



# The Colombian Conflict

## Where is it Heading?

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- These slides are based on a talk that Michael Spagat gave at CSIS on November 3, 2005.
- This version has been further developed together with Jorge Restrepo and with research assistance from Nicolás Suárez.
- This is still work in progress and subject to change.
- Comments are welcome:
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- Our team maintains a database on the Colombian conflict, 1988 - June 2005.
- This dataset has more than 21,000 events.
- We include only clear conflict events, requiring each event to have a military effect and to reflect a group action.
- The next slide shows the team that maintains the database at CERAC, a Bogotá think tank.
- Below commentary will follow each technical slide.

## CERAC Data-coding team



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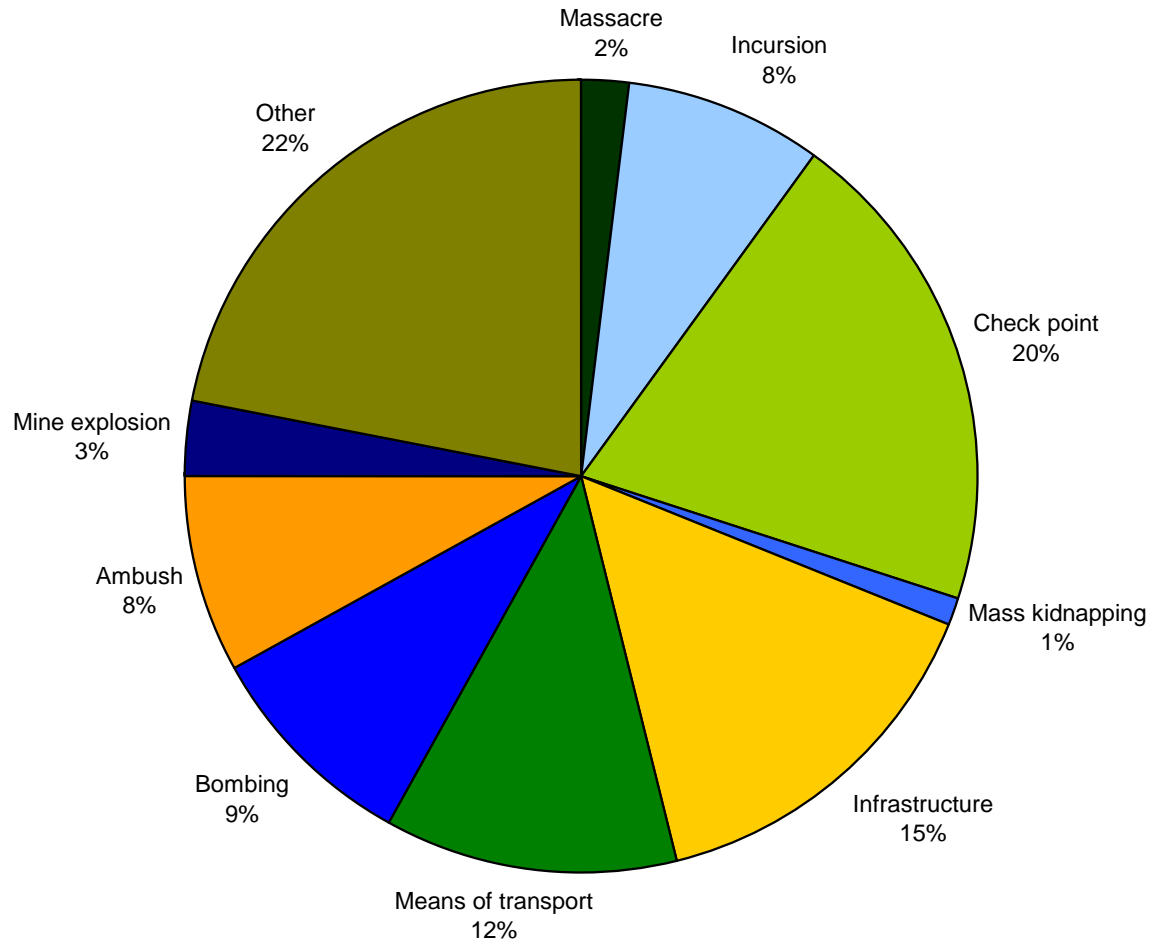


**Wilmer Marín**



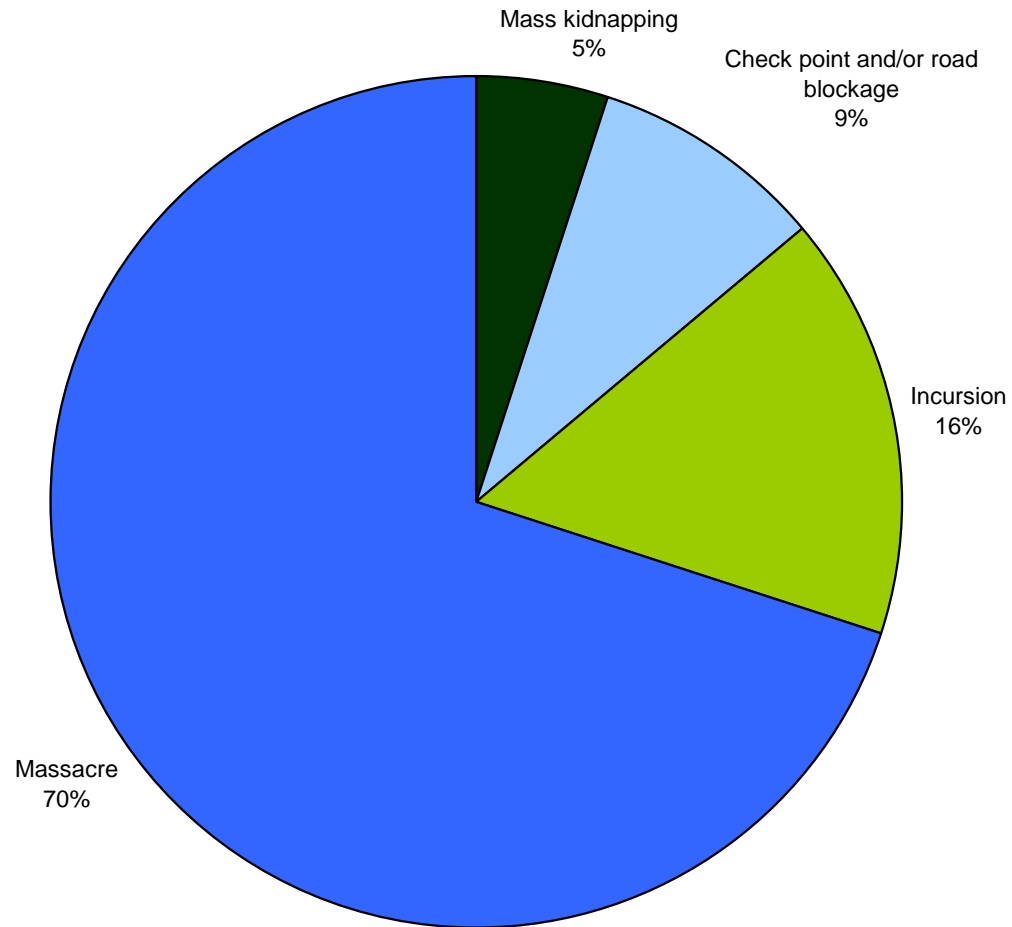
**Gustavo Perdomo**

### Portfolio of Attacks by Guerrilla Groups 1988-2004

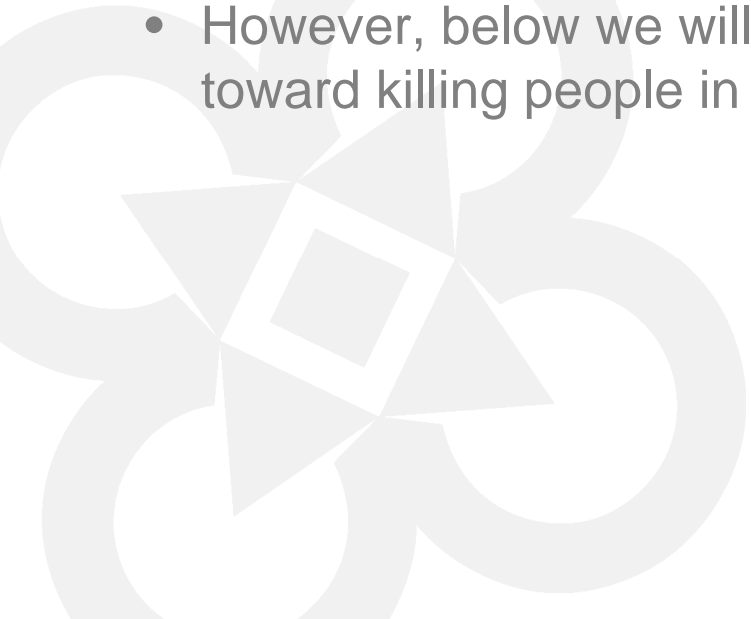


- Roughly half of all guerrilla attacks, including infrastructure attacks and attacks on means of transport, seem aimed mainly at disrupting the economy.
- This suggests that the guerrillas are not, as is often suggested, just interested in getting rich off drugs. They really do seem to aim for political power, local power in the short run and national power in the long run.
- Bombings are important because they account for most civilian injuries in the conflict.
- Massacres, killing at least four defenseless people in one event, have high impact but are a small fraction of all guerrilla attacks.

### Portfolio of Attacks by Paramilitaries 1988-2004

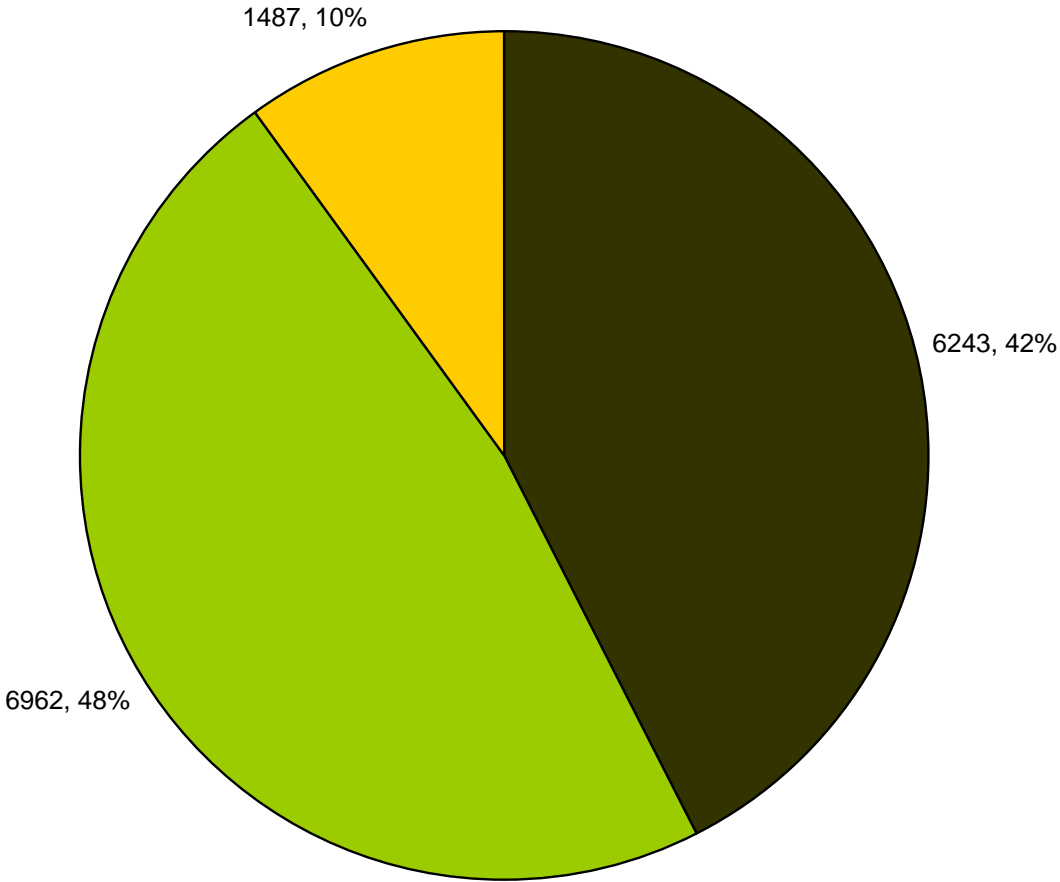


- Paramilitary attacks have consisted overwhelmingly of massacres and other attacks on civilian objectives.
- In the past it has been explicit paramilitary strategy to kill civilian whom the paramilitaries presume might be helping the guerrillas.
- However, below we will see that in 2005 the paramilitaries shifted toward killing people in ones and twos rather than in massacres.





**Total Killings in Attacks by Perpetrator,  
1988 - June 30 2005**



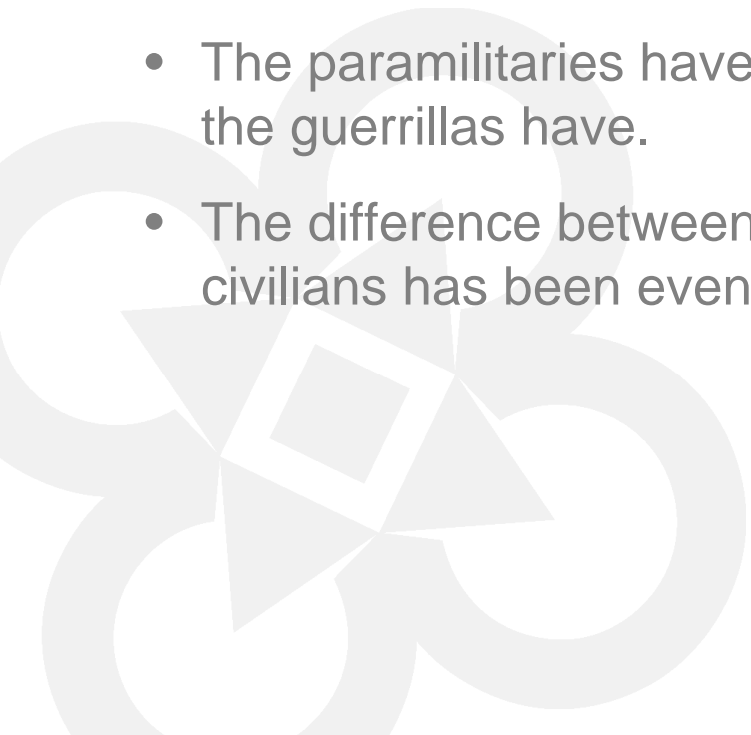
■ Guerrillas

■ Paramilitaries

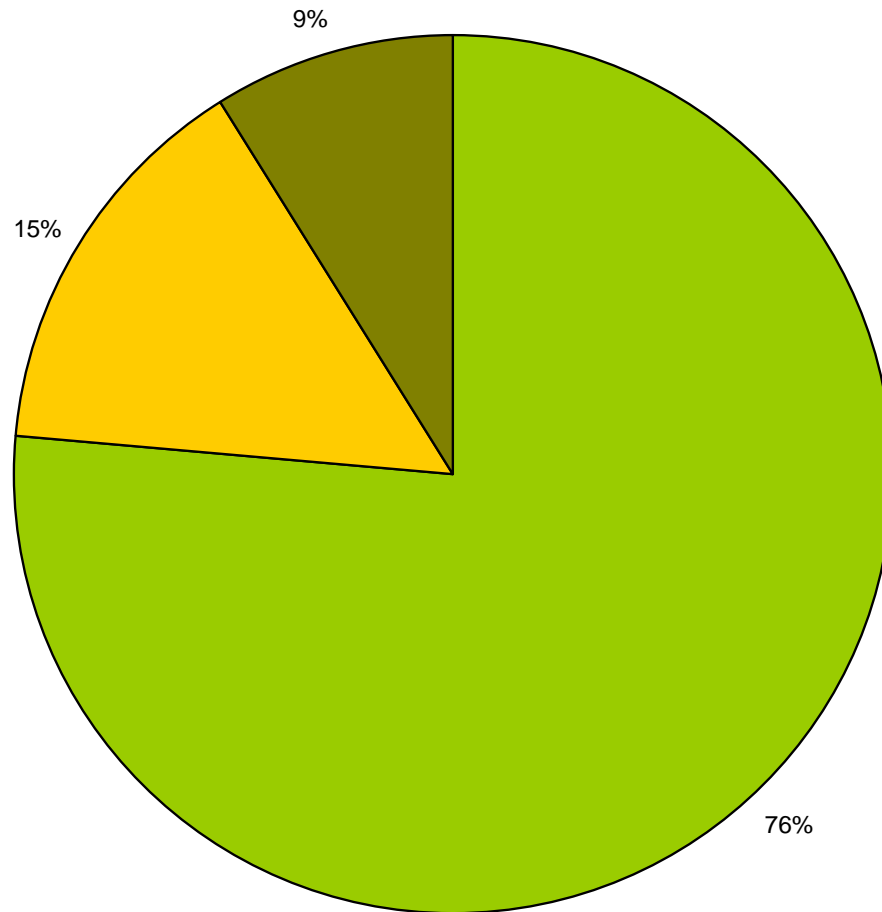
■ Government forces

Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database, 2005

- This pie chart covers only attacks because these are one-sided so attribution is unambiguous. In clashes between two groups we seldom can determine who is responsible for civilian casualties.
- The paramilitaries have killed more civilians over the years than the guerrillas have.
- The difference between paramilitary and guerrilla killing of civilians has been even bigger since 1998.



