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# Colombia's hydra: the many faces of gun violence

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A FARC member guards an area in La Macarena, southern Colombia, where rebels held soldiers captive. June 2001. © Scott Dalton/AP Photo

# Colombia's Hydra

## THE MANY FACES OF GUN VIOLENCE

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

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Colombia has long been characterized as one of the most violent countries in the world. Violence arising from a protracted armed conflict and both organized and common crime has claimed the lives of almost half a million civilians and combatants since 1979—almost 17,600 per year—a human security crisis of extraordinary dimensions.<sup>2</sup> This chapter finds that while there is considerable heterogeneity in the nature of homicides over time and space in Colombia, there is a strong contributing factor: firearms. In fact, more than 80 per cent of all homicides in Colombia since the late 1970s have been perpetrated with guns. What is more, this percentage has steadily increased—from about 60 per cent in the 1980s to more than 85 per cent in 2002. By 2005 more than 15 per cent of all deaths by natural and external causes<sup>3</sup> were firearm-related.

This chapter offers the first comprehensive and evidence-based overview of the relationships between armed violence and firearms in the country. Drawing on a combination of data sources and extensive field-based research, the chapter presents the following findings:

- There have been nearly 39,000 violent deaths due to armed conflict since 1988. The yearly average is 2,221 violent deaths, many of them concentrated in rural areas.
- Colombia experienced a significant reduction in conflict-related civilian deaths in 2003 and 2004, followed by a pronounced reversal in the first half of 2005.
- There have been more than 475,000 firearm-related deaths as a result of crime and conflict violence since 1979, averaging 17,600 per year, with most deaths concentrated in urban centres.
- More than 80 per cent of all homicides are committed with firearms—with more than half of the variation in external death rates over time attributable to firearms.
- Most weapons in circulation are illegal and unregistered. The number of legally and illegally held weapons (excluding the state security forces) is estimated between 2.3 million and 3.9 million, an ownership rate of 5.05 to 8.42 per 100 inhabitants. Official statistics report only 1.53 legally held firearms per 100 inhabitants, a low rate in comparison with other Latin American countries.
- Illegal right-wing paramilitaries appear to have more modern and abundant weapons stocks than left-wing guerrillas. Paramilitaries are also party to a more lucrative and sustained source of funding.
- Men suffer more than 90 percent of all gun deaths. More than one-third of all firearm deaths are concentrated among men aged 20–29, with more than 342,000 years of productive life lost from firearm deaths since 1985.
- It appears that firearm control measures have yielded significant dividends in reducing violence in major cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali.

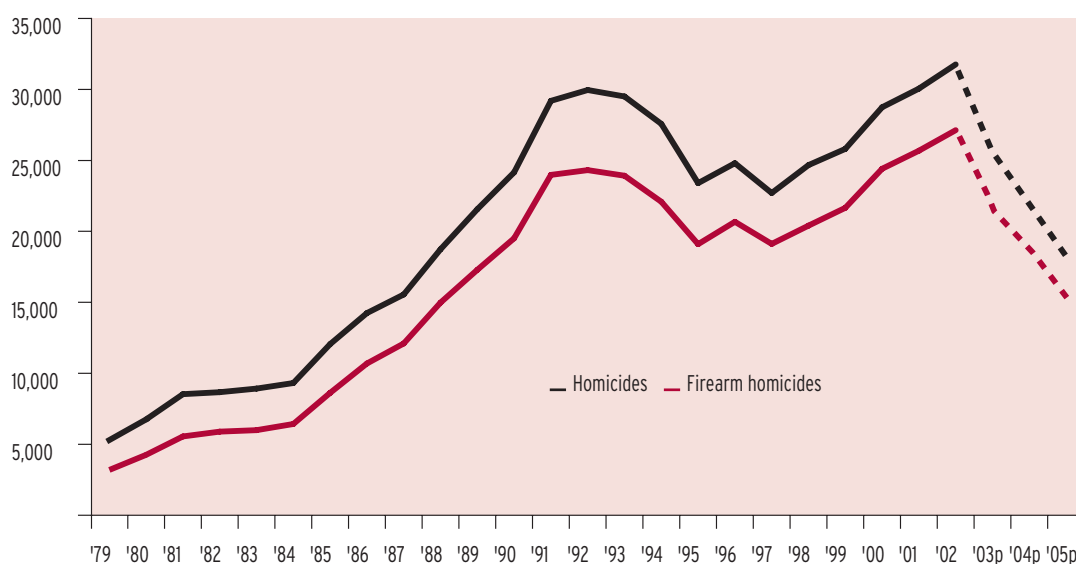
- Colombia's legal arms market is among the most transparent and tightly regulated in the world, despite uneven enforcement.
- The country exhibits a potentially unhealthy regulatory environment for firearms in which state-owned firms that produce and sell firearms also fall under the public entity that is responsible for arms control.

The causes and effects of Colombia's armed violence are complex;<sup>4</sup> this chapter presents their core features. The first section discusses the background and context within which conflict and criminal violence take place. Next, the chapter turns to the political economy of the legal arms industry, the dynamics of legal and illegal gun ownership, patterns of illegal production and trafficking in weapons, and the distribution and effects of conflict-related violence and criminal violence. It closes with a brief discussion of municipal arms control interventions and the nascent process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of the country's paramilitaries.

## CONTEMPORARY AND HISTORICAL DIMENSIONS OF ARMED VIOLENCE

Colombia has been afflicted by a long-standing human security crisis, which includes kidnapping and forced displacement along with systemic violence.<sup>5</sup> In concentrating on lethal gun violence, this chapter presents new empirical insights generated by the Small Arms Survey. Lethal threats in Colombia are driven by a complex and interconnected array of armed groups and individuals. Since 1963, a major contributor to human insecurity remains the armed conflict, which has pitted the government against left-wing guerrilla groups, primarily the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as the right-wing paramilitary groups such

Graph 9.1 **Homicides and firearm-related homicides, 1979–2002**



Source: DANE. Processed by CERAC

Note: 2003, 2004, and 2005 DANE figures drawn from National Police and INML.

as the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). Another factor contributing to insecurity is deeply embedded organized and common criminal violence, much of it carried out by narco-traffickers, mafia gangs, and petty bandits.

While both conflict and criminal violence constitute very real threats to human security, international concern has focused disproportionately on the former. Colombia's armed conflict has been characterized as a 'low-intensity' contest for political power (Restrepo, Spagat, and Vargas, 2004, p. 398). Unlike other wars in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, or Europe, the conflict is not marked by evident regional, ethnic, or religious drivers. Nevertheless, the impact of Colombia's armed conflict on human welfare has been profound: more than 38,800 people have been killed directly in conflict since 1988. Recently, there have been dramatic oscillations in annual figures, with a substantial decrease in killings—particularly of civilians—from its peak in 2002. Nevertheless, the decrease was followed by a sharp rise in early 2005, mainly due to a spike in paramilitary violence. It should be noted that illegal paramilitaries register exceptionally high killed-to-injury ratios, indicating a high degree of intentionality in their attacks (Restrepo and Spagat, 2005a, p. 142).

While conflict-related violence has had a devastating impact on human security, criminal violence has exacted an even heavier toll. More than 400,000 civilians have been killed as a result of criminal violence since 1988, the vast majority of them shot dead with small arms and light weapons (see Graph 9.1). Indeed, longitudinal trends in homicide are virtually indistinguishable from firearm-related homicides.

**Criminal violence has exacted an even heavier toll on human security than conflict-related violence.**

## POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PRODUCTION, IMPORT, AND EXPORT

Before analysing the scale and distribution of armed violence arising from conflict and crime, it is important to review Colombia's arms production, as well as its exports and imports. Colombia is a significant producer of weapons and munitions. The country also legally imports arms of various calibres from at least 43 countries and is striving to generate greater revenues from weapons exports.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Colombia has a massive illegal market for weapons, with a complex network of buyers and sellers—many of them driven by the armed conflict and narco-trafficking. It is useful to parse out the country's legal manufacturing capacities as well as the illegal dynamics of domestic arms acquisition in order to appreciate their relationship with human security.

As is the case in other countries, Colombia's domestic production of defence material and equipment has long been linked to intrinsic notions of national sovereignty, development, and security. Self-sufficiency in weapons and munitions production is frequently a stated goal of industrializing states, and Colombia is no exception. Indeed, the Colombian state has promoted the domestic production of firearms and explosives since the beginning of the twentieth century. The first production lines began operating in 1908, and domestic manufacturing grew steadily throughout the 1930s and 1940s, ensuring regular provision to the armed forces and police. The defence industry was itself consolidated into a single entity—INDUMIL (from the Spanish name *Industria Militar*) in 1954—which gained official monopolies on the production, import and export, and sales of firearms and explosives. Since its inception, INDUMIL has been a state-owned enterprise under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), which acts as the regulator and keeper of the registry for all legally held firearms through the Office for Control and Trade of Arms and Explosives (OCCAE).<sup>7</sup>

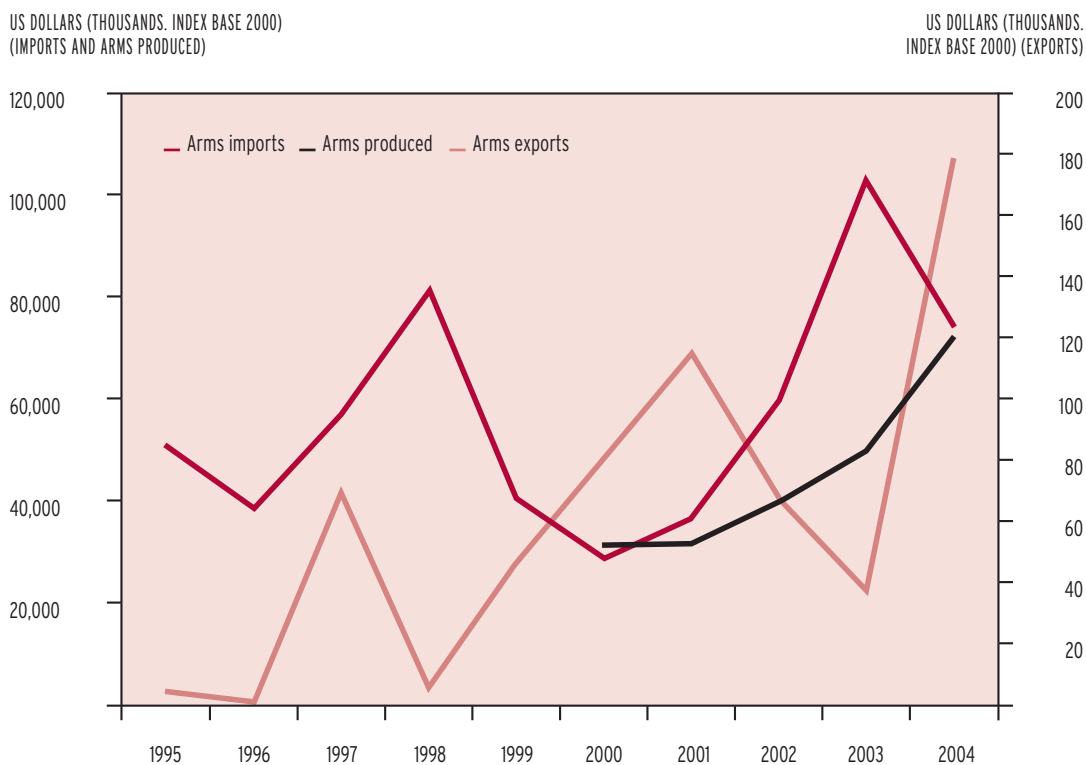
Since the 1990s, INDUMIL has increased domestic production and diversified its product lines. This strategy is part of an import-substitution policy driven by three main factors. First, by Colombian standards, foreign weapons are

expensive. Second, there has been a fear, particularly within domestic military circles, that the continued dependence on foreign weapons suppliers could expose Colombia to possible supply cut-offs and an unacceptable level of vulnerability.<sup>8</sup> Third, military planners have aspired with some success to capture some of the high profits generated by a domestic monopolization of military supply lines.

