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Historical grievances and war dynamics:

Old land conflicts as a cause of current forced displacements in Colombia*

Maria Paula Saffon⁺

Fabio Sanchez⁺⁺

Abstract

We explore the role of unfairly resolved land conflicts on the long-run dynamics of Colombia's war. We claimed that inadequately or unfairly resolved land conflicts can explain not only the emergence of rebel groups but also their repertoires and targets of violence—notably forced displacements. The identification strategy used combines the use of instrumental variables — distance of the municipality to the railroad in 1900- with a methodology of neighbor-pair fixed effects to test the causal relation between old land conflicts and recent forced displacements. Moreover, we use mediation analysis to test the mechanisms that we hypothesize as links between the independent and dependent variables—presence of armed groups and unfair land reform allocations. Our results show that, indeed, early 20th century land conflicts and recent forced displacements are causally linked, and their connection is mainly produced through the mediation of unfair land reform allocations and the presence of violent armed groups. We argue that unfair land reforms harbor the formation of peasant-based rebel groups and such groups promote displacements in the very same places that experienced old land conflict.

Key words: land conflict, forced displacements, armed conflict, Colombia

JEL codes: D74, N46, Q15

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Agravios históricos y dinámica de la guerra:

Conflictos de tierra antiguos como causa del desplazamiento en Colombia*

Maria Paula Saffon⁺

Fabio Sanchez⁺⁺

Resumen

Exploramos el papel de los conflictos de tierras resueltos injustamente en la dinámica de largo plazo de la guerra colombiana. Afirmamos que los conflictos de tierras resueltos de manera inadecuada o injusta no solo explican el surgimiento de grupos armados sino también sus repertorios y objetivos de violencia— especialmente el desplazamiento forzado. La estrategia de identificación utilizada combina el uso de variables instrumentales— la distancia del municipio al ferrocarril en 1900- con la metodología de efectos fijos de pares de vecinos para probar la relación causal entre los conflictos de tierras de las primeras décadas del siglo XX y el desplazamiento forzado reciente. Adicionalmente, utilizamos el análisis de mediación para comprobar los mecanismos que planteamos como posibles vínculos entre las variables independientes y dependientes— la presencia de grupos armados y adjudicaciones de tierra injustas. Nuestros resultados muestran que, en efecto, los conflictos de tierras de principios del siglo XX y los recientes desplazamientos forzosos están vinculados causalmente, y su conexión se produce principalmente a través de la mediación de las adjudicaciones de tierra injustas y la presencia de grupos armados. Argumentamos que las reformas agrarias injustas promueven la formación de grupos insurgentes de base campesina y dichos grupos promueven desplazamientos en los mismos lugares que experimentaron conflictos de tierra a comienzos del siglo XX.

Palabras clave: conflicto de tierras, desplazamiento forzado, conflicto armado, Colombia

Códigos JEL: D74, N46, Q15

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Are grievances irrelevant to explain civil wars? Cross-national statistical studies have not found a significant relation between the onset of civil wars and structural factors that could generate grievances like economic inequality, political repression, exclusion or discrimination. Instead, a strong correlation has been found between the outburst of wars and factors making rebellion feasible, such as available resources, recruits' poverty and states' military weaknesses (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). In the early 2000s, these results were interpreted as an "economic turn" in the study of civil wars, which entailed that greed, rather than grievance, was the main motivation for violent rebellion (see Arnson 2005 for a review). This conclusion was soon criticized by analysts who suggested that the lack of correlation between structural factors and war did not mean the irrelevance of the former, but rather that their relation should be theorized and tested contextually, since different types of structural factors likely explain different types of violence patterns (Cramer 2003; Blattman and Miguel 2010; Cramer and Richards 2011; Cederman et al 2013; Staniland 2012, 2014).

However, while turning to the micro-foundations of civil wars, most recent studies have tended to dismiss structural factors to favor endogenous explanations of violence during war. War-time variables, such as territorial control and the internal organization of armed groups, are considered the most relevant factors accounting for variation in the forms, prevalence and targets of violence (Kalyvas 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Wood 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015a; Weinstein 2007; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007a; 2007b; 2009; Leiby 2009; Stanton 2009, 2013; Steele 2009; Arjona 2010; 2014, 2016; Balcells 2010; Kalyvas and Balcells 2010; Arjona and Kalyvas 2011; Hoover Green 2011; Kocher et al 2011; Staniland 2012, 2014; Manekin 2012; Cohen 2013; Balcells and Kalyvas 2014; Balcells and Steele 2016).¹ Still, a few studies insist that pre-war

¹ See the reviews by Kalyvas (2012) and Wood (2015b).

factors—such as political competition and prior mobilization—can be relevant for explaining the origin and dynamics of wars (for instance, Balcells 2010; Zukerman Daly 2012). In fact, some suggest that such factors can offer the missing link between the macro-cleavages of war and the forms that violence adopts at the micro-level (Balcells and Steele 2016: 16).

Following this line of reasoning, we argue that certain structural factors may be relevant to explain the emergence of war, and that such factors may further explain the dynamics that war adopts, including the forms of violence that armed actors perpetrate, their frequency and targets (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017). We focus on a very relevant type of structural factor: inadequately or unfairly resolved land conflicts—i.e. conflicts that are addressed through measures that are biased against one of the social groups in conflict, and that hence reinforce the inequality between groups that first generated the conflicts. We argue that such conflicts may explain not only the onset of certain wars, but also the fact that forced displacements constitute a prevalent form of violence in those wars, as well as variation in the frequency and spatial distribution of forced displacements therein.

We apply the argument to the Colombian case. Land conflicts are at the core of the country's bloody history. It is a common place to observe that one of the main causes of the emergence or endurance of the armed conflict are failed land reforms (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013: 21; Mesa de Conversaciones Gobierno de Colombia y FARC-EP 2016: 10). However, micro-level empirical evidence is often lacking (for exceptions, see Albertus and Kaplan 2012; Zukerman Daly 2012). We connect old land conflicts not only to the emergence of rural armed groups but also to forced displacements committed by them in later stages of conflict. In so doing, we offer micro-evidence? to the thesis that enduring land conflicts have made it more difficult for the Colombian war to end.

To test the argument, we use a novel and comprehensive dataset on recent forced displacements, old land conflicts, land reform allocations, and presence of armed actors. We hypothesize and show that there is a strong link between recent forced displacements (registered between 1997 and 2014) and the first massive land conflicts that occurred in the country during its first export boom between peasant settlers and big landowners who dispossessed them (denounced between 1900 and 1936). Further, we show that the link between recent displacements and old land conflicts is mediated by two mechanisms: unfair land reform allocations (made between 1936 and 1987), and the presence of armed groups (between 1988 and 1996). We argue that armed actors are more likely to be present in places where the allocation of land tracts in the early stages of land reform implementation had higher concentration. Such concentrated allocations are assumed to have inadequately resolved prior land conflicts, since they likely benefitted big landowners instead of dispossessed peasants. Diagram 1 illustrates the argument.

Following Acemoglu García-Jimeno and Robinson (2012), we use an identification strategy that combines a matching methodology with an instrumental variable approach. We compare municipalities that experienced old land conflicts with neighboring municipalities that did not. We use these municipalities' distance to the railroad in 1900 as an instrument of old land conflicts. During the first export boom, access to the railroad significantly increased the value of land, and hence the economic incentives to appropriate it. However, such variable does not affect recent displacements, since the railroad lost economic importance by the mid-20th century—when it was replaced by highways. Municipalities that share borders are likely to share geographical and historical-institutional traits, as well as other unobservables. We further control for the latter using neighbor-pair fixed effects, as well as geographical and institutional controls. We also run a placebo test to exclude the intervention of omitted variables. The instrument considerably

increases the impact of old land conflicts on recent forced displacements, as well as the significance of the correlation.

Diagram 1. From Old Land Conflicts to Recent Forced Displacements

Moreover, to quantitatively grasp the impact of the causal mechanisms hypothesized to link old land conflicts and recent forced displacements, we use a novel methodology put forward by Dippel et al. (2017). The methodology decomposes the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent one into the direct effect produced by the independent variable alone and the indirect effect produced through the mechanism. Since we propose two mechanisms, we use the procedure twice, first to compare the direct effect of old land conflicts (our independent variable) to the indirect effect of armed groups' presence (our second mechanism) on recent forced displacements (our dependent variable); and second to compare the direct effect of old land conflicts to the indirect effect of biased land reform allocations (our first mechanism) on the presence of armed

groups (our second mechanism). We find that the indirect effect of each mechanism is significant and of greater magnitude than the direct effect of the independent variable, which means that the mechanisms are the main way through which the total effect is produced.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section summarizes the existing literature on forced displacement and contrasts it with the paper's argument; the second section provides a background of the Colombian conflict and the role of land conflicts and land reform therein; the third section describes the hypotheses, data and methodological strategy; the fourth section presents the results; the final section offers conclusions.