**Total Civilian Injuries in Attacks by Perpetrator,  
1988 - June 30 2005**



■ Injured civilians by guerrillas

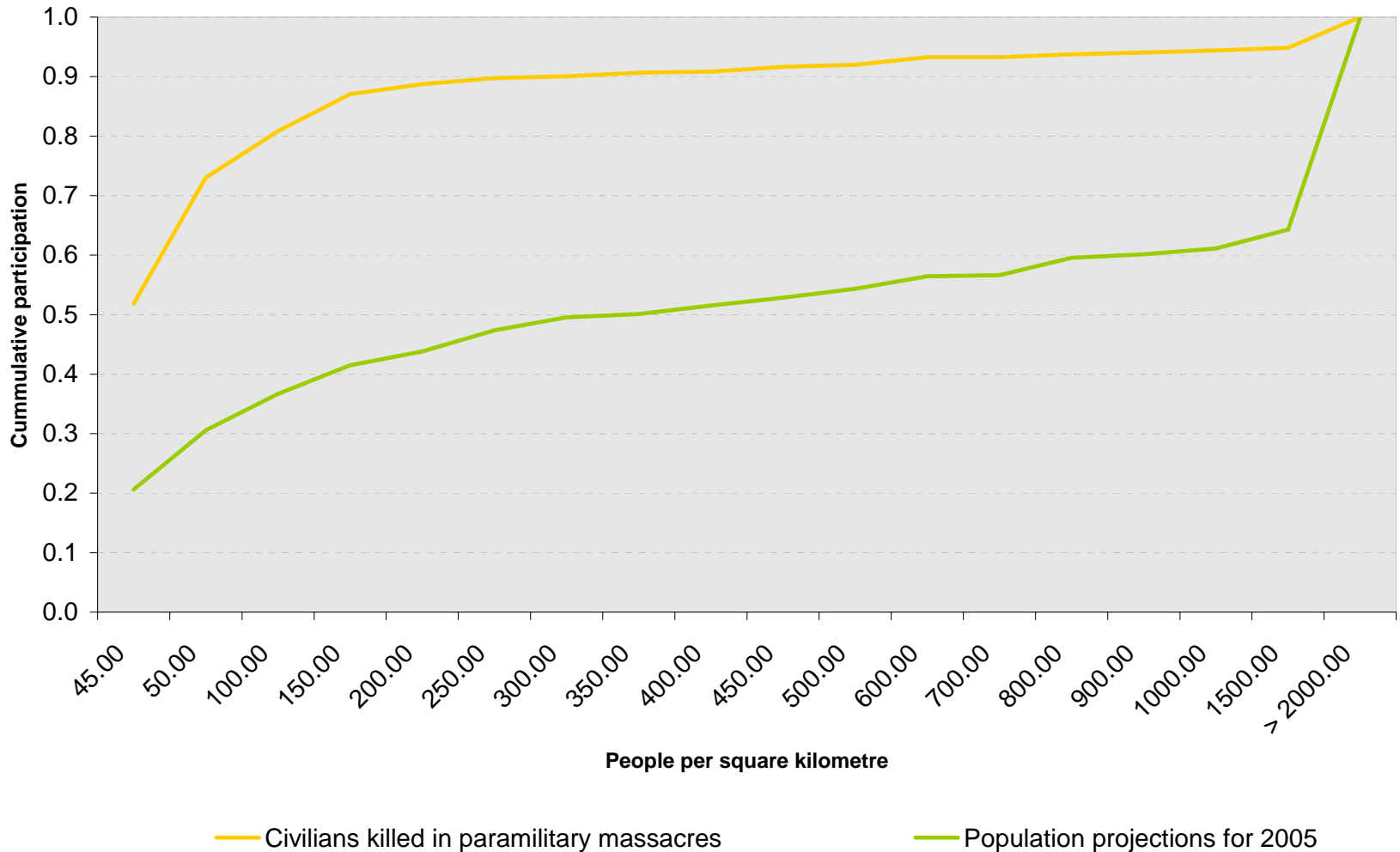
■ Injured civilians by paramilitaries

■ Injured civilians by government forces

- The guerrillas cause the overwhelming majority of injuries to civilians.
- These injuries come mainly in bombings, i.e., in a terrorist campaign.
- The paramilitaries injure very few people because they typically shoot people at short range in massacres.



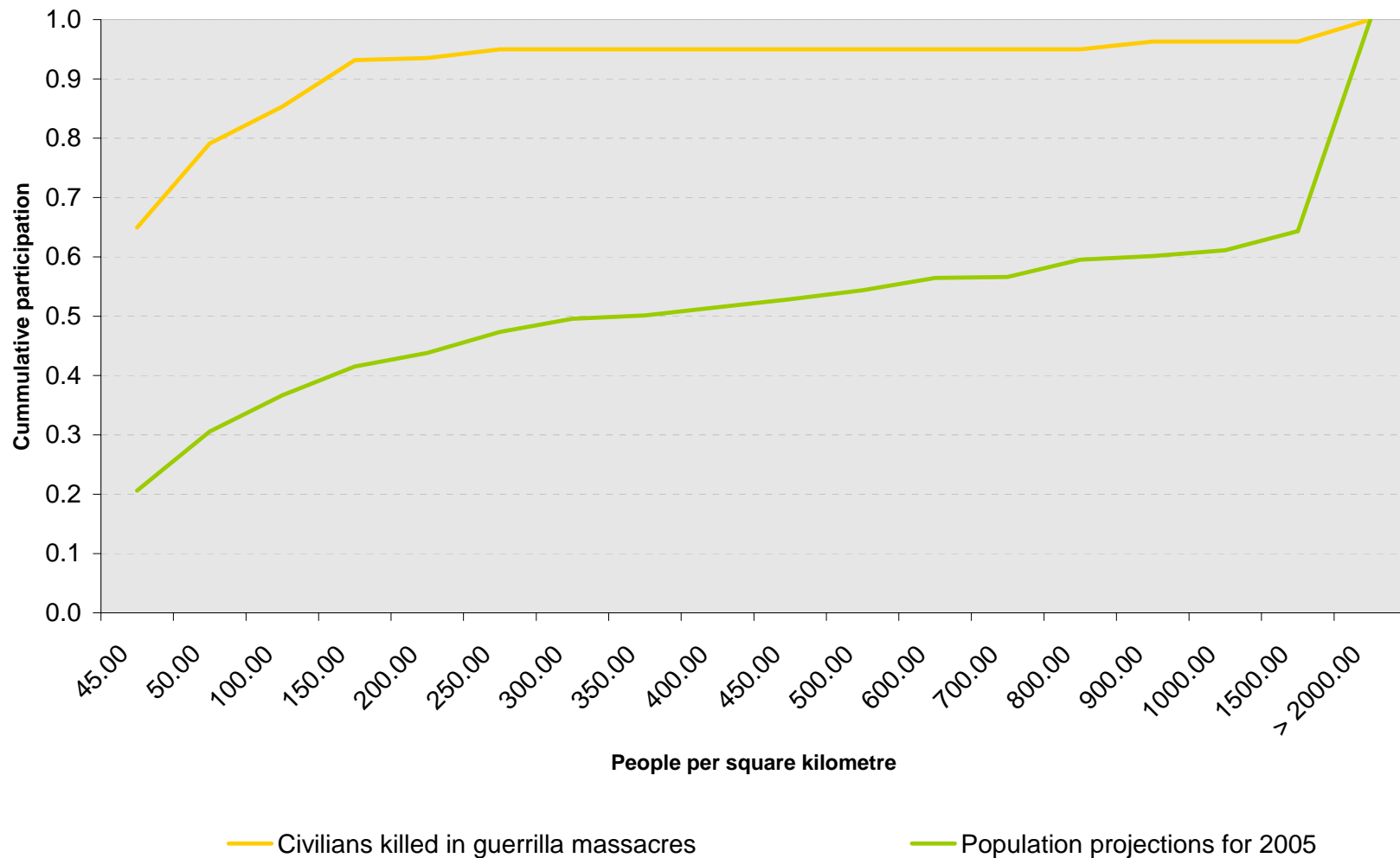
### Population Density and Civilians Killed in Paramilitary Massacres, 1988 - June 30 2005



- The two curves are “cumulative distribution functions”, read as follows:
- On the horizontal axis are population densities, i.e., number of people per square kilometre, given by municipality of which there are about 1,100 in Colombia.
- Each point on the green curve gives the fraction of the population living in municipalities of that population density or less.
- Each point on the yellow curve gives the fraction of all civilians who were killed in paramilitary massacres who were living in municipalities of that population density or less.

- Only about 20% of the population lives in municipalities with only 50 people per square kilometre or less but these municipalities account for more than 50% of the civilians killed in paramilitary massacres.
- The 50% of the population living in municipalities of less than 350 people per square kilometre account for about 90% of all civilians massacred by paramilitaries.
- To summarize, paramilitary massacres occur primarily in isolated rural areas.

### Population Density and Civilians Killed in Guerrilla Massacres, 1988 - June 30 2005

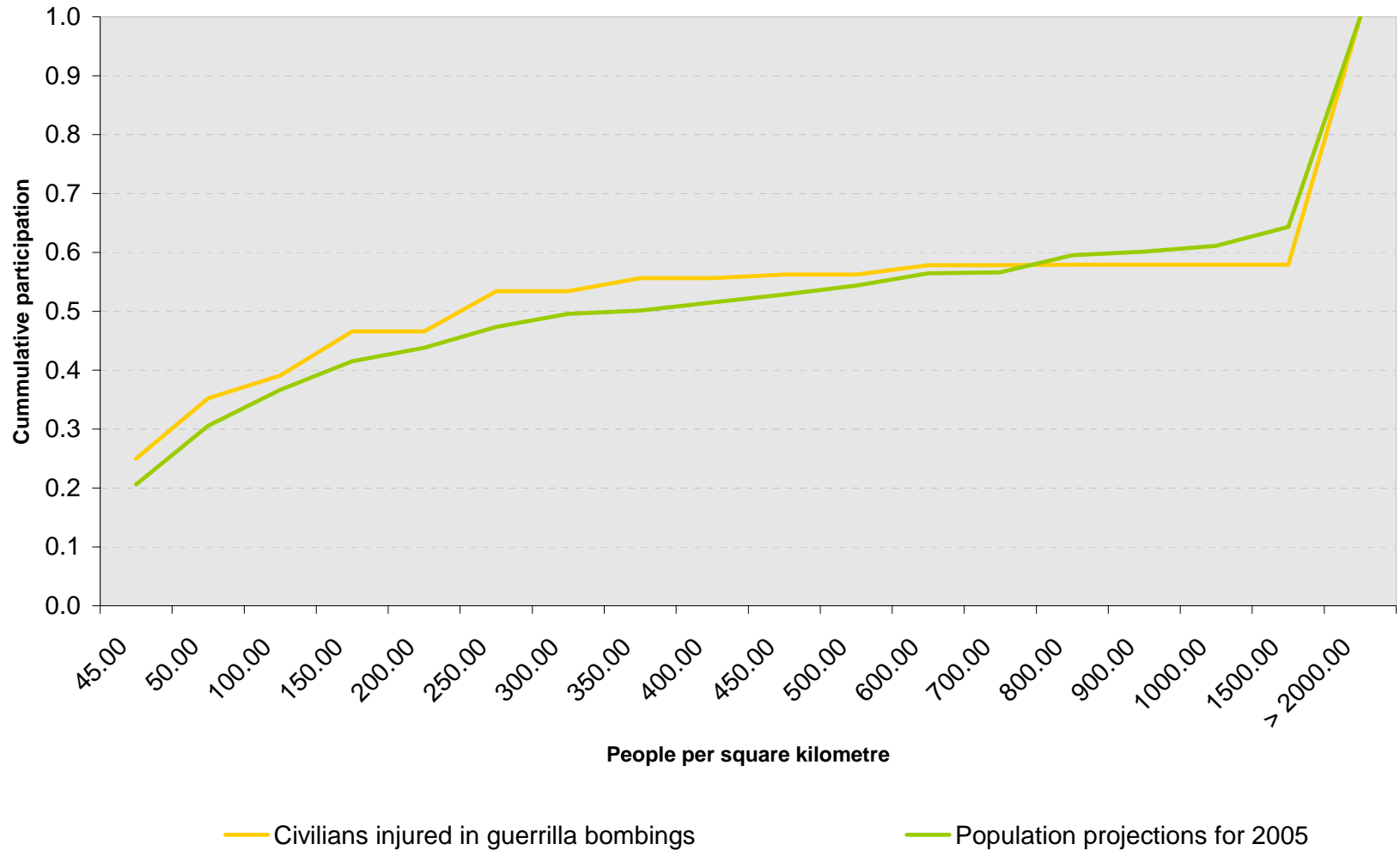




- Read the slide on guerrilla massacres in the same way as the one on paramilitary massacres.
- It shows the same general pattern but even more extreme.
- A full 2/3 or all civilians killed in guerrilla massacres were living in municipalities with population density of 50 people per square kilometre or less.



### Population Density and Civilians Injured in Guerrilla Bombings, 1988 - June 30 2005

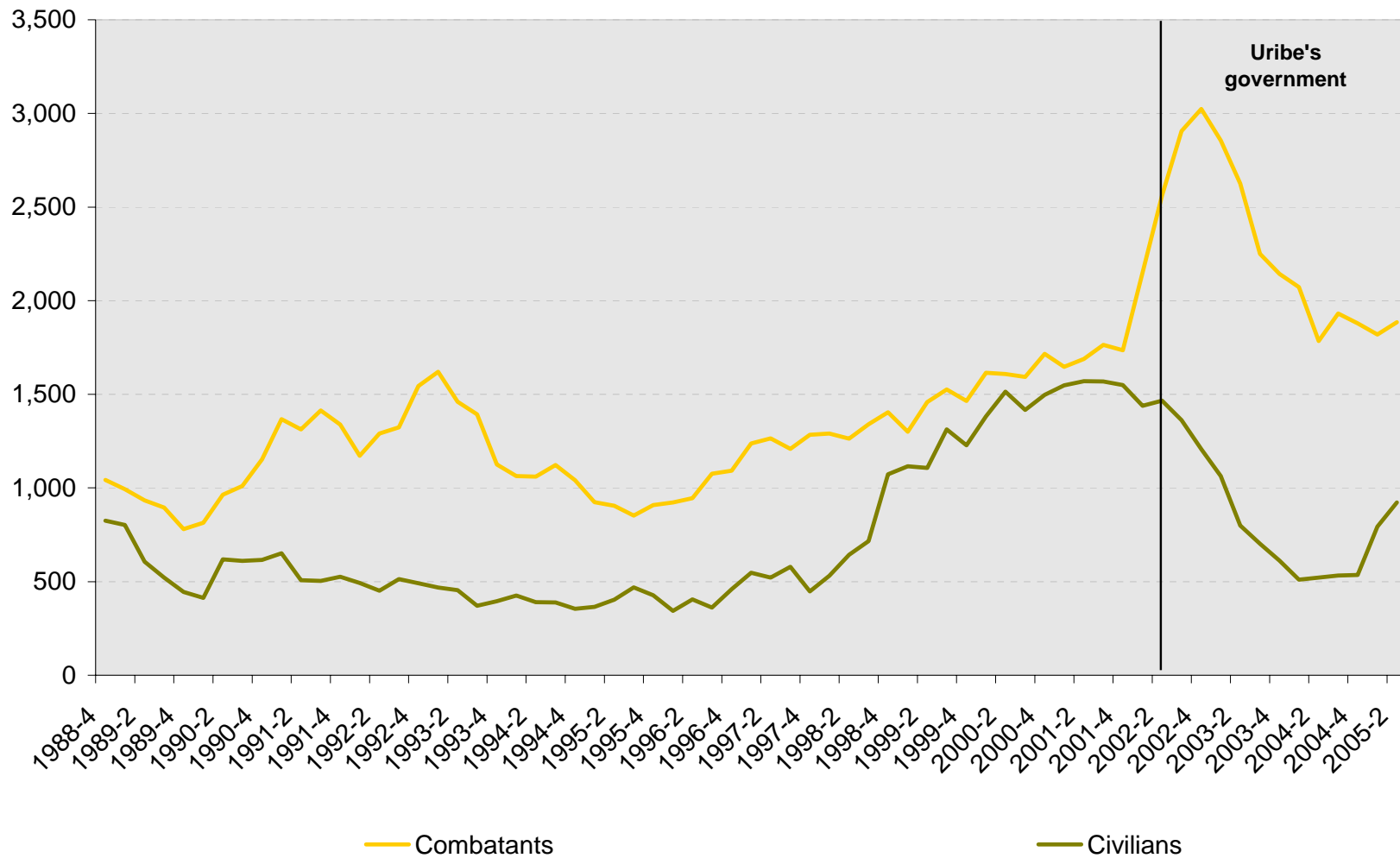


- Read the slide on civilian injuries in guerrilla bombings in the same way as the massacre slides.
- It shows a very different pattern.
- There is a slightly elevated risk in low-density municipalities but also big risks in Colombia's biggest cities.