INDUMIL's primary function is to equip the armed forces and the National Police, though it also supplies legitimate domestic demand and is quietly nurturing an export capacity. INDUMIL has in fact achieved self-sufficiency in, among other items, the Galil rifle<sup>9</sup>, revolvers, grenade launchers, and various types of ammunition.<sup>10</sup> Pistol production may also soon begin as part of a programme to upgrade the police force, which currently uses revolvers.<sup>11</sup> Secondary markets, including civilians and private security firms, are also being targeted for increased sales of revolvers.<sup>12</sup> As Colombia does not import significant quantities of revolvers, civilians, the armed forces, and the police are effectively a captive market for INDUMIL.

INDUMIL today is highly profitable. While imports have risen since 2001, INDUMIL has considerably expanded its production for export and domestic consumption (see Graph 9.2). To underpin this growth, the Colombian state has also initiated talks on the privatization of various aspects of production and the promotion of international partnerships. In 2003, for example, the defence minister indicated her interest in partially privatizing the company through

**Graph 9.2 Value of arms, munitions, parts, and accessories: imports, exports, and production, 1995–2004**



**Source:** National Tax Administration, INDUMIL. Deflator source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

Processed by CERAC



a partnership with Spain, expecting to ‘increase the production capacity of INDUMIL, especially in mortars and grenades’. Negotiations were reportedly suspended following a change of government in Spain in 2004; no official policy statement has been issued since.<sup>13</sup>

INDUMIL’s monopoly is affirmed not just in the Firearm Control Law, but also in the Colombian Constitution itself (Article 223). INDUMIL is relatively transparent in comparison with other publicly owned defence companies. Unlike several of its Latin American counterparts, the firm is highly unlikely to have been selling or leaking arms to organized crime syndicates or to embargoed countries. Predictably, the strongly regulated legal gun market is also accompanied by an illegal parallel market that appears to deal principally in military-grade weapons for (organized) criminal use. This suggests that the regulation of the legal market is not so strict as to drive aspiring legitimate gun users into the parallel market.

The MOD oversees an assortment of public entities that participate in the supply, manufacture, and regulation of firearms. INDUMIL, the primary agency, is the sole outlet for legal firearms, ammunition, and explosives through its central office in Bogotá and some 30 retail outlets throughout the country—each of which is located within military garrisons. The MOD’s OCCAE oversees all aspects of arms regulation and licensing to both individuals and corporate entities. The MOD thus oversees the production, import, and sales of firearms as well as the regulation of weapons sales. This potentially unhealthy regulatory environment is fraught with conflicts of interest. In particular, these current arrangements can create a situation whereby licensing requirements could be relaxed to enable certain weapons sales that should otherwise be blocked. While no systematic malfeasance has come to light, the separation of production and commercialization on the one hand and regulation on the other could avoid potential conflicts of interest and properly align incentives.

Colombia has an ownership rate of 5.05 to 8.42 weapons per 100 inhabitants.

## Patterns of ownership

In comparison with neighbouring countries, Colombia exhibits a low level of firearms ownership. The reason for this is twofold: the Colombian state enforces strong regulation on civilian arms possession and non-state conflict groups and organized crime exert tight control over the criminal market for guns. The Colombian constitution allows the licensing of a restricted type of firearm to civilians only if security needs are proven.<sup>14</sup> In that case the gun remains the legal property of the state. In areas where enforcement of gun regulation is weak, organized crime and conflict groups impose tight controls over firearm possession. Most weapons in circulation are nevertheless illegal and unregistered. The number of legally and illegally held weapons (excluding the state security forces) is estimated at 2.3 million to 3.9 million. With an estimated population of more than 46 million, the 2005 figure indicates an ownership rate of 5.05 to 8.42 per 100 inhabitants.

## Legal possession

The OCCAE had issued a total of 706,210 firearm permits to civilians by mid-2005. This figure includes the 235,696 registered firearms issued in the 1994 firearm amnesty, when the new regulation entered into force.<sup>15</sup> The 2005 figure indicates a ratio of 1.53 legal arms per 100 civilians. But while the number of legally registered firearms is lower than those of its neighbours, it appears that Colombian civilians are arming themselves in greater numbers.

In Colombia, the combined firearms holdings of the state—the National Police, armed forces, and intelligence services—are roughly equivalent to those of civilians, a ratio that is high and unusual in the region. The Department of National Planning (DNP) currently registers 113,418 armed police officers in the country. A standard multiplier of

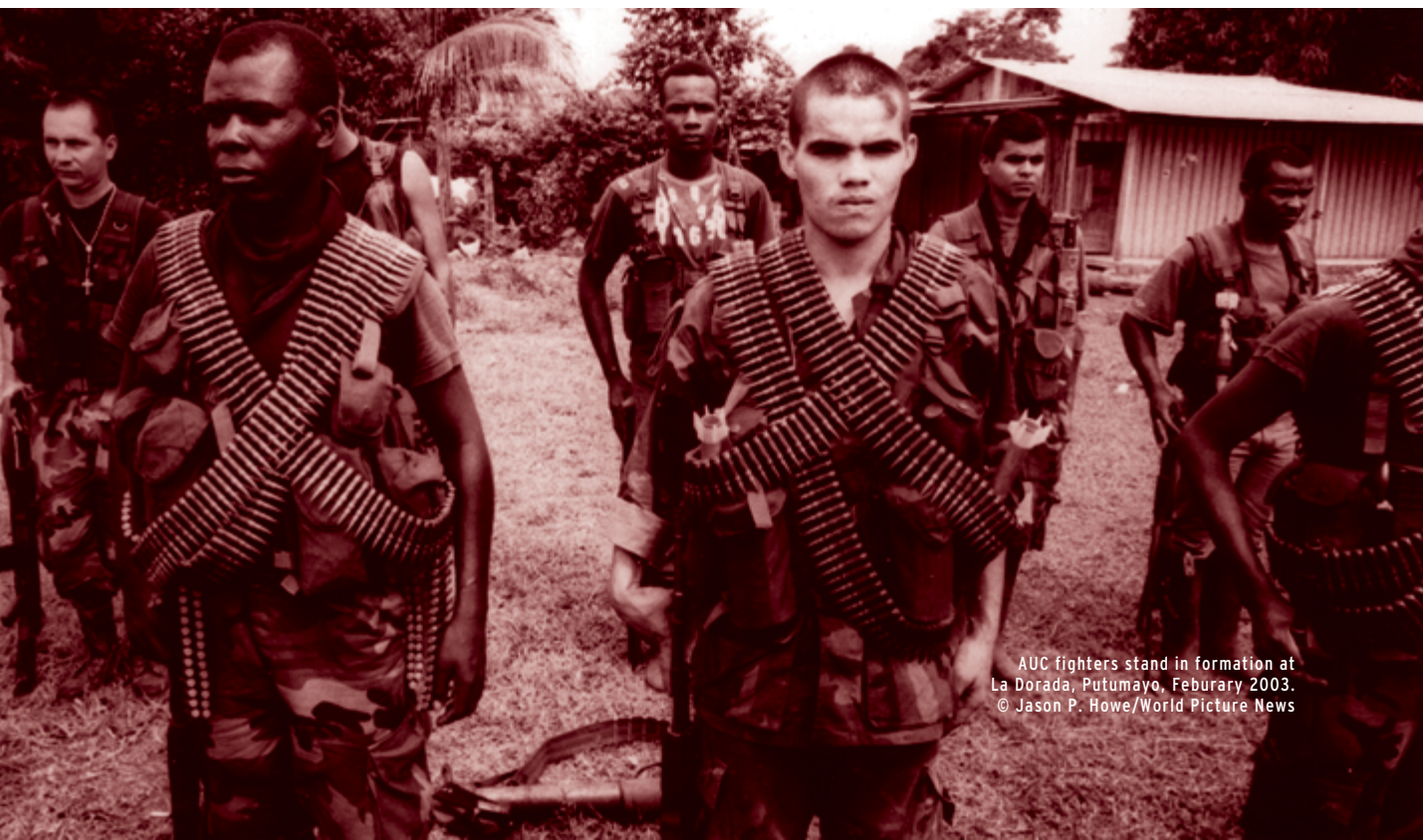
1.2 firearms per officer yields a range of 91,000 to 181,000 firearms in the hands of the National Police.<sup>16</sup> By way of comparison, the armed forces, according to the same source, presently include more than 249,190 personnel plus an estimated 60,700 reserve forces (IISS, 2005, pp. 329–30). The application of a conventional military small arms multiplier of 1.8 per recruit suggests that there are between 373,000 and 742,000 small arms and light weapons of various calibres in military armouries.<sup>17</sup> The Colombian armed forces are also shored up by more than 21,000 trained local battalions (*soldados de mi pueblo*, meaning ‘soldiers from my village’) with an estimated 1:1 ratio, thus raising total estimated state holdings to 486,000–944,000.

Unlike the National Police, the DAS (Administrative Department of Security)<sup>18</sup> does not publicly report its size, holdings, or budget, undermining any concerted effort to estimate its weapons stockpiles.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the DAS recently announced an ambitious arms modernization plan, including the purchase of several thousand assault rifles, sub-machine guns (MP5), and 0.40 S&W pistols (*Revista Cambio*, 2005).

### Illegal ownership<sup>20</sup>

Despite Colombia’s comparatively strict regulatory regime, the country is home to many unregistered guns. Official military sources estimate that there are as many as 800,000 unregistered weapons in circulation. National police sources, on the other hand, contend that the number is at least three times greater—reaching 2.4 million. Neither of these figures can be easily verified.

The country’s various non-state armed groups possess a wide range of weaponry. There are probably more than 12 different calibres and more than 42 brands distributed among the arsenals of non-state actors. But there are also conflicting estimates of the holdings of guerrilla and illegal paramilitary groups. The National Police estimates that



AUC fighters stand in formation at La Dorada, Putumayo, February 2003.  
© Jason P. Howe/World Picture News



the force strength of the FARC stands at around 12,500 (DNP, 2005).<sup>21</sup> Applying a standard multiplier of 1.6 military-style arms per combatant yields an upper threshold of 20,000 weapons of various types, including 9 mm pistols, Uzis, AKM-series assault rifles (since 1997), sniper rifles, various types of grenade launchers, and even man-portable air defence systems, or MANPADS. The ELN, for its part, is believed to consist of a much smaller force of around 3,600 active recruits (DNP, 2005). The application of an analogous multiplier of 1.6 arms per ELN combatant produces an estimate of about 5,900 weapons. The AUC, with more than 10,900 fighters (DNP, 2005), is believed to maintain a large stockpile despite the recent demobilization and disarmament process discussed in more detail below.<sup>22</sup> With at least 17,500 sophisticated and high-calibre firearms, including rifle and pistol silencers, they are among the most well armed of all non-state groups in the world today. Recent research and media reports confirm that the paramilitaries commonly use US-made R-15 assault rifles and M60 machine guns, as well as Israeli Galil rifles (AFP, 2004).

