

## Food Security, trade specialization, and violence in Colombia (1916–2016)

### *Seguridad alimentaria, especialización comercial y violencia en Colombia (1916-2016)*

Alexander Urrego-Mesa\* 

Universidad de Barcelona

#### ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Socioeconomic and historical approaches can contribute to the understanding of the relationship between food security, agricultural trade, and armed conflicts in developing countries. While the market-based perspective advocates that trade is a useful way to maintain food security nationally, other works suggest that trade liberalization and agro-export specialization have threatened food security since the 1980s, especially the self-sufficiency capacity. In Colombia, this agrarian change to agro-export specialization and food dependence has also been linked to the surge of the second wave of violence (c. 1980). However, armed conflict is also seen as an obstacle to economic and trade development.

I use the case study of Colombia between the First and the Second Globalizations as a remarkable example to analyse the relationship between food security and agricultural trade, and the role of armed conflict in the agro-export specialization. Is there a dichotomy between trade and self-sufficiency during the Colombian twentieth century? Did armed conflict contribute to the specialization in agro-exports during the Second Globalization?

To answer the first question, I build on time series from official records along throughout the twentieth century on food availability, agricultural trade, self-sufficiency, and land-use changes. I analyse the evolution of these time series considering the policies from the First to the Second Globalization passing through the state-led growth period. To answer the second question, I test the long- and short-term relationships between tropical agro-export specialization, armed conflict, and relative international prices using a Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) for the period between 1961 and 2016.

The results tell a story of success in improving per capita consumption of calories in the long-term and an impoverishment of diet that parallels the shift in agricultural trade. Colombia moved from being an exporter of tropical foodstuffs to becoming a food-dependent importer of cereals from the 1990s. This transformation did not mean reducing or ending tropical exports but increasing imports of staple foodstuffs. The growth in regular imports allowed some gains in per capita consumption, while eroding the self-sufficiency capacity of the domestic agricultural system to provide staple foods, thus risking food security.

Regarding the empirical testing, there is a positive long-term relationship going from violence and international prices towards tropical specialization, which is in line with the argument that violence is a tool of agribusiness development rather than a hindrance. However, in the short-term the lagged values of specialization and the relative prices are positively associated with the rise in violence. These results open a window to exploring the role of commodity crop specialization as a cause of violence in the short-term.

The paper discusses some of the implications for food security that can be drawn from the historical evidence beyond the dichotomic debate and sets out some framework lines for understanding the long- and short-term interactions between international and domestic actors involved in tropical specialisation based on the literature on the political economy of violence in the country.

\* Corresponding author. Email: alex.urrego.mesa@ub.edu (Alexander Urrego-Mesa).