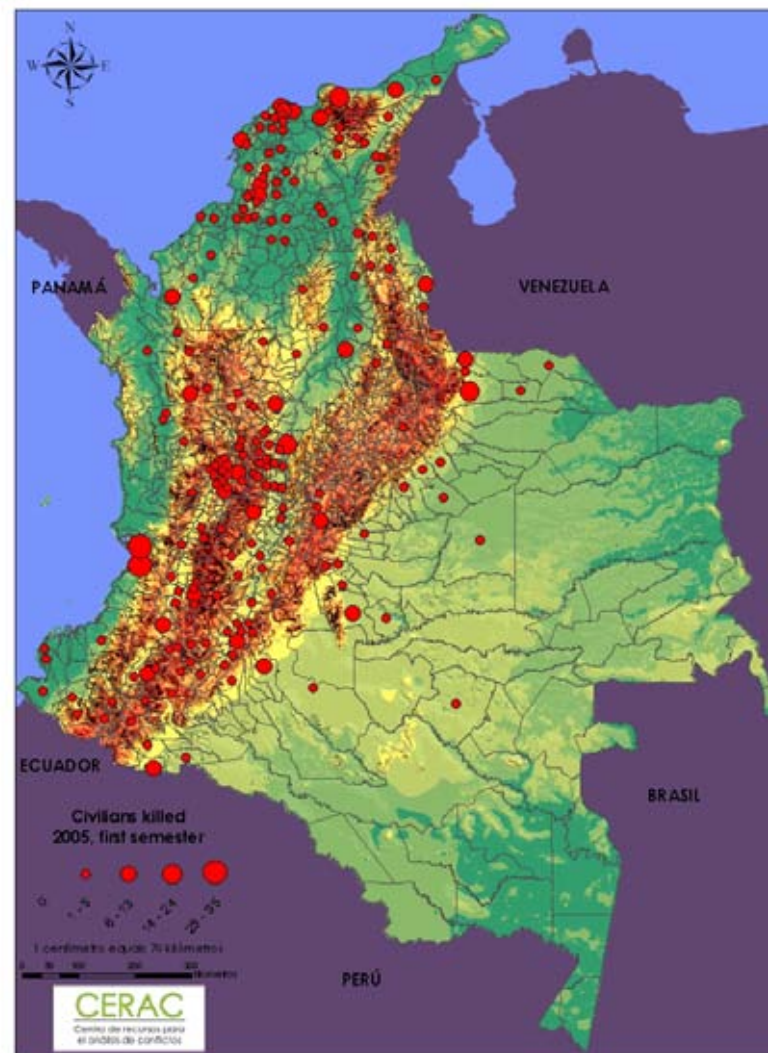
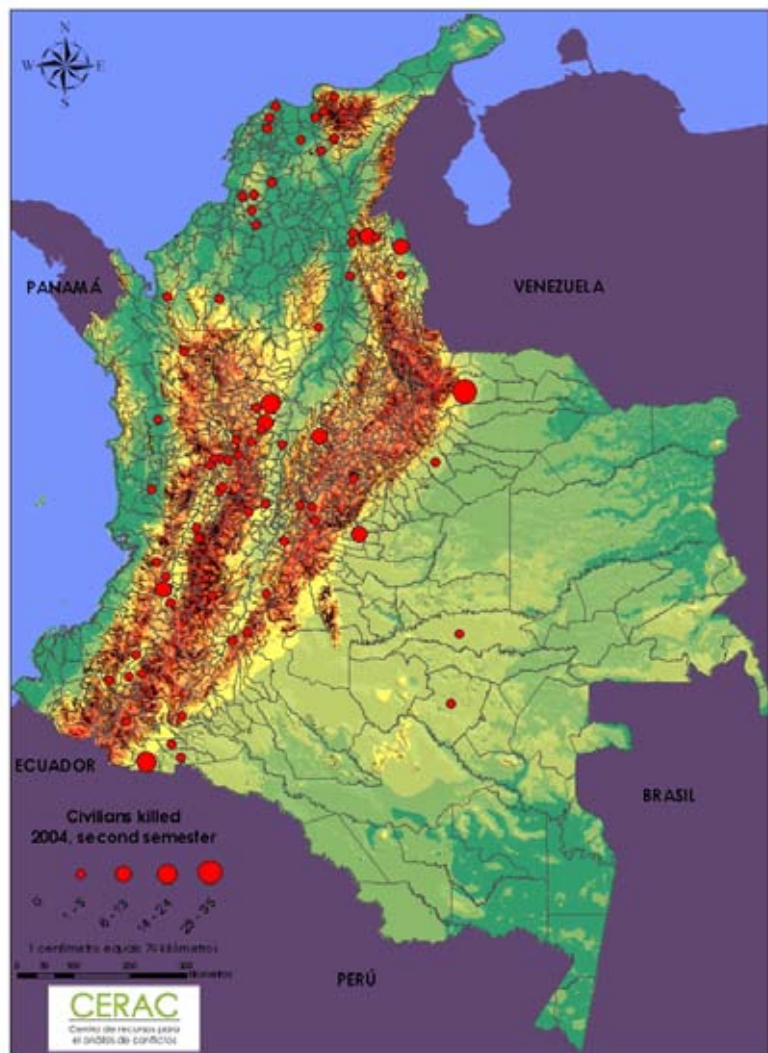
- Important note. All graphs that follow are quarterly “smoothed” graphs.
- This means that the number assigned to every quarter is the sum of the raw numbers for the last four quarters. Hence the last point in each curve (2nd quarter of 2005) is the sum of the numbers for the last two quarters of 2004 and the first two quarters of 2005.
- This technique makes the pictures easier to read than the raw ones which bounce around a lot and sometimes have lots of curve crossings. However, we will post the raw pictures soon.
- The maps below are not smoothed.

### Combatants and Civilians Killed by Quarter 1988 - June 30 2005



- We find that there have always been more combatants killed than civilians killed in the Colombian conflict.
- Note though that we are talking about the conflict, narrowly defined. Of course, the overwhelming majority of homicides in Colombia are of civilians. Killings directly related with the conflict account for 10-15% of total homicides in the country.
- Also there are other forms of victimization including kidnapping and forced displacement that affect civilians almost exclusively.
- This finding is consistent with those in “The Human Security Report 2005” that just came out.

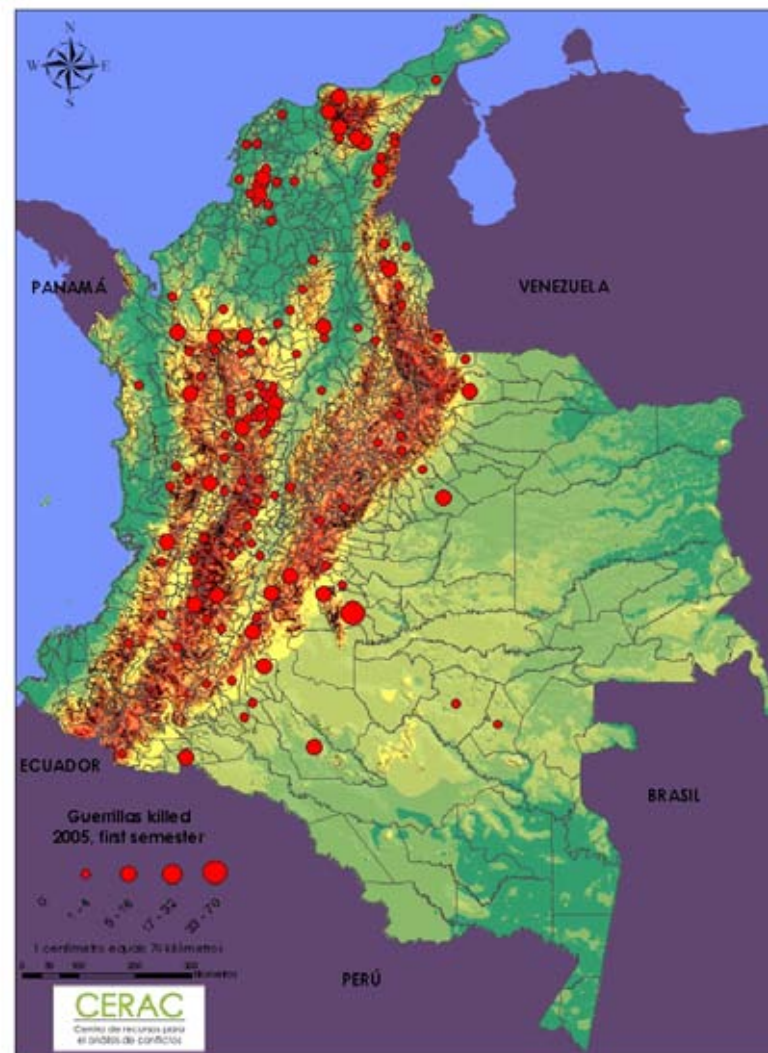
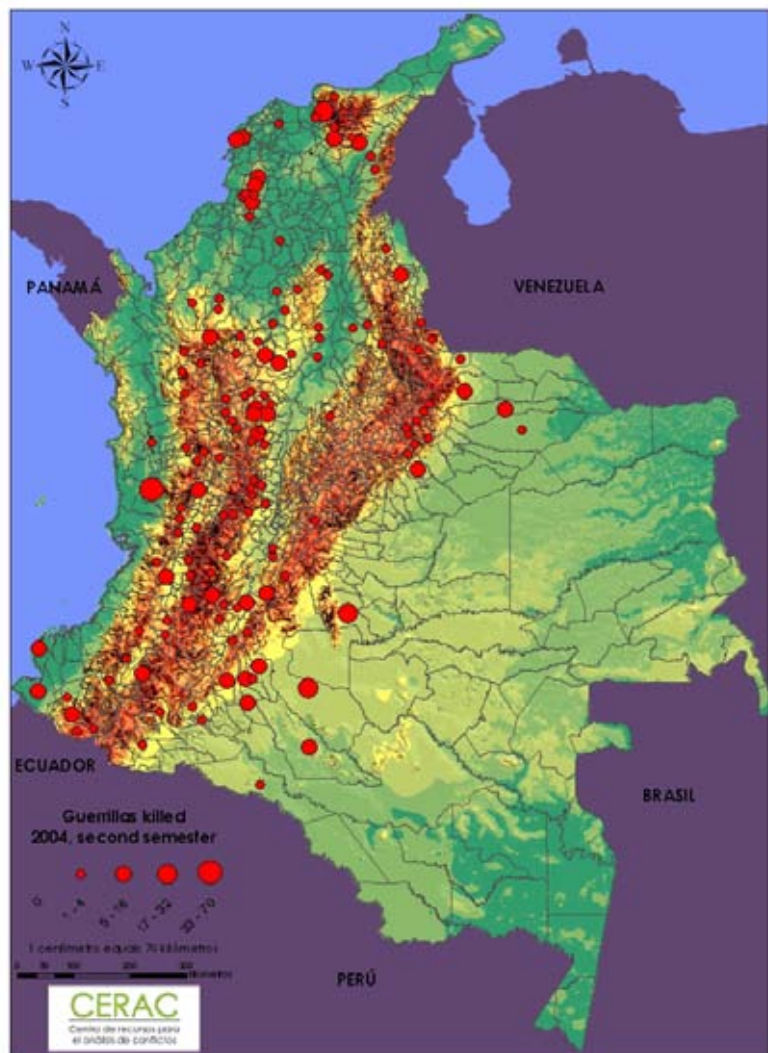
- More importantly, there are dramatic dynamics in the killing of civilians.
- There was a sharp drop that began just before Uribe took office.
- But now there is a sharp rise that is, in fact, muffled by the smoothing technique.
- Civilian killings in the first half of 2005 are only about 10% below the rate in the last year before Uribe took power.



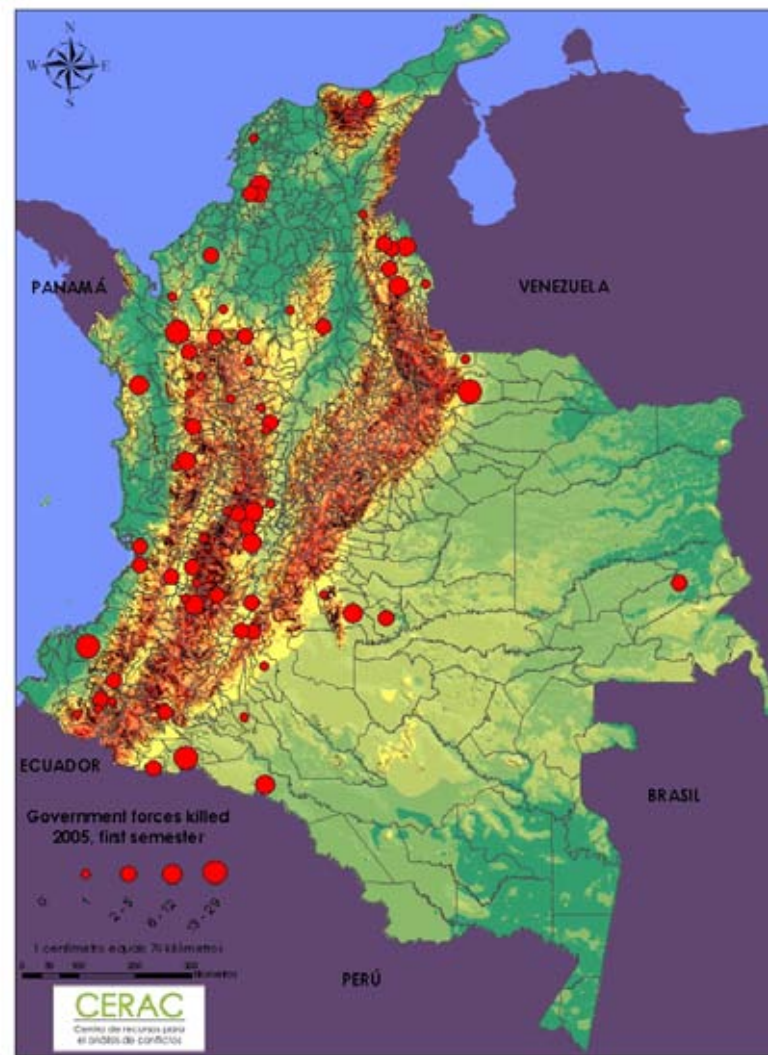
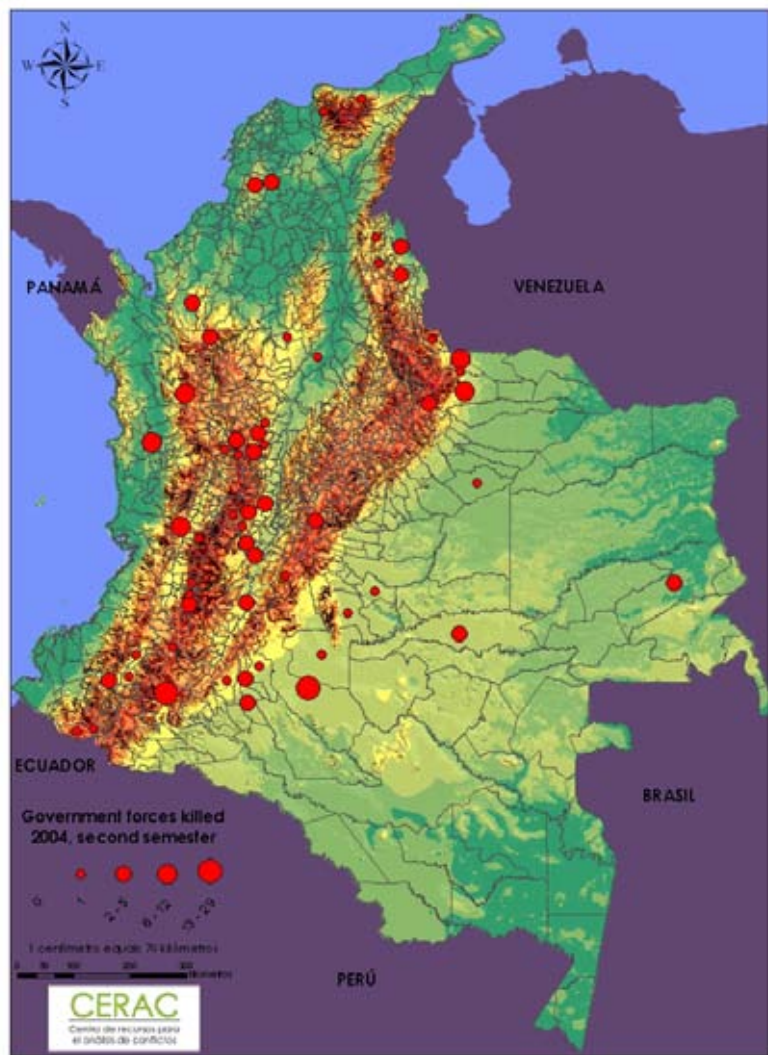


- **Note that at the end of this document there are two maps that locate the geographical terms we use below.**
- This pair of maps shows where the emerging pockets of civilian killing are located.
- Notable trouble spots are:
  - *Montes de María* region.
  - Western side of the *Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*.
  - South of the *Atlántico* department in the Caribbean plains.

