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in Apartadó, Colombia

Abbey Steele

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Calle 19A No. 1 – 37, Bloque W.
Bogotá, D. C., Colombia
Teléfonos: 3394949- 3394999, extensiones 2400, 2049, 3233
infocede@uniandes.edu.co
<http://economia.uniandes.edu.co>

Ediciones Uniandes
Carrera 1ª Este No. 19 – 27, edificio Aulas 6, A. A. 4976
Bogotá, D. C., Colombia
Teléfonos: 3394949- 3394999, extensión 2133, Fax: extensión 2158
infeduni@uniandes.edu.co

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proceditor@etb.net.co

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Electing Displacement: Political Cleansing in Apartadó, Colombia*

Abbey Steele[†]

8 May 2011

Abstract

This article highlights a nefarious effect of elections during civil wars by demonstrating that they can facilitate the displacement of civilians. This occurs through two main mechanisms: they reveal information about civilians' loyalties directly to armed groups; and they threaten the status quo of local elites' power, motivating them to ally with outside armed groups in order to regain it. Armed groups strategically displace civilians identified as "disloyal" in order to gain control over a territory. I test implications of the argument with original, micro-level quantitative and qualitative data from northwest Colombia. Using voter censuses and disaggregated electoral returns from 1991-1998, I show that residents in urban neighborhoods that supported the insurgent-backed political party, the Patriotic Union (UP), were more likely to leave the city of Apartadó than neighbors in other districts. However, residents of the nearby rural communities that supported the UP were the least likely to leave. I trace the patterns of violence across the communities using local archival materials and interviews to assess how well the argument accounts for the variation observed, and to explore the unexpected outcome in the rural area. While I find that counterinsurgents attempted strategic displacement in both the city and the mountains, they only succeeded in the urban areas because residents of the rural hamlets were uniquely able to overcome the collective action problem that strategic displacement generates. The findings demonstrate that that political identities are relevant for patterns of violence, and that political cleansing resembles ethnic cleansing.

Key words: displacement, violence, internal conflict, Colombia, Urabá

JEL classification: D74, D72, R23

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[†]Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University. Email: aasteel@princeton.edu

La elección del desplazamiento: La limpieza política en Apartadó, Colombia

Resumen

Este artículo muestra un nefasto efecto de las elecciones durante las guerras civiles, ya que las contiendas por el poder local pueden generar grandes desplazamientos de civiles. Las elecciones generan desplazamiento forzoso de civiles a través de dos mecanismos. Primero, las elecciones revelan información acerca de las lealtades civiles a los grupos armados, que los permiten expulsar a los civiles señalada como "desleal" para ganar el control de territorios. Segundo, las elecciones amenazan el status quo de poder de élites locales. Esto motiva a las élites de poder local a buscar alianzas con grupos armados para mantenerse en el poder, expulsando a la gente no simpatizante. El artículo presenta un análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo de las implicaciones de este argumento utilizando una base de datos novedosa de censos de votantes, y resultados electorales en Apartadó Colombia para los periodos de elecciones locales de 1991-1998. Los resultados demuestran que habitantes de barrios urbanos de Apartadó que apoyaron a la Unión Patriótica (UP) durante la elección del congreso de 1991, tenían mayor probabilidad desplazarse que sus vecinos de otras identidades políticas. De la misma manera, habitantes de las veredas rurales del corregimiento de San José de Apartadó que apoyaron a la UP tenían una menor probabilidad de ser desplazados. Utilizando datos de los archivos municipales y entrevistas con civiles, oficiales locales, y ex-combatientes, este artículo encuentra evidencia que puede explicar la variación dentro del municipio. Los paramilitares intentaban desplazar tanto a grupos de civiles que apoyan a la UP en la ciudad como en el campo, sin embargo, solo eran exitosos en los barrios urbanos dado que habitantes de veredas rurales pudieron superar el problema de acción colectiva de manera más exitosa. Los resultados demuestran que las identidades políticas y las elecciones están correlacionados con los patrones de violencia y el desplazamiento. De la misma manera, este artículo demuestra que los patrones y mecanismos utilizados en procesos de limpieza política se asemejan a los mecanismos utilizados en otras guerras civiles donde se realiza limpieza étnica.

Palabras claves: desplazamiento, violencia, conflict interno, Colombia, Urabá

Codigos JEL: D74, D72, R23

1 Introduction

In 1990, the banana-producing corridor in northwest Colombia was known for its leftist politics, strong unions, and the influence of two Marxist-inspired guerrilla groups. By 2002, the region tempered union activity and embraced right-wing paramilitaries. Existing explanations for such a shift relate to expectations about individuals' behavior given an armed group's degree of control: individuals change their allegiances because there are no alternatives (Kalyvas, 2006), or because they are coerced (Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos, 2009). In contrast, I argue that the shift away from leftist politics at the regional level was due to displacement. The expulsion of civilians perceived to be disloyal based on their association with the insurgent-backed political party enabled paramilitary and state forces to wrest control from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* - FARC) - and dramatically change the politics of the region.

I proceed in three steps. First, I disaggregate the concept of displacement, and focus on strategic displacement, which I define as the expulsion of civilians from a territory by an armed group. Second, I develop a theory of when and where strategic displacement is likely to occur during civil wars. I argue that strategic displacement is likely when armed groups compete for territorial control, and in communities where a local cleavage reveals civilians' loyalties. Although information about civilian preferences is difficult to obtain in the context of civil wars, elections conducted before or during a violent conflict are one way that armed groups can identify local cleavages. When and where civilians vote for an insurgent-affiliated political party, counterinsurgents infer that they are disloyal and target them for displacement.

Third, I disaggregate empirically to test implications of the argument with quantitative and qualitative evidence from a Colombian municipality. I find that residents in neighborhoods that supported the insurgent-backed political party, the Patriotic Union (*Unión Patriótica* - UP), were more likely to leave Apartadó than their neighbors residing in other districts. To assess the extent to which the variation is explained by my argument, I trace the patterns of violence and targeting in the urban and rural com-

munities of the municipality. Local archival materials and interviews with residents, political leaders, and former combatants show that counterinsurgents targeted neighborhoods affiliated with the FARC's political party. In the rural, mountainous district, however, I find that civilians were able to stay in spite of counterinsurgent targeting, not because of its absence.