It is significant that the paramilitaries have acquired and deployed better weapons than the guerrillas. This distinction—one that is not yet properly appreciated in discussions of Colombia's armed conflict—implies that paramilitary groups are both wealthier and better connected internationally and domestically than guerrilla groups. In fact, while the paramilitaries have been actively procuring modern military technology on the international market, the guerrillas have settled for cheaper, and even home-made, weapons. The illegal drug business is to a large extent a mirror image of the gun trafficking business, with guns flowing into the country and drugs flowing out. The paramilitary gun premium, expensive to maintain, suggests that the paramilitaries participate more deeply in the lucrative narcotics trade than do the guerrillas. In particular, recent evidence from the demobilization process suggests especially strong paramilitary participation in the international transport and distribution phases of the drug business.<sup>23</sup> This inference reinforces a difficult-to-prove perception among some analysts that the paramilitaries are bigger narco-traffickers than the guerrillas.<sup>24</sup> It also demonstrates graphically and unequivocally the utility of examining violence through the lens of small arms.

Paramilitaries have acquired and deployed better weapons than the guerrillas.

### Command and control

An in-depth analysis of the command and control of non-state armed groups can yield insight into prospects for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration in the event of a peace agreement or formal accord. Guerrilla deserters have revealed unusually strong levels of command and control over their weapons, in relation to both possession and use. The higher up a guerrilla leader may be in a given organization, the more robust and sophisticated the weapons under his or her command. This applies to the FARC more than it does to the ELN, since the FARC closely resembles a classical army formation while the ELN consists principally of smaller cells.

Paramilitary groups, most of which conglomerated in 1997 under the umbrella organization AUC, do not have such a well-defined military structure. They are largely organized in regionally defined 'fronts' or 'blocks' that are administered by an assortment of paramilitary leaders, typically affiliated with the AUC. Moreover, the organization of individual blocks appears to vary over time as the paramilitaries exhibit high turnover rates among leaders and combatants alike. This is because their recruitment—unlike that of the guerrillas—is strongly tied to financial incentives and regular payments. Interviews with ex-paramilitary combatants reveal that their arsenals are well stocked with modern weapons and munitions.<sup>25</sup> Respondents gave little indication that paramilitary groups maintained the strict 'fire discipline' or hierarchical control over firepower that was reported among guerrilla groups. This relative carelessness with respect to firearms use is yet another indication that the paramilitaries have ample resources and international connections to maintain well-stocked arsenals.

## ILLEGAL ARMS TRAFFICKING AND MANUFACTURING

The curbing of illegal production of and trafficking in small arms by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and narco-traffickers has been a top priority of successive Colombian administrations. In recent years, the US, Canadian, and Colombian governments have collaborated closely to improve their tracing of illegal arms flows, although this task remains immensely challenging.<sup>26</sup> In fact, arms smuggling into and out of Colombia has deep historical roots, particularly in the La Guajira peninsula bordering Venezuela and the Caribbean Sea (*El Pais*, 2004). Highly profitable exports of contraband goods, particularly cocaine, helped give rise to a roaring black market in small arms and light weapons (*O Globo*, 2005). Moreover, the country's extensive coastline and relatively porous frontiers with five countries, particularly the long tracts of isolated border areas, severely complicate the control of illegal weapons flows.

Although information on the scale and volume of Colombia's illegal arms trafficking is sparse, there are some clear patterns and trends.<sup>27</sup> For example, both the FARC and the ELN operate highly sophisticated procurement networks. Official arms seizure reports and media articles suggest that comparatively few weapons used by guerrilla groups originate directly from the stockpiles of the Colombian armed forces. It should be noted, however, that there are no publicly available statistics on state-owned weapons lost or stolen during combat. In fact, the army maintains that a mere ten per cent of guerrilla arms and ammunition retrieved by the armed forces were originally manufactured by INDUMIL (*El Tiempo*, 2005a). Though further investigation of this claim would be valuable, the guerrillas do appear to buy the overwhelming majority of their weapons from illegal dealers.

The Colombian authorities have managed to intercept a number of weapons shipments, shedding some light on the foreign procurement practices of the guerrillas. Though information is scarce, it appears that weapons are purchased through a complex web of interactions to avoid directly implicating guerrilla leaders. To minimize the risk of capture or interdiction, consignments are regularly air-dropped or shipped to an agreed safe area, often within a conflict zone where the government exerts only limited control. From there, weapons are shifted to a 'zone of consolidation', and ultimately to the 'rear guard' of a guerrilla front. The Caribbean coast, particularly the Urabá Gulf corridor, is a primary entry point for FARC assault rifles and light machine guns, most of which originate in the Middle East and Eastern Europe and are transshipped via Central America.<sup>28</sup> Pistols and ammunition follow a variety routes, for example through the infamous triple border area of Paraguay, across the Brazilian border, and into Vaupés Department (*O Globo*, 2005). Armed factions fight regularly over various 'prized' trafficking routes, such as jungle areas along the Pacific coast that have traditionally served as major smuggling routes. Though vigorously denied by the Venezuelan authorities, Colombian military intelligence alleges that corrupt elements within the Venezuelan armed forces regularly provide FAL rifles and 7.62 ammunition to the FARC and ELN.<sup>29</sup> Similar types of arms are also believed to be transshipped from Peru (*El Peruano*, 2005), while press reports have revealed the smuggling of G3s, HK33s, and Galils across the border from Ecuador (*El Comercio*, 2003).

The primary paramilitary smuggling routes for AKM-series assault rifles and various types of machine guns include the Urabá Gulf and the Pacific port of Buenaventura—with most weapons allegedly originating in the United States and Central America. A key access and distribution point is the town of Apartadó in Antioquia, which itself lies relatively close to the Panamanian border in a fiercely contested area characterized by exceptionally inaccessible topography. Some paramilitary groups reportedly possess weapons that are identical to government stocks—particularly Galil rifles, light machine guns, and 5.56 ammunition. Compared to guerrilla groups, paramilitary groups seldom use explosive devices (such as mines) but have much better access to pistols, even if they are less frequently used.<sup>30</sup>

Colombia's illicit craft firearms industry operates on a fairly large scale, with two types of producers and suppliers. First, there are small-scale manufacturers of non-automatic firearms whose primary clients are petty criminals residing in urban centres. Second, since the mid-1990s, the FARC has ratcheted up production of sub-machine guns, mortars, mortar grenades, and hand grenades. Interviews with demobilized guerrillas and government-affiliated security officials have confirmed that the FARC domestically produces copies of the Ingram 9 mm sub-machine gun and a semi-automatic Beretta pistol. Other products include 60 mm and 120 mm mortars, hand grenades, and explosives. 'Cylinder' or 'canister' bombs are particularly insidious home-made weapons that are fabricated with gas containers into which the guerrillas often pack shrapnel and even rotten produce to infect their victims.<sup>31</sup> The production of these weapons requires a combination of common metalworking tools, vices and presses, and more expensive raw materials than do *changones*, or sawn-off shotguns.

Intelligence officers point out that blueprints and design plans for some of these more sophisticated items have often been illegally obtained from INDUMIL, retired civil servants, or engineers.<sup>32</sup> For example, mortars and mortar grenades appear to copy standard Colombian military mortars. Security personnel and analysts document the construction of other mortars and launch platforms, such as for gas canister bombs, which appear to have benefited from foreign expertise, including that of the IRA.<sup>33</sup> Finally, there is evidence of a sophisticated network of armouries, repair shops, and specialist armourers within each FARC unit, suggesting a concern with economizing, repairing, and maintaining their limited war material. The extent of autonomous production and maintenance activity points to some government success in choking off FARC financing and supply routes. It also underscores the depth of the problem; the FARC has developed many ingenious ways of acquiring or producing the weapons it requires. In contrast, there is no evidence that paramilitary groups manufacture weapons to any significant degree. This also supports the assumption that they have sufficient resources and procurement capacity to satisfy their needs without resorting to improvisation.

Colombia has seen more than 38,800 conflict-related killings since 1988.

## VIOLENCE LINKED TO ARMED CONFLICT

The spatial and temporal dynamics of Colombia's armed conflict are becoming better understood. Compiled data registers more than 38,800 conflict-related killings since 1988—with an average of 2,221 deaths per year.<sup>34</sup> Most of these killings appear to have been perpetrated in isolated rural areas (Restrepo and Spagat, 2005b, p. 15). The municipalities with population densities below 50 people per square kilometre suffer well over 65 per cent of all conflict killings despite accounting for less than 20 per cent of the total population. In fact, only ten per cent of conflict fatalities have been in municipalities with population densities exceeding 200 people per square kilometre where two-thirds of the Colombian population resides. But these general trends only reveal one dimension of the effects of conflict-related violence. This chapter now considers who is killed by whom, the categories of victims, the types of events in which killings occur, and the various categories of weapons used to carry out the killing. In so doing, the chapter renders a sharp distinction between 'clashes', in which two or more groups exchange fire, and 'attacks', defined as one-sided events with no effective resistance.<sup>35</sup>

The distinction between clashes and attacks is important to recognize: most victims in 'clashes' are combatants while the majority of those victimized during 'attacks' are civilians (see Graph 9.3). Importantly, the vast majority of conflict-related civilian killings are perpetrated by paramilitary groups in massacres characterized by high rates of

Graph 9.3 **Civilian and combatant casualties during clashes and attacks, 1 January 1988–30 June 2005**



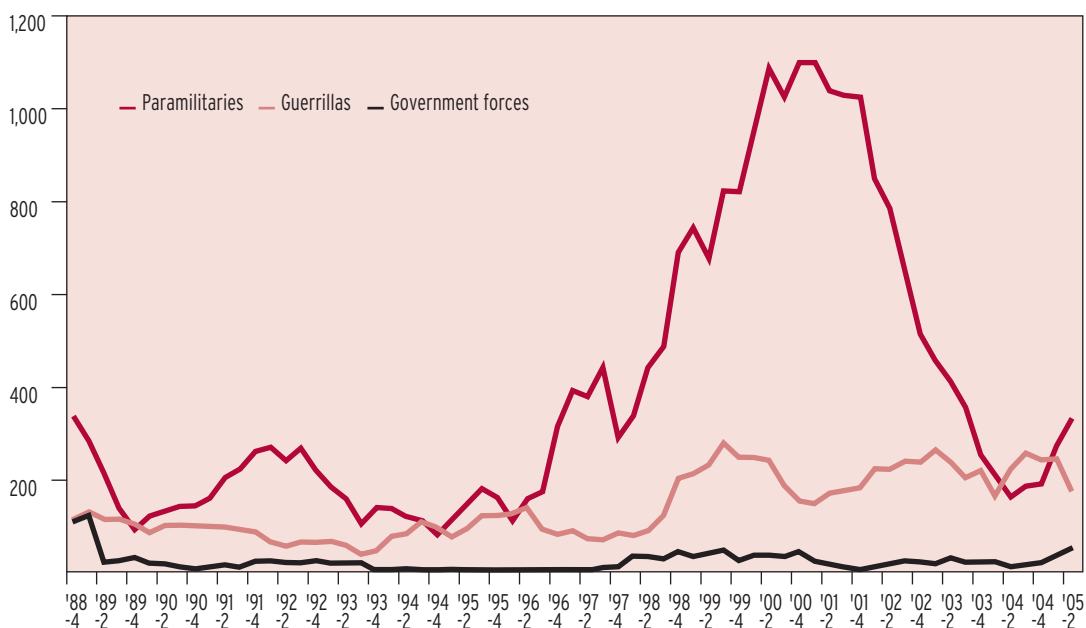
Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database

they have injured many more due largely to the indiscriminate nature of their bombings. Finally, government attacks are comparatively infrequent and account for a relatively modest proportion of overall civilian deaths, though they have nevertheless carried out a handful of aerial bombardments in which large numbers of civilians were killed.<sup>38</sup> This research reveals that paramilitaries are much more likely than the guerrillas or the government to fire a weapon in

intentional killing with few left injured.<sup>36</sup>

The paramilitaries have long sought to kill civilians whom they suspect of supporting the guerrillas. Such killings surged in the late 1990s, fell significantly in 2003, but then jumped again in the first half of 2005 (see Graph 9.4).<sup>37</sup> The FARC and ELN guerrillas, in contrast, have pursued an alternative strategy of disrupting Colombian society, employing bombing campaigns, the storming and seizing of municipalities, and focused attacks directed against public and private infrastructure. In the process, the guerrillas have killed significantly fewer civilians than have the paramilitaries, though

Graph 9.4 **Civilian casualties during attacks by group, annualized quarterly, 1 January 1988–30 June 2005**



Note: For each group (curve) in the figure, the number for every quarter is the sum of civilian killings for that group in the previous four quarters.

Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database

the course of their attacks. In fact, paramilitaries shoot in 70 per cent of their attacks compared to 11 and 10 per cent for the guerrillas and the government, respectively. This behaviour corresponds with the paramilitaries' apparent abundance of ammunition and weapons.<sup>39</sup>

Parsing out the role of specific weapon types in clashes and attacks by the state forces and non-state armed groups can generate insight into appropriate controls and restrictions. For 7,100 out of a total of 21,000 incidents, the type of weapon used was specifically documented. Of the remaining incidents, some 6,633 consisted of 'clashes' during which assault rifles were inevitably used. By adding these two categories, it is possible to discern weapons types in almost two-thirds of all reported conflict incidents since 1988.

All told, 14 specific categories of armament are deployed in conflict incidents. This varied set of categories ranges from home-made armoured vehicles, blunt objects, and sharp or bladed objects, to explosives and gas canisters. Firearms were the most widely documented instrument used in conflict. The most common types of weapons used include assault rifles and grenade launchers, followed by pistols, sub-machine guns, and mortars. Rifles appear to have been used in most of the high-impact incidents (see Table 9.1). Rifle incidents tend to produce more killings than injuries, whereas explosive incidents tend to generate the opposite trend.

**Table 9.1 Relationship between weapon types and casualties in conflict incidents, 1 January 1988–30 June 2005**

Number of incidents										
Casualty type	Casualty range	Firearms <sup>1</sup>	Assault rifle	Bladed weapons	Mines	Bombs and gas canisters	Other explosives <sup>2</sup>	Fire and bladed weapons	Combination <sup>3</sup>	Total
Killed	0	537	1,225	3	255	133	2,506	2	98	4,759
	1–10	1,996	5,473	28	210	67	468	39	104	8,385
	11–25	88	123	0	1	11	21	8	14	266
	26–74	12	22	1	2	2	4	5	2	50
	75 or more	1	2	0	0	5	0	0	1	9
Number of incidents										
Injured	0	1,990	5,269	29	130	128	2,336	48	102	10,032
	1–10	620	1,539	3	332	71	570	5	106	3,246
	11–25	17	31	0	5	14	62	1	10	140
	26–74	7	5	0	1	4	27	0	1	45
	75 or more	0	1	0	0	1	4	0	0	6

**Notes:**

1 Does not include assault rifles.

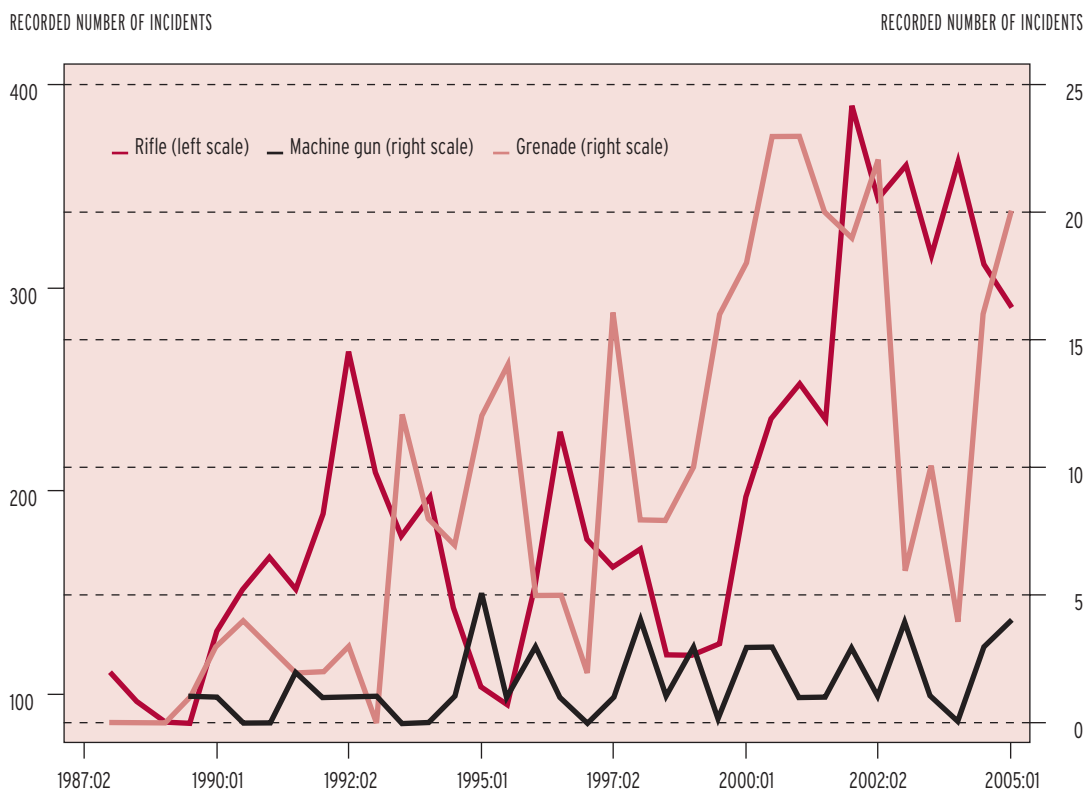
2 Includes explosives not enclosed in casing such as Anfo, C4, Dynamite, and Gelatinous dynamite among others but not bombs, mines, or gas canisters.

3 Two or more methods but not firearms or bladed weapons.

**Source:** CERAC Colombian Conflict Database



Graph 9.5 Evolution of small arms use in armed conflict, 1 January 1988–30 June 2005



Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database

The specific types of weapons used in Colombia's armed conflict have evolved considerably over the past two decades. Graph 9.5 documents the number of times weapons of various types were reportedly used between 1988 and mid-2005. It shows a peak in grenade use during 1995, followed by a significant surge in rifle use between 1999 and 2001. This second peak coincides with the introduction by FARC of large numbers of Jordanian-sourced AKM assault rifles into the country (*El Tiempo*, 2004). This period also witnessed the consolidation of various paramilitary groups into the AUC, as described above. In addition, the graph reveals that there has been a considerable decline in rifle use since 2002: this steep reduction has coincided with a dramatic fall in conflict-related casualties and reported conflict incidents.<sup>40</sup>

The geographical distribution and types of firearms used also shed light on the dynamics of Colombia's armed conflict. Between 1988 and mid-2005, for example, light weapons were most commonly used in Antioquia, Cauca, and the regions of the Sierra Nevada, Catatumbo, and Magdalena Medio (see Map 9.1). Considerable levels of armed violence and population displacement accompanied gun and drug trafficking on the routes discussed above, particularly near the Venezuelan border and the ports of Buenaventura and Urabá. The geographical distribution of explosive use closely resembles that of firearms, though it exhibits a much higher concentration and frequency along the Venezuelan border where there are oil pipelines.<sup>41</sup>

Map 9.1 Firearm use in conflict incidents by municipality, 1 January 1988–30 June 2005



## CRIMINAL VIOLENCE AND THE BURDEN OF FIREARMS

Although most international commentary on Colombia's human security crisis focuses on the armed conflict, organized and petty criminality is where guns exert their gravest toll. In contrast to conflict casualties, which are primarily rural (Restrepo and Spagat, 2005b, p. 15), criminal violence is a predominantly urban phenomenon. In fact, between 1979 and 2002, between 70 and 80 per cent of all firearm-related deaths occurred in urban areas.

There is considerable disagreement over the exact dimensions of Colombia's criminal violence. This debate is fuelled in part by separate data sets on criminal violence and firearm-related deaths, which are produced by three distinct authorities: the state statistical agency (DANE), the National Police Centre for Criminological Research (CIC), and the office of the medical examiner (INML). Despite protracted disagreements between agencies and with the human rights community, these three entities have reported remarkably similar trends since the mid-1990s so that the choice of data set is not as significant as is often believed.

The following section considers DANE data, which records some 475,000 people killed as a result of firearms use in homicides, suicides, accidents, and undetermined incidents between 1979 and 2005, some 11 per cent of all deaths over the period.<sup>42</sup>

While there is a lack of consensus over the magnitude of firearm-related deaths, there is unanimous agreement that the proportion of firearm-related deaths as compared to all naturally or externally occurring deaths is extremely high. In Colombia, firearm deaths are more than five times higher than in other comparator countries of Latin America, including Mexico, where firearm deaths constitute two per cent of all deaths.<sup>43</sup> There has also been considerable variation in this relationship over time, with firearm deaths rising from 3 per cent in 1979 to 15 per cent in 2002. In fact, the absolute number of firearm deaths increased an astonishing sevenfold during the same period—from 3,617 to 28,989—with the rate per 100,000 inhabitants increasing fourfold, from 16 to 66 (see Annexe 9.2). Firearm death rates peaked at 70 per 100,000 in 1991 at the height of the narco-trafficking era and declined dramatically over the last three years to 29 per 100,000 in 2005 (Annexe 9.3).<sup>44</sup> Graph 9.1 highlights a parallel shift in homicides and firearm-related

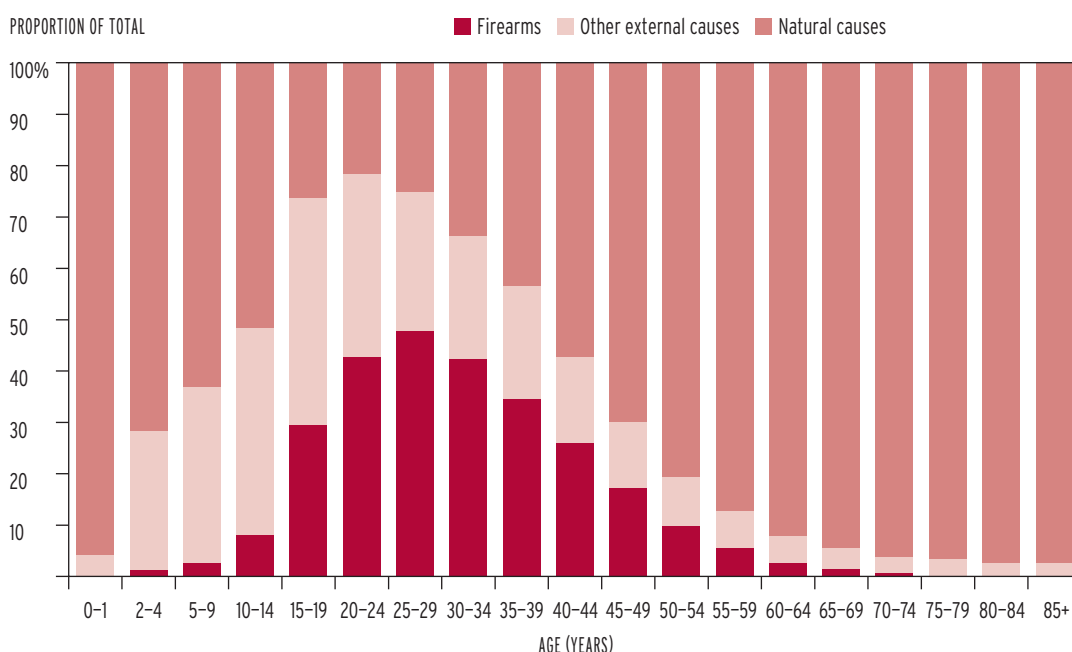
homicides; a similar relationship can be found in the total numbers of annual deaths in relation to firearm deaths, in terms of rates per 100,000. Thus, while there are some relatively constant causes of death (e.g. heart disease), variations in total numbers of annual deaths are essentially variations in gun deaths.