I. Existing literature and theory: forced displacements and old land conflicts

Forced displacement is, almost by definition, a result of violence—.² It is therefore no surprise that many studies have concluded that violence pushes people to leave their places of residence to escape the threat of its materialization or continuation (for cross-country statistical analyses, see Davenport et al 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004, 2006; Schmeidl 1997; for within country, see Adhikari 2013; for case studies see Zolberg et al 1989). However, the intensity of a conflict—measured as the number of deaths in battle—does not seem to explain the scale of displacement (Melander and Oberg 2007). Consequently, analysts have inquired whether certain types of war or armed actors are more likely to produce forced displacement than others (Adhikari 2013: 82; Steele 2011: 425). The results are inconclusive.

² The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement define forcibly displaced persons as those “who have been forced to flee, or leave, their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, and habitual violations of human rights (...)” (UNCHR 1998, principle 2).

While some have suggested that international war is a trigger of displacement (Zolberg et al 1989; Schmeidl 1997), others have found that it is not a significant predictor (Davenport et al 2003; Melander and Oberg 2006). Some have found that foreign intervention predicts displacement (Moore and Shellman 2004); yet others have argued that it is the retrieval of foreign intervention which may incite displacement (Schon 2015). A recent study shows that displacement strategies and targets are similar in conventional and irregular wars (Balcells and Steele 2016). Several studies have further showed that both rebel violence and government violence are likely to spur displacement (Schmeidel 1997; Apodaca 1998; Davenport et al 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004, 2006).

Scholars have also investigated the structural or institutional factors within a conflict, which may affect individuals' choice to leave. The results on this front are likewise mixed. Numerous studies posit that economic opportunities both in the places of origin and destination are consequential for individuals' decision to stay or leave (Zolberg et al 1989; Schmeidl 1997; Davenport et al 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004, 2006; Melander and Oberg 2006; Engel and Ibáñez 2007; Ibáñez and Vélez 2008; for a summary see Adhikari 2013: 83). Yet, when opportunities at the origin are measured through energy consumption per capita, they appear to negatively affect displacement (Schmeidl 1997). In contrast, when they are measured through GNP or GDP per capita, they are not found to be significant predictors of displacement (Davenport et al 2003; Melander and Oberg 2006).

On the other hand, some studies inquire into the geographic and infrastructural factors that may facilitate or hinder displacement, but do not find them to be consistent predictors. Forced displacement is not significantly determined by the presence of mountains, deserts, islands, or forests (Schmeidl 1997); by the sharing of boundaries with other countries (Schmeidl 1997); by

distance or terrain type (Moore and Shellman 2006), or by the presence of transportation infrastructure (Czaika and Kis-Katos 2009).

Taking a different approach, some scholars argue that displacement is the result of particular dynamics of conflict, such as changes in its geographical scope or balance of power, or the absence of territorial control of an armed group (Schon 2015 441-2; but also Kalyvas 2006). Instead, others posit that displacement is a strategy of armed actors to expel individuals or groups from the territories they wish to control. Particular targets include ethnic groups (Ron 2003; Bulutgil 2009), citizens with inconvenient political identities (Steele 2011; Balcells and Steele 2016), and landowners or precarious land right-holders (Ibáñez 2008; Reyes 2009).

Despite their differences, one common trait in all these studies is that forced displacement is explained by factors that characterize the violent context in which it is produced. Studies focus on the present of conflict and neglect its past, even though the latter may shed light not only on the root causes of conflict, but also on the forced displacement that it generates.

We propose to bring history back into the explanations of forced displacement—a strategy that may be useful to explain other forms of violence perpetrated during war. We argue that structural factors like enduring land conflicts can explain not only the origins of conflict but also the patterns of violence therein, and particularly the fact that forced displacements constitute an important element of the repertoires of violence of armed actors, as well as their frequency and targets (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017).

Land conflicts have been considered a cause of armed rebellion in many places—including Russia and China (Moore 1966), Vietnam (Mitchell 1968), Mexico (Katz 1973; Knight 1986; Tutino 1986; Trejo 2012); El Salvador (Mason 1986; Wood 2003); Peru, (Mason 1998);

Zimbabwe (Moyo and Yeros 2005); Nepal (Joshi and Mason 2008); Spain (Domenech and Herreros 2017).

We argue that a crucial mechanism connecting land conflicts and armed rebellion is the inadequate resolution of such conflicts by the state. Land reforms are the main way through which states can resolve land conflicts and diffuse rural unrest (Hirschman 1965; Huntington 1968; Paige 1975; Sanderson 1984; Wood 2003; Lipton 2009; Albertus and Kaplan 2012). Land reforms do not adequately resolve conflicts if they are systematically biased against one of the parties in dispute either in the books or in action (i.e. unfair). This happens when a group or class with claims to land is fully excluded from a land reform *de jure*, or when its rights to obtain lands are recognized *de jure* but enforcing authorities deny them *de facto*. The most obvious explanation for such outcome is vertical inequality, which leads a group—say, big landowners and entrepreneurs—to have excessive influence over the definition of land rights at the level of reform adoption or implementation (Albertus and Kaplan 2012; Flores 2014; Berry 2017). Biased land reforms, in turn, reinforce such inequality.

In places where land conflicts occurred at a significant scale and were inadequately resolved by state authorities through biased land reforms, rural-based rebel groups are likely to emerge. The grievances produced by land conflicts promote mobilization for land reform; if land reform is unfair, grievances are likely to become stronger and to offer grounds for an appealing framing for rebellion. In turn, prior mobilization is likely to offer a platform for collective rural rebellion (Zukerman Daly 2012).

Further, in those contexts, once war erupts, forced displacement is likely to become a crucial component of the repertoire of violence of armed actors, and displacements will cluster in places of prior inadequately resolved land conflicts. Rural-based armed groups will attempt to take

back lost lands or to invade disputed ones, which will lead to forced displacements. In turn, those groups' adversaries will target their territories and bases of support also through forced displacements. Rebels will attempt to do the same against their adversaries, and so on. Old land conflicts occurred decades before the initiation of a civil war can make certain places a hot spot of forced displacements. Land conflicts and displacements will probably cycle in such places, making land conflict, and even war, more intractable and likely to endure.

We assume that obtaining land is a central aim of forced displacement. It can be achieved by either forced land transfers at the time of displacement, or by forced land abandonments resulting from it. Land is coveted by armed actors for a variety of strategic reasons—including the control of territory, the exploitation of natural resources, and its reallocation to loyal supporters. Though the satisfaction of such strategic aims requires the targeting of lands with particular characteristics, it is not enough to explain the choice between lands similarly endowed. We argue that such choice can be explained by the legacies of prior inadequately resolved land conflicts.

Thus, we hypothesize that there are two sequential mechanisms through which old land conflicts generate forced displacements during civil war. First, unfair land reforms harbor the formation of peasant-based rebel groups. Second, such groups promote displacements in places of inadequately resolved old land conflicts.

II. The Colombian case: a long history of inadequately resolved land conflicts

The Colombian case is often portrayed as a paradigmatic example of feasibility theories of conflict, given armed groups' reliance on drug trafficking for funding (Collier and Sambanis 2005; Sánchez, Solimano, and Formisano 2005; Angrist and Kugler 2008; Vargas 2012). This portrayal

has been challenged as inappropriate for explaining the emergence of rural rebel groups in the 1960s and their survival until the 1980s—when groups began to be financed by drugs (Zukerman Daly 2012; Flores 2014; Berry 2017). Several analysts have linked early guerrilla groups to prior land conflicts (Molano 1992; Berry 2002, 2017; LeGrand 2003; Palacios 2006; Zukerman Daly 2012; Flores 2014). Palacios (2006, 166-7) has suggested an even longer continuity, claiming that the location of current guerrilla fronts coincides with that of early guerrilla groups and of the land conflicts that preceded them.

Indeed, land conflicts can be traced back to the late 19th century, when Latin America's first export boom pushed the country towards commercial agriculture and significantly increased incentives for land accumulation (Saffon 2015). Between the 1880s and 1920s, exports increased by more than 400 percent; they were mainly driven by coffee production, which rose as a share of exports from 12% in 1885 to 79% in 1929 (LeGrand 1986: 80). Accordingly, land values rose by more than 200% (Sánchez, López-Urbe and Fazio 2010: 380).

Lands suitable for coffee production and accessible by railroad were greatly coveted by landowners and entrepreneurs. In most cases, those lands lay in the agricultural frontier and belonged to the state or to absentee landowners; however, many had been previously occupied by *colonos*—settlers—who had migrated in the early 19th century looking for better economic opportunities and encouraged by legislation that promised ownership titles after five years of farming. Due to the expenses and difficulties related to titling processes, most *colonos* did not obtain secure property rights before the export boom (LeGrand, 1986: 64-5).

As land values rose, absentee landowners attempted to recover those occupied by settlers, as well as to extend their borders by encroaching upon neighboring ones. Since many such lands were still public, landowners attempted to obtain their allocation by the state, claiming that they

were empty or that it was they who had cultivated them. Settlers had a hard time defending their rights because of their lack of titles, and given landowners' influences on local authorities (LeGrand, 1986, 104-5, 118-36; 136-8; 187-91).

When the export boom reached its height, land conflicts became acute. In the late 1920s, dispossessed settlers began to occupy latifundia, arguing they were public lands that had been illegally appropriated by landowners. Their offensive strategy was propelled by the influence of the incipient labor movement, the communist party and liberal leaders who advocated for the *colonos*' cause—especially populist Jorge Eliécer Gaitán (LeGrand 1986, pp. 190-318). Seeking to keep peasants' support away from the communists and to avoid internal splits, liberal governments of the 1930s enacted several legal measures in favor of *colonos* (Sánchez 1977).

