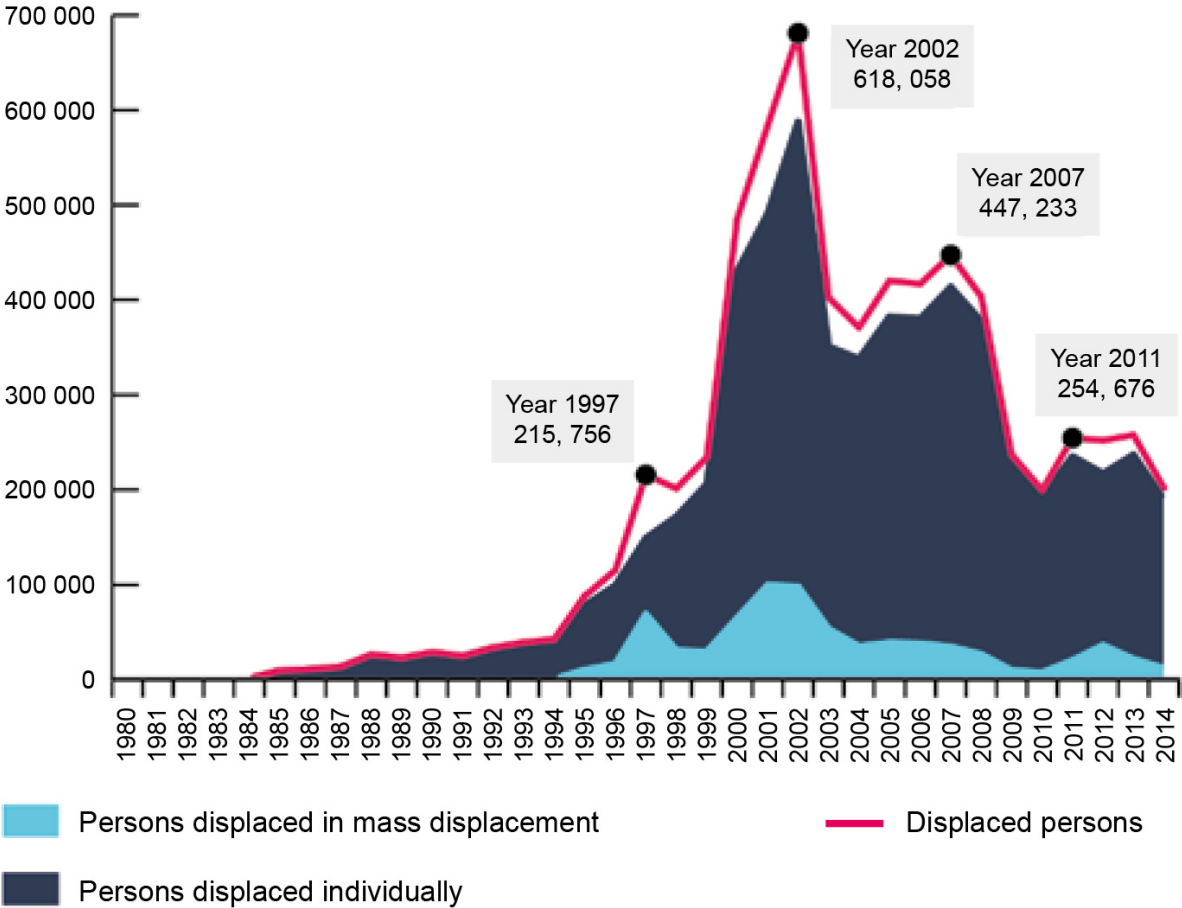
¹⁸There are several kinds of violence in Colombia but as Sánchez, Díaz and Formisano (2003) have stated, the conflict's dynamics determine the overall dynamics of violence in the country and not only deaths associated with the conflict.

¹⁹ As shown by the UNDP's human development report 2003, the Colombian conflict and its increasing deterioration has brought about a decrease in human development rather than the desired political changes (UNDP, 2003).

²⁰ In the case of the guerrillas, in their beginnings at least, control of territory was fundamental in attempting to win over the political support of the local population and to implement new forms of production and social policy organization at local level.

constant, ruthless struggle for appropriation and control of rural territory and the land and rent that generates between the various legal and illegal armed groups. This has unleashed brutal and extreme violence against the civil population who inhabit and work in those areas. It is this feature of the Colombian conflict that has caused a very specific type of victimisation: the generation of a huge number of victims of forced displacement, who constitute the vast majority of the total victims of the conflict; out of 7.6 million victims, 6.4 million or 80 percent of the total are cumulatively victims of forced displacement as a consequence of violence (UNDP, 2015). As the conflict expanded and deepened over the years, the number of victims of forced displacement rose considerably until it reached its highest level in 2002, when there were more than 600 000 victims (see Figure 5). For that reason, the National Center for Historical Memory (NCHM) regarded it as not going too far to characterise Colombia as a displaced nation (NCHM, 2015). The Colombian Constitutional Court has described forced displacement as a “national tragedy that affects the destinies of countless Colombians and that will mark the country's future for decades to come”.²¹

Figure 5 Change in number of people forcibly displaced in Colombia



Source: National Center for Historical Memory, 2015, p. 57.

²¹ CCC, Judgment SU-1150 of 2000. Judge Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz; repeated in Judgment T-702 of 2012. Judge Luis Ernesto Vargas Silva (NCHM, 2016:16).

3 The relationships between food security and armed conflict in Colombia

Given the distinctive features of Colombia and the armed conflict, as described above, the relationships between the conflict and food security have not been uniform or constant over time. Instead, they have varied as the conflict has transformed in accordance with the (changing) motivations of the various actors involved and the economic and social changes that have taken place in the country over the last half-century. The analysis below is thus valid insofar as it sets out the main relationships between food security and armed conflict that have taken place in Colombia at different times during the conflict but not necessarily in all stages. Moreover, the analysis below stresses the effect that these relationships have had on the population and highlights the main mechanism or transmission channels through which they have been established.