Firearms have thus played a central role in overall external causes of death. Of the more than 509,000 weapons-related deaths reported between 1979 and 2002, about 83 per cent were firearms-related (427,204), 16 per cent were attributable to bladed weapons, and less than one per cent were tied to explosives (see Annexe 9.4).<sup>45</sup> Perhaps more important, the percentage of all external deaths associated with firearms rose steeply until 1991 and has remained relatively constant since. Firearms thus currently account for more than 80 per cent of all homicides in Colombia, 36 per cent of all suicides, and more than 2 per cent of all accidents. In fact, firearm deaths account for fully 50 per cent of the variation over time in all external death rates.

It is also evident that criminal violence perpetrated with firearms is gender-specific. Men suffer more than 90 per cent of all gun deaths. In fact, firearms account for an astonishing 18 percent of total male deaths (of all causes, whether natural or external) compared to only 1.9 per cent for women. Annual male gun-death rates have ranged between 70 and 131 per 100,000 versus 5 to 10 per 100,000 for women. Thus, the absolute variation is much higher for men than for women, although they vary similarly in percentage terms. Annexe 9.5 presents a gender-specific review of the proportion of deaths from all causes, external causes, and firearms between 1980 and 2002 and demonstrates that women account for only seven per cent of firearm deaths.

Criminal violence perpetrated with firearms is also concentrated among specific demographic clusters of the population. It appears that men between 20 and 29 years of age account for almost 40 per cent of all firearm-related

**Graph 9.6 Demographic distribution of firearm death, 1979–2002**



Source: DANE; processed by CERAC

Map 9.2 Rates of firearm death by municipality, 1979–2002



deaths. Less than four per cent of firearm deaths are of people younger than 14 or older than 65. Graph 9.6 provides an overview of the age distribution of firearm victims in relation to deaths from external and natural causes. It observes that firearm exposure rises sharply from around the age of 14. People between 16 and 39, particularly the 20 to 24 range, experience the highest proportions of deaths due to external causes in total deaths (77 per cent) and firearm deaths in total deaths (nearly 50 per cent). Further, the graph shows that before age 14 and after age 40, most deaths are due to natural causes, while the reverse is true within this age interval. Firearm deaths are the principal contributing factor in this dynamic.

Firearm violence is concentrated predominantly in densely populated areas. This stands in sharp contrast to conflict violence which is predominantly rural. The large cities of Medellín, Bogotá, Cali, and Barranquilla are particularly susceptible to firearm-related violence, accounting for almost one-third of all firearm deaths over the past three decades.<sup>46</sup>

Much smaller cities such as Cúcuta, Bello,

Itagüí, Pereira, and Manizales have also suffered unusually high firearm death rates.<sup>47</sup> Some conflict-affected areas such as north-western Antioquia (Urabá), Casanare, Arauca, Putumayo, and Meta also present very high rates of gun violence. Moreover, firearm death rates vary widely by municipality (see Map 9.2). For example, in the municipalities of Granada, San Luis, and Cocorná (east of Antioquia), and Vistahermosa (Meta) firearm death rates ranged between 515 and 640 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2002, compared to Majagual (Sucre), Uribí (La Guajira), and El Tambo (Nariño), with rates between 2.64 and 3.44 per 100,000 in the same year (see Annexe 9.6).<sup>48</sup>

The full impact of firearm violence on Colombia's society and economy is difficult to quantify precisely, but simple calculations hint at its enormous dimension. Young men between 15 and 35 are disproportionately affected by a wide margin, so the impact on both formal and informal productivity is extensive. This chapter finds that some 342,253 years of productive life have been lost due to intentional firearm deaths since 1985. Moreover, a male Colombian born in 1985 has a five per cent chance of dying from firearms over the course of his lifetime, as compared to a nine per cent chance of dying from any other external cause. Thus, under present conditions, male Colombians born in 2002 will lose some 40 months of life on average due to firearm violence.<sup>49</sup> The socio-economic conse-

quences of this loss on the labour force are likely to be significant, coming just after these victims have finished their tax-supported educations. Moreover, it is plausible that some urban men have invested lightly in workforce preparation due to the fact that they are unlikely to have long lives during which to exploit such efforts. Clearly, reducing gun violence is an urgent public policy priority for Colombia and for the international community more generally.

## MUNICIPAL ARMS REDUCTION AND DDR

There are arguably few more important policy interventions to reduce armed violence—both conflict and criminal-related—than arms control. But there is also a wide bandwidth of control policies, ranging from prohibitions on domestic production, imports, exports, and civilian controls to military and police enforcement measures, legislative reform, and changes in incarceration policy. Previous editions of the *Small Arms Survey* have reflected on the value of international, regional, and national regulatory frameworks for preventing armed violence. This chapter focuses instead on several examples of innovative municipal efforts to reduce gun violence at the local level, as well as aspects of the controversial DDR process under way since 2004, under which many of the paramilitary groups have demobilized.

### Municipal arms reduction

Despite suffering one of the highest rates of armed violence in the world, Colombia has recently witnessed a dramatic decline in firearm-related deaths and victimization. This development warrants serious attention, although it is too early to identify a real trend. Analysts have tied declines in gun violence in Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín to identifiable municipal policy interventions that might be usefully applied elsewhere, inside and outside Colombia (Guerrero, 1999; Villaveces et al., 2000; Llorente et al., 2000).

Colombia has recently witnessed a dramatic decline in firearm-related deaths and victimization.

In the mid-1990s, when national homicide rates were peaking, local authorities of large cities experimented with plans to reduce arms-related violence. Rodrigo Guerrero, then mayor of Cali, introduced temporary restrictions on the carrying of firearms, alcohol prohibitions, and other security guarantees such as road checks and increased police presence. The carrying restrictions were often introduced during festivals and on other occasions such as during weekends, prior to pay-day, or late at night (Guerrero, 1999). A similar tactic was employed by Jaime Castro, a former mayor of Bogotá (1992–94), when he invoked obscure legal mechanisms to suspend civilian carrying licenses in certain situations, particularly on election days.

But one of the most impressive examples of municipal arms control emerges from Bogotá. Antanas Mockus, concerned with spiraling levels of armed violence in the early 1990s, was elected mayor of Bogotá in 1995 with violence reduction as the central issue in his campaign. During his two terms (1995–96 and 2001–03) he responded to record-low levels of confidence in public security provision by introducing alternative approaches for citizens to protect themselves and their families. As part of a programme called ‘security for everyone’, and with the support of the Catholic Church and the police, he restricted carrying licenses during weekends and evenings throughout the city. Mockus introduced police roadblocks, both to reduce drunk driving and to undertake gun searches.

Opinion surveys have been conducted in order to investigate perceptions of safety and attitudes towards the preference to carry a firearm to feel secure. About 25 per cent of people surveyed by the local Secretary of Culture



### Box 9.1 A snapshot of firearm homicides in Colombia, 2003–2005

There is a more up-to-date alternative to the DANE data applied elsewhere in this chapter. These include the national police crime database or SIEDCO (Sistema de Información Estadístico Delincuencial, Contravencional, y Operativo), which processes information from the 36 police departments throughout the country. Between 2003 and 2005, for example, SIEDCO recorded

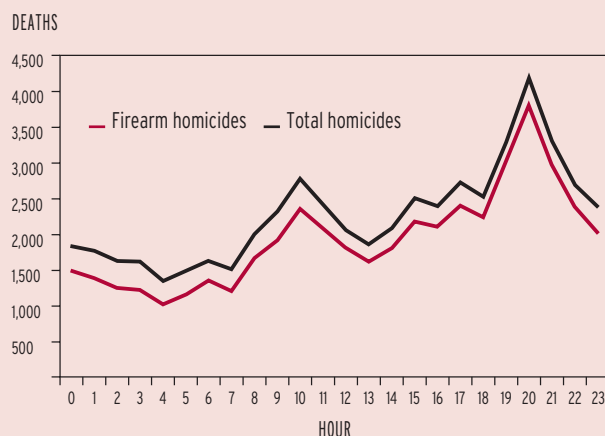
**Table 9.2 Homicides by type of weapon in Colombia, 2003–05**

Type	2003	2004	2005	2003–05
Firearm	20,058	17,208	14,510	51,776
Sharp object	2,257	2,368	2,486	7,111
Blunt object	309	310	287	906
Explosive material, smoke, fire and flames	347	197	317	861
Hanging, strangulation, and suffocation	32	67	107	206
Other	10	13	5	28
Poison	2	10	14	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,015</b>	<b>20,173</b>	<b>17,726</b>	<b>60,914</b>
<b>Rate per 100,000 inhabitants</b>				
Firearm homicides	44.99	37.97	31.54	38.34*
Total homicides	51.62	44.51	38.53	45.16*

**Source:** National Police–CIC (SIEDCO) and DANE; processed by CERAC

\* Average rate 2003–05

**Graph 9.7 A question of timing: homicides and firearm homicides, 2003–05**



**Source:** National Police–CIC (SIEDCO); processed by CERAC

61,299 homicides, of which 52,028 were reportedly caused by firearms. Table 9.2 details annual homicides, while also disaggregating these according to the type of weapon used in the incident. Firearms are far and away the leading cause of homicide, followed by bladed weapons.

SIEDCO also gathers information on the time and date of an incident. Graph 9.7 demonstrates that homicides peak at 8 pm with a follow-on peak at 10 am. Homicides also appear to peak on weekends, suggesting that there are potentially compelling benefits from restricting weekend carrying permits. SIEDCO also collected detailed data on almost 8,000 crimes and offences involving the use of firearms in the first trimester of 2005. Though an incomplete and imperfect sample, Table 9.3 provides a breakdown of these figures by type of weapon. While they reflect a modest sample, these statistics point to the dominant role played by revolvers, shotguns, and pistols. Police officials revealed that more than 95 per cent (7,594) of all the cases involved firearms without permits.