The most important was Law 200 of 1936—Colombia's first land reform. The law established the state's authority to recover unexploited large land tracts and those for which alleged owners could not exhibit titles. It further recognized the right of settlers to claim the ownership of (even private) lands they had possessed in good faith for more than five years. Lands allocated on the grounds of Law 200 were largely located in places of prior land conflicts (Saffon 2015). However, it is doubtful that dispossessed settlers were the only—or even main—beneficiaries of land reform. The law foresaw complicated judicial procedures for *colonos* to reclaim their lands, which allowed big landowners to easily block favorable decisions. The law also operated as a perverse incentive for big landowners to preemptively evict settlers before they could question their titles, and to subsequently claim the land for themselves. Furthermore, the law did not foresee special mechanisms for securing the enforcement of land rights of the peasants who benefitted from land reform, which exposed them to future dispossessions. For these reasons, Law 200 was

criticized by the promoters of the peasants' cause—who defended alternative bills, and who saw the cause compromised by the influence of landowners in Congress (Londoño 2011: 311).

Law 200's incapacity to adequately resolve land conflicts led to further invasions by dissatisfied peasants. Both those invasions and the land reform allocations made to peasants motivated landowner retaliation. At the height of land conflicts, "La Violencia"—the bipartisan civil conflict that shook Colombia between 1948 and 1958 after Gaitán's assassination—erupted. Most analysts agree that, even if it mainly resulted from intra-elite disputes, unresolved land conflicts were a key factor explaining La Violencia's dynamics and its legacies (LeGrand 1984; Medina 1986; Roldán 2002; Berry 2002; Kalmanovitz and López 2006; Palacios 2006; Ibáñez and Muñoz 2010; Zukerman Daly 2012; Flores 2014).

Forced displacements became a recurrent practice, which allowed contending parties to seize disputed lands and allocate them to supporters (Ocquist 1980; Roldán 2002). Peasant settlers located in liberal and communist regions were displaced by the conservative government and paramilitaries, while landowners attempted to recover the lands they occupied. In turn, peasant leaders formed guerrilla groups claiming their right to self-defense; they retained land control in places where landowners or state authorities were weak, or fled to places of peasant mobilization (Roldán 2002; Palacios 2006; CNMH 2014, 40-4). In their strongholds, guerrillas exercised local power, especially managing land conflict (CNMH 2014, 58, 98). Estimates refer to around two million displaced people (Ocquist 1980: 227) and to a significant rise of land inequality resulting from disposessions (Ocampo et al 2007, 332; Berry 2002, 33-4).

La Violencia ended in 1958 through the *Frente Nacional* pact, by which liberals and conservatives alternated the presidency, and divided up the seats of other executive posts and

Congress (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2007, Ch. 2). Legislation was adopted to restitute lands dispossessed during the conflict, but its implementation was quite limited in scope (Karl 2017).

Nevertheless, most irregular armies demobilized through amnesties, and the few that did not organized as non-violent peasant resistance groups, which sought land control and political autonomy. Their areas of influence were disparagingly labeled “independent republics” and were often attacked by national governments (Pérez 2004: 75-7). One of the fiercest attacks was the 1964 bombardment of Marquetalia, which became the founding milestone of FARC (the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces). Despite the disproportionate use of force by the army, peasant guerrillas survived and soon after declared their will to seize power through revolution. They proclaimed an agrarian program that, among other things, proposed to restitute dispossessed lands to peasants and to provide titles to all occupants (CNMH 2014, 47-54, 64-5).

FARC was not the only guerrilla group that emerged from the remains of La Violencia’s irregular armies. As Zukerman Daly (2012, 487-8) argues, both ELN (the National Liberation Army) and EPL (the People’s Liberation Army) were created in the 1960s using the organization and leadership of old insurgent groups. This explains her key finding that the strongest predictor of early guerrilla presence and violence (i.e. between 1964 and 1984) at the municipal level is the control and exercise of violence by irregular groups during La Violencia (1948-58). She attributes this relation to the source of collective action that the latter groups offered, which remained dormant when old insurgents demobilized, but was easily reactivated by emergent guerrilla groups. In turn, following Pécaut (2001), Zukerman Daly (2012, 488) argues that old guerrilla groups found their source of collective action in the peasant mobilization of the 1920s and 30s, which was generated by the agrarian conflicts occurred between 1870 and 1931. In fact, she finds the latter

conflicts to be the most important predictor of guerrilla presence and control during La Violencia, which she uses as a plausible proxy for the latter's impact on more recent guerrilla groups.

The relation between land conflicts and civil war continued during the rest of the 20th century, given the Colombian state's incapacity to fairly resolve such conflicts. Under the Frente Nacional (1958-74), new attempts to carry out land reform were pushed by the liberal governments of Lleras Camargo and Lleras Restrepo with the explicit aim of pacifying the countryside. Law 135 of 1961—promoted by the first administration and reformed by Law 1 of 1968 during the second—sought to effectively implement and further expand the objectives of Law 200. However, once again, the influence of landowners stalled the most radical aspects of the land reform both in the books and in action (Berry 2002: 40; Albertus and Kaplan 2012: 204).

The law created INCORA, a national land reform institute devoted to the clarification of land titles, the recovery of unduly acquired public lands and unexploited private lands, the allocation of land to small cultivators, and the provision of technical and material support to the latter. However, the law established public empty lands—instead of private or disputed ones—as the preferred source of allocation. Further, it only foresaw the revision of titles and scope of exploitation of plots greater than 2,000 hectares, which allowed landowners to easily escape expropriation through land fragmentation. On the other hand, the law allowed for the allocation and exceptional sale of big tracts of public land—of maximum 450 and 1,000 hectares, respectively—which allowed landowners to obtain even more lands.

The land reform was implemented through regional projects developed in zones that were selected by INCORA's board (Tobón 1976; Zamosc 1986). Though there were objective criteria to guide it, selection could be strongly influenced by landed elites, given the board's composition. Peasant representatives were a small minority; the rest were representatives of economic and

political elites, including big landowners—notably, cattle ranchers and agricultural interest groups—several bodies of the executive, Congress, the armed forces, and even the church (Florián 2013: 100). On the ground, regional projects could be easily captured by local landowners, who diverted expropriation and channeled technical and economic support towards them (see Offner 2012 on Valle del Cauca). In practice, this led to a “low- intensity land reform” (Albertus and Kaplan 2012), which was strongly shaped by landed elites’ interests (Duff 1968) and only benefitted a small percentage of the peasantry (López-Urbe 2018).

To counter the slow pace of land reform through peasant empowerment, in 1967 President Lleras Restrepo created ANUC (the National Association of Peasant Users of Colombia). It was composed of affiliated local peasant associations who received government economic and organizational support and were granted seats in local committees that made decisions on land reform allocations and investment projects (López-Urbe 2018). As a result, peasant mobilization rapidly expanded; it pushed for greater land reform allocations and promoted the invasion of unproductive latifundia where allocations had not taken place (Zamosc 1986).

However, state-sponsored peasant empowerment was not enough to bring about a large-scale land reform. As López-Urbe (2018:15, 22-3) shows, between 1967 and 1972, less than 5% of peasants received land reform allocations. Moreover, affiliation of local organizations to ANUC only marginally increased the amount of land hectares allocated to peasants at the municipal level; land allocations disproportionately benefitted peasant leaders.³

³ According to López-Urbe in 71% of the municipalities that received land reform and that had organizations affiliated to ANUC, at least one peasant leader received land. Further, leaders’ plots were twice as big as the average plot allocated through land reform.

The alliance between ANUC and the state ended in 1972. With Pastrana's Conservative government, land reform allocations slowed down, and resulting peasant land were repressed. Pressured by landowners, the government sanctioned the Chicoral pact, a bipartisan agreement that restricted the goals of agricultural policy to productivity enhancement, thereby blocking redistribution (Kalmanovitz and López 2006: 337-8; Berry 2002: 42-4). The pact was formalized by Law 4 of 1973, which established that privately owned lands were not susceptible of expropriation if they were economically exploited, but relaxed the definition of exploitation to include lands (of any size) occupied by cattle and adjacent uncultivated lands. From then on, land redistribution was marginalized from Colombian agrarian policy (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2010: 227).⁴

The break-up with ANUC and the restriction of land reform had a strong impact on the armed conflict. An important faction of ANUC joined FARC'S armed struggle in the early 1970s (Molano 2015). Since then, land reform allocations have tended to spur rebel activity in the countryside. Albertus and Kaplan (2012) find a strong positive correlation between municipal-level allocations and guerrilla activity between 1988 and 2000, except when land reform efforts are sustained.