3.1 The relationships between armed conflict and food insecurity and the main transmission channels

3.1.1 The armed conflict's focused impact on production, distribution and marketing of food in disputed rural territories occupied and controlled by armed actors

As in the majority of violent conflicts, the Colombian conflict has affected food security through its destructive and disruptive effects on production, distribution and marketing of food. However, unlike other experiences, this damage has not had a significant impact on food security nationwide. It has been limited to the local and regional level, i.e. rural territories that have been occupied or controlled for long periods by the various armed actors, which have been the subject of ongoing violent dispute, or which have temporarily become military theatres. Since the territories affected by the conflict have increased (and changed) over time, the conflict's impact on food production locally grew as the conflict developed and spread. Moreover, in the case of Colombia, damage to production was caused mainly by the strategies used to occupy and control rural territories by illegal actors rather than physical destruction caused by weapons of war and combat.²² Although these strategies have had different motivations and objectives, depending on the actor implementing them,²³ the results have been basically the same since in all cases the armed conflict has had a negative effect on food security through decreased availability of food and access to it.

The available information indicates that food security locally and regionally has been affected both by the difficulty or impossibility of bringing in food from other regions due to the prevailing conflict, as well as a decrease in local production due to destruction or abandonment of crops

²² Greater physical destruction has been caused by state forces through the use of powerful weapons such as cannons and aerial bombardment of guerrilla positions, illegal crops and facilities related to drug trafficking. For example, forced manual or aerial eradication of illegal crops and bombardments as part of the operations known as the Patriot Plan, Victory Plan, Consolidation Plan and Sword of Honour Plans I and II, financed with aid from the United States through the Columbia Plan, seriously affected collective territories through the destruction of facilities used to grow illegal crops, animal deaths and pollution of rivers (NCHM, 2015).

²³ The guerrillas' motivations for the control and occupation of territory changed over time from purely political objectives (creating a local social base and exercising local power) to essentially economic aims involving wealth accumulation. In the case of paramilitary groups, the control and occupation of territory had a clear political objective: to decrease (and eliminate) the guerrillas' social bases and construct their own bases allowing them to control and exercise local power. In economic terms, just like the guerrillas, their aim was to accumulate wealth and obtain rents.

and land by the local population. Access to food has also been affected by conflict due to an increase in local unemployment and food shortages caused by a disruption of distribution networks and channels for marketing and sale of food (damage to roads, rural tracks, bridges, local markets, etc.), as well as problems with physical movement (by land and river) of people and goods due to the risks and restrictions imposed by the armed groups occupying or controlling the territories (NCHM, 2014, 2015, 2016; UNDP, 2011; Machado Cartagena, 2009; Kalmatovitz and López Enciso, 2006).

This suggests that in the case of Colombia, one of the features of armed conflict that has most affected food security in rural areas is the practice followed by most of the illegal actors which consists of confining the civil population, preventing the inhabitants from leaving and blocking access to food, fuel, medicine and all essentials required for the survival of resident households and displaced persons that are there. According to the National Center for Historical Memory, confinement, as a means of restricting mobility and access to goods and services from the state, has marked the lives of thousands of communities and households nationwide (NCHM, 2015:458). The guerrillas have followed this practice in the areas they control and occupy.

For example, during the guerrilla expansion that took place in 1978–1991, the FARC put in place controls over the population, which meant that people could not leave the region without the permission of the local commanders. Additionally, in the so-called Demilitarized Zone created as part of the peace negotiations between the government and the FARC in 1998 and in territorial control zones, checkpoints were set up on roads and rivers, time-limits were set for road and river transport, night-time travel was prevented and travelling salesmen were controlled by requiring a pass issued by the FARC (NCHM, 2014). Additionally, the use of mines surrounding coca crops and to prevent public forces from entering guerrilla areas has confined people in settlements and villages.

One characteristic case took place in January 2013, when 300 inhabitants of four small towns in the Roberto Poyán municipality in the department of Nariño were unable to leave because the FARC had mined roads and fields in the area in response to the nearby presence of the army (NCHM, 2014). Another case took place during the same period in the north of the department of Antioquía, in coca-growing settlements in the municipality of Briceño where 360 farmers were confined to their homes for 15 days by mines laid by the FARC Frentes 18 and 36. As a result, they could not travel to the weekly market, were not working and their children did not go to school (NCHM, 2014). Finally, it is relevant to mention the serious situation faced by the Embera and Wounaan peoples in the department of Chocó, members of the Jiw people in Guaviare and Meta, and the Hitnus and Makaguanes in Arauca between May and September 2011, who were confined by the territorial control exercised by illegal armed actors to prevent access by other armed groups and the public forces. In these and other areas of the country, restrictions on mobility, bringing in food and carrying out everyday activities such as fishing and hunting have seriously deteriorated communities' living conditions (ACNUR, 2012).

In addition to the guerrillas, paramilitary groups also extensively resorted to confining territories, peoples and entire communities as a mechanism of territorial, social and political control (NCHM, 2014, 2015, 2016; UNDP, 2003, 2011; CNHC, 2015; Pécaut, 2015, Gutiérrez, 2015). In these cases, the situation suffered by the population was far worse since the paramilitaries often considered the civil population living in confined territories to be the guerrillas' social bases, which meant that measures to protect the local population's movements were much stricter. Consequently, the population suffered from lack of availability and access to food.

As a result of this situation, food insecurity has increased for the population who live and work in these territories and their living conditions have deteriorated. Unfortunately, few studies systematically take into account the magnitude of the impact and scope of the effects of the conflict on food security in the territories most affected by the conflict. As stated by the National Center for Historical Memory, there is no nationwide evidence confirming a clear relationship between conflict and a reduction in production but there is abundant empirical evidence of the harmful effects of the conflict on this variable locally and regionally, especially among peasant farmers, indigenous peoples and people of African descent, who are the groups characterised by high levels of poverty and food insecurity (NCHM, 2015, 2016).

Due to the long length of the conflict, the impact of these kinds of effects has been cumulative and has varied with the number of years areas have been affected. According to a study conducted by Arias and Ibáñez (2012), in the first two years armed groups are present, production measured in terms of agricultural income falls and then recovers after six years. The same authors have also found specific strategies used by producers to reduce the negative impact of the presence of armed groups, consisting of using a larger percentage of land for temporary crops or pasture or leaving land unused. They concentrate their production on crops with a low profit but a fast return (Arias and Ibáñez, 2012; NCHM, 2015).