- Intensification of civilian killings in:
  - The east of *Antioquia* department.
  - The middle *Cauca* river valley.
  - And around the city of *Buenaventura* (port on the Pacific coast).
- A less concentrated increase of activity in:
  - *Cauca* department.
  - North of the *Nariño* department.
  - The north of *Meta* department.
  - Along the *Venezuelan* border.
  - Along the Ecuadorian border, to a lesser extent.
- An emerging trouble spot in the east of the *Magdalena* department towards *Bolívar* and *Atlántico* departments.

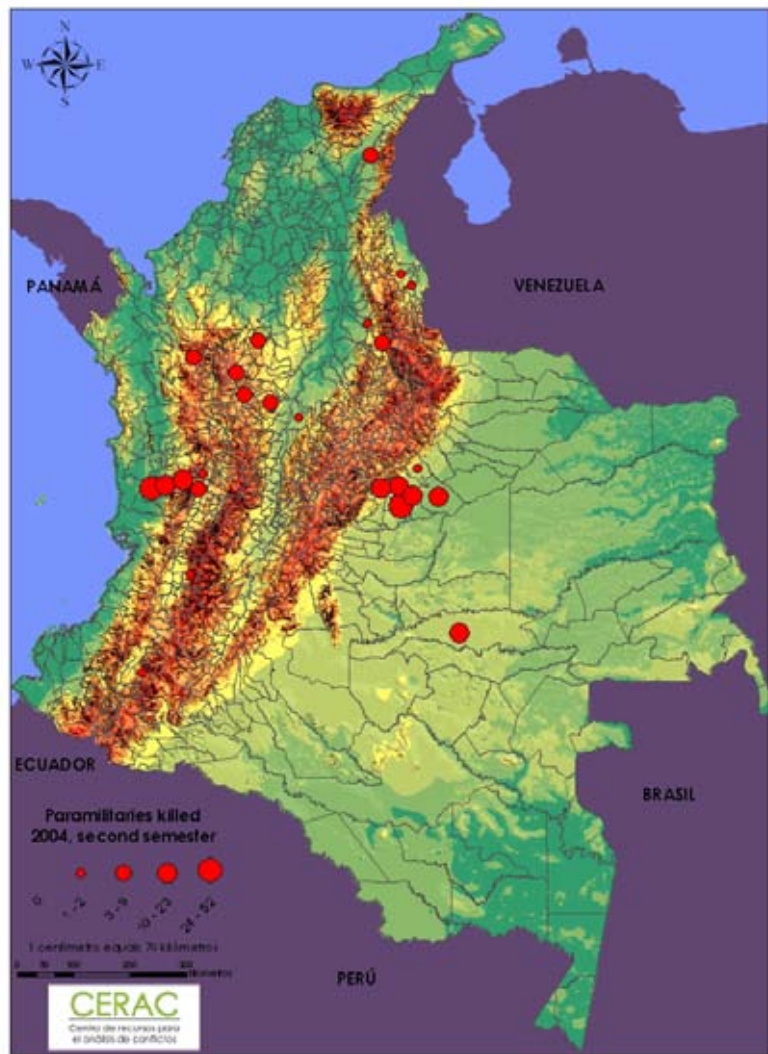


- In the second half of 2004 there were many guerrillas killed during the government's well know, and US supported, southern offensive known as *Plan Patriota*, but officially called *Operación JM*.
- There is considerably less killing of guerrillas recorded in the south in the first half of 2005. Probably this reflects a combination of dispersal of guerrillas who took a beating in their rearguard and a need for the Colombian military to regroup after taking their own casualties and being hit hard with jungle diseases to which the guerrillas have developed resistance over the years. Also, we believe that a shift in the location of killings of guerrillas into the deep jungle may have increased the likelihood of our data undercounting these killings.
- There was a perceptible increase in killings of guerrillas around the *Sierra Nevada* and *Serranía del Perijá* mountains way up north.



- Killings of government forces increased notably along both the Ecuadorian and Venezuelan borders in the first half of 2005.
- The maps suggest that the guerrillas are using both of these borders more actively in 2005 than they were in 2004 and that the government is hamstrung by its inability to pursue across them.
- A reduction in government casualties in the east and southeast of *Antioquia*, showing a government improvement there, but a deterioration in the north and northwest of this department.
- But things are much worse for the government further down the *Cordillera Central* (the mid mountain range of the Colombian Andes), especially in the *Cauca* region.
- There is a significant increase in government casualties in the area to the east of the *Urabá* gulf, along the cordilleras of *San Jerónimo* and *Abibe*.

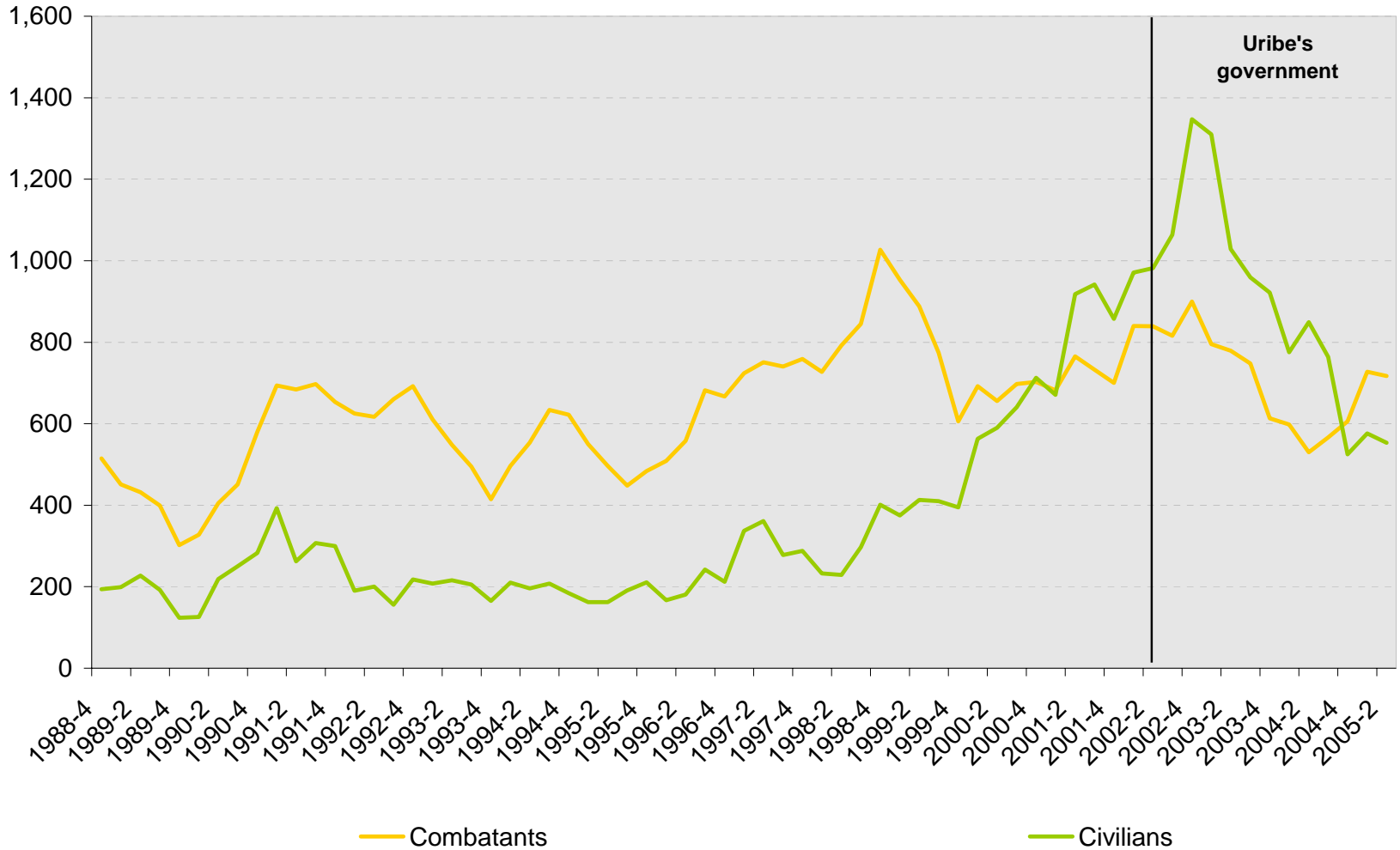




- There were very few killings of paramilitaries in the first half of 2005 as they negotiated their disarmament and demobilization.
- In the second half of 2004 there were a significant number of paramilitaries killed in two well-defined clusters.
  - The first one, at the *Cañón de las Garrapatas*, continues during 2005, and is a serious trouble spot in which rival paramilitary and the guerrilla groups are fighting for control over narcotics crops.
  - The second one, disappearing in 2005, corresponds to the fighting between rival paramilitary groups in the *Llanos Orientales*, in particular fighting between the groups of “Martín Llanos” and “Miguel Arroyave”. There were also some clashes between government forces and paramilitaries in that area, in which the government prevailed.



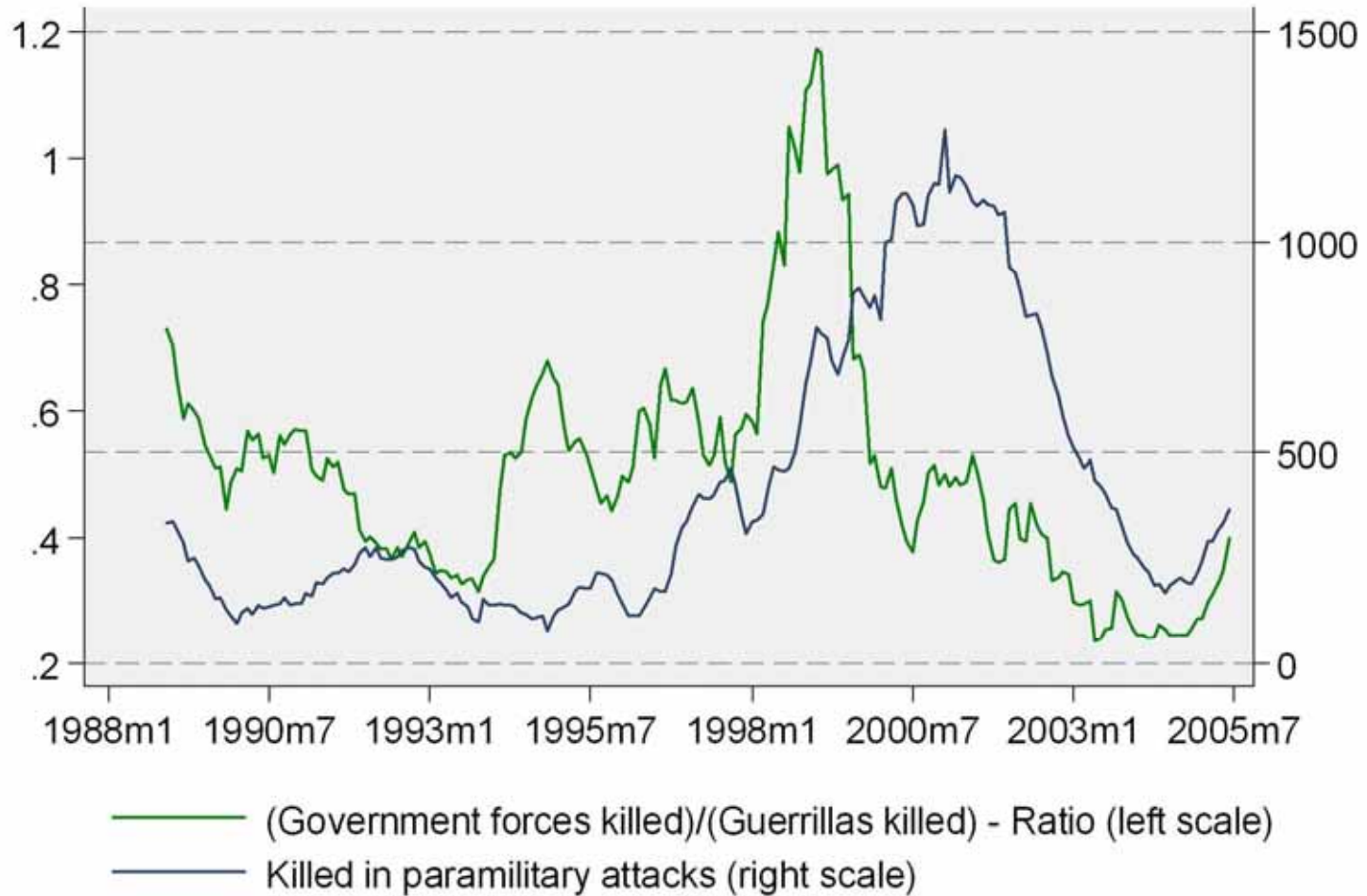
**People injured by group by quarters  
1988 - June 30 2005**



Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database, 2005

- The injury information is necessarily not as good as the killing information.
- In particular, we have very little information on injuries to guerrillas and paramilitaries because these groups are generally able to evacuated their injured before they are counted.
- The information on civilians and government forces is much better but there are still problems in defining injuries and diseases do not count although they are quite similar to injuries.
- Still the last slide does show a big spike in civilian injuries peaking in 2002 and then abating.