Since the 1980s, the scale and intensity of the Colombian armed conflict augmented exponentially, due to guerrillas' turn towards drug-trafficking and civilian targeting, and the

⁴ The most important were Law 30 of 1988 and Law 160 of 1994. Access to private lands could only take place through market-based land purchases by subsidized peasants; but even that option was curtailed by the elimination of land taxes—which reduced incentives to sell—and the detachment of land prices from cadaster values—which increased prices (Kalmanovitz and López 2006, 348-9). Public land allocations were circumscribed to remote areas of the country where lands were often not apt for agriculture and had no transportation outlets (Ibáñez and Muñoz 2010: 289).

emergence of right-wing paramilitary groups that fought them through irregular means —often in alliance with economic elites and state authorities (Romero 2003, 2007; Duncan 2006). However, land is still a core driver of conflict. Territorial control affords armed groups military advantage, as well as grounds for social and political governance (Steele 2009; Arjona 2010, 2014, 2016; Balcells and Steele 2016). Further, armed groups direct, regulate and/or tax the economic exploitation of lands through drug cultivation and trafficking, illegal mining and the extraction of other natural resources. Land acquisition has moreover been used to launder money obtained from illegal activities (Bello 2004; Duncan 2006; Kalmanovitz and López 2006, 334-5).

Land seizures have very frequently entailed the forced displacement of prior occupants. Possible reasons for this include the strategic or economic value of the lands, their occupation by alleged opponents of armed groups, and/or the vulnerability of occupants' rights. It is calculated that more than 5 million hectares (10% of the country's exploitable surface) have been abandoned or transferred under coercion during the conflict's last three decades (Ibáñez 2009). The main victims of land losses have been the internally displaced, whose number has now surpassed the seven million, who are estimated to have been owners or possessors in more than 50% of the cases (CSPPDF 2009).

We claim that forced displacements do not only respond to contemporary war dynamics, but also to the legacies of the old unresolved land conflicts described in this section. As Palacios (2006, 166-7) argues, contemporary guerrilla activity is likely correlated not only to restricted land reform efforts, but also to the unresolved land conflicts underlying both. As we have seen, early guerrilla activity seems to be explained by prior peasant collective action capacity resulting from old land conflicts (Daly 2012). Since subsequent land reform efforts did not adequately resolve such conflicts or appeased guerrillas, it is likely that conflictive areas persisted as hotspots of rural

insurgency, and particularly of forced displacements and dispossessions perpetrated by insurgents to either take back or invade the lands that were not granted to peasants through land reform. It is further likely that those areas also became hotspots for anti-insurgent groups who perpetrated new displacements and dispossessions to target the social bases of guerrillas, and that guerrillas in turn retaliated, thereby making land conflicts and displacements cycle therein.

III. Empirical strategy: identifying the impact of old land conflicts on recent forced displacements

We hypothesize that the frequency and geographical distribution of recent forced displacements in the Colombian armed conflict can be explained by old land conflicts occurred during the first export boom. We further hypothesize that such relation is mediated by two mechanisms: (i) early land reform allocations that did not adequately solve prior conflicts; and (ii) the presence of armed groups.

To test the main hypothesis, we employ an identification strategy inspired in a matching methodology, which uses the distance to the railroad in 1900 as an instrument for old land conflicts. To test the mechanisms, we carry out an analysis of mediation that allows us to distinguish the direct effect of old land conflicts on forced displacements from the indirect effect produced through the mediation of the presence of armed groups, as well as the direct effect of old land conflicts on armed groups' presence from the indirect effect produced through the mediation of unfair land reform allocations (see diagram 1).

Dependent variable: recent forced displacements (1997-2014)

We measure recent forced displacements as the total number of registered persons displaced *out of* a municipality between 1997 and 2014 as a result of the Colombian armed conflict. Forcedly displaced persons have been legally recognized as victims of conflict since 1997 (Law 387), and the state requires their registration for the provision of humanitarian aid, access to social services, programs for socioeconomic stabilization, and reparations.

We use data from the National Registry of Victims, which captures nearly seven million displaced persons for the period under consideration. Underestimation is likely minimal, since strong incentives exist for the displaced to register as soon as they can to receive aid, and registration is considered a fundamental right that is uncommonly denied to petitioners.⁵ Further, registration is not likely to be biased by lack of access, since displaced persons can register at no cost in any municipality before local ombudsman authorities. The average number of displaced people for the 1,122 Colombian municipalities was 6,313 between 1997 and 2014 (Table 1A).

⁵ Colombian Constitutional Court, T-025 of 2004 ruling.

Table 1A: Descriptive statistics for the main variables used in our empirical exercise (all municipalities)

Variable	All Municipalities			Municipalities with Land Conflicts (1900-1930)			Municipalities without Land Conflicts (1900-1930)			T-test $\mu_2 = \mu_3$
	Obs	Mean	Std Dev	Obs	Mean	Std Dev	Obs	Mean	Std Dev	P-value
Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	1122	6312,68	14231,07	170	13099	22656,74	952	5100,83	11738,9	0,00
Unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987	1122	0,44	0,37	170	0,54	0,3	952	0,42	0,38	0,00
Public land allocations 1936-1987 (number)	1122	304,4	634,8	170	652,41	1048,15	952	242,26	504,24	0,00
Public land allocations 1936-1987 (ha)	1122	12340,1	38716,51	170	28936,8	55990,98	952	9376,4	33937,9	0,00
Armed actors' presence 1988-1996	1122	11,38	52,72	170	36,05	126,38	952	6,98	17,61	0,00
Dummy railroads 1900 (1 if distance<30km)	1116	0,44	0,5	170	0,61	0,49	946	0,41	0,49	0,00
Distance to railroads 1900 (km)	1116	58067,5	83393,29	170	39333,3	52918,21	946	61434,1	87351,1	0,00
Old land conflicts 1900-1930 (number of pieces of land)	1122	0,35	1,32	170	2,33	2,62	952	0	0	0,00
Geographic and Municipal Characteristics										
Area (km2)	1122	1017,6	3201,21	170	1117,98	1847,23	952	999,68	3386,91	0,66
Altitude (Meters)	1122	1140,48	1155,5	170	753,39	808,95	952	1209,6	1194,15	0,00
Distance to department's Capital (km)	1122	81,46	60,57	170	90,09	67,54	952	79,92	59,14	0,04
Distance to main market (km)	1122	129,97	111,56	170	124,42	81,94	952	130,97	116,07	0,48
Soil Fertility Index	1120	2,76	1,16	170	3,04	1,05	950	2,71	1,17	0,00
Erosion Index	1120	4,06	1,04	170	4,28	0,92	950	4,02	1,06	0,00
Minimum distance to main roads (km)	1122	9,35	18,96	170	7,22	13,35	952	9,73	19,78	0,11
Coffee index	1120	0,29	0,33	170	0,23	0,29	950	0,3	0,33	0,02
Municipal rent 1916 (per capita)	1120	1,18	1,33	170	1,59	1,85	950	1,1	1,2	0,00
State presence 1794 (index)	1122	0,52	0,85	170	0,89	1,14	952	0,45	0,76	0,00
Municipal taxes 1996	1117	3459,99	47897,1	170	17407,2	121792,5	947	956,27	3901,45	0,00

Independent variable: land conflicts during the export boom (1900-1936)

As seen above, land conflicts during Colombia's first export boom mainly took place between settlers of public lands and landowners who dispossessed them. We operationalize these conflicts using archival data found in the *Baldíos Correspondence*, which contains more than 600 petitions of protection or intervention in local land conflicts sent by rural actors to national executive authorities between 1880 and 1936.⁶ These petitions are, to our knowledge, the best and most complete source of land dispossession records for this period.

Petitions came from very different areas of the country (see Map 1). They consist in telegrams, hand-written letters and other informal formats, which did not entail technical expertise or personal delivery. This explains that 70% are signed by poor peasants. Still, underreporting is likely due to information costs, perceptions of illegitimacy of state authorities, and/or threats by dispossessors or complicit local authorities. Over-reporting is also possible, since *colonos* could request protection as a preemptive strategy. It is further possible that old land conflicts were not randomly distributed across the territory but rather located in places with weak property rights, low-quality local institutions, and/or presence of powerful landowners. These factors may have persisted until recently and could also be associated to contemporary forced displacements.

Consequently, OLS estimates using the observed independent variable would probably be biased. To address these problems, we use the following strategy.

Identification strategy

We follow Acemoglu, García-Jimeno and Robinson (2012)'s seminal strategy to combine a matching methodology with an instrumental variable approach. We compare municipalities that

⁶ This source was first used by LeGrand (1980). We only use petitions made in or after 1900 to instrument them with the distance to the railroad of that year, as explained below.

experienced old land conflicts with municipalities that did not. We propose to use the distance to the railroad in 1900 as an instrument of old land conflicts.

Matching methodology

We use a neighbor-pair fixed effects strategy, which allows us to compare municipalities that are expected to share economic, political, social, and institutional characteristics but that differ in having or not experienced old land conflicts. We restrict the data to a sample composed of all the municipalities that experienced at least one conflict between 1900 and 1936, and all their adjacent municipalities that did not experience land conflicts. In total, the sample contains 666 municipalities out of the total 1,122 current municipalities. Of them, 168 experienced old land conflicts, and 498 did not. Map 1 shows the location of both types of municipalities, and table 1B their descriptive statistics.