The theory has relevance beyond subnational variation in Colombia. Displacement is a massive feature of civil war violence: as of 2010, an estimated 40 million people are displaced in 52 countries (Birkeland and Jennings, 2011). Understanding the underlying logic of displacement is necessary for adopting preventive measures - potentially including refraining from elections - and for developing effective interventions. Studying the political aspects of displacement illuminates this effort, because it reveals patterns that have been overlooked, and which many actors have incentives to continue to obscure. Non-governmental organizations, and state and non-state armed groups all have reasons to portray displacement as apolitical, albeit different ones: NGOs emphasize that IDPs and refugees are victims, while armed groups claim that displacement is an unfortunate by-product of civil wars. The politics of displacement have implications for civilian safety - even after they flee violence, they may not avoid it (Steele, 2010; Stepputat, 1999).

This article has six sections. In section two, I briefly review the literature on displacement. In section three, I develop the theory. Section four presents the empirics and discusses the results. In section five, I use interview and archival evidence to further evaluate the argument and the quantitative findings. Section six concludes.

2 Displacement during Civil Wars

The literature relevant to the causes of civilian displacement can be grouped into three main approaches. Some scholars implicitly or explicitly treat displacement as a haphazard by-product of violence. Following Petersen (1958) and Kunz (1973), these studies tend to conceive of displacement as similar to migration; civilians face 'push' factors like

violence, conflict, and war (e.g., Cohen and Deng, 1998; Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989). In cross-national studies, scholars have linked higher levels of violence to higher levels of displacement (e.g., Davenport, Moore and Poe, 2003; Moore and Shellman, 2004, 2006; Schmeidl, 1997; Stanley, 1987). Yet Melander and Oberg (2007) have found that battle deaths within civil wars do not explain the scale of displacement, which suggests that not all types of violence are equivalent. Further, comparing violence and displacement does not resolve the underlying relationship: as I argue below, violence could increase in order to increase displacement.

A second body of literature implies that ethnic difference explains observed variation. Yet wars that are not considered “ethnic” also generate high levels of displacement. Further, even during ethnic civil wars, there is evidence that variation exists in terms of which communities and members are targeted (Bulutgil, 2009; Ron, 2003).

Finally, in contrast to the “byproduct” or “ethnic” lines of reasoning, which group people as “civilians” or “co-ethnics,” a third body of literature groups them by observable characteristics related to wealth. Authors infer that armed groups target the wealthy, or the landless, because they seek to expropriate (the former group has more to loot, while the latter is easier to victimize) (Ibáñez, 2008; Reyes, 2009).

All three arguments assume that civilians in general, or civilians of a certain “type,” face the same risk of violence.¹ The two latter suggest that armed group strategy plays a role, but they tend to infer motivations based on victims’ profiles. Recent scholarship on civil war violence theorizes armed group strategy and civilian agency in a deductive way, which leads to a fourth implication for displacement. Kalyvas (2006) assumes that armed groups prefer to govern all civilians within a territory, so civilians should change their behavior according to whichever armed group is in control. As a result, this logic implies that very little displacement should be observed at all, and yet roughly twice as many individuals have been displaced during civil wars since 1945 as have been killed (Birkeland and Jennings, 2011). The theory I develop in the next section builds on insights into armed groups’ strategies during civil war and civilians’ preferences and agency. Whereas the “ethnic” and “material” bodies of literature focus on immutable

types, I emphasize political identities.

3 A Theory of Strategic Displacement in Civil Wars

Before outlining my theory, some conceptual clarity is required. Most work refers to the legal definition of internally displaced person (IDP) or refugee, found in the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which defines refugees as anyone “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. . .” (Article 1) (UNHCR, 2010), (e.g., Moore and Shellman, 2004).² Even though the predominant “push-pull” model implies a range of possible causes that could generate a “fear of being persecuted,” relying on the legal definition of refugees forces studies to try to account for all observed IDPs or refugees - in other words, the aggregate outcome of several potential causes. Such an approach, though, limits our ability to get a handle on where and when different processes are likely to be contributing to what we observe. In this paper, I focus on what I call “strategic displacement,” which I define as the expulsion of civilians from a territory by an armed group.³ I aim to address the conditions under which armed groups engage in strategic displacement.

Secondly, I restrict the scope of the project to civil wars. In particular, I focus on “irregular” civil wars (Kalyvas, 2005), which are characterized by an imbalance of resources between strong state militaries and allied militias and weak insurgents, leading insurgents to avoid military confrontations with the state. In such a context, it is unclear where civilians should go to improve their safety. For insurgents, it makes sense to hide among civilians to avoid detection and direct combat. For counterinsurgents, the “identification problem” - separating civilians from insurgents - is the central challenge (Kalyvas, 2006).

Civilians are individuals who do not participate in the military activities of any armed

group, but who may be “part-time” affiliates or collaborators. To maximize the probability of avoiding violence, I assume that individuals continually assess their risk and weigh the actions they can take to reduce that risk, subject to their political preferences and resource constraints.⁴ I assume that all things equal, they prefer to stay in their communities.⁵

Finally, I assume that armed groups, including state armed forces, are organizations that compete for control over a territory. To this end, they use various forms of violence to gain or retain control, or to disrupt a rival’s presence or control.⁶

3.1 Conquest and Loyalties

I argue that local politics and warfare explain strategic displacement. Armed groups are most likely to displace when they challenge for control of a territory, and when and where the political loyalties of the population are known.

In irregular civil wars, territorial control - what armed groups compete for - requires collaboration by civilians. Yet the emerging conventional wisdom suggests that control also explains collaboration: according to the logic outlined by Kalyvas (2006), civilians should be willing to comply with whichever armed group is more powerful. I argue instead that collaboration is not just a function of incentives, such as security, but also of civilians’ loyalties. Loyalties may reflect numerous aspects of individuals’ experiences and perspectives, such as political preferences, social networks and organizations (Gould, 1995; Petersen, 2001), “pleasure in agency” (Wood, 2003), and armed groups’ behavior (Arjona, 2009). Whatever their source, I assume that loyalties will influence the likelihood and quality of collaboration. Yet loyalties can be difficult for armed groups to detect, especially in wars without an ascriptive cleavage. David Galula, a captain in the French army during the Algerian War of Independence, articulated the dilemma: “To sum up the situation (...) the big question was how to assess the loyalty of the [locals]. The theory that the population would join our side once it felt protected from the threat of rebel bands had proved wrong. The idea that we could forcibly im-

plicate the population on our side had not worked” (Galula, 1963, 97). In other words, counterinsurgents face two challenges: 1) how to gain control of a territory if “conversion” of civilians is not possible; and 2) how to identify the loyalties of civilians. I argue that resolving the first problem depends on figuring out the second: armed groups can opt to displace when and where they can infer loyalties.