3.1.2 Forced displacement: the main mechanism generating food insecurity in Colombia

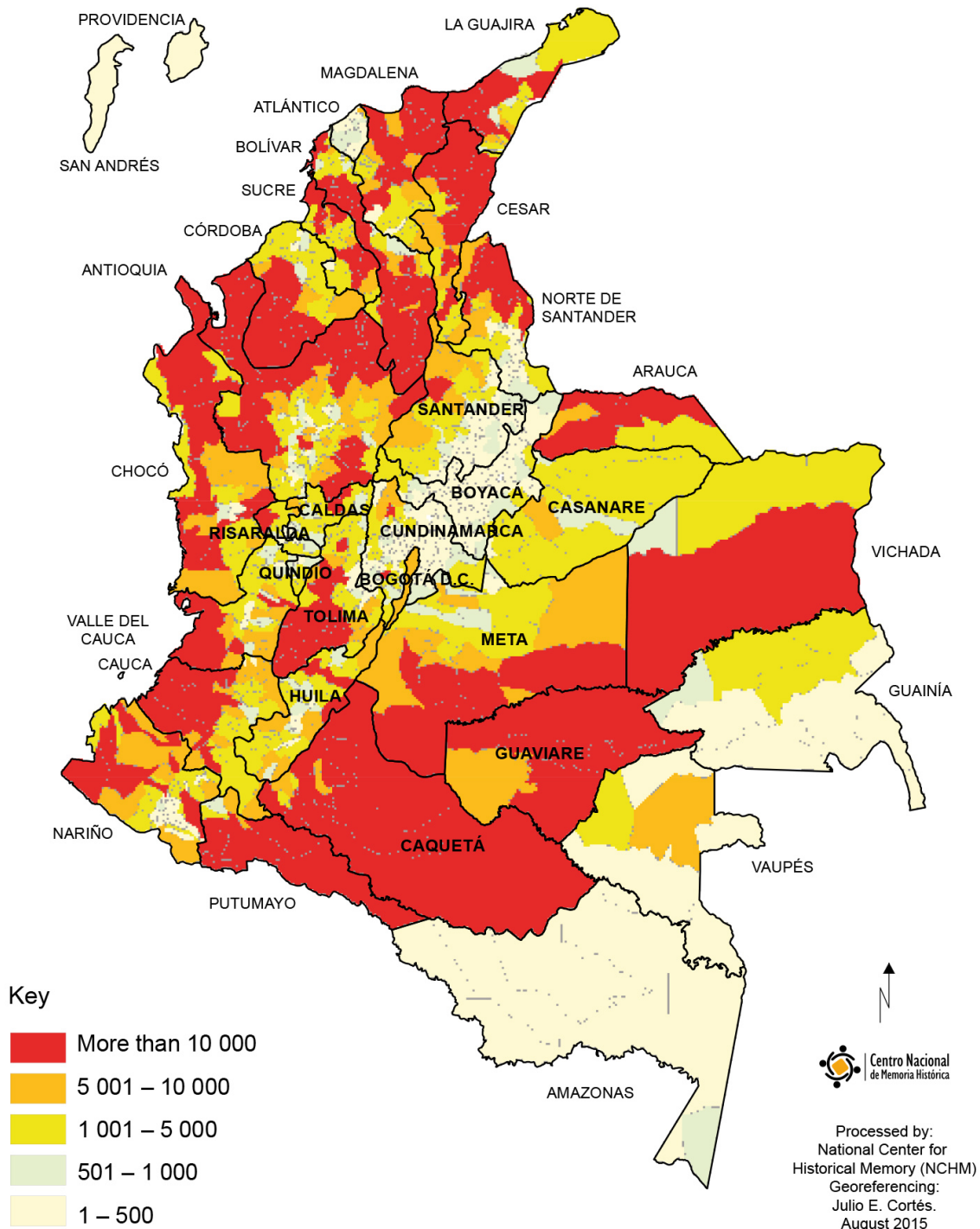
In the case of Colombia, the main mechanism whereby armed conflict has had a negative effect on food security is the mass forced displacement generated by the fierce dispute over rural territories by the various legal and illegal armed actors, who have used perverse strategies to force the local population to leave their homes and abandon their property, including goods and land. Other households have been forced to leave their homes and abandon their property as a survival strategy due to the harsh economic, social and security conditions they faced in their places of origin²⁴. Once they have been displaced from their places of origin, the victims generally migrate to urban centres, where they face a complex and highly unfavourable environment. Therefore, in the case of Colombia, the fundamental link between violent conflict and food security is forced displacement, which is the main source of victimisation and is one of the main manifestations of personal insecurity associated with them.

As mentioned above, there are more than six million victims of forced displacement. This is around 80 percent of all victims and 14 percent of the country's total population²⁵. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that in 2012 Colombia was the country with the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world (Ortiz and Kaminker, 2014; Restrepo and Sadinle, 2009). Due to its magnitude and its impact on the civil population, forced displacement is the main humanitarian crisis in Colombia (NCHM, 2015). More than 80 percent of people displaced by violence live in a state of humanitarian emergency (WFP, 2003).

²⁴According to a study by the World Food Programme (2003) on the situation of the displaced population, moving away is their initial survival strategy. According to the results of the survey of municipal capitals as part of the study, 94 percent of households have been displaced once. 48 percent of them left their homes as they were victims of direct threats and 40 percent because they were afraid even though they had not been directly threatened (WFP, 2003).

²⁵ According to official records, just over half of the displaced population are women (3 301 848); while 2 279 576 are minors, 1 480 983 of whom are under 12 years old. It is also estimated, based on demographic data from 2005, that around 15 percent of the entire Afro-Colombian population and 10 percent of the total indigenous population have been displaced.

Figure 6 Historic forced displacement by municipality in Colombia



Source: National Center for Historical Memory, 2015, p. 137.

The rural population is the most affected (87 percent of displaced people are rural in origin) because the countryside has been the main theatre of operations for guerrillas, paramilitary groups and counterinsurgency campaigns by the Armed Forces, as well as drug trafficking. It is also the countryside where there has been relentless, violent conflict between armed and

unarmed, legal and illegal groups over possession of land and strategic control of rural territories.

Forced displacement is the main cause of the increase in food insecurity in Colombia for several reasons. First of all, its long length and increasing expansion and deepening has had vast cumulative effects extending beyond the short-term. As stated in various studies, forced displacement took place in Colombia throughout the twentieth century and even before (NCHM, 2015, 2016). However, as the current conflict has developed and deepened, forced displacement has become more widespread and reached alarming levels to the point of generating a veritable humanitarian crisis. In fact, it was precisely during the worst period of the conflict (1985–2002) that the number of victims of displacement was highest (recall Figure 5).