**Table 9.3 Weapons used in crime and offences: January–April 2005**

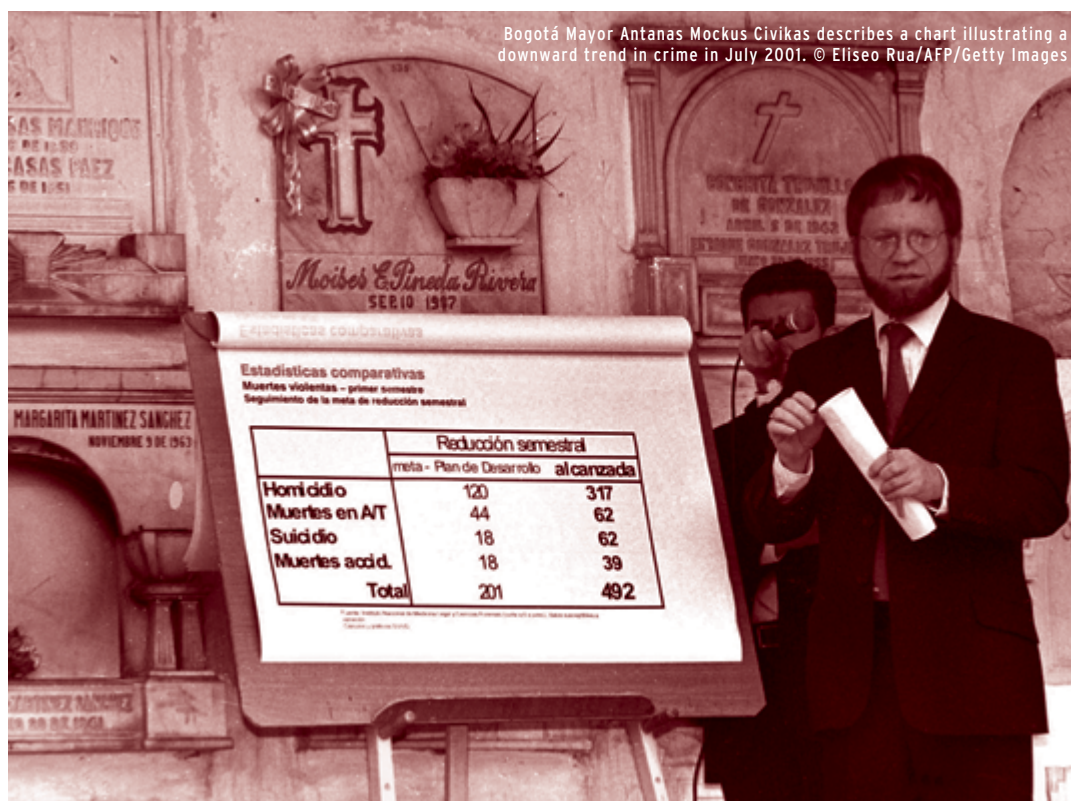
Category	Quantity
Revolver	4,317
Shotgun	2,243
Pistol	1,243
Assault rifle	78
Carbine	33
Sub-machine gun	19
Other firearm types	9
Mortar	4
Machine gun	2
Bazooka	2
Cohete	3
Grenade launcher	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,955</b>

**Source:** National Police–CIC (SIEDCO); processed by CERAC

in 2002 said that it was important to protect oneself with a firearm. In a subsequent survey, carried out in 2003, after the start of the implementation of Mockus's disarmament plan, the response fell to ten per cent. Finally, the Quality of Life Survey of 2003 revealed that disarmament campaigns were one of the measures that made people feel the safest: at least two-thirds of all respondents asserted that disarmament campaigns increased their perception of security.

Related research has explored the impact of active anti-gun policies and other security interventions—particularly those launched in the mid-1990s—on reducing firearm-related homicides in Bogotá. These studies have found a statistical dependency between specific arms control restrictions and reduced homicides on weekends. In other words, it appears that the temporary bans on carrying firearms, strongly enforced on weekends, yielded a positive effect (Aguirre et al., 2005, p. 26).

In the absence of strong national backing, the mayor of Bogotá drew on voluntary support and private funding to launch a buyback programme in 1995 and 1996. As there is no federal regulatory framework to support efforts by municipal institutions to collect firearms, the Church and its parishes were harnessed, with priests negotiating with gang leaders to turn in their weapons. The mayor's office simultaneously launched a series of measures that, while viewed by some as mere political stunts and political opportunism, may actually have contributed to altering the culture of violence in the city. These included an initiative of exchanging toy guns for poetry books, which is still actively endorsed by the police, and another programme of rendering spoons from guns. There have been no robust statistical studies of the impact of these distinct measures on reducing homicide, though few can dismiss the dramatic 26 per cent decline in Bogotá's homicide rate experienced during Mockus's tenure (1995 to 1996).<sup>50</sup>



The physical collection of weapons represents only one feature of these various interventions. In fact, only a modest number of firearms were decommissioned in Bogotá during the 1990s. During the Mayor's programme, returned arms included 200 to 300 *changones* from 20 parishes, 2,300 firearms, and more than 800 grenades that were destroyed on Mother's Day towards the end of his first term. While fewer than 4,000 firearms have been destroyed in this programme during the past 10 years, the impact of these interventions cannot be measured solely by the number of weapons collected (*El Tiempo*, 2005d). The collection and destruction of firearms yielded important symbolic effects that were widely felt—'a flip side to Santander department exhibitionism and machismo', in the words of one local politician.

## Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

A series of DDR processes have been applied to various rebel groups over the past few decades. In fact, successive Colombian administrations have eagerly pursued DDR since the 1950s, after the relatively positive DDR experience during and after the period known as *La Violencia*.<sup>51</sup> There have been nine separate 'collective' DDR programmes with distinct guerrilla groups since the 1970s. Since 1990, some 7,300 ex-guerrillas have been collectively disarmed, and 4,715 of them entered reintegration programmes.<sup>52</sup> Specific DDR frameworks have varied from negotiation to negotiation—and no formulaic or standardized approach has yet emerged.<sup>53</sup>

To be sure, DDR is an intrinsically complicated and ambitious exercise in any context (Small Arms Survey, 2005, ch. 10; Muggah, 2005). Colombia is a case in point: a vast array of operational agencies and departments are responsible for the execution of various components of DDR. For example, the Dirección General de Reinserción (Reinsertion Department) under the Ministry of the Interior is directly responsible for the DDR of individuals covered under various peace agreements.<sup>54</sup> The Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare) ensures that the rights of youth and minors are respected during the DDR process. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence offers humanitarian assistance to demobilized people. The Fiscalía General de la Nación (National General Prosecutor's Office) is charged with defining the legal situation of adult ex-combatants. The costs of ensuring that these agencies are coordinated and effective are tremendous. All told, the government spent more than USD 94 million on DDR between 1998 and 2002.

Despite the lack of evidence, it is widely believed that investments in DDR have reduced violence. It is true that properly demobilized groups are expected to stop killing people. However, DDR could also be blamed for the sharp rise in illegal paramilitary groups that began towards the end of the 1990s. In particular, the rise has been linked to outrage in some right-wing circles concerning the fact that left-wing guerrillas were demobilizing without penalties. The extent to which some of these formerly demobilized individuals resumed activities with armed groups, including the paramilitaries, has yet to be determined. While it is plausible that DDR has reduced violence over the years, there has not been a single study to carefully review the causal links between DDR and resumed livelihoods or reductions in armed violence or criminality.

The DDR process in Colombia is exceedingly controversial. In December 2002 most paramilitary groups initiated a ceasefire with the government, albeit one they have not always adhered to on the ground. This led to a suspension of hostilities with the government and paved the way for politically volatile negotiations in 2003. As early as January 2003, the first surrendered weapons were trickling in, many of them of high-quality but with serial numbers erased. By March 2006, more than 22,097 ex-combatants had turned in more than 17,600 weapons (Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 2005).<sup>55</sup> Despite involvement of the Organization of American States (OAS), the US and Canadian governments,

By March 2006, more than 22,000 paramilitaries had turned in more than 17,000 weapons.

the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and a host of others, the process has been subjected to withering criticism, especially from human rights organizations. Most critics argue that the process began before an adequate legal framework was put in place and also that the measures ultimately installed were too soft on the paramilitaries (HRW, 2005, p. 203).<sup>56</sup> Government officials have reacted to this criticism with frustration, pointing to the country's long history of impunity deals with left-wing groups, none of which provided any reparations for victims.

Though few of the DDR critics have addressed these apparent inconsistencies, there are nevertheless two compelling reasons for treating the paramilitaries differently from the guerrilla groups of the past. First, as this chapter has shown, the paramilitaries have been by far the most vicious faction in the Colombian armed conflict since the late 1990s. Second, in the present environment, weak punishment for paramilitaries can be challenged in the Colombian Constitutional Court, the Inter-American Court for Human Rights, and even the International Criminal Court.<sup>57</sup> Paramilitaries who have committed or ordered massacres will not voluntarily sign up for prison terms that are proportional to their crimes. In fact, the law may go too far in effectively capping sentences at 6.5 years. The paramilitaries are comparatively poor fighters whose negotiating position might soften up under military pressure (Restrepo and Spagat, 2005b, p. 67).

**Bogotá, Medellín,  
and Cali have shown  
drastic reductions in  
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recent years.**

The government should respond more vigorously than it has to ceasefire violations committed by paramilitary groups currently sitting at the negotiating table. But it would be costly to pursue an exclusively military solution to paramilitarism and, therefore, some leniency is an inevitable component of any demobilization deal. The main problem is that the current Colombian administration has neither the time nor the resources to determine which particular crimes were committed by various paramilitaries, who the victims are, and what property has been stolen. Nevertheless, these issues can be addressed during the Justice and Peace law's implementation phase with sufficient resources, political will, and international engagement.

## CONCLUSIONS

Colombia has been an extraordinarily violent place for a long time. This chapter has shown that firearms have played a central role in many of the country's challenges. Weapons of various calibres are the primary tool of those who murder, kidnap, and forcibly displace. Conflict violence is predominantly rural while criminal violence is mainly urban. Young males are the primary victims of gun violence. Left-wing guerrillas, right-wing illegal paramilitaries, drug dealers, and the government forces that oppose them are all well armed with relatively sophisticated weapons. Colombian civilians are also armed, though less so than their neighbours.

This chapter has found that easy availability of small arms and light weapons has been a major contributor to the onset, lethality, and scale of both criminal and conflict violence in Colombia. On average, more than half of the variation over time in external death rates is significantly explained by the variation in firearm death rates. Yet despite Colombia's severe problems there are real grounds for hope. In recent years there have been substantial reductions in homicides in several of the country's biggest cities. Some of the policy initiatives that have contributed to these improvements can be replicated elsewhere and extended, not just in Colombia.

The Colombian cities of Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali have shown drastic reductions in homicide rates in recent years, with gun control being central to their success. These experiences demonstrate that gun control policy can and had yielded a substantial impact even within an overall context of rampant violence. It should be noted, however,





National Police mascot Segurito (Safie) shows the press seized weapons in Medellín, December 2004.  
 © Gerardo Gomez/AFP/Getty Images

that the reductions in violence have been achieved principally in more densely populated areas, where the state has established a strong presence. In isolated areas, the state holds little sway and the conflict continues unbridled. Conflict violence, especially pertaining to civilians, had been greatly reduced in 2003 and 2004 but many of these gains were reversed in the first half of 2005. All in all, the country's major successes have been limited in scope.