If conversion is unlikely, an alternative is expulsion. Armed groups are most likely to engage in strategic displacement when trying to gain control of a territory, because it facilitates conquest directly and indirectly.⁷ First, to the extent that the “disloyal” civilians contribute to insurgents, removing them from a community directly reduces the resources available to insurgents, and, consequently, their presence.⁸ Selective violence is insufficient to generate changes in loyalties. Second, the remaining population may be more likely to comply with counterinsurgents, and therefore lower the costs of establishing control, via three possible mechanisms. First, upsetting the balance of power should reduce civilians’ fear of retaliation by insurgents. I expect civilians who may have developed grievances against insurgents or their followers to denounce individuals to counterinsurgents more regularly. In turn, the application of selective violence can reinforce counterinsurgent control of an area (Kalyvas, 2006). Second, with the most likely supporters of insurgents gone, counterinsurgents can spend less resources on monitoring. Third, displacing should also have a demonstration effect: the violence observed by the non-targeted civilians establishes a credible threat against defecting in the future.

The possibility of collective targeting and its expected cascade effect makes strategic displacement less costly than mass killing.⁹ In addition, in contemporary civil wars, mass killing invites condemnation that could lead to intervention - and jeopardize an armed group’s goal of territorial control. Second, because displacement is frequently perceived to be a by-product of violence rather than a strategy, armed groups, especially state armed forces, can deny responsibility more easily than when using lethal violence.

If strategic displacement is effective during conquest, how do armed groups detect the disloyal? In some wars, ascriptive ‘clues’ are used to infer loyalties by one or both armed

groups, and civilians themselves. Even in wars without an ethnic cleavage, though, information linking groups of civilians to armed groups can emerge, especially at the local level. Elections contested by political parties that could be viewed as sympathetic to armed groups, or “parties of the enemy” (Trinquier, 1964, 27), facilitate strategic displacement both directly and indirectly. First, they allow armed groups to form beliefs about civilians’ loyalties, and they link those loyalties to particular locations within a community. Second, the public revelation of a cleavage also provides information to civilians and elites in a community, which in turn enables them to take stock of their relative distribution, form beliefs about future safety, and to seek allies outside the community. In other words, when a group-level identifier like political party membership links some civilians to an armed group, it can either entice outside challengers to strike, or prompt locals to form alliances with outsiders. The information elections reveal is crucial, because in order for strategic displacement to be effective, an armed group must be able to direct sustained violence against a precise civilian group within a region or city. In communities without an ascriptive cleavage, counterinsurgents attempting to displace a targeted segment of the population need to direct violence against particular locations, and electoral results reflect where parties have a territorial base.¹⁰ Targeting the group - what I call “collective targeting” - is effective because individuals’ risk is tied to others’ decisions (Steele, 2009*b*). In the context of violence and threats against their group, households have strong incentives to leave, which increase if others begin to do so, because the odds they will suffer increases.

The argument leads to implications that I test in the next section.

4 Testing the Theory in Colombia

The topic and theory pose considerable challenges to empirical testing. Information on group identities that are largely unobservable (i.e., in non-ethnic civil wars) is difficult to gather in the context of civil wars, let alone across wars. Colombia is an appropriate setting to test the theory, for both analytical and practical reasons. Given that the

argument is based on local-level dynamics, a sub-national research design is appropriate.¹¹ As an irregular civil war, it fits the scope conditions of the argument. With a population of internally displaced people (IDPs) roughly estimated around 4 million - nearly 10 percent of the population - Colombia ranks among the Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo as one of the countries most affected by internal displacement in the world (Birkeland and Jennings, 2011). Finally, relatively rich data are available, and the possibility to conduct fieldwork in some regions of the country make an in-depth study possible.

I collected fine-grained quantitative and qualitative data for several communities of a municipality¹² in northwest Colombia called Apartadó, where support for the insurgent-backed political party varied across city neighborhoods and rural communities. This variation allows me to test a central implication of my argument: civilians perceived to be disloyal are more likely to be expelled by the challenging armed group than other residents. I collected original data on individuals that I linked to electoral returns, and by extension, political affiliation. Yet though we observe variation in displacement across political groups as expected, it may be explained by dynamics other than armed group strategic behavior. To test whether or not the correlations are explained by my argument, I trace the behavior of the counterinsurgent forces in neighborhoods and communities in Apartadó using archival and interview evidence. As I develop below, this approach allows me to explore an unexpected outcome and develop insights into the conditions under which civilians are able to resist strategic displacement.

Before describing the data, I provide a brief background on the Colombian civil war and its trajectory in Apartadó.

4.1 Civil War in Apartadó

The municipality of Apartadó was officially founded in 1968, and quickly became the de facto capital of the booming banana industry. It is situated in the northwest region of Urabá, in the department of Antioquia. The region is about one-tenth the land

mass of Colombia, and about one-tenth the population size. Apartadó's 600 square kilometers span flatlands and mountains, anchored by one mid-sized city surrounded by three rural districts and two indigenous reservations (*resguardos*).¹³ Figure 1 is a map of the municipality. Its diverse terrain and socioeconomic base, combined with variation over time and across communities in armed group presence, makes Apartadó a basis for comparison to a range of other types of communities within Colombia, and allows me to test key implications of the argument.