Secondly, the main victims of forced displacement are rural people and communities who, at the time they were displaced, were mostly living in poverty²⁶ and suffering from nutrition and health problems (especially children and the elderly). According to a study commissioned by the World Food Programme, the average food calorie consumption of displaced people was 1752 kcal per day, which is less than the minimum requirement of 2100 kcal per person per day. Additionally, displaced people had higher indices of chronic and acute malnutrition than the host population (Trentmann, 2003). Another study on dietary patterns and access to food by displaced families in the municipality of Girón, Santander, found that food insecurity affected 95 percent of the family studied and, generally speaking, dietary quality was unsatisfactory (Prada, Hernán and Ortiz, 2008). The same study argues that among children acute malnutrition is four times higher than the country's average and chronic nutrition is twice as high.

Thirdly, it mainly affects the most vulnerable groups, who were already suffering from food insecurity in their places of origin: children, the elderly, women and indigenous populations and those of African descent. These account for the bulk of the displaced population, 72 percent of total victims. In fact, the characteristics that increase vulnerability after displacement are belonging to an ethnic minority and female-headed households due to the death or disappearance of the head of the household, being a child, or being elderly. The ethnic population also suffers from loss of cultural identity, racial discrimination and, due to the marked sociocultural differences, they suffer from a painful process of adaptation (NCHM, 2015).

Indigenous peoples have suffered widespread deterioration in living conditions, especially affecting women, children and the elderly, due to malnutrition, diseases associated with dietary deficiencies, the suspension of official schooling and people's own educational initiatives, and the alteration of housing patterns and the spatial layout of settlements (NCHM, 2015).

When they are caused by conflict, female-headed households affect the make-up of the household and abruptly alter the role of women in it. Female-headed households have higher dependency rates and a smaller number of individuals of income-generating age, which increases their vulnerability after displacement (Ibáñez and Velásquez, 2008).

Fourthly, forced displacement rapidly and suddenly affects the lives of its victims, particularly their ability to produce and gain access to food and because in the vast majority of cases, there is a drastic and sudden impoverishment of the affected people and families due to the temporary

²⁶ According to the National Human Development Report (UNDP, 2011), in 2008, 49 percent of the population in rural areas was affected by poverty, while in the cities the level was less than half of that at 22 percent. According to sources consulted by the *Misión para la Transformación del Campo* (DNP, 2015), 77 percent of the employed population in rural areas had a monthly income below the legal minimum wage, compared with 41 percent in urban areas.

or permanent loss of their assets (land and goods). According to Darío (2015), one of the greatest impacts that displacement of the population has had is the vast property losses suffered by the affected families, which can be calculated based on the number of households affected. According to data from the *Comisión de Seguimiento a la Política Pública sobre Desplazamiento Forzoso* [Commission Monitoring Public Policy regarding Forced Displacement], cited by the UNDP's Human Development Report 2011, 83 percent of the displaced population registered in the *Registro Único de Población Desplazada* [Unified Displaced Population Register] (RUPD) lost some property (not including household furniture): 72 percent animals, 50 percent machinery and equipment, 42 percent land, 32 percent crops, 24 percent production infrastructure and 19 percent non-rural real estate. Moreover, the number of hectares of which people were dispossessed and forced to abandon due to displacement from 1980–2010 amounted to around 6.6 million hectares (not including the territory of ethnic communities). This is approximately 12.9 percent of the country's agricultural land. Most of the dispossessed land consisted of smallholdings of up to 20 hectares (73 percent of the property), and medium-sized holdings between 20 and 500 hectares (26.6 percent of the property) (UNDP, 2011).

This loss of property worsened the country's poverty figures and insofar as it was accompanied by even greater concentration of land and real estate ownership, it also contributed to a rural GINI coefficient above 0.6 (CHCV, 2015). Ibáñez and Vásquez (2008) state that home-related losses are considerable since in their places of origin 65 percent of households had a home of their own. This fell to just under 25 percent in their host location. They have also found that around 6 percent of households that have their own home in their host location were not homeowners in their place of origin. This is due to public social housing programmes.

One must also take into account that, generally speaking, displaced people migrate to the cities, where they face an unfamiliar (and sometimes hostile) environment for which they do not have the necessary employment skills and abilities to allow them to find quality jobs. This forces them to engage in informal activities that do not generate sufficient income to lead a decent life or gain access to the food the family requires (CHVC, 2015; Gutiérrez, 2015). As has been rightly stated, in the eyes of the city's central inhabitants, the most "well-off", displaced people are comparable with the inconveniently destitute, the unemployed or informal street workers, who expose a situation they would prefer not to see (NCHM, 2015).

According to a study carried out in 2008, income from employment and the level of consumption per adult equivalent (among displaced people) in the initial months falls from almost USD 1000 to around USD 300. This implies that displaced households in their host location earn almost 54 percent of what they earned in their places of origin and work around 63 percent of the hours they previously did (Ibáñez and Velásquez, 2008). Additionally, due to the loss of assets and employment difficulties, the fall in consumption by adult equivalent is significant as it is 38 percent less and does not improve over time. Therefore, the composition of consumption is altered in the sense that a significant proportion is funded with donations, which makes displaced families dependent on state and private aid (Ibáñez and Velásquez, 2008).

Moreover, the study commissioned by the German GTZ for the World Food Programme (WFP) shows that the displaced population suffers from food insecurity due to their economic handicap in acquiring basic foodstuffs. This situation is worsened by their rural characteristics. According to this report, around 80 percent of displaced people do not have the possibility of eating a nutritionally balanced diet (Trentmann, 2003).

The situation is more complex considering that the vast majority of displaced people migrate to small towns²⁷ characterised by weak public finances and institutions, so the local authorities cannot adequately provide for the displaced population. According to the report by National Center for Historical Memory (2015), the growth of municipal capitals and host towns and cities receiving the displaced population is also forced and accelerated and focused on municipalities that do not have the financial capacity to meet their needs. This sometimes results in the expansion of informal settlements on the outskirts with well-known negative consequences in terms of the environment, town planning and the quality-of-life of the original population and recent arrivals (NCHM, 2015).