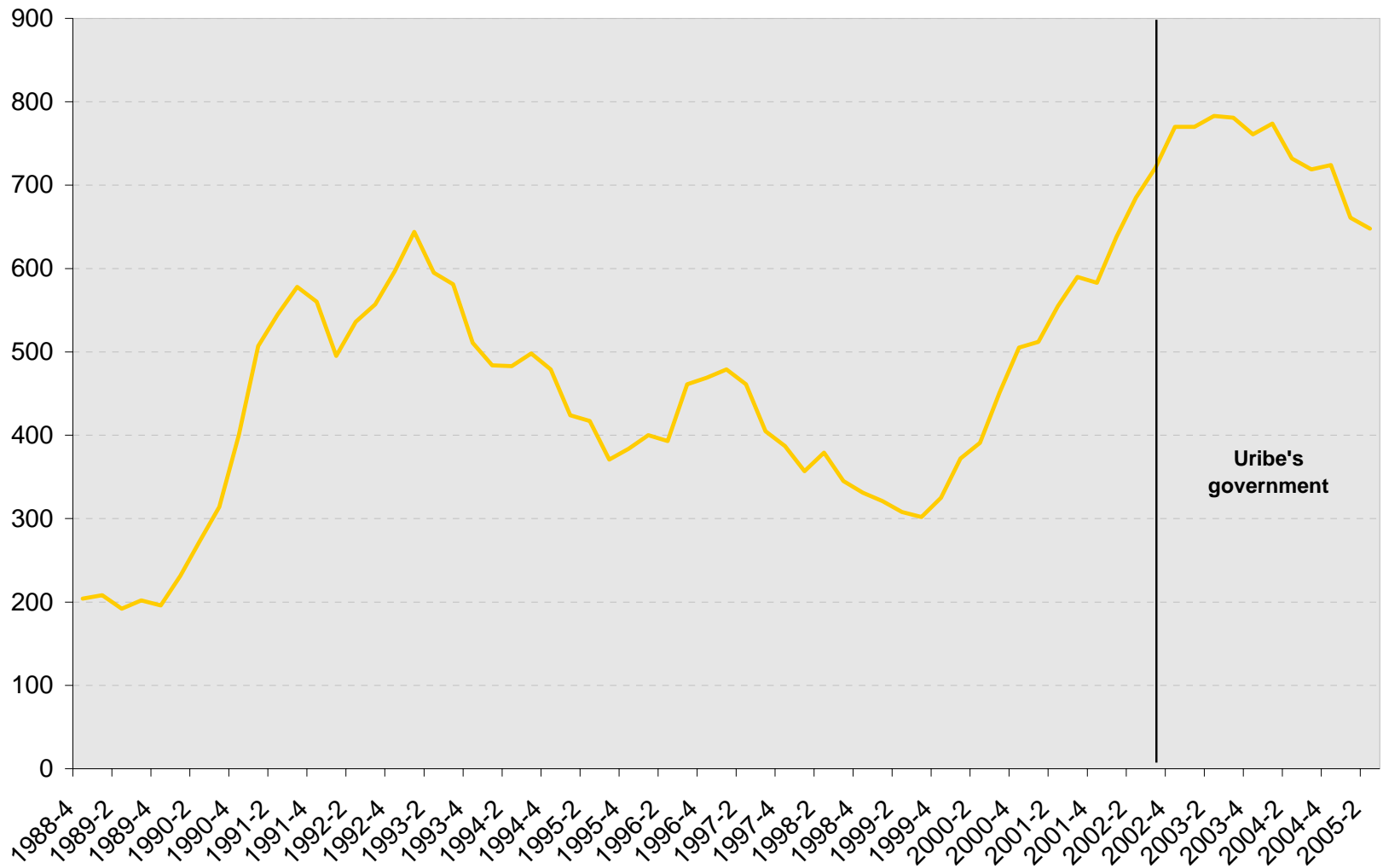
## Government-Guerrilla-Paramilitary Interplay



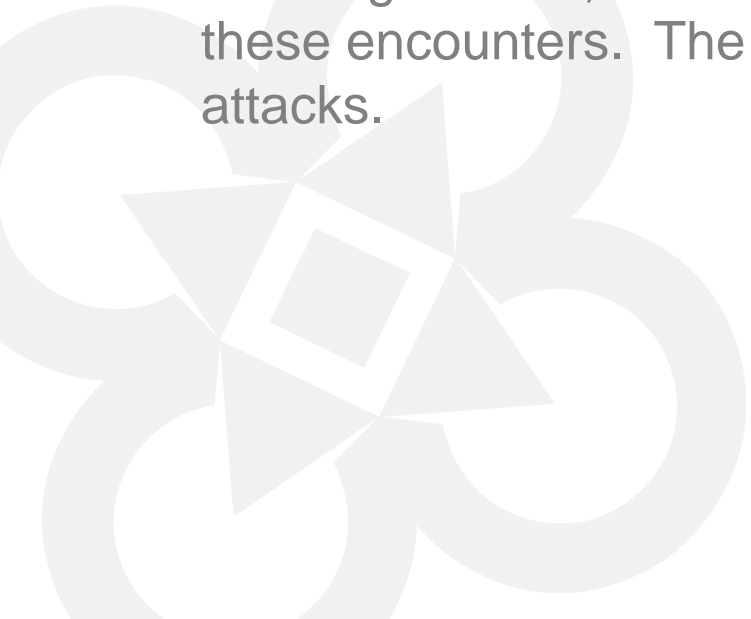
Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database.

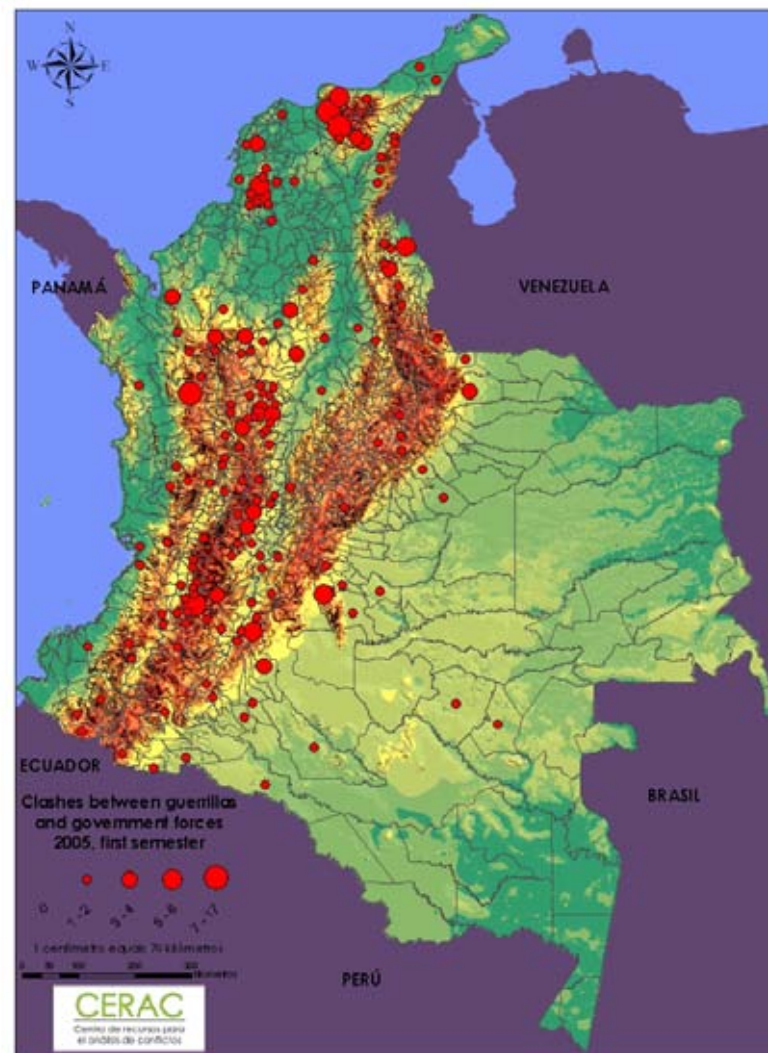
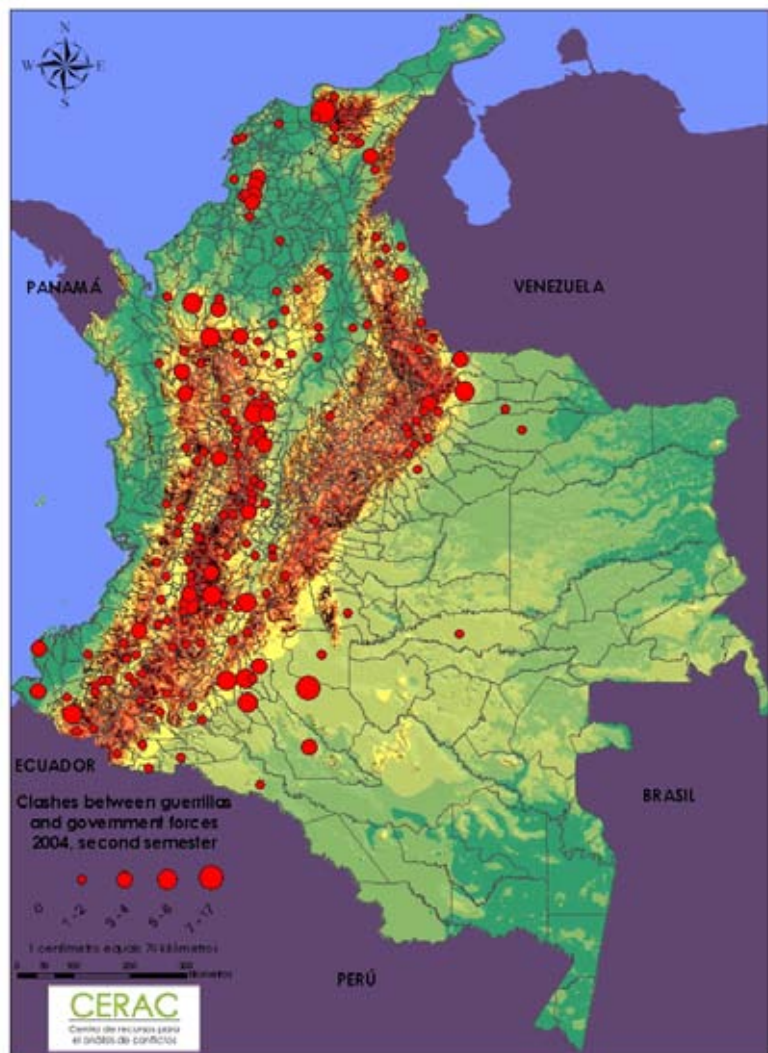
- The green curve in the above picture gives the ratio of government forces killed to guerrillas killed. It shows enormous improvement over the last five years before turning around in 2005.
- The other curve (referring to the right axis) shows killings by the paramilitaries which shows its own dramatic movement.
- The movement of the two curves shows that paramilitary activity tend to increase during periods when the government does not contains the guerrillas well and vice versa.
- In other words, paramilitary activity has substituted for government success over the years and this pattern even seems to continue into 2005.

### Government Guerrilla Clashes by Quarters 1988 - June 30 2005



- The number of clashes between the government and the guerrillas is very high, although it has been falling from its peak of 2003.
- As a rule, lots of clashing is good for government forces and bad for the guerrillas, as the government normally gets the better of these encounters. The guerrillas tend to prefer (unopposed) attacks.





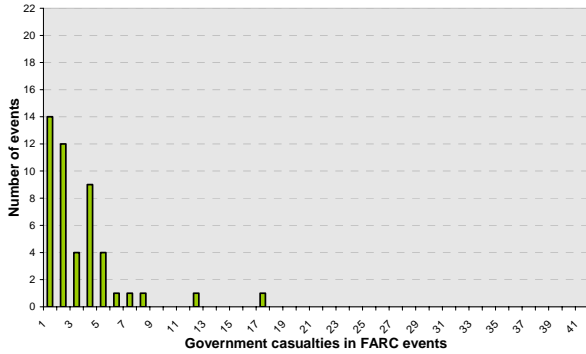
- There is a common misperception that the government has concentrated almost exclusively on its southern offensive, neglecting other areas.
- However, the maps above show many different areas all over the country where government forces have been clashing with the guerrillas in a sustained manner. A “retreat” and a counter offensive by the guerrilla never materialized.
- There are two big concentrations in the north (*Montes de María* and *Sierra Nevada*) and many clashes in the east of *Antioquia*, and the *serranías* in the inland lowlands/savannahs of the Caribbean coast: *Serranía de San Jerónimo*, *Ayapel*, *San Jacinto* and *San Lucas*.



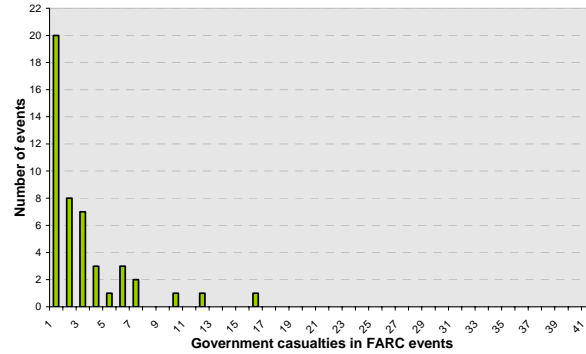
- There were significantly fewer clashes in the south in the first half of 2005 compared to the second half of 2004, although some of these were actually highly publicized as the FARC tried to mount long duration attacks at some *Cauca*, *Nariño* and *Putumayo* towns (e.g., *Toribío*) and were able to inflict losses on government forces during those events.
- The next slide shows the size distribution of casualties of government forces in encounters with the FARC (clashes and attacks). It shows a shift toward big-casualty events in 2005.

# Size Distribution of Government Casualties in Encounters with the FARC

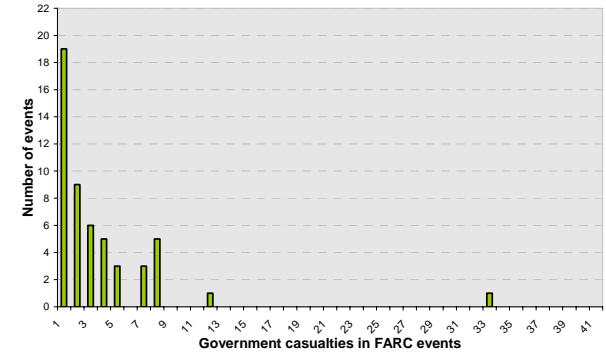
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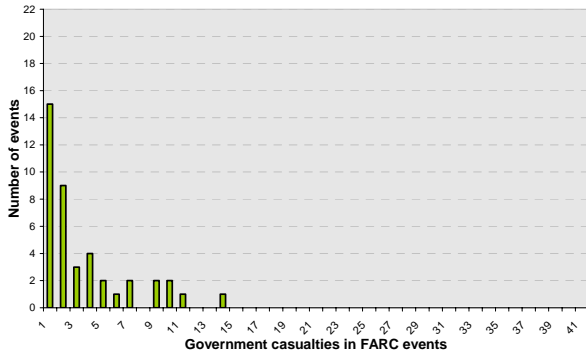
2004-2