Map 1. Sample of neighbor municipalities with and without old land conflicts

**Table 1B: Descriptive statistics for the main variables used in our empirical exercise
(sample of neighbor municipalities with and without old land conflicts)**

	Municipalities with Land Conflicts (1900-1930)			Neighbors without Land Conflicts (1900-1930)			T-test $\mu_4 = \mu_5$
	(1)			(2)			
Variable	Obs	Mean	Std Dev	Obs	Mean	Std Dev	P-value
Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	168	12778,2	22596,3	498	6689,31	14332,24	0,00
Unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987	168	0,54	0,3	498	0,44	0,35	0,00
Public land allocations 1936- 1987 (number)	168	655,72	1053,17	498	314,36	536,12	0,00
Public land allocations 1936- 1987 (ha)	168	29144,8	56278,42	498	13644,9	41745,18	0,00
Armed actors' presence 1988- 1996	168	35,66	126,86	498	7,97	14,18	0,00
Dummy railroads 1900 (1 if distance<30km)	168	0,61	0,49	498	0,43	0,49	0,00
Distance to railroads 1900 (km)	168	39674,7	53140,47	498	51845,7	54570,91	0,01
Old land conflicts 1900-1930 (number of pieces of land)	168	2,29	2,56	498	0	0	0,00
<i>Geographic and Municipal Characteristics</i>							
Area (km2)	168	1120,51	1857,43	498	981,31	2796,17	0,55
Altitude (Meters)	168	762,22	809,68	498	1040,46	1392,15	0,01
Distance to department's Capital (km)	168	90,61	67,77	498	81,85	60,65	0,12
Distance to main market (km)	168	124,91	82,3	498	127,5	84,4	0,73
Soil Fertility Index	168	3,05	1,05	498	2,83	1,15	0,03
Erosion Index	168	4,28	0,92	498	4,1	1,01	0,04
Minimum distance to main roads (km)	168	7,31	13,4	498	8,88	15,18	0,23
Coffee index	168	0,22	0,29	498	0,24	0,3	0,66
Municipal rent 1916 (per capita)	168	1,6	1,86	498	1,22	1,27	0,00
State presence 1794 (index)	168	0,89	1,14	498	0,44	0,78	0,00
Municipal taxes 1996	168	17601,6	122506,4	498	1198,19	4614,39	0,00

Model

Our basic regression model is:

$$y_g = \beta S_g + \gamma x_g + \zeta_{gi} + v_g \quad g \in M$$
$$y_i = \beta S_i (= 0) + \gamma x_i + \zeta_{gi} + v_i \quad i \in N(g)$$

Where M denotes the set of municipalities with old land conflicts, and N the set of adjacent municipalities without. The index of municipalities with old conflicts is g , where $g \in M$. The index of municipalities without conflicts is i , where $i \in N$. $N(g) \subseteq N$ is the subset of municipalities without conflicts that are adjacent to a municipality with conflicts g , and $M(i) \subseteq M$ is the subset of municipalities with conflicts that are adjacent to a municipality without conflicts, i . The dataset is composed by any possible combination of pairs (g, i) .

In turn, y_T (where $T=g, i$) denotes the dependent variable (number of displaced persons per municipality between 1997 and 2014); S_T denotes the independent variable (number of land conflicts between 1880 and 1930); x_T is a vector of controls, which includes the constant, geographical controls, and department-level fixed effects; ζ_{gi} denotes the fixed effects of adjacent pairs, which are common non-observables for the pair of neighbors (i, g) ; and v_T are specific non-observable variables.

Instrumental variable: municipalities' distance to the railroad in 1900

We calculated the instrumental variable tracing and geo-referencing a map found in a book on the Colombian railroad by Arias de Greiff (1986). The variable is measured as a dichotomous indicator, which takes the value of 1 if a municipality is less than 30 kilometers away from the

1900 railroad (the median of all Colombian municipalities), and 0 otherwise. The first stage of the analysis is:

$$S_g = bG_g + cx_g + \zeta_{gi} + \epsilon_g \quad g \in M(i) \quad (1)$$

$$S_i = bG_i + cx_i + \zeta_{gi} + \epsilon_i \quad i \in N(g) \quad (2)$$

Where G_T is the instrument and ϵ_T is the error term.

The second stage, which estimates the instrumented coefficient β_{IV} , is:

$$y_g = \beta_{IV}\widehat{S}_g + \gamma x_g + \zeta_{gi} + v_g \quad g \in M(i) \quad (3)$$

$$y_i = \beta_{IV}\widehat{S}_i + \gamma x_i + \zeta_{gi} + v_i \quad i \in N(g) \quad (4)$$

The 1900 distance to the railroad is a novel and valid predictor of land conflicts during the export boom. Like in many other places of the world, the railroad was the chief technological innovation to improve ground transportation in 19th century Colombia (Meisel, Ramírez and Jaramillo 2014: 1). Proximity to the railroad very likely increased land values, and hence incentives for land dispossessions (Coatsworth 1981; Saffon 2015), so the instrument should be highly correlated to subsequent land conflicts. We use the state of the railroad in 1900, when both the export boom and land conflicts were incipient to measure its impact on most of the reported land conflicts under the export boom, which occurred after that year.

The instrument complies with the exclusion restriction (Angrist and Pischke 2009) since distance to the railroad cannot explain recent forced displacements or current land values in Colombia. As explained next, the development of the railroad up to 1900 was not motivated by export promotion. After dramatically expanding between the 1920s and 50s, the railroad ceased to be economically relevant in the second half of the 20th century. Moreover, we propose key controls for current land values and a robustness checks, which help us exclude the possibility that the

distance to the 1900 railroad affected land values through other variables correlated with current forced displacements.

Brief history of the railroad

The railroad began to be constructed in 1855. The initial goal was to connect the country internally, especially with its isolated capital city, Bogota (Platt 1926; Nieto 2011: 62). By 1900 the railroad was still incipient. About 600 kilometers—0.15 kilometers per 1,000 inhabitants—had been scattered across the country (Meisel, Ramírez and Jaramillo 2014: 12). Under Reyes (1905-1910)'s administration, railroad construction began to be encouraged as part of a strategy to promote export agriculture (Meisel, Ramírez and Jaramillo 2014: 12), notably by serving coffee-producing regions (Escobar 2008). However, investments remained limited until the mid-1920s, when they were enabled by the increase in the international price for coffee, the country's insertion in the financial world market, and the compensation the United States paid to Colombia for Panama. While by 1919 only 700 kilometers had been added to the railroad, more than three times as many were built between 1923 and 1929 (Meisel, Ramírez and Jaramillo 2014: 12-5, 24). By 1927, it was finally possible "to speak of an actual *railroad network* that more or less efficiently linked the main centers of production and exchange of the country" (Nieto 2011: 70).

However, the railroad's development was drastically halted in the 1930s. The Great Depression held back foreign loans and forced Colombia to suspend payments. Expenditures on the railroad were subject to severe criticism due to their alleged inefficiency and corruption (Meisel, Ramírez and Jaramillo 2014: 28, 23). Consequently, Colombian governments radically changed their developmental strategy by directing most investments to highways and car roads, thus letting the railroad wither (Duque 2006). Between 1930 and 1950, the railroad's participation in investment in transportation infrastructure dropped from 60 to 20% (Meisel, Ramírez and

Jaramillo 2014: 28), and many rails were dismantled to open the space for car roads (Nieto 2011: 70).

By the 1970s, the national railroad system ceased to be economically and technically viable (Nieto 2011: 71). The lack of investments led to its physical deterioration, and a series of administrative failures brought about its bankruptcy (Betancur y Zuluaga 1995). The railroad never became economically relevant again. There are currently only four functioning railroads, which were opened recently to serve new mining activities (Kohon et al. 2016: 13, 62, 64). Of the 777 kilometers in operation, 110 are located in places where the 1900 railroad existed.⁷

Proposed controls and robustness checks

The former account indicates that recent land values which could affect forced displacements are unlikely influenced by the distance to the 1900 railroad. The latter was constructed prior to the export boom and to the policy and investments that allowed export regions to be served by the railroad. Further, the 1900 railroad was very restricted in length and connectivity. While subsequent railroad developments were strongly connected to exports, the railroad ceased to function in the 1950s. The few still-operating tracts are mostly in places other than the 1900 railroad.

Moreover, some factors that currently affect the value of land in Colombia today were certainly not present at the beginning of the 20th century, and consequently could not have motivated the construction of the railroad. Those factors include natural resources like coal and iron, illegal drug crops, and corridors for drug trafficking, all of which began to be relevant in the last three decades.

⁷ 67 of the 245 km belonging to the Atlantic concession, and 43 of the 344 km belonging to the Pacific concession.

Now, it is possible that highways and roads replaced railroad tracts located in economically strategic places, which could still be valuable due to their export-producing activities and to the proximity to those roads, and which could include some of the 1900 railroad tracts. Further, as seen, some current tracts coincide with the 1900 ones.

To exclude the impact that distance to the 1900 railroad could exert on recent forced displacements through variables other than the export boom land conflicts, our model introduces an array of variables likely related to current land values, such as distances to 1993 highways and car roads, departmental capitals and main markets; indices of coffee land suitability, soil fertility and erosion. We further carry out a placebo test, explained in section V.

Mechanisms and mediation analysis

Let us recall our hypothesized mechanism linking inadequately resolved land conflicts and recent forced displacements is the municipal presence of armed groups between 1988 and 1996. While grievances stemming from old land conflicts could explain early presence of peasant-guerrillas, the latter could also motivate paramilitary activity. The clustering of both armed actors in hotspots of prior land conflicts is considered to cause forced displacements.