In view of these reasons, it is no surprise that according to some studies and field research, the top priority of victims of displacement is food. According to Trentmann (2003), the displaced population felt their main need was food (78.5 percent) followed by work (63.5) and housing (55 percent). The same research found that malnutrition was one of the main health problems suffered by the population, in particular, among children and the elderly.

Fifthly, displacement has lasting impacts of various kinds on the well-being of people and the communities to which they belong due to the loss of productive assets and property and the deterioration of individuals' productivity. Ibáñez and Velásquez (2008) show how the displaced population have lost 37 percent of the net present value of lifelong aggregate rural consumption compared with those who have not been displaced. Additionally, forced displacement brings about a sharp change in the family structure of displaced people compared with the national demographic and family structure, which has strong effects in psychosocial and gender equality terms.

In summary, forced displacement increases food insecurity through the following effects:

- a) It has a negative effect on the availability of food due to a reduction in production resulting from abandonment of land and neglect of crops and the difficulty of bringing food in from outside the area.
- b) It prevents access to food through price increases in areas where there is scarcity and the reduction in displaced people's income due to loss of their property and the difficulties they face in entering the formal labour market in the urban areas they arrive in.
- c) In the host areas, the insanitary and crowded conditions in which displaced families generally live and the lack of minimally adequate sanitation at both community and household level worsens displaced people's health and nutrition, especially among the neediest: women (especially those who are breastfeeding or pregnant) and young children. In this situation, the adequate use and utilisation of the available food is in no way assured (Trentmann, 2003).
- d) Women and children become more vulnerable due to the weakening and, in some cases, complete disappearance of social protection mechanisms such as the family, community and local authorities and, in many cases, women start to go out to work because the conflict has made them the head of the household (Galindo, Restrepo and Sánchez, 2009).

²⁷ Just 14 percent of the displaced population is located in the country's main cities such as Bogota, Medellín, Cali, Cartagena, Barranquilla and Bucaramanga, in that order of size. In contrast, 50 percent of that population live in a category-six municipality. These are municipalities whose institutions and financial capacity are weak or almost non-existent (NCHM, 2015).

- e) This has long-term effects on the population's welfare and on the communities affected by displacement due to the loss of durable goods and assets such as housing and land. All this has a negative effect on productivity and the psychology of people and communities.

Unfortunately, there are very few studies that systematically and rigorously analyse the impact of internal forced displacement on food security among the displaced population. One of the most notable of these was carried out by *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (ICBF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), which was published in 2008 (ICBF/WFP, 2008). This draws together and maps nutritional problems in Colombia identified through three different sources of information: (i) the *Encuesta Nacional de la Situación Nutricional en Colombia* [National Survey of the Nutritional System in Colombia] (ENSIN) carried out in 2005, (ii) The 2006 results of the ICBF's *Sistema de Seguimiento Nutricional a Usuarios* [User Nutrition Monitoring System] and (iii) *Estado nutricional de alimentación and condiciones de salud de la población desplazada por la violencia en seis subregiones de Colombia*, a study on the nutritional, dietary and health situation of the population displaced by violence in six sub-regions of Colombia.

The study analyses the food security situation of the displaced population in 6 micro-regions in the country and compares it with the situation of the stratum 1 population (host communities) in the same microregions. The result of the analysis shows that all households are at a critical level of food insecurity since 60 percent to 88 percent of households with children under 5 years of age view themselves as facing food insecurity. Just 12 percent of the displaced families surveyed are viewed as having food security compared with 40 percent of the families in the stratum 1 host community. In contrast, 87 percent of displaced families regard themselves as facing food insecurity (31 percent reported slight insecurity, 52 percent moderate insecurity and 4 percent severe insecurity). In ENSIN (2005), 40.6 percent of the SISBEN 1 population felt secure in terms of food security. Among families in the stratum 1 host community, in spite of the percentage reporting themselves as suffering from food insecurity being lower than among displaced people at 60 percent, it is still a significant percentage. This percentage is distributed between 28 percent with slight insecurity, 27 percent with moderate insecurity and 4 percent with severe insecurity (ICBF/WFP, 2008).

Another relevant study was undertaken by the World Food Programme (WFP, 2003). This study concludes that the displaced population suffers great deficiencies in terms of adequate nutrition and is in a serious situation of food insecurity, mainly due to their inability to generate sufficient income to meet their food needs. When the situation of the poorest population in urban areas is compared with the population displaced by violence in Colombia, it is found that the latter lives in worse conditions (WFP, 2003).

The above data clearly show that internal forced displacement is the main mechanism whereby the conflict affects food security, despite the fact that in recent years the Colombian government, the municipalities, the international community and private institutions have all made great efforts to tackle displaced people's nutrition situation.²⁸

²⁸ According to a study by the WFP (2003), 53 percent of homes report their main survival strategy being receipt of aid from neighbours, relatives, friends, the government or an NGO and 47 percent utilise strategies that affect the household such as selling property or decreasing expenses. According to the same source, although the main survival strategy is receipt of aid as a nationwide average, there are major regional differences since on the coast it is more common to use strategies that affect the household, such as use of savings, sale of belongings, going into debt and decreasing expenses, while in the south and south-west, the main strategy is

A necessary question arises from the above analysis: in the case of Colombia, why has forced displacement resulted in a serious humanitarian crisis and become the main mechanism causing food insecurity and one of the main links between food insecurity and the conflict? The answer to this question has to do with two essential features of the conflict and the Colombian economy, which were analysed above: (a) the strategic role played by rural territories in generating and perpetuating armed conflict and social and political violence; and (b) the existence of an agrarian structure that creates permanent conflict and violence over possession and use of land. We analyse each of these factors in detail below.

Strategic control of rural territories: the cause and consequence of the internal armed conflict and a factor in causing violent eviction and dispossession

Unlike other regional and international conflicts, in the case of Colombia there is a direct relationship between territorial control and the escalation and deepening of hostilities, on the one hand, and forced displacement and food insecurity, on the other. This particular feature of Colombia has to do with one of the main features of the armed conflict, which has historically hinged upon control of territory and its use as a means of accumulation of wealth and social and political control. Therefore, all legal and illegal actors that have been involved in the conflict and certain national and international economic elites have implemented terror strategies to force the civil population to hand over or abandon their land and property, including threats and open, brutal violence (CHVC, 2015; Estrada Álvarez, 2015; Pécaut, 1997, 2015; Gutiérrez, 2015; Machado Cartagena, 2009; NCHM, 2014, 2015, 2016; Reyes, 1988).