Insurgency & Political Loyalties

The civil war in Colombia has a long history with numerous protagonists and distinct patterns of violence. After *La Violencia* (The Violence), a civil war of partisan violence and banditry roughly spanning 1946-1964, Marxist guerrilla groups emerged, including the largest that still exists - the FARC. The armed groups developed networks in several peripheral areas of the country like Urabá. In addition to the FARC, the Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación* - EPL), a splinter leftist group, established a presence in Urabá by the 1970s. In the banana belt, the political parties of the EPL, the PC-ML (*Partido Comunista - Marxista Leninista*), and of the FARC, the PCC (*Partido Comunista de Colombia*), competed for union members on the banana plantations at night.¹⁴ Over the course of the 1980s, civilians and workers became attached to the political groups and unions (Suárez, 2007). Mario Agudelo, the head of the EPL's PC-ML in the region for over a decade, told me that by the early 1990s, "People had really strong identities. They had a sense of belonging (...) People would say, 'I am a communist, I am an *esperanzado*.'¹⁵ And in Apartadó, even if they didn't, if they lived in 'X' neighborhood, they became associated with the identity of that neighborhood"¹⁶

As part of the peace process with the Betancur administration (1982-1986), the FARC and PCC created a legal political party in 1985 - the Patriotic Union (*Unión Patriótica* - UP). The party contested elections for the first time in 1986. Political organizing by the FARC in Apartadó formed a natural base for the UP. When elections were extended to the local level in 1988, UP candidates won mayoral posts in three Urabá municipalities:

Apartadó, Mutatá, and Rio Sucio.¹⁷ Policarpa, a neighborhood in Apartadó that PCC leaders helped create through an “invasion” of private property in 1986, was populated by UP sympathizers, as were most neighborhoods in Comuna 1.¹⁸ (The sector is named for Bernardo Jaramillo, the UP presidential candidate assassinated in 1990.) Comuna 2 was a stronghold of EPL supporters. In the mountains, the town of San José de Apartadó and the 24 surrounding hamlets were the historical cradle of the powerful 5th Front of the FARC, and another base of UP support. Peace talks fell apart in 1987, and the UP announced a formal split with the FARC; however, the party continued to be associated with the FARC in population perception (Giraldo, 2001).

The Counterinsurgency

Betancur’s peace talks with the FARC led not only to the formation of the UP, but also to the consolidation of early paramilitary efforts. When Betancur engaged the FARC, he ordered a pull-back of the military’s aggressive tactics under the previous Turbay administration. Military officers, including Betancur’s first Minister of Defense, disagreed with peace talks and a few started to support small militias, particularly in Puerto Boyacá in the Magdalena Medio region. Fidel Castaño - a narco who bought vast amounts of land in the department of Córdoba, which borders Urabá - established a group there following the Puerto Boyacá model (Romero, 2000).

Together, the guerrilla groups were too strong in Urabá for the military to combat, or for the paramilitaries to penetrate. Local rivalries were subsumed under a coalition between the EPL, the FARC, and the ELN, in the *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simon Bolívar* (CGSB) in the late 1980s. Despite a military base in the region, and the pleas of banana plantation owners to intervene, the Army could not establish control over Urabá. In 1986, the government even established a military “mayor,” and attempted to register all individuals living in the banana belt (Medina Gallego and Téllez Ardila, 1994, 130). The unions (i.e., the PCC and PC-ML) organized a “civic strike,” which halted the regional economy until the military backed down.

It was the national demobilization of the EPL in 1991 that sparked an increase in

violence and upended alliances, providing an opening for the paramilitaries to conquer the area.¹⁹ After an initial calm following the EPL demobilization, the FARC accused demobilized EPL members of betraying the revolution, and more to the point, of denouncing FARC leaders and sympathizers to state forces. Ex-EPL members became targets of the FARC, prompting them to create a “self-defense group” known as the Popular Commands (*Comandos Populares* - CPs). Each side engaged in tit-for-tat assassinations and massacres - the largest of which was perpetrated by the FARC in an *esperanzado* neighborhood in Comuna 2 called *La Chinita* in January 1994; 34 people were killed at a street party.

By 1994, counterinsurgent conquest became possible. Castaño founded a paramilitary group called the Colombian Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (*Autodefensas Colombianas de Córdoba y Urabá* - ACCU). The ACCU allied with the CP, and the military collaborated with both groups to challenge the FARC’s control. While scattered reports of displacement existed before the paramilitary incursion, there is no evidence of strategic displacement. This pattern is consistent with my argument. Further, the UP’s participation in elections set the stage for strategic displacement. Indeed, local and regional officials and human rights advocates reported a surge in displacement in 1995 (Actas, 1995). The question for my argument is whether or not the counterinsurgent campaign targeted UP supporters for expulsion.

4.2 Displacing the Disloyal

In the local registry (*Registraduría*) in Apartadó, I found fine-grained data on individual residence and political affiliation that allow me to compare pre-conquest, local-level data linking individuals to groups – in this case, to the UP - with post-conquest, comparable information, to get a sense for patterns of targeting. In 1991, electoral support for the UP varied across the neighborhoods and communities of the municipality. According to my argument, armed groups attempting conquest of a territory should target the subsets of communities that they associate with the rival armed groups. In the context

of Apartadó, residents of neighborhoods and communities that supported the UP should be more likely to leave than residents of communities that did not have UP support.

The Data

The data on residence come from voter censuses in 1991 and 1998 - spanning the period of the paramilitary conquest. Each census listed individuals by their unique identification number (*cédula*), and the nearest polling station of the individual. The data were acquired at the municipal registry.²⁰ Each form of each census contained roughly 400 individuals. I photographed the forms and the data were transferred from 969 photos to Stata datasets.

The 1991 census provides a pre-conquest baseline. In 1991, 24,603 individuals were listed in the census (excluding duplicates), and in 1998, there were 40,977. To detect which individuals left, I matched on individuals' identification number. Matched individuals were coded as "stayed," unmatched individuals from the 1991 census were coded as "left," and unmatched individuals from the 1998 census were coded as "arrived." Table 1 shows the number of those in each census, as well as the amount of people that stayed, arrived, and left the municipality.

Table 1: Registered Voters in Apartadó, 1991 and 1998

Year	Total	Stayed	Arrived	Left
1991	24,603	-	-	-
1998	40,977	16,259	24,718	8,344

To link the polling station and voters with the UP, I also collected electoral returns by polling station ("*mesas*") at the Registry, including turnout and number of votes for each candidate.²¹ The most complete electoral returns in terms of municipal coverage from 1991 are those from the national congressional election in October. Because the voter census listed identification numbers by polling station, I can link voters to disaggregated electoral returns.