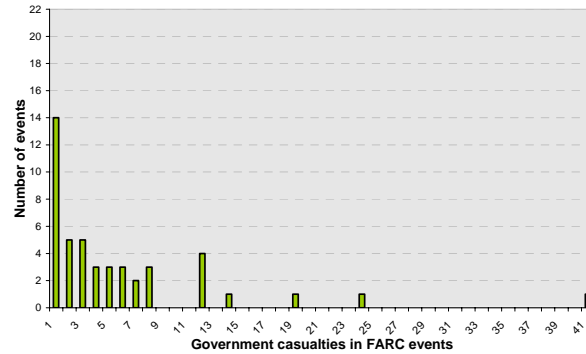
2004-3



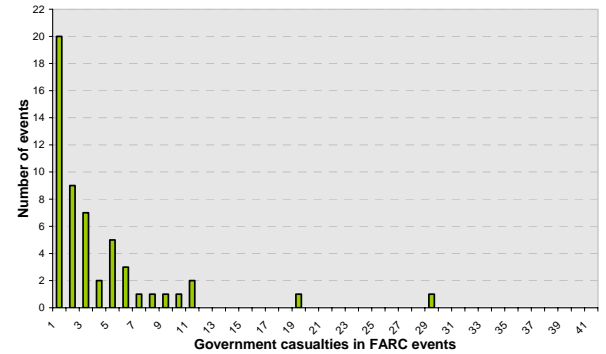
2004-4



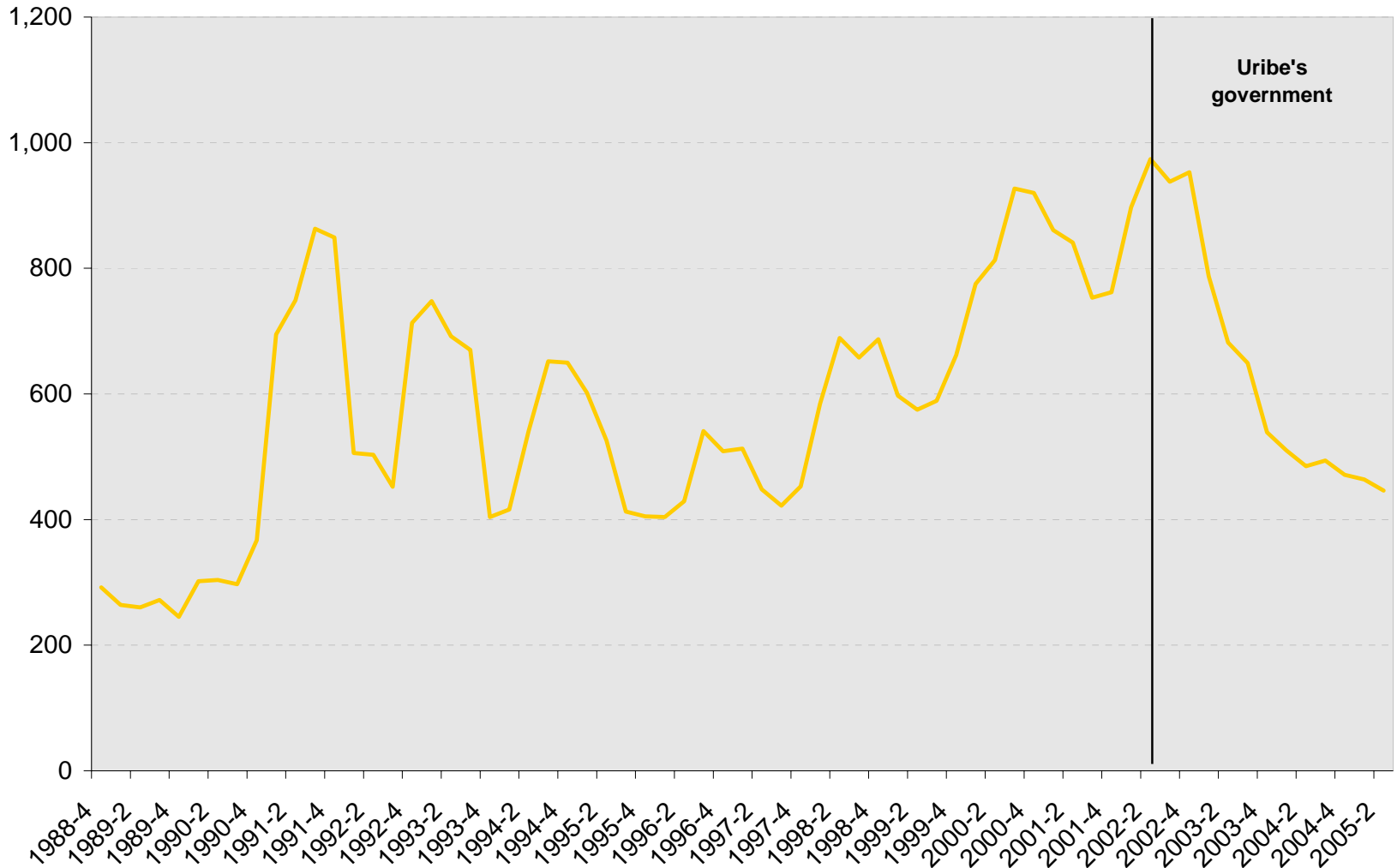
2005-1



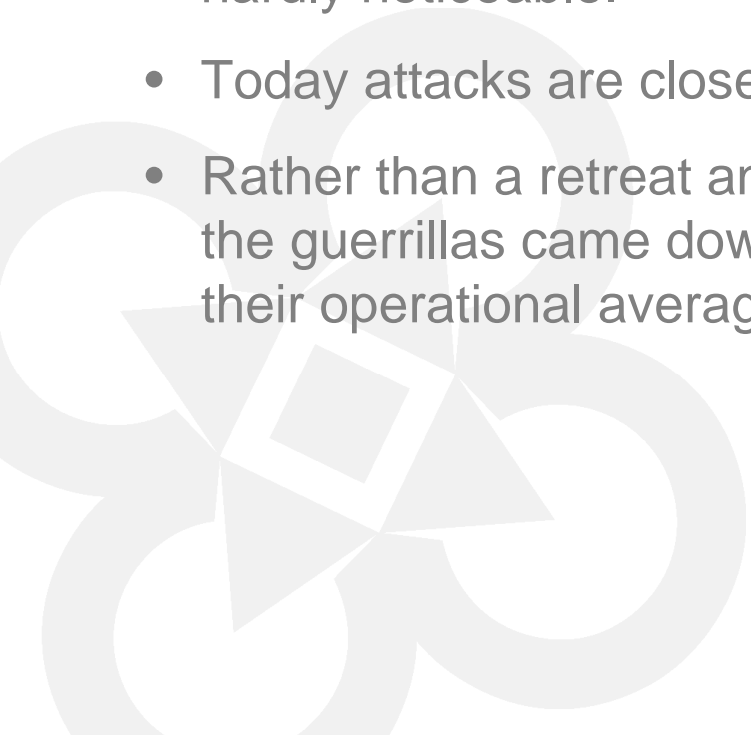
2005-2

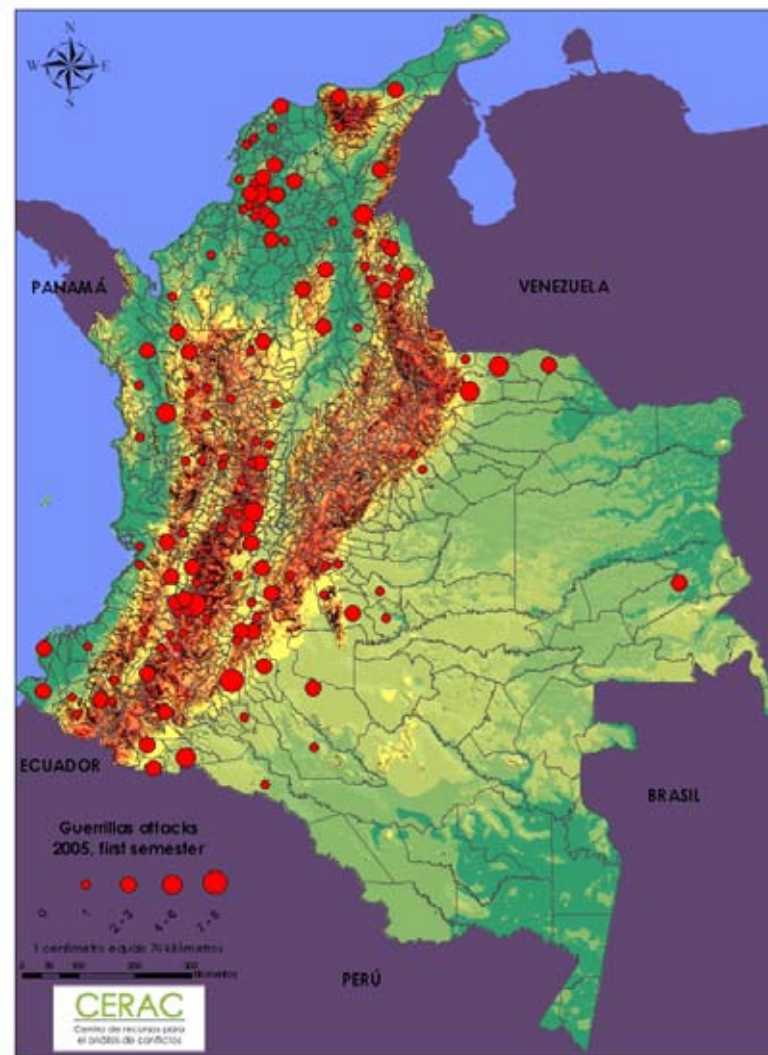
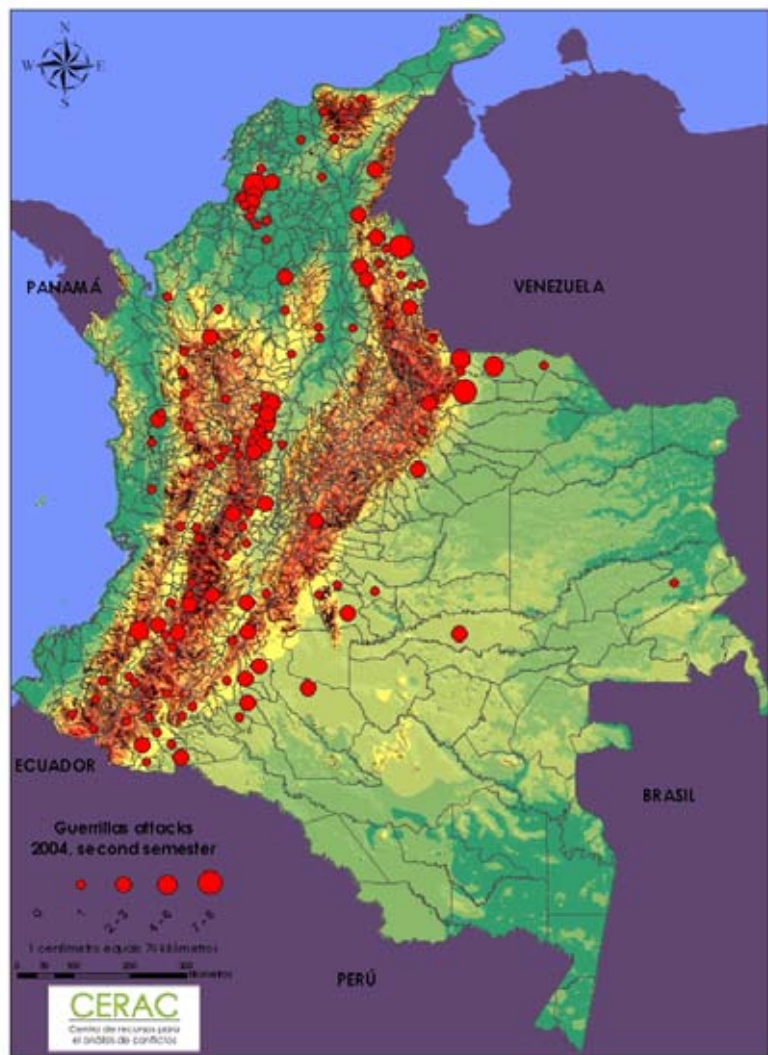


### Number of Guerrilla Attacks by Quarter 1988 - June 30 2005



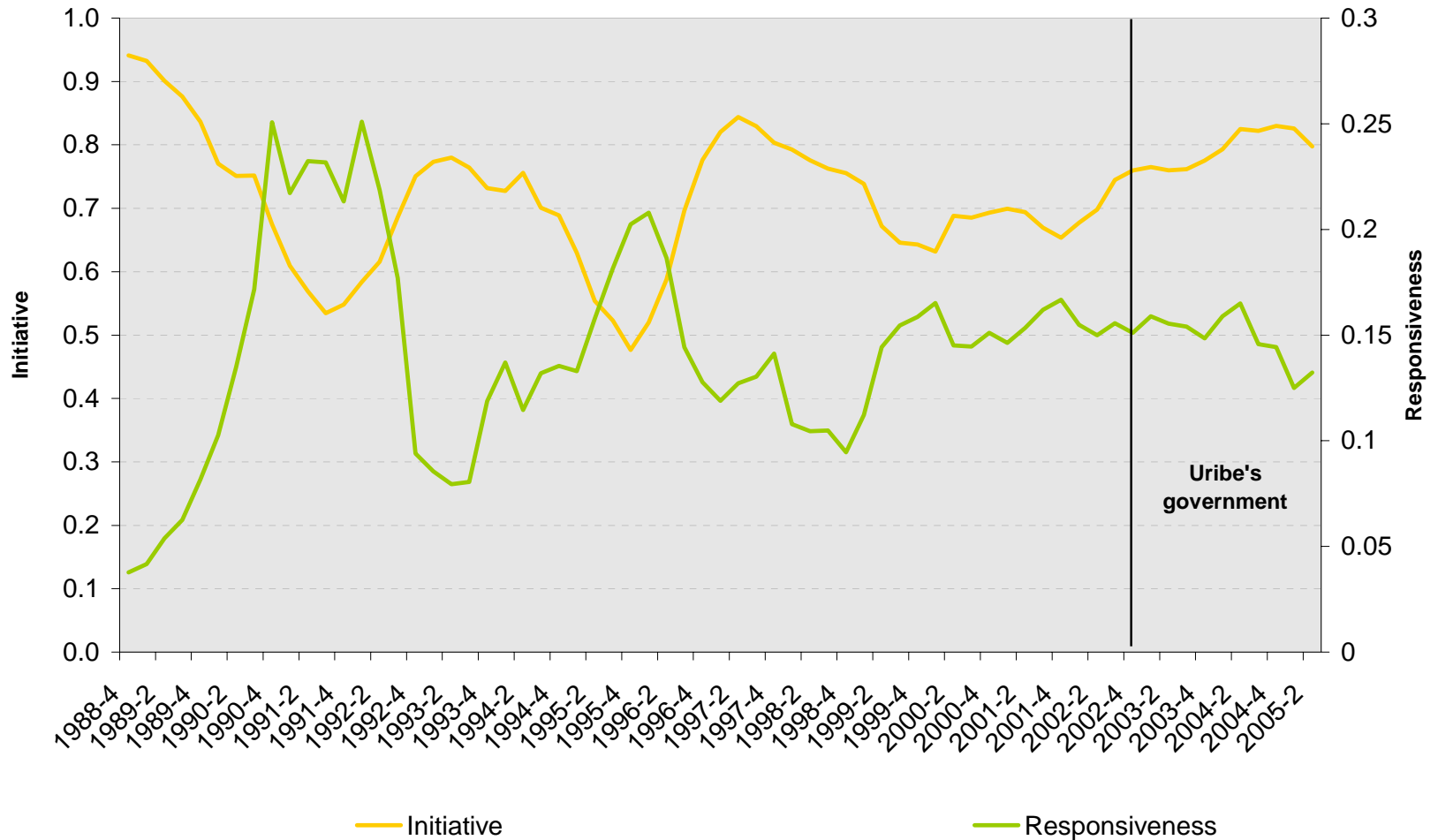
- Still, the number of guerrilla attacks has dropped precipitously under Uribe.
- This drop continued in the first half of 2005 but the change is hardly noticeable.
- Today attacks are close to their average historical level.
- Rather than a retreat and a counter offensive, in attacking terms, the guerrillas came down from a historical high and remain at their operational average.





- Guerrilla attacks have been in many locations. There seems to be a misperception that this is a new phenomenon but this has long be true. In fact, the spreading of attacks has been a long-standing guerrilla tactic.
- The Ecuadorian border has emerged as a major attacking focus for the FARC.
- The Venezuelan border is also a big problem although perhaps slightly less so in 2005 compared to 2004.
- There have been numerous attacks concentrated on the low altitude *serranías* of the Caribbean savannahs. The paramilitary presence and concentration of forces for demobilization tend to be located in the low-level savannahs and not in these isolated mountain ranges so this activity might reflect guerrilla attempts of fill vacuums left by demobilizing paramilitaries. This could also be a by-product of a strategy of the government forces scale these mountains in pursuit of the guerrillas. We are unable to adjudicate between those hypotheses.

### Initiative and responsiveness by quarter 1988 - June 30 2005

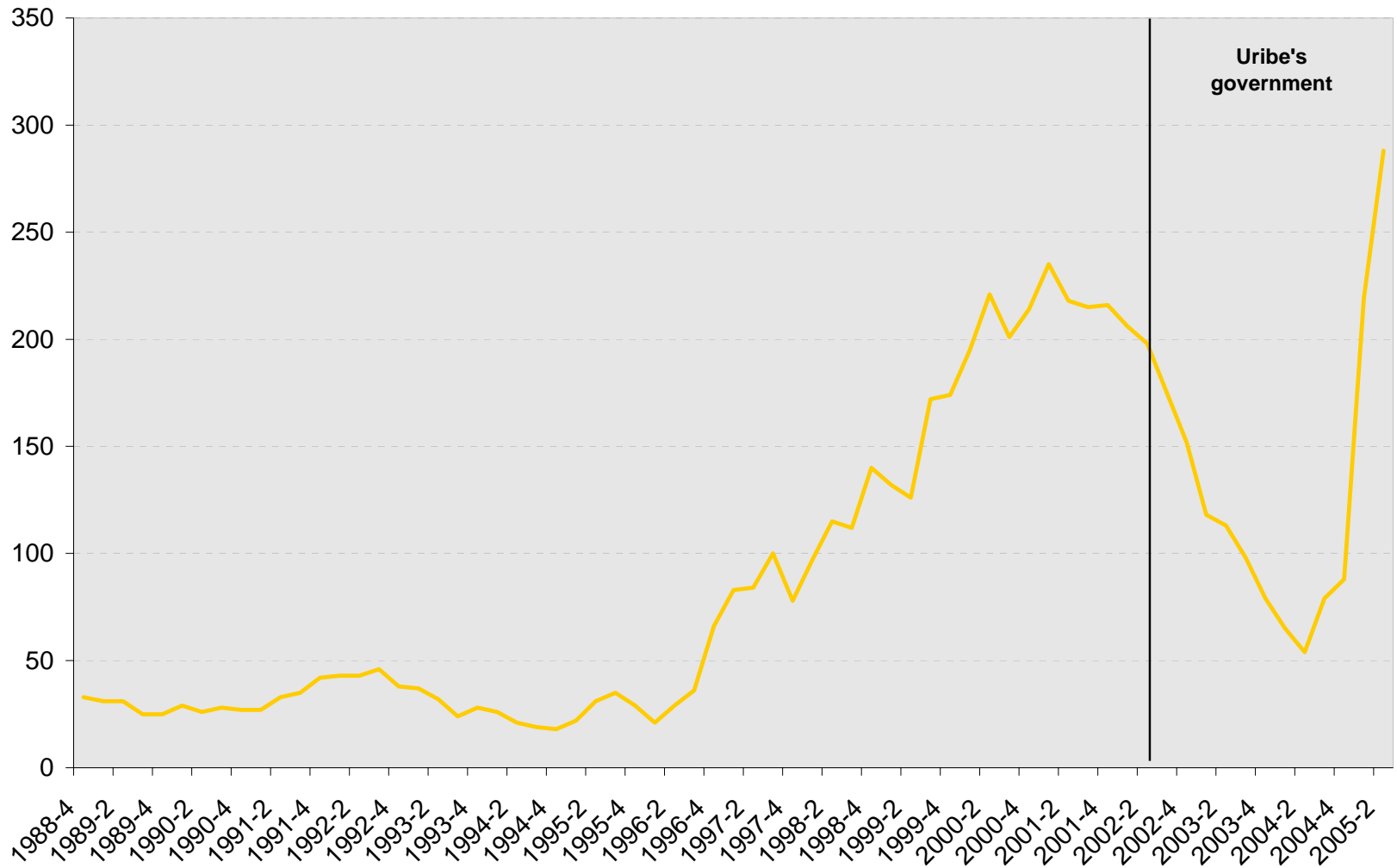


- We give two measures of the performance of the government forces above.
- “Initiative” gives (on the left axis) the fraction of government-guerrilla clashes that are not tied to a guerrilla attack on the same day in the same place. The idea is to measure the degree to which the government forces are seeking out the guerrillas and engaging them rather than waiting for the guerrillas to make a first move.
- Initiative has been moving up steadily in recent years.
- Moreover, it is possible that we have underestimated initiative in recent months due to possibly incomplete information on government activity *Operación JM* in the souther jungles.