In the case of Colombia, control of territory and possession of land has acquired greater importance due to the existence of an extensive and highly profitable illegal economy linked with the production, processing and marketing of illegal crops (marijuana, coca and poppies) and with extractive industry (gold, silver, etc.), which makes control of territory a central goal of all the legal and illegal armed actors. In fact, as various studies have documented, the escalation of the conflict and the increase in the displaced population go hand-in-hand with the boom in the illegal economy in which the paramilitaries and guerrillas are involved. They have used the resources from these activities to strengthen themselves militarily and for their own benefit (Machado Cartagena, 2009; NCHM, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), Pécaut, 2015; Darío Fajardo, 2015).

Moreover, there is a further factor, political in nature that explains the relationship between conflict and displacement: the interest of the various armed actors involved in the conflict in controlling territories they regard as their enemies' political and social bastions. In fact, the various armed groups and even the Armed Forces have caused the forcible displacement of communities perceived as being under the influence of their adversaries. This practice has been used extensively by paramilitaries and guerrillas (CHCV, 2015).

Finally, it is important to point out that territorial control has been an important objective for illegal armed groups and certain national and international economic elites interested in appropriating land and using it for highly lucrative economic activities such as cultivation of African palm, which requires large expanses of land to make it a lucrative business,²⁹ and extractive industry. Although it is true that this pattern of behaviour cannot be generalised and not all

far and away receipt of aid. Such aid is mainly institutional in the centre of the country and private in the south-west.

²⁹The area covered by African palm plantations rose from 161 000 hectares in 2001 to 336 956 in 2008 (FEDEPALMA, 2009:50; cited in Ocampo and Valencia, 2009).

businesspeople involved in such activities resort to eviction or dispossession, there are well-documented cases that confirm that this phenomenon has taken place in various areas of the country. In fact, the evidence points to the expansion of certain agroindustry crops, in particular African palm, and large-scale mining going hand-in-hand with forced displacement of peasant communities, as took place in Antioquia, Valle del Cauca and communal territories of people of African descent in Atrato and on the Pacific coast (CODHES, 2013). There have been reports of forced displacement in the Pacífico region, Urabá Chocoano, and Tumaco in the department of Nariño. Other land problems have arisen in the Caribe region (Molano, 2009; Ocampo and Valencia, 2009).

The link between African palm and the problem of land occupation appears to take place through the following mechanisms: (a) physical coercion pushing people to leave the land and private businesses or the illegal actors themselves coming in to plant African palm trees; (b) when pre-established crops overlap with the collective territory of Afro-Colombian communities, and (c), when businesses contractually purchase plots of land and conflicts regarding title arise with those who claim possession or those who, due to the rise in land prices, decide not to sell their land so it can be incorporated in the respective African palm project (Ocampo and Valencia, 2009).

There is broad consensus that paramilitaries are the main culprits of eviction and dispossession. According to Pécaut (2015), although initially these groups sought territorial control from a military viewpoint, aimed at containing the guerrillas' expansion, over time this became mixed with economic objectives (in particular the accumulation of property and land) as well as political objectives (control of local power and access to Congress). Both actions made them the main parties responsible for dispossession of land in the country (CHCV, 2015). For example, during the campaign carried out between 1995 and 1997 by the paramilitaries to "reconquer" Urabá, where the strategy was encouraged by regional military commanders and politicians who coordinated paramilitary groups and were soon joined by regional businesspeople, the aim was to promote a model of social, territorial and political re-engineering by spreading the agricultural export development model. Through this campaign they not only expelled the guerrillas from the region but also transformed the social geography and population of the territory (Wills Obregón, 2015).

It is important to point out, as Pécaut stresses (2015), that in the case of Colombia, those involved did not have plans to ethnically cleanse the population as in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Rwanda. They were acting with specific political and economic objectives in mind (CHCV, 2015).

Mass dispossession and expropriation of land is estimated to have affected 8.3 million hectares (358 937 properties) in the 1994–2010 period alone (Estrada Álvarez, 2015; Giraldo, 2015). At regional level, a study performed in 10 departments found that between 1997 and 2007, the paramilitaries dispossessed a total of 744 580 hectares, while violently displacing 985 566 peasants (Giraldo, 2015).

Meanwhile, the historic trend of individual abandonment shows that between 1994 and 2013, the periods in which most families were affected by dispossession and eviction were 2000–2002 and 2005–2008. This matches the periods of forced population displacement. Official information, mainly individual, records 48 774 abandonment declarations, covering 2 237 689 hectares. It is also being observed that 72.3 percent of abandonment declarations concern smallholdings (fewer than 20 ha), adding up to slightly less than 100 000 hectares. In contrast,

more than half of the abandoned land area, 51 percent (1 158 788 has), belongs to properties larger than 500 ha but these account for a small number of declarations (755) (NCHM, 2016).

The agrarian issue as a source of conflict and an ongoing cause of forced displacement

The second factor that explains why displacement is the main mechanism generating food insecurity is the agrarian issue, in particular the topic of land ownership and use. In Colombia, this has historically been one of the main sources of social conflict and violence and is one of the main outstanding issues. In fact, issues regarding landholding, its role in the agricultural structure and conflicts of various kinds revolving around it have been included in the majority of analyses of the agricultural problem in Colombia. According to Machado Cartagena (2009), it could not be any other way considering that the country has failed to take advantage of various historic moments to resolve its agrarian question structurally. This has brought along a problem that today is of a different dimension to 50 years ago, especially due to the entry of drug traffickers into land purchases, the expansion of illegal crops, links between various illegal armed groups and drug trafficking, and their claims to territorial control in different parts of the country³⁰ (Machado Cartagena, 2009).

There is agreement about there being a strong relationship between high concentration of land ownership and forced displacement. Departments with a higher concentration of ownership have the highest figures for forced displacement. However, some authors have stated that agrarian inequality has had an effect on the conflict due not so much to inequality in itself but instead for three main reasons (Gutiérrez, 2015): (a) the political assignment of property rights over land not only through large-scale landowners (concentration) but also through specialists in violence; (b) the constant expansion of the agricultural frontier, articulated in various economic forms, which generates violence due to conflict surrounding property rights arising from occupation; and (c) the articulation between political power and large landowners (CHCV, 2015). It is also important to stress that the relationship between land and conflict is not univocal and unidirectional. It is bi-univocal and operates in both directions: the conflict over land is the cause and also the effect of internal armed conflict in the countryside (Machado Cartagena, 2009; Reyes, 1987, 1988, 2000).