I used the electoral returns to create a continuous variable of UP party support by

polling station in 1991 (“UP vote share”), and a dummy variable (“UP influence”) for each polling station, coded as ‘1’ if the UP won over 50% of the vote.²² Of 60 urban polling stations, 31 were coded as having ‘UP influence.’ The vote share for the UP ranged from 10-90%. I also coded each polling station as “urban” or “rural”: “rural” is a dummy coded ‘1’ if the vote location is not within the city according to the Department of National Statistics (DANE). There were 2,401 voters from the rural communities of Apartadó, among 3 polling stations. Of the three rural communities, one supported the UP with over 90% of the vote, another with only 28%, and the third with 21%. The descriptive statistics of the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Min	Max	Mean	S.D.
Left (=1 if not in Apartado in 1998)	24,603	0	1	0.34	0.47
Rural (=1 if rural polling station)	24,603	0	1	0.10	0.30
UP vote share (by polling station)	20,585	0	0.90	0.49	0.19
UP influence (=1 if UP > 50%)	20,585	0	1	0.50	0.50
Proportion Left (by Polling Station)	22,803	.11	1	.33	.10

Comparisons

The first thing to note is the substantial proportion absent in 1998 across polling stations and communities in Apartadó: roughly one-third of those registered in 1991 no longer resided in the municipality. However, there is variation across the municipality.

I present the tests of differences in the average proportions of displaced residents between polling stations with higher UP influence and those with lower in Table 3. In each column, the differences between the proportions are significant at the 99% level. The 95% confidence intervals are presented below the average proportion. In the entire sample, more displacement occurs in UP neighborhoods. Comparing all individuals living in Apartadó indicates that living in a UP-influenced neighborhood increases the likelihood that the individual will not appear in the 1998 census. However, disaggregating by rural and urban communities reveals a different pattern. Residents of the rural community that was a UP stronghold were less likely to be absent from the

1998 census.

Table 3: Proportion of Residents from UP and Non-UP Polling Stations Absent from 1998 Census

Polling Station	All	Urban	Rural
UP	0.350*** [0.34-0.36]	0.365*** [0.35-0.37]	0.270*** [0.25-0.29]
Non-UP	0.320*** [0.31-0.33]	0.313*** [0.30-0.32]	0.396** [0.36-0.43]
Observations	20,585	18,192	2,393

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

To get a better sense of what these average proportions substantively mean, I disaggregate by UP vote share, and by rural and urban communities.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the average proportion gone from the city in 1998. Substantively, this graph indicates that polling stations where the UP gained less than 20% of the vote were likely to lose about 20% of their residents, while polling stations where urban residents supported the UP with 80% of the vote were likely to lose roughly 40% of their residents. In other words, moving from the lowest level of UP support to the highest yielded twice as much population loss on average.

These data are consistent with my argument for the 60 polling stations in the city. However, Table 3 indicates that residents of the rural community that supported the UP were resilient relative to their urban counterparts. In the next section, I process-trace to evaluate if the urban pattern indicated by the data is accounted for by my theory in the way expected, and I also explore why the rural pattern diverges from my expectations.

Caveats

While these fine-grained data represent an advancement in precision, there are two potential concerns: missing data, and the validity of the indicator for displacement. I address each in turn.

Perhaps the census data from 1998 presents a misleading sense of the proportion of those who left from urban and rural communities. To assess how complete the data are,

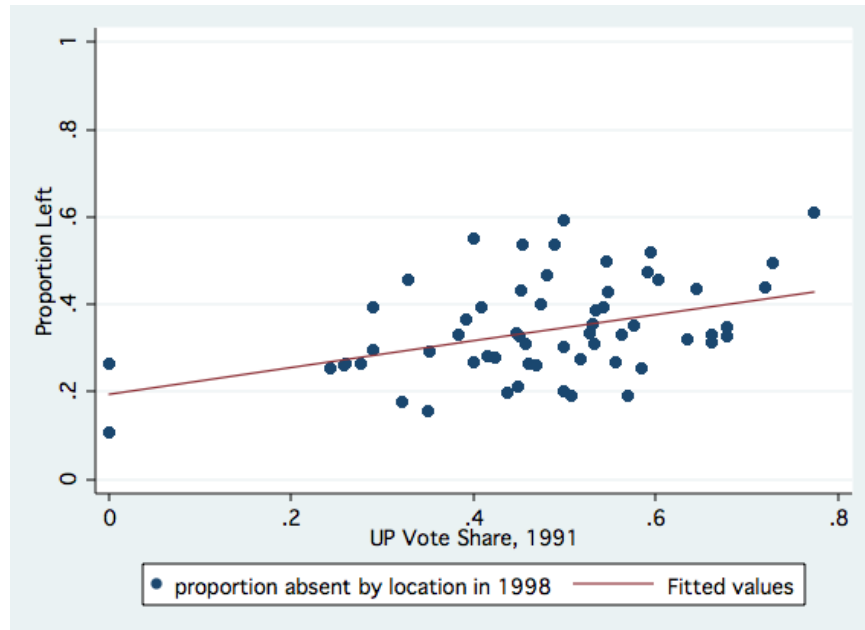


Figure 2: Proportion Absent from Polling Stations, by UP Vote Share

I compare the aggregate data available from Colombia's National Registry on registered voters for Apartadó. The numbers indicate that the total I collected is roughly the same as the total at the national level. Table 4 presents the comparison.

Table 4: Aggregate Census Data and Voter Files for Apartadó

	1990	1991	1997/8	2000
National Registry	21,234	–	40,476	47,353
Apartadó Census	–	24,603	40,977	52,814

These data indicate that the data are complete, at least with respect to the records kept at the national level. However, there was some unevenness in which sub-municipal areas were registered. There is incomplete information for voters. Some individuals are registered to polling stations for which I could not find corresponding electoral returns, so I do not have political affiliation for 1,802 individuals. In addition, 2,218 people registered in 1991 were not linked to a polling station. In total, of the 24,603 individuals listed in the 1991 census, 20,585 individuals are linked to both a location, and to the vote return. Finally, two polling stations listed in the electoral returns do not

have corresponding voters. This is potentially problematic because they are the polling stations with the highest UP vote share in the city. Polling station 75, for example, which the UP candidate won with 91% of the vote, has no recorded voters in the census. For polling station 6, which supported the UP with 90% of the vote, only 16 individuals were recorded. These missing data could affect the analysis. However, they represent only two data points of 60. Excluding them may change the substantive comparison, but does not invalidate the findings.