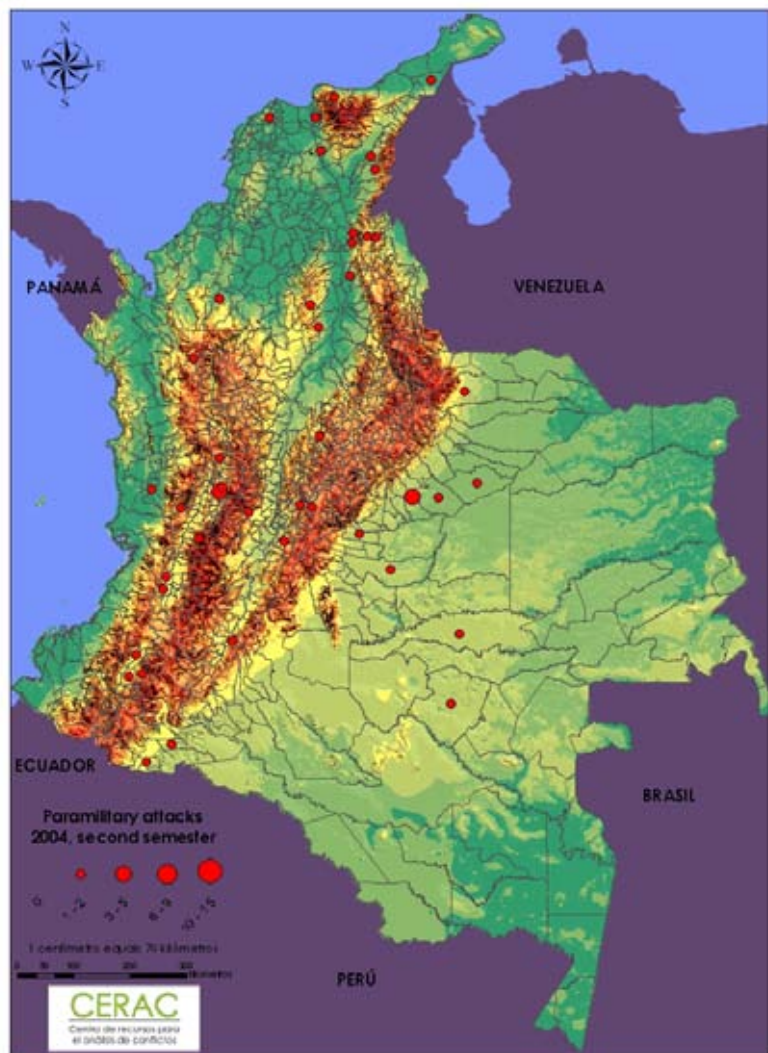
- “Responsiveness” gives (on the right axis) the fraction of guerrilla attacks that draw a same-day, same-place response from government forces. The idea is to measure the extent to which the government is able to react to and punish guerrilla actions.
- We find responsiveness to be relatively steady although it drops in recent quarters.
- We think responsiveness can be too high as might have been the case around the beginning of 1996 when unusually high responsiveness and low initiative could have indicated an excessively defensive posture.

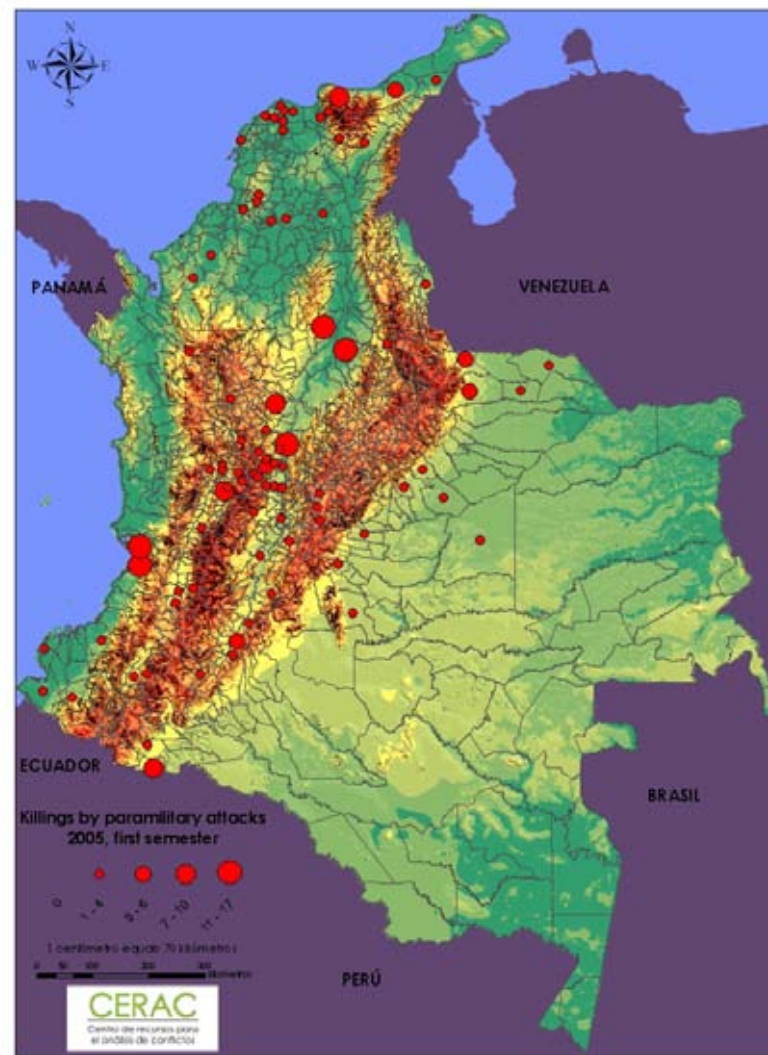
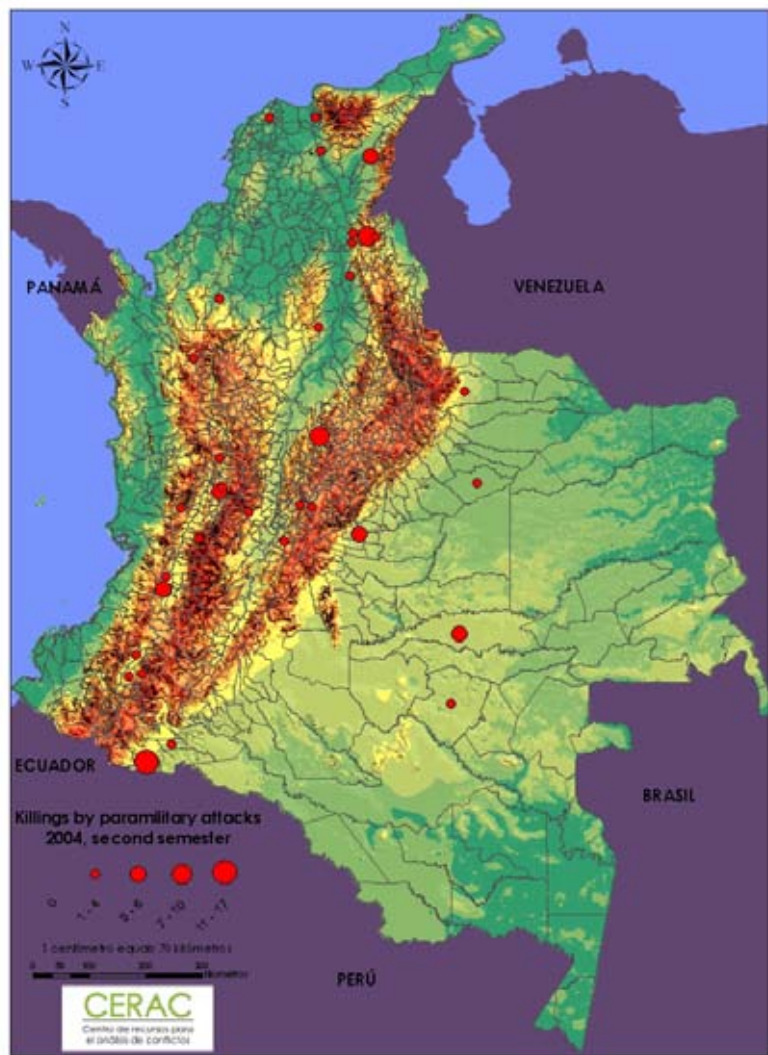
### Number of Paramilitary Attacks by Quarters 1988 - June 30 2005



- The drop and rise in the number of paramilitary attacks under Uribe is stunning as is the rise preceding Uribe.
- These changes must be viewed within the context of the next few slides.

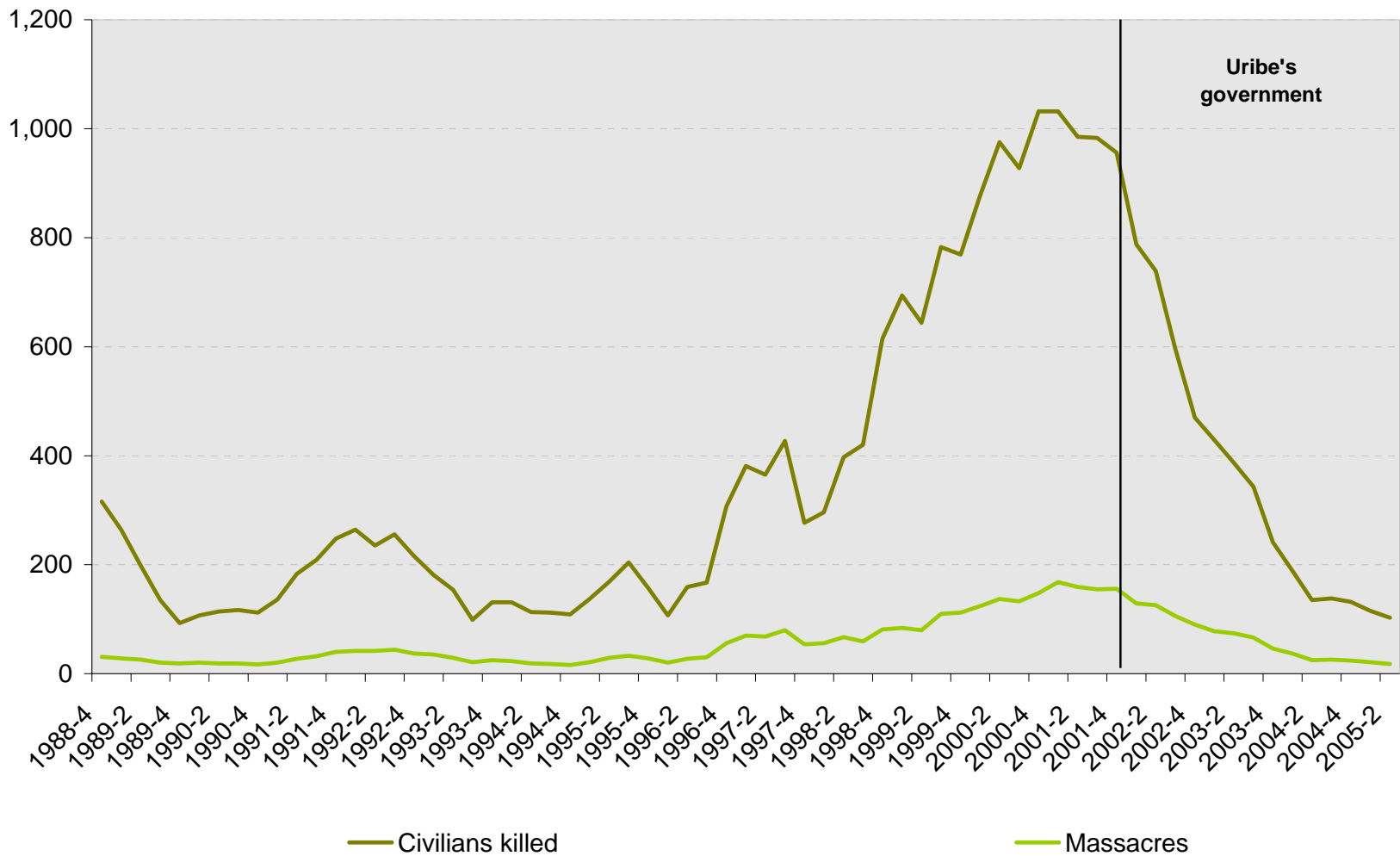




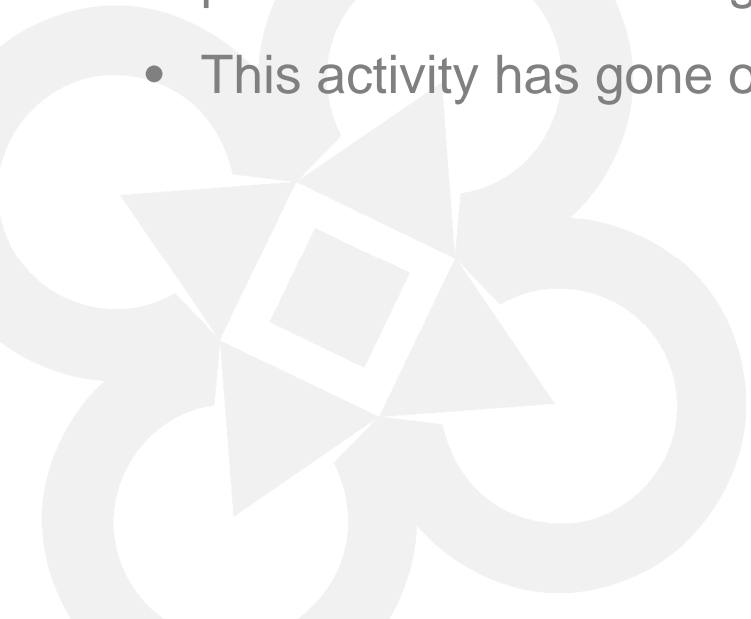


- The maps show that the takeoff in paramilitary activity is happening in many different places.
- We find a reactivation of paramilitary attacks and killings in 2005 in the *Montes de María*, in the south of *Atlántico*, in the east of *Antioquia*, in the west of *Cundinamarca*, in the *Magdalena Medio* region, in *Meta*, in *Arauca* and in the savannahs of *Córdoba*.
- This cannot be attributed to the few paramilitary groups that are not negotiating disarmament and demobilization with the government. On the contrary, this corresponds mostly with those areas where the negotiating groups are located.

### Civilians Killed in Paramilitary Massacres by Quarters 1988 - June 30 2005



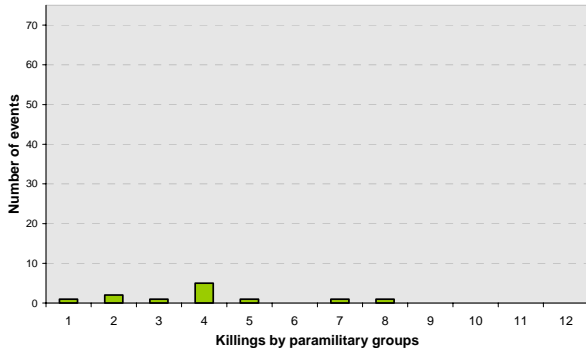
- This picture shows that the surge in paramilitary attacks does not take the form of massacres, which by definition require that four people be killed.
- As the next slide shows, in the vast majority of these events the paramilitaries are killing one or two people at a time.
- This activity has gone on largely below the radar screen.