The agrarian question is a source and consequence of the internal armed conflict due to the strategic interest all the participants in the conflict have in controlling rural territories and appropriating land in order to finance their illegal activities and accumulate wealth. Therefore, it is no coincidence that all of the legal and illegal armed actors, as well as local elites and

³⁰ The Human Development Report 2011 produced by UNDP-Colombia argues that the rural conflict involves agrarian conflict and internal armed conflict and that although they both take place in the countryside, they are different in terms of their goals, actors, the strategic role of land in each case, and the practices the actors resort to. The struggle for land, welfare and political inclusion are the driving forces behind the former; control of territory and the population and the sovereignty dispute with the state feed the second. The main actor in the agrarian conflict is peasants acting through organization and social mobilisation. The main actors in the armed conflict are the guerrillas and paramilitaries using their ability to exercise armed coercion to dispute the state's sovereignty. In the first case, land is an aim in itself. In the second case, land is a means of accumulation (economic power), prestige (through legitimisation in a hierarchical social order), influence (political power) and territorial control (to ensure they have corridors for military purposes or trafficking routes for criminal purposes) (UNDP, 2011). They also state that the agrarian conflict and the armed conflict end up being related in terms of their effects: displacement of the population and dispossession of land. Because land has become an instrument of war and so is subject to pillaging and dispossession through de facto means or through illegal use of legal instruments. And the population is the objective of control and therefore is susceptible to being displaced or confined (UNDP, 2011).

political actors have deliberately sought to control territory and appropriate land in different ways.³¹ For example, according to a study performed by Reyes (1995), in the 1980–1993 period, drug traffickers had purchased land in 409 municipalities and were mostly using it for cattle ranching (NCHM, 2016; Duncan, 2006; Galindo, Restrepo and Sánchez, 2009). Similarly, a report produced by *Semana* magazine published the estimates produced by the SAC (Colombian Farmers' Society), according to which drug traffickers had acquired around 4 million hectares, “[which they consider] a concerning figure since the number of hectares under cultivation in Colombia is 4 222 000”. According to Reyes, this allowed the drug traffickers to “control the rural investment model” and the supply of food. As far as landownership is concerned, 4–5 percent of all rural property in Colombia, i.e. around 4.5 million hectares [would be] in illegal hands (NCHM, 2016).

3.2 The relationships between food security and armed conflict

There can be no doubt that the high levels of food insecurity in Colombia, especially in rural territories, have had an influence on the dynamics of the armed conflict at local and regional level, especially taking into account that during the half-century the country's conflict has lasted, it has been affected by adverse climatic conditions and external and internal shocks that have increased food insecurity among highly vulnerable populations, such as indigenous peoples, the population of African descent and peasant farmers.³² Unfortunately, there are very few analyses of the relationships between food security and armed conflict. In our opinion, this has to do with at least the following factors: (a) the absence of serious problems with food shortages nationwide; (b) the absence, at national level, of conflicts related to food price rises, partly due to the availability of foreign currency, which has made it possible to cope with temporary shortages through imports; (c) the markedly different situation in the country in terms of food security between urban and rural areas; and (d) the absence of robust and reliable quantitative and qualitative information about the links between the dynamics of food security and local and regional conflicts.

In spite of the above-mentioned limitations, having reviewed the literature in the context of this report, it is possible to identify some relationships between the two variables, i.e. how food (in)security influences the dynamics of the armed conflict. The main relationships and the transmission channels appear to be as follows:

- a) At local level, the increase in food insecurity generated by the destruction of crops and/or by lack of access to food due to insufficient income has generated violent reactions that have contributed to deepening of social conflict in the territories, which in turn has intensified the armed conflict. For example, Rodríguez de Taborda (2013) argues that discontent caused by diminished production of subsistence foods has generated violent reactions among indigenous communities.

³¹ The form of land appropriation is important in terms of the impact on the victim population: if the land is purchased, albeit by force and at lower-than-market prices, at least those affected received some income in return. Conversely, when the land is openly dispossessed, the effect is far greater as there is no benefit in terms of income for the families or communities affected.

³² As the UNDP rightly stated in the Human Development Report 2011, the peasant population has been ignored in most of the studies and the “peasant” category does not even exist in the official jargon related to diagnosis and formulation of public policy. However, based on independent studies, it is estimated that the peasantry consists of around seven million people and produces just over half of the food consumed in Colombia (UNDP, 2011).

- b) In some rural regions, the destruction of illegal crops carried out by the Colombian army with aid from the United States has caused unemployment and hunger. This, in turn, has increased the incentives for the population, especially young people, to become involved in illegal activities, including joining illegal armed groups.
- c) The loss of food production caused by adverse climatic conditions (especially floods and droughts), has caused undernourishment and misery at local and regional level, which in turn has led to forced displacement, while contributing to an increase in social conflicts concerning land.

From a more structural point of view, the great inequality in land ownership and its serious consequences in terms of poverty and food insecurity was a major factor leading to the outbreak of conflict during the first few decades of the armed conflict. This situation, together with the eviction and dispossession strategies practised by the various actors in the conflict and the absence of a rural development strategy, fuelled the internal armed conflict in subsequent decades (NCHM, 2016; CNRR, 2009).

4 Conclusions and policy recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The analysis set out above suggests that the links between food security and violent conflicts are complex and changeable. It clearly shows that the effects of conflicts on food security are not merely short-term. Depending on the duration, intensity and type of damage caused, they can seriously affect food security in the medium and long term.

This study applies to events in Colombia, where the changes the conflict has made to the structure of landholding and land use will clearly have serious repercussions for food security in the coming years and decades due to the effects on food production and in terms of rural employment. Another example is the profound geographical population changes brought about by the conflict through the mass forced displacement caused. This will affect not only the future development of food security nationally, regionally and locally, but also countryside-city relations. Therefore, another relevant conclusion drawn from the study is the need to supplement short-term actions that generally seek to alleviate food insecurity among the populations most affected by conflict in the post-war days with comprehensive policies aimed at bringing about structural changes that contribute to achieving food security in the medium and long-term. The implementation of a comprehensive rural development strategy is a crucial instrument in achieving this aim.