As a proxy for presence, we use the number of offensive actions or attacks—different from military clashes—carried out by armed groups, reported in a dataset constructed by CEDE and in various government sources. The only way to determine armed groups' presence is through evidence of their violent actions. Presence and armed activity tend to coincide in a long period of time. In a given year, it is likely that an armed actor does not undertake any attack; yet it is quite unlikely that an armed group remains inactive over an eight-year period.

The start date of the variable is the earliest year for which we have a consistent indicator of armed actors' presence and activity, though including data on early presence does not change the results. The end date is the first year for which we have data on recent forced displacements, our dependent variable.

In turn, we hypothesize that the mechanism linking old land conflicts to the presence of armed groups are unfair land reform allocations made after the export boom (1936-1987)—which, we argue, made the grievances stemming from land dispossessions more patent, and hence motivated the formation of early peasant guerilla groups.

We use municipal-level data on public lands allocated by the state on the grounds of land reform programs compiled by the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (Incoder, for its Spanish initials). For *unfair* land reform allocations that we assume do not adequately resolve prior land conflicts, we created a variable consisting in the proportion of allocated public lands that correspond to the top 10th percentile of allocated areas, weighted by the “delay” of the allocation.⁸ We consider that the greater the concentration of land plots allocated in the early stages of land

⁸ We first created a year weight, which is smaller the tardier the land allocation year. Then, we calculated the total weighted area allocated in municipality i in a given year t as the sum of the area of each plot j ($AREA.PLOTj$) weighted by the year of allocation as:

$$WEIGHTED.AREA_{i,t} = \sum_{j=1}^n \{AREA.PLOTj, i, t * [(1988-t)/1326]\}$$

Where 1,326 is the sum from 1 to 51.

Subsequently, we calculated the total weighted area of public land allocated in each municipality as:

$$WEIGHTED.AREA_i = \sum_{t=1936}^{1987} WEIGHTED.AREA_{i,t}$$

Finally, to obtain the concentration of land reform allocations, we divided the total area of weighted plots that went to the top deciles of land grantees in each municipality by the total weighted allocated area in the said municipality.

reform, the more incapable was the land reform to adequately solve prior land conflicts. Indeed, such conflicts consisted in the dispossession of poor settlers by large landowners, so if land reform allocations tended to be concentrated, they probably benefitted the latter and, instead of being resolved, grievances stemming from land conflicts were rather accentuated, thus increasing the likelihood of guerrilla ~~groups~~groups' emergence.

To verify whether the two previous variables are the main mechanisms that connect old land conflicts to recent forced displacements, we employ a novel methodology put forward by Dippel et al (2018), which develops the work of Imai, Keele and Tingley (2010) and Imai et al. (2011). The complete model is estimated using the Generalized Methods Moment (GMM), with the aim of decomposing the total effect of the (instrumented) endogenous variable into (a) the direct effect that it produces on the outcome in isolation and (b) the indirect effect that it produces through the mechanism or mediating variable.

Since we hypothesize two mechanisms that sequentially link the endogenous variable to the outcome, we carry out the methodology twice, once to understand the effect that the endogenous variable (old land conflicts) has on the presence of armed actors and through the latter on current forced displacements; and the second time to understand the effect that the endogenous variable (old land conflicts) has on unfair land reform allocations and through this variable on the presence of armed actors.

In each time, this is done by running two set of instrumental variable regressions using the methodology of neighbor-pair fixed effects explained above. In the first set of IV regression—equations (5) and (6)—the endogenous variable (old land conflicts S) is instrumented with the 1900 distance to the railroad G , and the mediating variable M becomes the dependent variable, as follows:

$$S = \beta_1 G + \beta_2 x + \epsilon \quad (5)$$

$$M = \alpha_1 \hat{S} + \alpha_2 x + v \quad (6)$$

In the second set of IV regression—equations (7) and (8)—the mediator M becomes the endogenous variable and is instrumented with the 1900 distance to the railroad; the dependent variable is the outcome of interest y , and the original endogenous variable S is included as a control. Thus:

$$M = \eta_1 G + \eta_2 S + \eta_3 x + \epsilon \quad (7)$$

$$y = \theta_1 \hat{M} + \theta_2 S + \theta_3 x + v \quad (8)$$

By replacing equation (6) into (8), we obtain the direct effect θ_2 of the endogenous variable S on the outcome y and the indirect effect $\theta_1 * \alpha_1$ produced through the mediating variable. If the latter is, indeed, a relevant mechanism, then $\theta_1 * \alpha_1$ should be statistically significant.

IV. Results

Main causal relation: old land conflicts and recent forced displacements

In accordance with our main hypothesis, our statistical analyses find a significant and robust relation between old land conflicts (1900-1936) and recent forced displacements (1997-2014).

This correlation is illustrated by Graph 1:

Graph 1. Old land conflicts (1900-1936) and recent forced displacements (1997-2014)

The simplest way of understanding the strength of the correlation is to compare the means of the dependent variable for municipalities with and without old land conflicts, as found in Tables 1A and 1B. The mean number of recent forced displacements is twice as great in municipalities with old land conflicts than in those without.

The differences in displacement between municipalities with and without old land conflicts remain robust and significant when running regressions with the models specified above. As Table 2 shows, an increase of one old land conflict in a municipality increases the number of recent forced displacements therein by more than 8,000, compared to the neighbors' municipality mean of 6,689.

Table 2: Effect of old land conflicts on recent forced displacements

Variables	OLS		IV	
	(1) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	(2) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	(3) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	(4) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014
Old land conflicts 1900-1930	2,328.24*** (411.080)	-333.09 (446.949)	8,025.06*** (2,762.245)	8,114.06* (4,573.662)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900			1.25*** (0.217)	0.72*** (0.207)
F test of excluded instruments			33,1	12,1
Observations	1,630	1,630	1,630	1,630
Geographical controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Institutional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fixed Effects of Department	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of pairs	815	815	815	815

Note: This table estimates the equations 1-4. Columns (1) and (2) are estimated by OLS. Columns (3) and (4) are estimated by IV. Column (1) and (3) include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs. Column (2) and (4) add geographical controls (area and altitude of the municipality, distance to department's Capital, distance to the main market, soil fertility and erosion, minimum distance to the main roads and coffee index) and institutional controls (municipal rent of 1916 per capita, State presence 1794 and municipal taxes 1996). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

As observed in Table 2 the instrument is a strong predictor of the endogenous variable old land conflicts. Moreover, the IV estimator of old land conflicts it remains significant and with the same magnitude after introducing a battery of geographical, institutional and economic controls—including variables influencing land value indicators, such as distances to the department's capital, to the main country's market and to roads, indices of coffee land suitability, soil fertility and erosion, as well as departmental fixed effects and other institutional and geographical variables, such as municipality area and altitude, an index of state presence under the colony, municipal rent in the early 20th century, and current municipal taxes. This may indicate that 1900 railroads affect recent forced displacements through old land conflicts and not through some omitted variable—i.e. current land values.

Mechanisms: presence of armed groups and unfair land reform

Our mediation analyses further show that the relation between old land conflicts and recent forced displacements is mainly produced by the two mechanisms we hypothesized.

Mechanism 1

Concerning the first mechanism—presence of armed actors—we followed these three steps:

- i) We calculated the relationship between old land conflicts—instrumented with the distance to the 1900 railroad—and the presence of armed groups between 1988 and 1996 by estimating equations (5) and (6). The result is presented in Table 3, panel A. As can be seen, the relationship is positive and statistically significant: one additional old land conflict in a municipality is associated with a 55 increase in attacks (as a measure of presence) by armed groups. The coefficient remains robust and with the

same magnitude after the inclusion of a large set of controls listed at the bottom of Table

3. Graph 2 illustrates the relation:

Graph 2. Correlation between old land conflicts (1900-1936) and presence of armed groups (1988-1996)

- ii) We calculated the relationship between the presence of armed groups—now instrumented with the distance to the 1900 railroad—and our dependent variable—recent forced displacements between 1997 and 2014 by estimating equations (7) and (8), and controlling for old land conflicts. The result is presented in Table 3, panel B. There is also a significant and positive correlation between these two variables: one additional attack by armed groups between 1988 and 1996 in a municipality raises the number of forced displacements by 150. Graph 3 illustrates the correlation. Moreover, old land conflicts—introduced as controls—lose significance, suggesting that such variable mainly affects forced displacements through the presence of armed groups.

Graph 3. Correlation between armed actors' presence (1988-1996) and recent forced displacements (1997-2014)

- iii)* We carried out the mediation analysis, which allows us to compare the indirect (or mediated) and directed (or unmediated) effects produced by old land conflicts on recent forced displacements. The obtained estimators, shown in Table 3, panel C, result from replacing the coefficients of the IV model in Table's 3 panel B into panel C—i.e. replacing equation (6) into equation (8). As can be seen, the indirect effect produced by old land conflicts on recent forced displacements *via* presence of armed actors is calculated (i.e. the interaction $\theta_1 * \alpha_1$) is statistically significant and large in magnitude (8,344). In contrast, the direct or unmediated effect (captured by coefficient θ_2 from equation (8)) is not statistically significant, negative and relatively small in magnitude (-229).