I am more concerned that the available data under-represent the number of people displaced from the municipality, rather than the other way around. Unless individuals register in a new municipality, they remain registered in their previous one. If my argument is correct, and people are displaced as the result of a perceived association with an insurgent organization because of their inferred electoral behavior, I would expect them to be reluctant to register to vote in their new communities. As a result, they remain in the voter census even though they no longer reside in Apartadó.²³

Finally, I infer that those not appearing in the 1998 dataset have been displaced sometime between 1991 and 1998. However, there are many possible reasons for why individuals who appear in 1991 do not re-register in 1998. One could be death. The mortality rates for the department were higher than the national average: 7.58 between 1990 and 1995, and 7.14 between 1995 and 2000 (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), 2010). Based on the 1991 census population, deaths would have been expected to reach 1,461 for the period between 1991 and 1998. In other words, approximately 9% of the total missing from the 1998 census are potentially due to death, not displacement.

Another possibility is migration unrelated to violence. Based on the migration rates estimated by the National Department of Statistics (*Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas* - DANE) for the Department of Antioquia (the lowest level of disaggregation for which I could obtain estimates), a net of roughly 9 people would have been likely to migrate *into* the municipality during this period (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), 2010). I have not uncovered any evidence in

the archival materials why some neighborhoods and communities would be more likely than others to shrink during this period for reasons unrelated to the violence. While it is impossible to know with certainty the motivations of each individual or household, the job opportunities and wages available in this region were very favorable relative to comparable sectors elsewhere in the country (Romero, 2003). In fact, the population of the region nearly doubled between 1991 and 1998 at least in part because wages in the banana industry were the highest in the country for manual labor, and demand for labor on the plantations remained high during this period.

Even with these caveats, the relationship between proportion absent from the 1998 voter census and UP vote share is robust. I do not believe that any of the potential biases systematically affect the data, or the inferences.

5 Collective Targeting and Strategic Displacement

With the data on voters in Apartadó and electoral patterns, I showed that the likelihood that individuals would leave between 1991 and 1998 was linked to their neighborhoods' support for the UP. This variation is consistent with my argument, but it's possible that the relationship can be attributed to an alternative causal path than the one laid out in my theory. Further, the comparison of voter censuses revealed a puzzling outcome: the urban pattern is consistent with the argument, while the rural one is not. In this section, I use qualitative evidence to trace what happened in the city. The ideal evidence to assess whether or not strategic displacement was counterinsurgents' goal, and if UP support was the basis for targeting, would be a paper trail of paramilitary strategy. Unfortunately, such a record does not exist. Instead, I draw on interviews with former and current residents of Apartadó, including former armed group members, and archival materials to trace the extent to which the observed variation is due to a counterinsurgent strategy of displacement. Second, I trace the violence in San José de Apartadó to uncover why its residents were able to stay in spite of the district's support for the UP. I find that counterinsurgents did attempt to displace the civilians in the

area, but civilians were able to resist.

5.1 Political Cleansing in the City

Among residents and leaders from Apartadó who I interviewed, from those sympathetic to the UP and the FARC, to those who sided with the EPL and the paramilitaries, there was a consensus that UP supporters were targeted for displacement from Apartadó. Gloria Cuartas, former mayor of Apartadó, told me that during the time she was in office, from 1995 and 1997, she believed there “was a policy of displacement to cleanse the area, as they called it. Displacement was directed at the UP.”²⁴ A former FARC commander who was based in the region between 1997-1998, who now goes by William, said that the state launched an offensive “to take back the region from the UP.”²⁵ Leonidas Moreno, a parish priest of the Catholic Church who has been in the region since the early 1980s, told me, “[The paramilitaries] wanted to push [the guerrillas] back so they would lose contact with the people, and lose their power. In order to carry out their strategy, the tactic they used was the perverse one of draining the sea [*quitarle el agua del pez*]. It was barbaric.”²⁶

Observable indicators also suggest paramilitary strategy, particularly the location and type of lethal violence, and explicit threats. In August of 1995, Mayor Cuartas formed a group called the Committee for the Epidemiological Monitoring of Violence (*Comité de Vigilancia Epidemiológica en Violencia - CVEV*), comprising representatives of the mayor’s office, the local branch of the national coroner’s office, the Police, the Army, the Red Cross, and the local prosecutor’s office.²⁷ The first several meetings report on a generalized sense of threats and fear in the municipality. In the second meeting, the committee makes reference to threat-related displacement: “Threats affect the population in general. The exodus [of people] isn’t only a response to death, but also to diverse types of threats (...)” (Actas, 1995, 2). Such tactics would not have been employed if the counterinsurgents intended to avoid displacement.

Further, the tactics were directed towards members of political groups. Starting

in 1996, the CVEV specifically and notably highlights high levels of violence in Policarpa and Alfonso López in Comuna 1. In three years of monthly meetings, no other neighborhoods or communities besides those in Comuna 1 and San José de Apartadó - UP-dominated areas - are mentioned in connection with paramilitary activity. In October 1996, the CVEV reports “an increase in the number of homicides on the way to Alfonso López. In that zone, there is no presence of the Army.” (Actas, 1996, 11). In March 1997, the CVEV records:

History has taught us that after any violent event there are always retaliations, something that is already evident with the presence of the [paramilitaries] in Alfonso López and San José de Apartadó, which caused what we foresaw in the previous Committee meeting: the increase in the displacement of people (...) To this, add the calls that are received about the ‘patrols of armed people’ in Policarpa and Alfonso López. (Actas, 1997, 18).