Future progress depends largely on Colombia's paramilitaries, who have been the main perpetrators of conflict violence against civilians in recent years. As this chapter has shown, they are also more deeply involved in trading narcotics and weapons than the guerrillas, and are thus armed groups of major international significance. If they can be successfully demobilized and their criminal activity kept in check, the country could look forward to a future much less violent than its past. If, instead, the paramilitaries transition from a mixture of counterinsurgency and criminality into pure criminality, Colombian violence could reach new heights. Paramilitary DDR is, therefore, critical and should become a major focus of international attention. ■



## ANNEXE 9.1. TOP TEN COUNTRIES EXPORTING ARMS AND PARTS TO COLOMBIA, 1994–2005\*

Country	Export value (USD)*
United States	195,887,011
South Africa	163,678,531
Israel	145,348,075
Brazil	50,364,170
Belgium	14,958,391
Italy	12,857,171
France	12,165,775
Czech Republic	11,159,777
United Kingdom	10,161,063
Spain	6,635,414
Other countries	51,677,648
Total top 10 countries	623,215,378
<b>Total</b>	<b>674,893,026</b>

\* Cumulative value for January–October 2005

Source: National Tax Administration; processed by CERAC

## ANNEXE 9.2. TOTAL, EXTERNAL, AND FIREARM DEATHS IN COLOMBIA, 1979–2005

Year	Total	External causes	Firearm	External causes/total (%)	Firearm/total (%)	Firearm/external (%)
1979	110,400	15,680	3,617	14	3	23
1980	125,573	18,898	4,980	15	4	26
1981	139,505	22,084	6,552	16	5	30
1982	137,678	22,685	7,127	16	5	31
1983	140,292	23,767	7,343	17	5	31
1984	137,189	24,455	8,211	18	6	34
1985	153,947	29,218	11,505	19	7	39
1986	146,345	30,210	13,472	21	9	45
1987	151,957	32,179	14,780	21	10	46
1988	153,065	34,995	17,447	23	11	50
1989	154,694	36,228	18,947	23	12	52
1990	156,314	38,107	20,569	24	13	54
1991	162,063	43,066	24,941	27	15	58
1992	167,743	44,395	25,084	26	15	57

1993	168,647	44,621	24,572	26	15	55
1994	168,568	43,287	23,118	26	14	53
1995	169,896	41,532	21,313	24	13	51
1996	173,506	42,307	23,062	24	13	55
1997	170,753	41,087	22,222	24	13	54
1998	175,363	42,823	21,950	24	13	51
1999	183,553	43,959	23,320	24	13	53
2000	187,432	46,031	26,465	25	14	57
2001	191,513	47,175	27,618	25	14	59
2002	192,262	48,438	28,989	25	15	60
2003*	189,073		19,624	20	10	50
2004*	194,788		16,951	18	9	45
2005*			13,494			
<b>Total 1979–2002</b>	<b>3,818,258</b>	<b>857,227</b>	<b>427,204</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Change from 1979 to 2002</b>	<b>74.2%</b>	<b>208.9%</b>	<b>701.5%</b>	<b>77.4</b>	<b>360.2</b>	<b>159.4</b>

Notes: \* Projected

Source: DANE and National Police–CIC; processed by CERAC

### ANNEXE 9.3. TOTAL, EXTERNAL, AND FIREARM DEATH RATES PER 100,000 INHABITANTS, 1979–2005

Year	Total	External causes	Firearms
1979	397	56	13
1980	441	66	18
1981	480	76	23
1982	463	76	24
1983	462	78	24
1984	442	79	26
1985	486	92	36
1986	453	94	42
1987	461	98	45
1988	455	104	52
1989	451	106	55
1990	447	109	59
1991	454	121	70

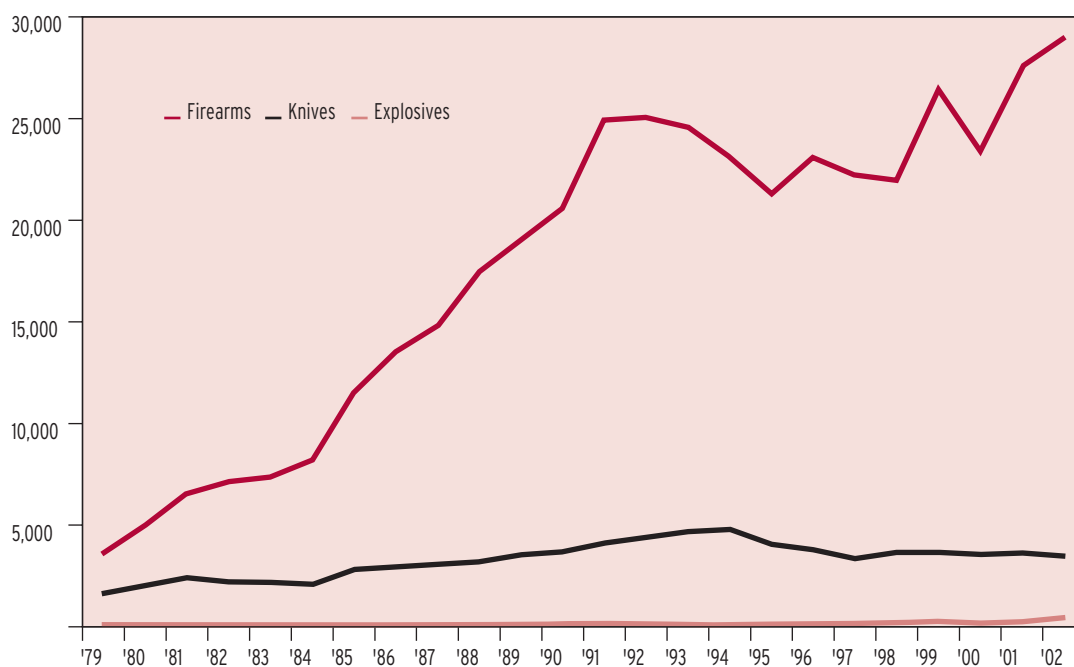
1992	461	122	69
1993	454	120	66
1994	445	114	61
1995	441	108	55
1996	442	108	59
1997	426	103	55
1998	430	105	54
1999	441	106	56
2000	443	109	63
2001	445	110	64
2002	439	111	66
2003*	424		44
2004*	430		37
2005*			29

Notes: \* Projected

Source: DANE and National Police; processed by CERAC

## ANNEXE 9.4 DISAGGREGATING WEAPON TYPES AND DEATHS IN COLOMBIA, 1979-2002

NUMBER OF DEATHS



Source: DANE; processed by CERAC

## ANNEXE 9.5 PROPORTION OF MALE AND FEMALE VICTIMS FOR ALL CAUSES, EXTERNAL CAUSES, AND FIREARMS, 1980–2002

Year	Total (%)		External causes (%)		Firearms (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1980	56	44	81	19	93	7
1981	56	44	83	17	93	7
1982	56	44	83	17	93	7
1983	56	44	83	17	94	6
1984	57	43	83	17	94	6
1985	57	43	84	16	94	6
1986	58	42	86	14	94	6
1987	59	41	86	14	94	6
1988	59	41	87	13	94	7
1989	60	40	87	13	93	7
1990	60	40	87	13	93	7
1991	61	39	88	12	93	7
1992	61	39	88	12	93	7
1993	61	39	87	13	93	7
1994	61	39	87	13	93	7
1995	60	40	86	14	93	7
1996	60	40	87	13	93	7
1997	60	40	87	13	93	7
1998	60	40	87	13	92	7
1999	60	40	86	14	93	7
2000	61	39	87	13	93	7
2001	60	40	87	13	92	7
2002	60	40	87	13	92	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>7</b>

Source: DANE; processed by CERAC

## ANNEXE 9.6. FIREARM DEATH RATES BY MUNICIPALITY, 1985, 1993, 2002, AND AGGREGATE

1985				
Department	Municipality	Population	Firearm deaths	Rate per 100,000
Boyacá	La Victoria	3,017	15	497.18
Arauca	Cravo Norte	3,557	13	365.48
Antioquia	Salgar	22,652	73	322.27
Huila	Altamira	2,822	8	283.49

Guaviare	San José Del Guaviare	41,476	115	277.27
Meta	Puerto Lleras	9,576	25	261.07
Arauca	Puerto Rondón	1,985	5	251.89
Boyacá	Muzo	11,567	29	250.71
Arauca	Saravena	24,417	61	249.83
Risaralda	Balboa	8,953	22	245.73
Sucre	Corozal	47,329	1	2.11
Santander	Girón	53,547	1	1.87
Córdoba	Cereté	58,605	1	1.71
Tolima	Espinal	58,696	1	1.70
Atlántico	Soledad	170,854	2	1.17
	<b>National totals</b>	<b>31,658,715</b>	<b>11,505</b>	<b>36.34</b>
<b>1993</b>				
Meta	El Castillo	3,104	15	483.25
Antioquia	Apartadó	78,019	312	399.90
Casanare	Sácama	1,139	4	351.19
Santander	Sabana De Torres	20,000	68	340.00
Antioquia	Chigorodó	44,201	148	334.83
Boyacá	La Victoria	1,571	5	318.27
Cundinamarca	San Cayetano	5,464	17	311.13
Boyacá	Pauna	9,752	27	276.87
Antioquia	Medellín	1,834,881	5,000	272.50
Valle del Cauca	El Cairo	9,589	26	271.14
Córdoba	Lorica	120,961	2	1.65
Atlántico	Soledad	257,650	4	1.55
Atlántico	Sabanalarga	73,409	1	1.36
Bolívar	El Carmen De Bolívar	74,836	1	1.34
Atlántico	Malambo	75,807	1	1.32
	<b>National totals</b>	<b>37,127,295</b>	<b>24,607</b>	<b>66.28</b>
<b>2002</b>				
Antioquia	Granada	17,326	111	640.66
Meta	Vistahermosa	19,781	105	530.81
Antioquia	San Luis	16,445	87	529.04
Antioquia	Cocorná	21,552	111	515.03
Caquetá	El Paujil	16,833	83	493.08
Caquetá	Curillo	14,700	70	476.19
Norte de Santander	Tibú	39,977	182	455.26
Meta	San Juan De Arama	10,426	47	450.80
Meta	Uribe	9,730	42	431.65



Caquetá	Solita	9,874	39	394.98
Nariño	Guaitarilla	28,184	1	3.55
Córdoba	Pueblo Nuevo	28,221	1	3.54
Nariño	El Tambo	29,044	1	3.44
La Guajira	Uribia	66,957	2	2.99
Sucre	Majagual	37,885	1	2.64
	<b>National totals</b>	<b>43,834,117</b>	<b>28,899</b>	<b>65.93</b>
<b>Aggregate 1979–2002. Population of 2002</b>				
Risaralda	Balboa	7,372	358	211.14
Antioquia	Valdivia	11,963	542	196.98
Antioquia	Salgar	18,110	815	195.66
Caldas	Viterbo	18,684	839	195.24
Boyacá	Muzo	16,445	727	192.21
Boyacá	La Victoria	1,311	57	189.04
Antioquia	Remedios	17,658	746	183.68
Antioquia	Apartadó	96,039	4,047	183.21
Antioquia	Olaya	2,686	110	178.06
Caquetá	Curillo	14,700	598	176.87
Bolívar	Hatillo De Loba	12,701	2	0.68
Nariño	Nariño	6,441	1	0.68
Chocó	Bajo Baudó	14,062	2	0.62
Chocó	Río Iro	7,184	1	0.61
Magdalena	Zapayán	8,944	1	0.49
	<b>National totals</b>	<b>43,834,117</b>	<b>427,204</b>	<b>42.37</b>

Source: DANE; processed by CERAC

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AUC</b>	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia)	<b>FARC</b>	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
<b>CERAC</b>	Conflict Analysis Resource Center		
<b>CIC</b>	Centro de Investigaciones Criminológicas, Policía Nacional (National Police Centre for Criminological Research)	<b>INDUMIL</b>	Industria Militar (Military Industry)
		<b>INML</b>	Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (National Institute of the Medical Examiner and Forensic Sciences)
<b>DANE</b>	Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (National Administrative Department of Statistics)	<b>MOD</b>	Ministry of Defence
<b>DAS</b>	Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (Administrative Department of Security)	<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
		<b>OCCA</b>	Oficina de Control y Comercio de Armas