Table 3: Mediation analysis Mechanism 1 (Armed actors' presence)

Panel A. Causal relationship between the old land conflicts and armed actors' presence				
VARIABLES	Armed actors' presence 1988-1996			
	OLS		IV	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930	12.49*** (1.723)	-0.69 (1.271)	52.32*** (16.881)	55.55** (27.687)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900			1.25*** (0.217)	0.72*** (0.207)
F test of excluded instruments			33,1	12,1
Panel B. Relationship between the armed actors' presence and recent forced displacement controlling by old land conflicts				
	Recent forced displacements 1997-2014			
Armed actors' presence 1988-1996			143.01** (63.265)	150.21** (66.158)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930			541.95 (873.637)	-229.66 (428.004)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900			51.61*** (19.352)	41.15** (16.300)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930			10.99*** (1.541)	-1.50 (1.343)
F test of excluded instruments			7,11	6,37
Observations	1,630	1,630	1,630	1,630
Geographical controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Institutional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fixed Effects of Department	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of pairs	815	815	815	815

<u>Panel C. Results of Mediation</u>	
Forced displacements 1997-2014	
Indirect effect of armed actors' presence 1988-1996	8344.16***
Direct effect of old land conflicts 1900-1930	-229.66
Total effect	8,114.06*

Note: Panel A estimates the equations 5-6 and Panel B estimates the equations 7-8. Columns (1) and (2) are estimated by OLS. Columns (3) and (4) are estimated by IV. Column (1) and (3) include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs. Column (2) and (4) add geographical controls (area and altitude of the municipality, distance to department's Capital, distance to the main market, soil fertility and erosion, minimum distance to the main roads and coffee index) and institutional controls (municipal rent of 1916 per capita, State presence 1794 and municipal taxes). Panel C compares the indirect effect with the direct effect and total effect. The indirect effect is the product between the estimator of column (4) in Panel A and the estimator of column (4) in Panel B. The direct effect is the estimator of old land conflicts of column (4) in Panel B. The total effect is the estimator of old land conflicts over recent forced displacements (column 4 in table 2). These estimators include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs, geographical controls and institutional controls .*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

These results confirm that the effect of old land conflicts on forced displacements is indirect, mainly occurring through the presence of armed groups. The fact that old land conflicts explain armed actors' presence in a much later period (as established in i) makes this finding non-banal, since it does not only show that forced displacements are mainly perpetrated by armed actors, but also that the latter are in places of quite old land conflicts. The link between the latter and armed actors' presence is further explained by the following analysis.

Mechanism 2:

We argue that the presence of armed groups in places of old land conflicts is mediated by unfair or highly concentrated time-weighted land reform allocations made between 1936 and 1988—which accentuated land conflicts instead of resolving them, and hence promoted guerrilla emergence, and later paramilitary backlash. To show this, we followed the same three steps described in the previous section, but this time we used unfair land reform allocations as the mediator and the presence of armed actors as the outcome of interest:

- i) The relation between old land conflicts—instrumented with the distance to the 1900 railroad—and the mediator—unfair land reform allocations—was calculated estimating equations (5) and (6). The results are reported in Table 4, panel A. The IV coefficient indicates that there exists a positive and statistically significant relation between old land conflicts and unfair land reform allocations: an increase in one old land conflict results in 17% increase of the weighted proportion of public lands allocated to the top decile. Graph 4 also illustrates the relation:

Graph 4. Old land conflicts (1900-1930) and unfair land reform allocations (1936-1987)

- ii) The relation between the mediator—unfair land reform allocations, instrumented with the distance to the 1900 railroad—and the outcome of interest here—presence of armed groups—was calculated estimating equations (7) and (8), controlling for old land conflicts. The result is reported in Table 4, panel B; it indicates that there is a positive and significant relation between the two variables: an increase of 10 percentage points of the weighted proportion of public lands allocated to the top decile in the 1937-1988 period increases in 35.6 the number of armed groups' attacks between 1988 and 1996. Graph 5 illustrates this relation:

Graph 5. Correlation between unfair land reform allocations (1937-1987) and armed actors' presence (1988-1996)

- iii) To compare the indirect (or mediated) and directed (or unmediated) effects produced by old land conflicts on armed groups' presence, we replaced the coefficients of the IV model in Table's 4 panel B into panel C—i.e. equation (6) into (8). The estimators are shown in Table 4, panel C. As can be seen, while the direct or unmediated effect of old land conflicts on armed groups presence is marginally significant, negative and small in magnitude (-6.7), the indirect effect produced *via* unfair land reform allocations is much more significant and robust (62.3). Since the latter estimator is higher than that of the total effect (55.5), we can conclude that the whole effect of old land conflicts on the presence of armed groups occurred through the mediation of unfair land reforms allocations.

Table 4: Mediation analysis Mechanism 2 (Unfair land reform allocations)

Panel A. Causal relationship between the old land conflicts and unfair land reform allocations				
VARIABLES	Unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987			
	OLS		IV	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930	0.035*** (0.005)	0.017*** (0.005)	0.135*** (0.035)	0.175** (0.074)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900			1.25*** (0.217)	0.72*** (0.207)
F test of excluded instruments			33,1	12,1
Panel B. Relationship between unfair land reform allocations and the armed actors' presence controlling by old land conflicts				
	Armed actors' presence 1988-1996			
Unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987			399.39** (171.735)	356.29** (172.800)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930			-1.53 (6.072)	-6.75* (3.772)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900			0.13*** (0.038)	0.12*** (0.041)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930			0.03*** (0.005)	0.01*** (0.005)
F test of excluded instruments			11,50	8,04
Observations	1,630	1,630	1,630	1,630
Geographical controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Institutional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fixed Effects of Department	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of pairs	815	815	815	815

<u>Panel C. Results of Mediation</u>	
Forced displacements 1997-2014	
Indirect effect of unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987	62.35**
Direct effect of old land conflicts 1900-1930	-6.75*
Total effect	55.55**

Note: Panel A estimates the equations 5-6 and Panel B estimates the equations 7-8. Columns (1) and (2) are estimated by OLS. Columns (3) and (4) are estimated by IV. Column (1) and (3) include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs. Column (2) and (4) add geographical controls (area and altitude of the municipality, distance to department's Capital, distance to the main market, soil fertility and erosion, minimum distance to the main roads and coffee index) and institutional controls (municipal rent of 1916 per capita, State presence 1794 and municipal taxes). Panel C compares the indirect effect with the direct effect and total effect. The indirect effect is the product between the estimator of column (4) in Panel A and the estimator of column (4) in Panel B. The direct effect is the estimator of old land conflicts of column (4) in Panel B. The total effect is the estimator of old land conflicts over armed actors' presence (column 4 in table 3). These estimators include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs, geographical controls and institutional controls .*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The importance of the previous results can hardly be exaggerated. (i) indicates that land reform efforts, which were allegedly made to put an end to land conflicts and grant land access to dispossessed peasants, were in fact diverted toward landed elites. This could only have added insult to injury, since it was those elites who were the main suspects of dispossession, but they were rewarded instead of punished by land reform. Thus, the grievances generated by old land conflicts were sharpened by the Colombian state's incapacity to adequately resolve them through land reform. This explains that armed groups' presence is not mainly explained by old land conflicts but rather by the impact they had when such conflicts were not adequately resolved through a fair land reform, as shown by (iii).

Robustness Check

To verify that recent forced displacements result from the previously analyzed mediated effects of old land conflicts and not from other unaccounted variables, we conducted a placebo test. The test involved the following steps:

First, for all municipalities close to the 1900 railroad—i.e. all municipalities for which the value of the instrument is equal to 1—we flipped the dummy of the presence of old land conflicts. Thus, municipalities with a dummy value of one were assigned a value of zero, and vice versa. We hence created “false” old land conflicts⁹. The subsample of municipalities close to the railroad amounts to 838 of the 1,630 observations of our full sample. 458 (54.65%) out of those 838 had at least one land conflict between 1900 and 1930, so when flipping the old

⁹ In the appendix below we carry out the mediation exercises using the true dummy variable for old land conflicts.

The results in the appendix resemble the ones presented in tables 2, 3 and 4. These tables use an endogenous variable the number of Old Land Conflicts instead of a dummy of the presence of Old Land Conflicts.

conflict dummy they received a value of 0. The remaining 380 municipalities were close to the railroad but did not have any old land conflicts, so when flipping back the old conflict dummy they received a value of 1.

Second, to maintain the same percentage (54.65%) of municipalities with and without old land conflicts, we flipped back the old conflicts dummy for the 78 observations in excess in the first group. In that way, our sample close to the 1900 railroad comprises 78 municipalities with true old conflicts and 380 with false old conflicts. The 78 municipalities were randomly selected through a bootstrap methodology with 200 repetitions—each having 380 observations with “false” old land conflicts and 78 with true ones.