A former resident of Alfonso López told me that’s why he left the region: unrecognizable men and boys on motorcycles started riding through the neighborhood, intimidating and frightening residents.²⁸ A man who once lived in Policarpa told me that the nickname for his old neighborhood was ‘*Poliplomo*’ - a play on its name that incorporates a slang term for bullets.²⁹ Miguel³⁰, the current head of the neighborhood council for Policarpa, who was a founding resident of the neighborhood in 1986, told me that paramilitaries “came in here and shot at everything – they said they were against the UP, but not everyone here was [with the UP].”³¹ Marisel, a resident of Alfonso López who stayed in the community, said that “strange men drove around in cars and shot anywhere. They were crazy – they ran across rooftops. We hid under the beds, but I don’t know why. They would come in and kill people anyways.”³²

The military also acknowledged that paramilitaries targeted the UP and particular communities. In a secret report prepared for the Commander of the Army dated October 1996, General Adolfo Clavijo notes:

The paramilitaries shoot at auxiliaries and presumed collaborators of the

FARC and the ELN, the political leaders of the UP and the PCC and the population that lives in regions of influence of these groups. They commit selective assassinations and massacres. They use as terrorist objectives, for their genocides, the banana plantations and the neighborhoods *barrios de invasión* of the FARC, the UP and the PCC (Clavijo Ardila, 1996, 11).

As Clavijo indicates, both selective and collective violence were employed concurrently, rather than sequentially as expected by Kalyvas (2006), suggesting that multiple types of violence were employed in the pursuit of establishing control.

Taken together, the interview and archival evidence indicate that displacement was targeted strategically by paramilitaries against those who were perceived to be disloyal, not just an unintended byproduct of the violence. In addition, if paramilitaries targeted based on other possible indicators such as class or even ideology, they would have targeted Comuna 2 as well. Comuna 2 was populated by a similar profile inhabitant as Comuna 1 - mostly banana workers and union members with a history of leftist politics - yet it seemed to have suffered no targeting by paramilitary groups.³³ The difference is that EPL supporters, demobilized combatants, and CP militants lived in Comuna 2; the EPL's alliance with the paramilitaries explains how inhabitants avoided expulsion. In effect, their demobilization demonstrated a more relevant loyalty than their leftist politics or socio-economic status.

But if paramilitaries successfully politically cleansed areas associated with the UP in the city of Apartadó, how did UP supporters in the rural community avoid a similar fate? I turn to this question in the next section.

5.2 Rural Resistance

As indicated in the archival materials above, San José de Apartadó was also targeted by counterinsurgents. The commander of the area army brigade, General Alejo Rito del Rio, redeployed troops stationed from rural communities to towns in 1996. As a result, one of his subordinates, Colonel Carlos Velásquez, denounced him for colluding

with paramilitaries.³⁴ He told me, “Everyone knew there would be massacres in the communities [by the paramilitaries]” because they were perceived to be loyal to the FARC. When I asked him which communities, San José de Apartadó was at the top of the list.³⁵

Initially, the residents in the area did leave their homes as a result of the incursion. The Catholic Church reported that “in 1996, the pressure became unbearable and the displaced arrived to [the town of] San José de Apartadó” following “orders to abandon” their land (Pastoral Social, 2001, 94). (Some settlements are as far as an 8-hour walk into the mountains from the town of San José de Apartadó.) In March 1997, hundreds from San José de Apartadó arrived in the city of Apartadó. Residents reported that paramilitaries threatened them, and that the Air Force bombed the area. The families - an estimated 90, according to the Catholic Church (Pastoral Social, 2001, 95) - were housed in the municipal coliseum in Apartadó. While they were there, some families formed a “peace community” and declared neutrality, meaning that the community would not interact with any armed actor, including the state. They eventually returned to their homes in the hamlets and town of San José de Apartadó. Eight days later, according to María, a co-founder of the community, the paramilitaries returned. She says they threatened to decapitate people, and gave them five days to leave. Residents had three options: sell the land, leave, or die.³⁶ Still, they stayed.

The community continued to suffer violence since then. By María’s count, 180 community members have been killed, more than three-quarters of which she attributed to the paramilitaries and the Army. The most recent massacre occurred in February 2005 and included women and children; several members of the Army have been arrested and charged. Why has the peace community avoided displacement in the face of such violence? My sense is that a combination of an internal hierarchy and external support explain the community’s survival, and individuals’ decisions to stay in spite of the violence. The community makes decisions through a 5-member elected council, about everything ranging from external visitors to punishment of its members. If a family chooses to leave the community, members are instructed to sever ties with them,

increasing the costs of leaving. This mechanism mitigates the collective action problem that communities face when targeted collectively, because it prevents the cascade of abandonment. The more people that stay, the safer any given household is from suffering direct violence.

Secondly, external advocates for the community increase the cost of violence for counterinsurgents. Close relationships with international NGOs such as the Fellowship for Reconciliation (FOR) and Peace Brigades International offer a kind of protection. These organizations provide volunteers who live in or make regular visits to the community, and denounce violence against its members to a wide network of activists. Army generals complained that whenever the military attempted to enter the area, such organizations lobbied the Colombian government to pressure them to withdraw.³⁷ Though the violence has persisted over the years, without the external advocates, it is reasonable to conclude that the community would have been dislodged years ago.

The Peace Community in San José de Apartadó indicates that perceived loyalty does shape the likelihood of strategic displacement, but at the same time also suggests that civilians can resist strategic displacement under some circumstances.³⁸

6 Conclusion

The defeat of the UP and shift in control of Apartadó in the 1990s was due to a change in the composition of the electorate, not a change in preferences or behavior. I argued here that armed groups displace disloyal civilians, such as the UP supporters, during conquest. I show that electoral politics at the local level play a role in the identification of disloyal civilians. Two central mechanisms show that paramilitaries behaved in ways that are consistent with a goal of displacement: threats to members of the UP to leave, and lethal violence targeted to group members *because* of their membership. This type of targeting is what I call collective: paramilitaries targeted members of neighborhoods associated with the UP (and not others)- and by extension - the FARC (Steele, 2009*a*). Rather than indiscriminate, this collective violence was employed to generate a sensation

of risk among a group of people they sought to expel.³⁹ In this sense - the expulsion of civilians based on political identities closely resembles ethnic cleansing: it is political cleansing.

Two central points emerge that are relevant for the study of civil war violence. First, displacement is a tactic used by armed groups to gain control over a territory or community, not a haphazard byproduct of violence. Existing scholarship argues that levels of control explain violence; rather, here I show how violence, including non-lethal forms, explains control. Second, I show that group-level political identities matter, even in the context of a civil war in which ethnic identities do not shape the cleavage. In the context of Colombia, these identities were reflected in electoral politics. According to my argument, the expulsion of a substantial segment of population based on a shared characteristic - whether observable or not - is likely to occur, and to systematically vary, in civil wars. Conceptually, strategic displacement subsumes ethnic cleansing as a sub-category.