The analysis conducted also shows that the state, whether by act or omission, is a central actor that directly and indirectly affects the relationships established between food security and violent conflicts. In the case of Colombia, the combination of the existence of a strong state at central level and weak (or even non-existent) state institutions in rural territories has been a fundamental factor in the development of food security and the specific manner in which armed conflict has affected it in the various territories. Therefore, another conclusion that should be stressed is the need to strengthen state institutions at the various levels, as well as achieve adequate coordination and complementarity between the action taken by the state at central level and the action implemented regionally and locally, especially in the food production sector.

Finally, analysis of the Colombian case shows that the transmission channels that operate in the relationship between violent conflicts and food security are configured by the nature of the conflict, its dynamics and intensity and the specific manner in which its effects are felt. In the case of Colombia, the main channel for the transmission of the negative effects of the armed conflict on food security is the forced displacement of millions of people from their places of origin caused by legal and illegal armed actors, for whom control of territory (and not just possession of land) is a strategic objective in military, economic and political terms. Hence, another of the important conclusions of the study is the need to have an in-depth understanding of the nature, dynamics, intensity and pattern of effects caused by conflict, since only then will it be possible to understand the particular relationships seen in each specific case between these and food security.

4.2 Policy recommendations

Now that Colombia is in the post-war stage following the signing of the Peace Accords with the FARC-EP, the main guerrilla force in the country, and the commencement of negotiations with the other historic guerrilla force, the ELN, it is a propitious moment to design and implement state public policies to contribute to building a robust and lasting peace. This will involve, among

other aspects, a determined tackling of the serious problem of food insecurity prevailing in the country within the more general framework of Comprehensive Rural Reform as proposed in the recently signed Peace Accords. Taking into account the high priority given to food security and the fight against malnutrition in the Peace Accords,³³ below we present some policy recommendations aimed at strengthening the country's food security so as to make it a powerful instrument for reconciliation and social stabilisation.

The policy measures recommended are as follows:

- a) Review and update the strategy to care for the displaced population in order to align it with the objectives and contents of the Peace Accords, as well as strengthen programmes and actions aimed at reducing the food insecurity of the affected population who decide to remain in urban areas in the post-war phase. The strategy should also include care for host communities and families, since many of these groups are located in territories affected by the conflict and are in poverty and face difficult conditions of food insecurity.
- b) Support the social and economic reintegration of displaced persons who decide to return to their places of origin and include them as part of the target population of programs and projects included in the Peace Accords. For this population, it is fundamental to implement programs and actions aimed at facilitating their return to their places of origin, including carrying out novel support programs for the reintegration of displaced persons in the communities and territories affected by the conflict into productive activity and employment, and to construct and renovate productive assets.
- c) Within the framework of the post-war action related to the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Reform (CRR) envisaged in the Peace Accords, make it a priority to restore the material losses suffered by the displaced population and the population affected by the conflict, including land restitution, replacement of homes and provision of working capital and capital goods.
- d) Develop special programs to increase food production in the territories affected by the conflict that include both the returned population and the local population and implement a programme of construction and/or rebuilding of food distribution and marketing centres and channels. This involves, among other aspects, constructing and/or renovating the road structure and supporting local production activities such as squares and markets, and food storage and supply chains.
- e) Give maximum priority, as envisaged in the Peace Accords, to carrying out health and environmental clean-up programmes in the communities and territories affected by the conflict and healthcare for populations in vulnerable situations, in particular children, the elderly, women, the indigenous population and those of African descent.

³³ The Agreement on Comprehensive Rural Reform (Peace Accord I. Towards a new Colombian countryside: Comprehensive Rural Reform [CRR]) states: "In the area of food and nutrition, the CRR aims to ensure that the entire rural and urban population in Colombia has sufficient access to and availability of the foodstuffs they need for proper nutrition, in terms of opportunity, quantity, quality and price, especially in the case of children, pregnant or breast-feeding women, and the elderly, prioritising the production of food and the generation of income." This agreement recognises the right to nutrition as a fundamental human right, envisages the creation of a special system to progressively guarantee this right and the government undertakes to put the food and nutrition policy into effect. The development of departmental and local food and nutrition plans is also envisaged nationwide together with the creation of departmental and municipal food and nutrition boards.

- f) Accelerate and deepen programmes related to the provision of property title for land and the return of land, prioritising the displaced population and residents in the rural territories affected by the conflict, including territories where indigenous communities and those of African descent live. This measure is particularly important to prevent or mitigate the medium- and long-term impact on food security of lack of land for the displaced population.
- g) Review and strengthen the state institutions supporting the rural sector, particularly producers of basic foodstuffs, with regard to technical assistance, credit and marketing of agricultural products.
- h) Since the displaced and returned populations have different needs, different profiles and aspire to achieve different goals and objectives, it is fundamental for the policies, programmes and projects designed and implemented to support these populations taking this situation into consideration, in particular differences in gender, age, ethnicity, access to land and their production and employment profile. Therefore, it is recommended to design and carry out a comprehensive policy for their return and resettlement in rural and urban areas to ensure they effectively enjoy the rights of victims of forced displacement with a differentiated focus based on gender, ethnicity and age.
- i) Although Colombia has a robust legal framework to care for the displaced population, it is recommended to review and strengthen the special programmes for the displaced population as well as those aimed at socio-economic stabilisation in order to increase their effectiveness and scope, as well as their levels of performance, which are relatively low.
- j) Improve the official records of the displaced population as well as the system of monitoring and assessing indicators.
- k) The above recommendations must come within the general context of implementing the Comprehensive Rural Reform envisaged in the Peace Accords, which must, in turn, be in line with the national development strategy implemented from the centre. As international experience shows, during the post-war stage it is fundamental to ensure coordination and complementarity between macroeconomic and sectoral policies and the strategies and measures envisaged in the peace commitments, since the absence of such coordination has serious consequences for the peace process. Regarding this point, the experience of El Salvador during the post-war stage is instructive since in that country the majority of programmes to demobilise and reintegrate former combatants failed because they were carried out with a short-term vision, in isolation and without taking into account the structural crisis that the country's agricultural sector was going through at the time the war finished. This was aggravated by the implementation of macroeconomic and sectoral policies with a clear anti-agricultural bias (Segovia, 1996, 2017). This situation no doubt contributed years later to the emergence of a new form of violence, which has now caused more deaths than the war itself.

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