Third, we estimated the mediation models using the subsample of municipalities with the dummy of “false” land conflicts. The estimations obtained are compared with the results obtained using the dummy of “true” old land conflicts. Table 5 shows, the first stage predicts the presence of both “true” and “false” old conflicts as both types of conflicts are close to the railroad. Nonetheless, the second stage predicts statistically significant recent forced displacements using the dummy of “true” old land conflicts whereas non-significant coefficients are obtained in the second stage when the dummy of “false” old land conflicts is used. Similar non-significant results are obtained for the effect of “false” old land conflicts on the presence of armed actors between 1988 and 1996 (table 6) and on unfair land reform allocations between 1936 and 1987 (table 7). In contrast, statistically coefficients are obtained for the effect of “true” old land conflicts in the very same variables.

The results confirm that it is the presence of old land conflicts between 1900 and 1936, and not some other variable also related to distance to the 1900 railroad, which explain current forced displacements.

Table 5: Robustness Check: Effect of true and false old land conflicts on recent forced displacements

Variables	IV (True old land conflicts)		IV (False old land conflicts)	
	(1) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	(2) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	(3) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014	(4) Recent forced displacements 1997-2014
Old land conflicts 1900-1930 (dummy)	21,354.84*** (7,345.541)	19,936.15* (10,679.218)	72,056.688 (55,588.379)	25,951.387 (33,934.759)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900	0.47*** (0.073)	0.29*** (0.065)	0.139*** (0.053)	0.226*** (0.062)
Observations	1,630	1,630	1,630	1,630
Geographical controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Institutional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fixed Effects of Department	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of pairs	815	815	815	815

Note: This table estimates the equations 1-4. Columns (1) and (2) are estimated by OLS. Columns (3) and (4) are estimated by IV. Column (1) and (3) include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs. Column (2) and (4) add geographical controls (area and altitude of the municipality, distance to department's Capital, distance to the main market, soil fertility and erosion, minimum distance to the main roads and coffee index) and institutional controls (municipal rent of 1916 per capita, State presence 1794 and municipal taxes 1996). *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6: Robustness Check: Mediation analysis Mechanism 1 (Armed actors' presence) using true and false old land conflicts

Panel A. Causal relationship between the old land conflicts and armed actors' presence				
VARIABLES	Armed actors' presence 1988-1996			
	IV (True old land conflicts)		IV (False old land conflicts)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930 (dummy)	139.24*** (43.209)	136.48** (62.332)	469.818 (487.934)	177.658 (239.110)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900	0.47*** (0.073)	0.29*** (0.065)	0.139*** (0.053)	0.226*** (0.062)
Panel B. Relationship between the armed actors' presence and recent forced displacement controlling by old land conflicts				
	Recent forced displacements 1997-2014			
Armed actors' presence 1988-1996	143.01** (63.265)	150.56** (65.494)	147.076 (124.797)	133.720 (441.209)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930	541.95 (873.637)	-612.22 (1,183.079)	2,957.901** (1,453.458)	2,195.041 (3,173.344)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900	140.20** (65.534)	41.84** (16.208)	66.679*** (25.405)	41.067** (20.244)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930	31.76*** (4.502)	-6.02* (3.178)	-9.648 (5.956)	-4.426 (5.626)
Observations	1,630	1,630	1,630	1,630
Geographical controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Institutional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fixed Effects of Department	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of pairs	815	815	815	815

Panel C. Results of Mediation		
	Forced displacements 1997-2014	
	True old land conflicts	False old land conflicts
Indirect effect of armed actors' presence 1988-1996	20548,43**	23756,43
Direct effect of old land conflicts 1900-1930	-612.22	2,195.041
Total effect	19,936.15*	25,951.387

Note: Panel A estimates the equation 5-6 and Panel B estimates the equation 7-8 . Columns (1) and (2) are estimated by OLS. Columns (3) and (4) are estimated by IV. Column (1) and (3) include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs. Column (2) and (4) add geographical controls (area and altitude of the municipality, distance to department's Capital, distance to the main market, soil fertility and erosion, minimum distance to the main roads and coffee index) and institutional controls (municipal rent of 1916 per capita, State presence 1794 and municipal taxes). Panel C compares the indirect effect with the direct effect and total effect. The indirect effect is the product between the estimator of column (4) in Panel A and the estimator of column (4) in Panel B. The direct effect is the estimator of old land conflicts of column (4) in Panel B. The total effect is the estimator of old land conflicts over recent forced displacements (column 4 in table 5). These estimators include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs, geographical controls and institutional controls .*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 7: Robustness Check: Mediation analysis Mechanism 2 (Unfair land reform allocations) using true and false old land conflicts

Panel A. Causal relationship between the old land conflicts and unfair land reform allocations				
VARIABLES	Unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987			
	IV (True old land conflicts)		IV (False old land conflicts)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930 (dummy)	0.359*** (0.084)	0.430*** (0.161)	1.211 (1.204)	0.559 (0.409)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900	0.47*** (0.073)	0.29*** (0.065)	0.139*** (0.053)	0.226*** (0.062)
Panel B. Relationship between unfair land reform allocations and the armed actors' presence controlling by old land conflicts				
	Armed actors' presence 1988-1996			
Unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987	429.34** (193.240)	377.72** (185.220)	407.951 (262.684)	345.188 (962.821)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930 (dummy)	-14.83 (23.165)	-25.80* (13.704)	-24.142 (16.881)	-15.394 (38.151)
First Stage				
Dummy railroad 1900	0.12*** (0.038)	0.11*** (0.041)	0.163*** (0.055)	0.119* (0.065)
Old land conflicts 1900-1930 (dummy)	0.11*** (0.016)	0.05*** (0.019)	0.036 (0.023)	0.032 (0.024)
Observations	1,630	1,630	1,630	1,630
Geographical controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Institutional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fixed Effects of Department	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of pairs	815	815	815	815

Panel C. Results of Mediation		
	Armed actors' presence 1988-1996	
	True old land conflicts	False old land conflicts
Indirect effect of unfair land reform allocations 1936-1987	162.42**	192,96
Direct effect of old land conflicts 1900-1930	-25.80*	-15.394
Total effect	136.48**	177.658

Note: Panel A estimates the equation 5-6 and Panel B estimates the equation 7-8. Columns (1) and (2) are estimated by OLS. Columns (3) and (4) are estimated by IV. Column (1) and (3) include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs. Column (2) and (4) add geographical controls (area and altitude of the municipality, distance to department's Capital, distance to the main market, soil fertility and erosion, minimum distance to the main roads and coffee index) and institutional controls (municipal rent of 1916 per capita, State presence 1794 and municipal taxes). Panel C compares the indirect effect with the direct effect and total effect. The indirect effect is the product between the estimator of column (4) in Panel A and the estimator of column (4) in Panel B. The direct effect is the estimator of old land conflicts of column (4) in Panel B. The total effect is the estimator of old land conflicts over armed actors' presence (column 4 in table 6). These estimators include fixed effects of department and neighbor pairs, geographical controls and institutional controls .*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

V. Conclusions

This paper recovered the role of structural factors and the grievances they engender as a relevant explanation of war dynamics—not only war emergence. We claimed that inadequately or unfairly resolved land conflicts can explain not only the emergence of rebel groups but also their repertoires and targets of violence—notably forced displacements. We applied the argument to the Colombian case where the relation between land conflicts and war has long been stressed, and where forced displacement has been a massive and tragic phenomenon.

We hypothesized that recent forced displacements stem from inadequately resolved land conflicts, which date back to the first decades of the 20th century. The country's export boom generated strong incentives for land appropriation and frontier expansion. In many cases, valuable lands were occupied by peasant settlers with possession rights, who were dispossessed by landed elites. Dispossession bred conflicts, which mid-20th century land reform laws attempted to resolve through the allocation of public lands to peasants. However, we showed that the allocation of public lands was highly concentrated and likely captured by local landed elites. Thus, instead of adequately resolving land conflicts, land reform allocations accentuated them, thus contributing to the emergence of rural guerrilla groups. These groups tended to cluster in places of inadequately resolved land conflicts and to carry out forced displacements therein either to get back unfairly allocated lands or to preemptively invade disputed ones. As the armed conflict deepened, those places became hotspots of land conflict and forced displacements, since guerrilla adversaries—paramilitary groups—also targeted them through violence and forced displacements to recover territory or attack guerrilla bases of support.

To empirically test the causal relation between old land conflicts and recent forced displacements, we employed an identification strategy that combines an instrumental variable—

distance of the municipality to the railroad in 1900- with a matching methodology of neighbor-pair fixed effects. Moreover, to test the mechanisms that we hypothesize as links between the independent and dependent variables—presence of armed groups and unfair land reform allocations—we employed mediation analysis, which allowed us to compare the significance and magnitude of direct or unmediated effects to indirect or mediated effects.

Our results show that, indeed, early 20th century land conflicts and recent forced displacements are causally linked, and their connection is mainly produced through the mediation of unfair land reform allocations and the presence of armed groups. Thus, the paper shows that structural factors and the grievances they generate can, indeed, be relevant causes not only of war emergence but also of the dynamics that war adopts. The paper shows that inadequately resolved land conflicts are one such structural factor in the Colombian case, which cannot only explain the conflict's emergence, but also the central role that forced displacements have played in armed actors' repertoires of violence. The paper also suggests that such structural factor can impose relevant obstacles to Colombia's quest for peace: if old-standing land conflicts are not adequately or fairly resolved through agrarian policies that actually grant access to land to dispossessed peasants, it is unlikely that violence—and especially forced displacements—will cease or not reemerge.

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