Elections not only shaped displacement, but were shaped by it in subsequent years. At the local level, those who were able to stay, or new arrivals, were aware of the rules of the game imposed by paramilitaries. Miguel, the community leader in Policarpa, lamented to me that, "People won't do anything anymore. It was different before - everyone would come out, organize, vote. Now they won't do anything." For those who leave, having been displaced once for supporting a political party have strong disincentives to vote for that party again in their new communities, even if their political preferences do not change. At the national level, the FARC barred participation in elections in territories it controlled as early as 1997. The UP quickly declined and eventually dissolved in 2002 for lack of support. Although political mobilization, representation, and participation are generally regarded as desirable, this experience highlights why elections in the absence of order are dangerous: they expose civilians to targeting and displacement.

Notes

¹Moore and Shellman (2004) model risk as a lottery, but concede that it most likely varies more systematically among civilians.

²The Convention was later amended to include internally displaced people.

³Accordingly, not all displacement falls within what I define as strategic. It is difficult to estimate what proportion of displacement overall is strategic; it is likely to vary over time and across space within wars, and across wars.

⁴Because civilians are agents in my analytical framework, they can potentially thwart attempts at strategic displacement. As a result, the observation of civilian movement is only an indicator of the dependent variable, not a direct measure of it: in some cases, movement may not be observed despite an attempt at strategic displacement, while in others, aggregate displacement may not imply strategic behavior by armed groups.

⁵The emotional and economic ties people have to their property are deep. In Book 17 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli (1910) urged the prince to avoid taking people's property, "because men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony" (Machiavelli, 1910). Further, the people least likely to have capital to ease the burden of relocation are also those that are most likely to rely on the land, or to lack a proper legal title to their property, or both. These characteristics are likely to be true even if there is no symbolic value of the land, as in the examples Toft (2003) provides, or sacred one, as with some indigenous or ethnic groups.

⁶Not all armed groups or parties to civil wars qualify. I also assume that their main goal is not the elimination of some sub-group of the general population, for its own sake.

⁷This logic mostly applies to counterinsurgents, but in some cases, insurgents defending against encroachment may resort to displacement, for similar reasons. Once challenged, insurgents have an incentive to target groups that could potentially ally with the challenging armed group, to attempt to stave off the advance of counterinsurgents.

⁸Counterinsurgents must have sufficient resources to make a sustained assault. I assume this to be exogenous.

⁹This does not imply that lethal violence will not be employed in the process of strategic displacement.

¹⁰Paradoxically, precisely where insurgents organize voters and mobilizations, they expose supporters, potentially undermining the likelihood of maintaining their influence by inviting counterinsurgent intervention.

¹¹This article is a subset of a broader project that also tests implications for spatial and temporal variation across Colombia between 1982-2006.

¹²A municipality is an administrative district roughly equivalent to a county in the US. It includes a *cabecera*, or county seat - usually a town or city, and surrounding rural communities.

¹³The city and the municipality share the same name.

¹⁴The FARC backed SINTRABANANO, and the EPL supported SINTAIGRO. Union members and party organizers I interviewed explained that union membership (and by extension, association with either of the clandestine political parties) was determined by the plantation where they worked, rather than an ex-ante political preference.

¹⁵When the EPL demobilized, it formed a political party known as *Esperanza, Paz, y Libertad* (EPL) - Hope, Peace, and Liberty. Its supporters became known as *esperanzados*.

¹⁶Interview with the author, Medellín, 14 May 2008.

¹⁷The EPL and PC-ML contested local elections beginning in 1988 as well through its party, the Popular Front (Frente Popular).

¹⁸Colombian cities are organized by *comunas*, or districts, which generally comprise several *barrios*, or neighborhoods. A map of the comunas in the city of Apartadó is available in the online Appendix.

¹⁹The theory does not suggest that an attempt at conquest will be made as soon as identification of rivals' supporters is possible. Many intervening variables explain under what conditions an armed group challenges another for control.

²⁰Individuals register to vote with their municipal registry. Each municipality has a local registry, charged with tracking births, deaths, voters, and election results, among other records. However, such censuses are not kept on file as a matter of course; these were found in a run-down attic area in unmarked binders. Attempts to find comparable data for neighboring municipalities were unsuccessful.

²¹The level of disaggregation contained in official E-24 forms is not archived regularly at the local level, or maintained in the departmental or national registries.

²²The "1" for the proportion left variable is due to one polling station with only 5 voters, none of whom were in the 1998 census.

²³Additional sources bear out this concern: I located 61.5% of the individuals registered in the 1991 census in the national welfare database, and found that over 60% were no longer living in Apartadó by 2003 (Steele, 2010).

²⁴Interview with the author, Bogota, 13 June 2008.

²⁵Interview with the author, Bogota, 6 August 2007.

²⁶Interview with the author, Apartado, 29 June 2007.

²⁷Minutes of the meetings were collected at the municipal archives of the mayor's office in Apartadó.

²⁸Interview with the author, Medellín, 14 May 2007.

²⁹Interview with the author, Medellín, 23 May 2008.

³⁰I use pseudonyms for individuals who are not public figures to protect the identities of those who could face retribution for speaking with me.

³¹Interview with the author, Apartadó, 9 June 2008.

³²Interview with the author, Apartadó, 9 June 2008.

³³Instead, the violence in that neighborhood was predominantly perpetrated by the FARC and its allies. This violence is consistent with my argument as well - during competition for territorial control, insurgents targeted rivals in an attempt to retain influence.

³⁴Colonel Velásquez was forced to retire as a result. General Rito Alejo del Rio was arrested in 2008 on charges of colluding with paramilitaries.

³⁵Interview with the author, Bogotá, 29 March 2008.

³⁶Interview with the author, San José de Apartadó, 2 July 2007.

³⁷Interviews with author, Bogotá, 8 May 2007.

³⁸Despite its claims, the community has been dogged by allegations that it is not neutral. (Most recently by a former FARC political commander of the 5th Front who demobilized in April 2009 (Monroy Giraldo, 2009).)

³⁹My theory allows for several possible mechanisms to ultimately generate displacement at the individual and household levels. I argue that it is advantageous for armed groups competing for control to employ a variety of tactics likely to trigger this response.

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