<b>DDR</b>	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration		y Explosivos (Office for Control and Trade of Arms and Explosives)
<b>DNP</b>	Departamento Nacional de Planeación (Department of National Planning)	<b>SIEDCO</b>	Sistema de Información Estadístico Delincuencial, Contravencional, y Operativo (Statistical Information System of Delinquency, Offences, and Operations)
<b>ELN</b>	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)		

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This chapter was produced by the Conflict Analysis Resource Center (CERAC) and the Small Arms Survey. References to CERAC's work relate to its conflict database on Colombia or to its research on violence and conflict in Colombia, which was undertaken with the support of the Small Arms Survey. Unless otherwise noted, information reflects details revealed during structured author interviews administered in October and November 2005 in Bogotá, with strong cooperation provided by the Vice Ministry of Defence. The information gathered during these interviews was triangulated with debriefings by intelligence officers of the armed forces.
- 2 Roughly 75 per cent of these deaths are criminal homicides. An examination of the complex interplay between criminality and armed conflict lies beyond the scope of this study.
- 3 External causes of morbidity and mortality include accidents, intentional self-harm, assault, events of undetermined intent, legal intervention and wartime operations, and complications during medical and surgical care.
- 4 A comprehensive assessment of armed violence in Colombia by CERAC and the Small Arms Survey is forthcoming and will be available in English and Spanish.
- 5 This chapter uses the concept of human security as a human welfare lens through which to analyse violence.
- 6 For a list of Colombia's main arms suppliers and the corresponding quantities, see Annexe 9.1.
- 7 This particular arrangement is rare in Latin America, where most arms industries have been entirely or partially privatized. Full or partial privatization is not necessarily an improvement in terms of the institutional arrangement for arms control.
- 8 On human rights grounds, Colombia has long been subject to a de facto arms embargo from many producers of high-quality arms. For example, the European Union does not sell arms to the Colombian forces and the United States, one of their main suppliers, has conditioned certain arms sales on human rights performance. As a result, Colombia is dependent on South Africa, Israel, Singapore, and a few European countries for arms supplies. Colombia is now actively seeking new suppliers, including China (*El Tiempo*, 2005b).
- 9 The armed forces adopted the Israeli Galil in 1992, and INDUMIL began production in 1994. INDUMIL estimates that 12,000–40,000 are produced annually. Previous assault rifles included the Heckler & Koch G3, imported from Germany..
- 10 In the late 1990s INDUMIL began a major shift towards self-sufficiency. By 2002 this goal was fulfilled in the production of Galil rifles, for which it currently produces some 30 million rounds of 5.56 military-grade ammunition each year. INDUMIL is self-sufficient in the production of three types of revolvers (i.e. 38L, 32L, and 38S), various kinds of ammunition (i.e. 38L, 9 mm, 32L, 7.62, and shotgun ammunition), mortars, and hand grenades. INDUMIL is also striving to become a leading producer of high-grade explosives and explosive services for the mining and oil sectors by the end of 2006. It has significant exports to Central America.
- 11 Such an upgrade would probably necessitate decommissioning existing weapons to prevent their leakage into the open market, although neither the national police nor INDUMIL have yet addressed this issue officially. Increased Colombian production of high-grade pistols would bring Colombia into competition with Venezuela, which recently announced its own domestic pistol production (*El Tiempo*, 2005c).
- 12 Primary products include the Llama INDUMIL Martial .32 long and .38 special, as well as the Llama INDUMIL Scorpio and Cassidy. INDUMIL is believed to have produced between 4,000 and 12,000 revolvers per year since 1999.
- 13 See, for example, *El Espectador* (2003).
- 14 The Colombian Constitution (Article 223) states: 'Nobody may own or carry weapons without a permit issued by the competent authorities.' The specific rules about firearms appear in legislative decree 2535 of 17 December 1993.
- 15 Of the new permits issued since 1994, 80.91 per cent went to Colombian citizens, 18.96 per cent to foreign residents, and 0.13 per cent to private security companies. Permits are divided into 'holding' and 'carrying' varieties. Colombian civilians appear more inclined to acquire carrying licenses for personal protection, while foreigners and companies overwhelmingly acquire holding licenses.
- 16 This range results from multiplying the number of estimated police officers by the standard multiplier and then establishing a margin of error of 33 per cent. It should also be noted that in the case of Colombia, these police-issued firearms are subject to rigorous command and control

procedures. Police-issued weapons are carried only during the officers' shifts and handed in during off-duty periods. Nevertheless, police are entitled to up to two personal firearms under the law and many avail themselves of this right. Based on author interviews with police and army officers, November 2005.

As with the police stockpile estimate above, this range is determined by applying a standard multiplier and ascribing a margin of error of 33 per cent.

DAS is a security institution with judicial police, intelligence, and immigration functions that is roughly equivalent to a combination of the FBI and the CIA in the United States.

There are indications that DAS uses much more sophisticated weapons than the police: in 2005, the United States provided USD 4 million for DAS to purchase 1,500 M16s and 3,000 pistols for a new special task force. See, for example, *Revista Semana* (2005).

All the figures of personnel strength of the illegal non-state armed groups were confirmed during interviews with intelligence officers of the Colombian army. Author interviews with police and army officers, November 2005.

Senior demobilized FARC commanders interviewed for this study maintain that the FARC has some 42 active 'fronts' and several mobile columns and units.

This is the latest official figure. The current figure may have changed as paramilitary DDR is an ongoing process.

Several high-ranking paramilitary commanders are currently being tried for their alleged involvement in narco-trafficking in Colombia and the United States. See Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2005a) for a description of the prosecution of these leaders. The leader of the paramilitaries, Diego Fernando Murillo, is requested by the District Court of New York on drug trafficking charges and his extradition was petitioned by the US government according to the Nota Verbal No. 1733, US, 26-07-04.

See, for example, Pizarro (2004, ch. IV), who deals with the impact of narcotics traffic on the conflict groups. Carlos Castaño, the former leader of the largest paramilitary group, the AUC, claimed in an interview that his organization received up to 70 per cent of its funding from narcotic-related activities (AP, 2000).

Author interviews, October and November 2005.

See, for example, <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/icitap/TextColombia.html>.

Moreover, the director of the forensic laboratories of the judicial police (Dirección Central de Policía Judicial, or DIJIN) claims that some 70 per cent of all firearm-related offences are committed with illegal arms.

For a documented case of smuggling, see the report of the Organization of American States (OAS) on the cache of assault rifles for the paramilitaries that was intercepted in Panama through Nicaragua (OAS, 2003). See also AP (2006).

Intelligence and police sources, as well as several press reports, claim that FAL rifles are often seized during counter-guerrilla operations. See also Schroeder (2004) and García-Peña (1999, p. 3).

The CERAC database reveals that guerrillas use explosive devices 12 times more often than the paramilitaries. Furthermore, author interviews with demobilized guerrillas and paramilitaries show that the guerrillas use pistols more frequently than the paramilitaries, issuing them to rank-and-file members as well as their leaders.

In one incident, in Bojayá-Chocó in May 2002, the FARC used such cylinders to bomb a church in which people had taken shelter from guerrilla-paramilitary clashes, killing 119 and wounding 90.

Author interviews with DAS detectives, October 2005.

Author interview with security personnel and analysts, November 2005. There has been much speculation on an IRA-FARC link. Colombian army officers claim that there are strong similarities between IRA and FARC tactics and techniques in the use of explosives. The *Sunday Times* (2005) provides an account of this subject.

For initial data, see Restrepo et al. (2004, p. 407).

Attacks cover a wide range of events such as massacres, bombings, mine explosions, economic sabotage (e.g. attacks on oil pipelines or electricity grids), incursions, and aerial bombardments.

This paragraph draws on Restrepo and Spagat (2005a, p. 135).

In this latest outbreak, the paramilitaries generally killed people one or two at a time rather than in larger numbers, as they had before.

The government tends to clash with guerrillas rather than engage in attacks such as those staged by the guerrillas and paramilitaries. Relatively few civilians are harmed during these clashes.

The low percentages for the guerrillas and the government are largely explained by the types of attacks. Shots are not usually fired during an aerial bombardment or during an attack on economic infrastructure, for example.

Grenade use follows a similar pattern until 2004.

The conflict in Arauca tends to be waged in small towns with heavy explosive use by guerrillas.

Between 1979 and 2002, there were 857,227 deaths from 'external causes', i.e. not from natural diseases. More than 430,000 people died from external causes without a firearm being involved.

The rest of this section draws only on DANE data, which runs through 2002.

- 44 In Colombia the firearm homicide rate reached a peak of 66 per 100,000 in 2002 (DANE). See, for example, Godnick et al. (2002).
- 45 For more than 95 per cent of all reported firearm deaths between 1979 and 2002 (406,855), no specific type of weapon was identified. In approximately 2 per cent of these cases (8,762), the data specifies 'handguns', while in 3 per cent of them (12,533) it specifies 'long guns'.
- 46 Medellín experienced 12.6 per cent of all firearm deaths, Bogotá 12 per cent, Cali 6.5 per cent, and Barranquilla 2.19 per cent.
- 47 The projected populations of these cities for 2005 are: Medellín (2,093,624), Bogotá (7,185,889), Cali (2,423,381), Barranquilla (1,386,895), Cúcuta (742,689), Bello (400,291), Pereira (521,684), Itagüi (288,207), and Manizales (382,193).
- 48 The areas east of Antioquia and south of the Meta department are major clusters of conflict violence.
- 49 In contrast, female Colombians born in 2002 will lose only four months on average.
- 50 See, for example, Aguirre et al. (2005).
- 51 *La Violencia* refers to a period marked by vicious fighting between liberal and conservative party supporters from 1948 to 1952, although lower-level violence continued for some years afterwards. A large disarmament and demobilization programme of the liberal guerrillas and conservative militias coincided with the start of the agreement that put an end to the infighting known as Frente Nacional (1958); the programme was also carried out during the previous military government (1953–57).
- 52 Guerrilla groups and their numbers are as follows: M-19 (900), PRT (200), EPL (2,000), Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (157), Comandos Ernesto Rojas (25), CRS (433), Milicias de Medellín (650), Frente Francisco Garnica (150), COAR (200). See, for example, Guáqueta (2005).
- 53 See Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2005b) for a detailed discussion of this evolution.
- 54 For more information, see Decree 2546 of 1999.
- 55 Of the total number returned, there were 13,333 long-range weapons, 2,460 handguns, 1,161 machine guns and mortars, and 8,550 grenades. At least 2,000,000 rounds of ammunition were also surrendered.
- 56 In its *World Report 2005*, Human Rights Watch asserts that '[a] significant obstacle to a full and effective paramilitary demobilization is the lack of a legal framework to govern the demobilization process and the benefits to be provided to those who demobilize. A draft bill initially proposed by the administration of President Alvaro Uribe in 2003 would have allowed cooperative paramilitary leaders responsible for atrocities to go virtually unpunished. After an international and domestic outcry, the proposed law was modified. However, a new version of the bill circulated in April 2004 still contains serious flaws—a failure to provide for thorough investigations of paramilitary crimes and illegal assets, and a loophole allowing those convicted of atrocities to entirely avoid incarceration—that make the effective demobilization and dismantling of paramilitary structures unlikely' (HRW, 2005, p. 203).
- 57 The legal framework provided by the Justice and Peace law limits the jail sentence to a maximum of eight years. Sentences can be served in penal rural colonies.

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