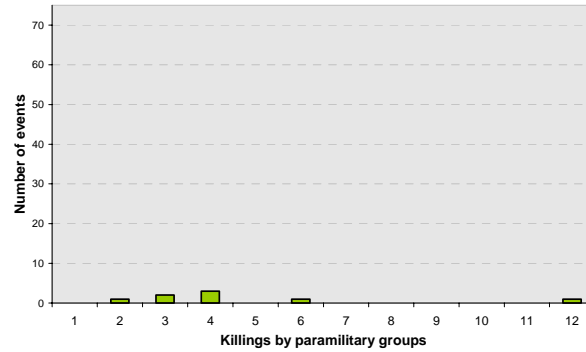


# Size Distribution of Killings by Paramilitaries

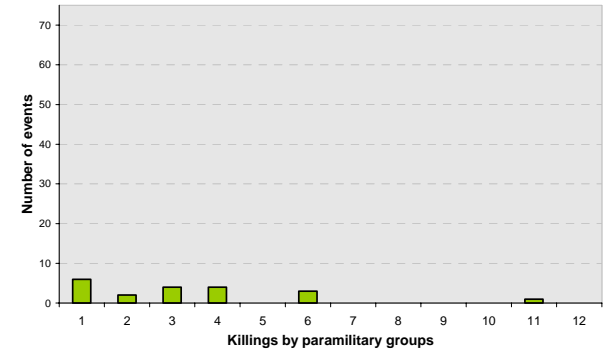
2004-1



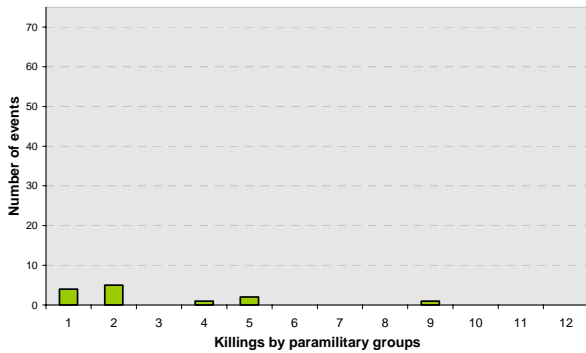
2004-2



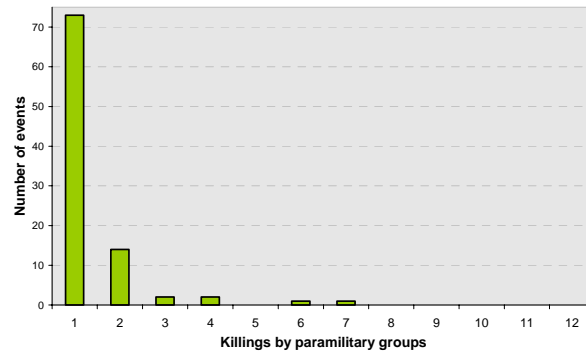
2004-3



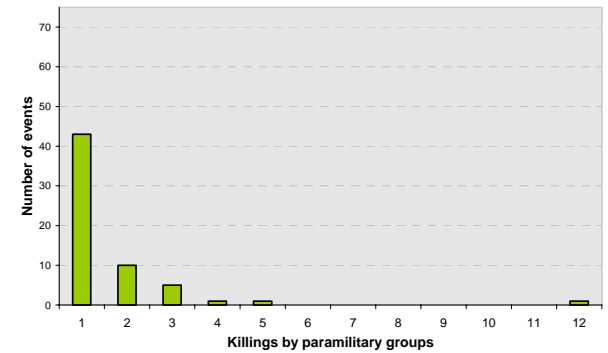
2004-4



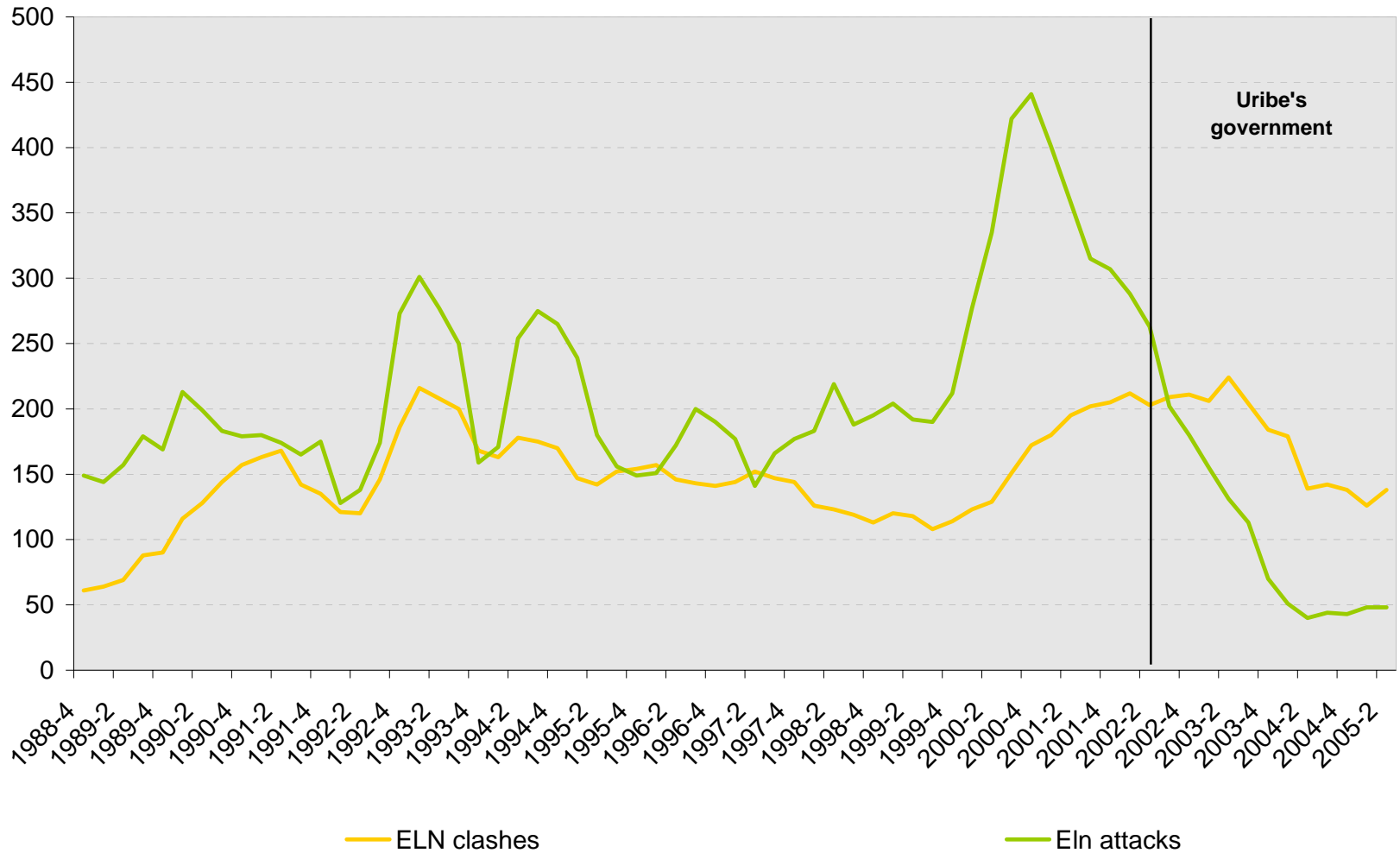
2005-1



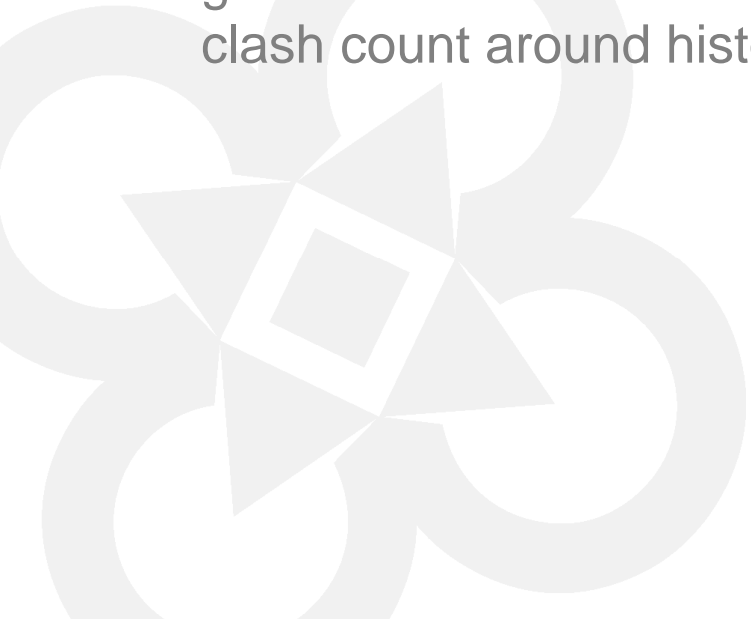
2005-2



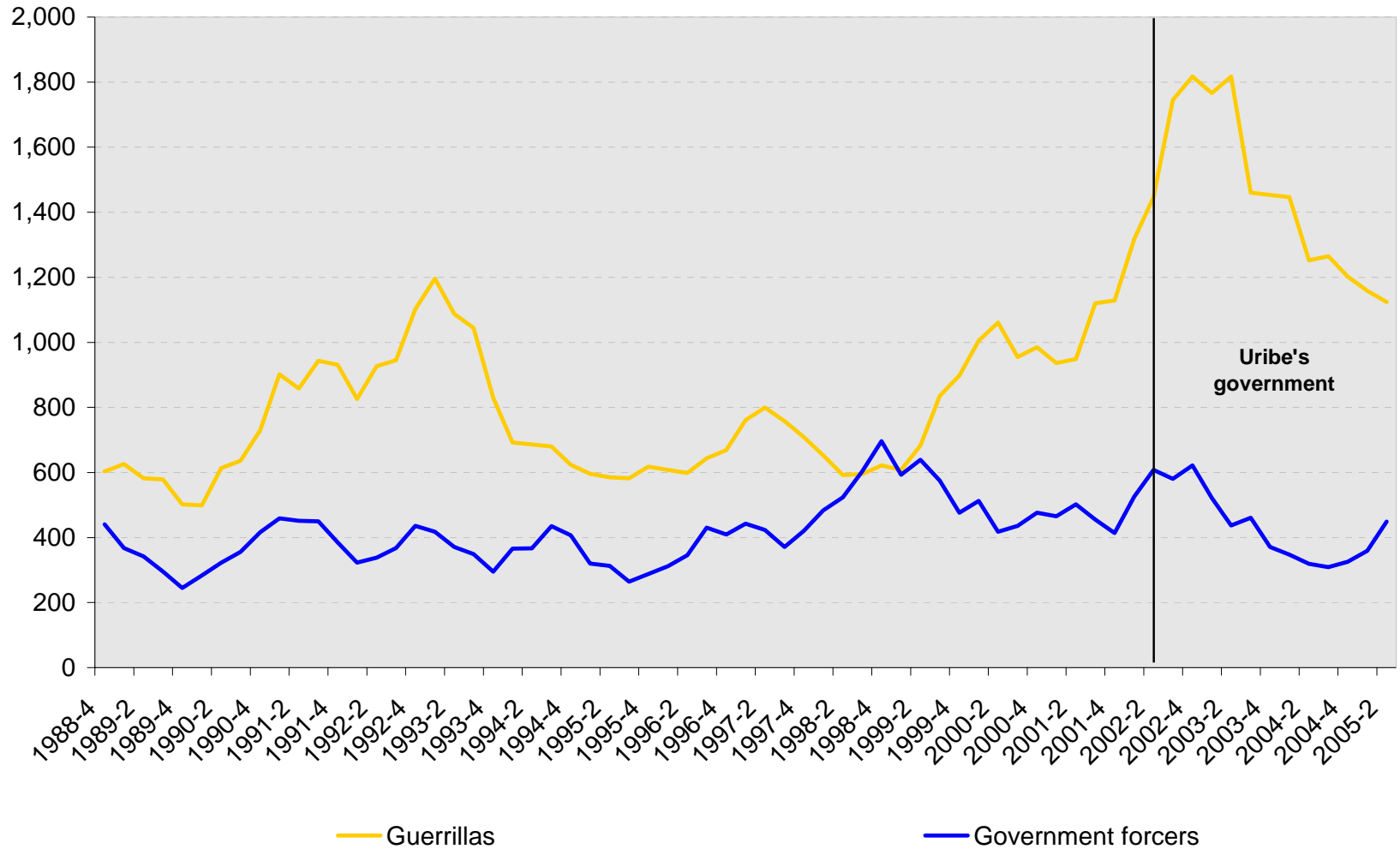
### Number of ELN Clashes and Attacks by Quarters 1988 - June 30 2005



- ELN attacks have dropped very far in recent years but now seem to be bottoming out.
- Government-ELN clashes have not dropped as sharply as the government has maintained pressure on the ELN, keeping the clash count around historical averages.

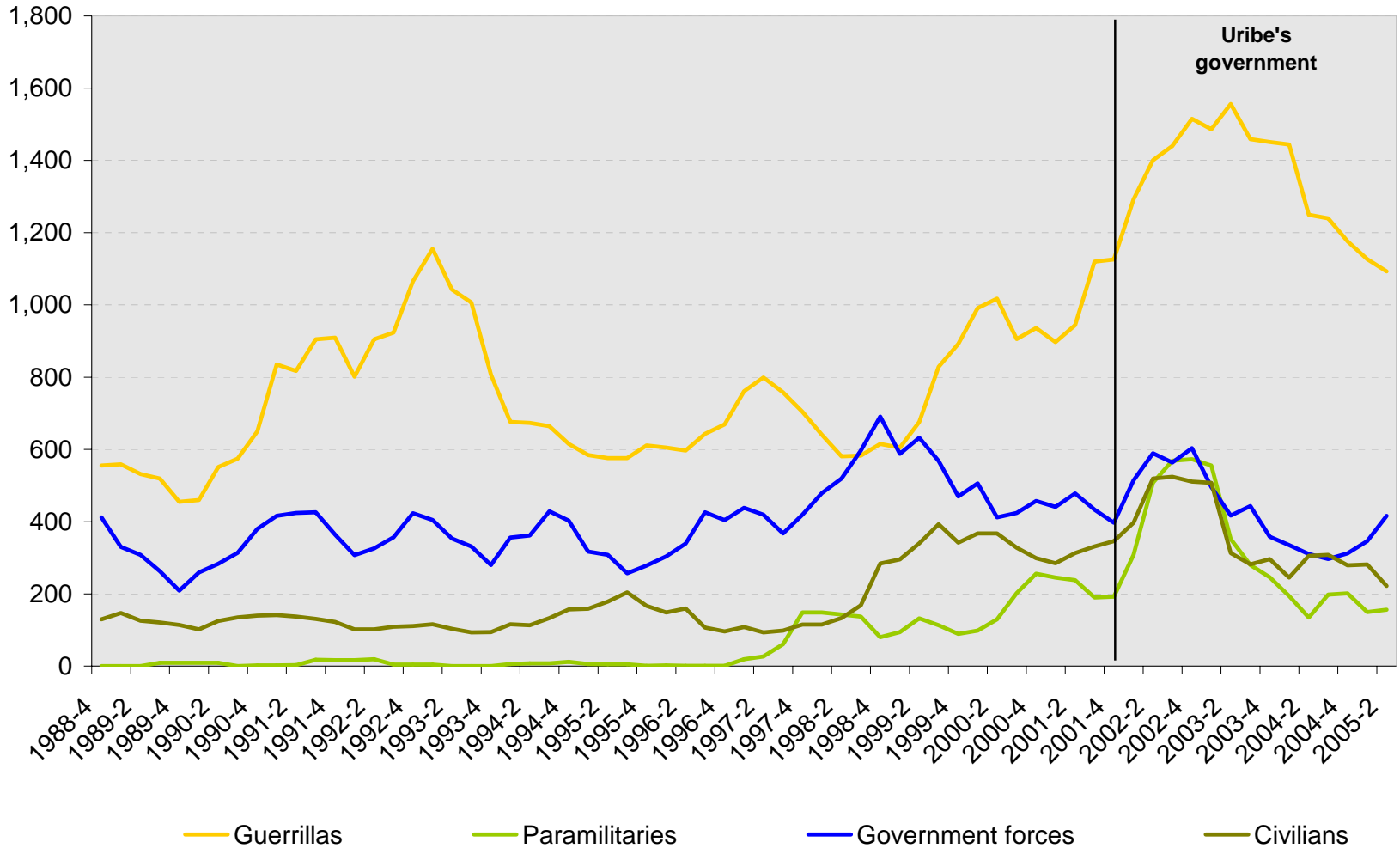


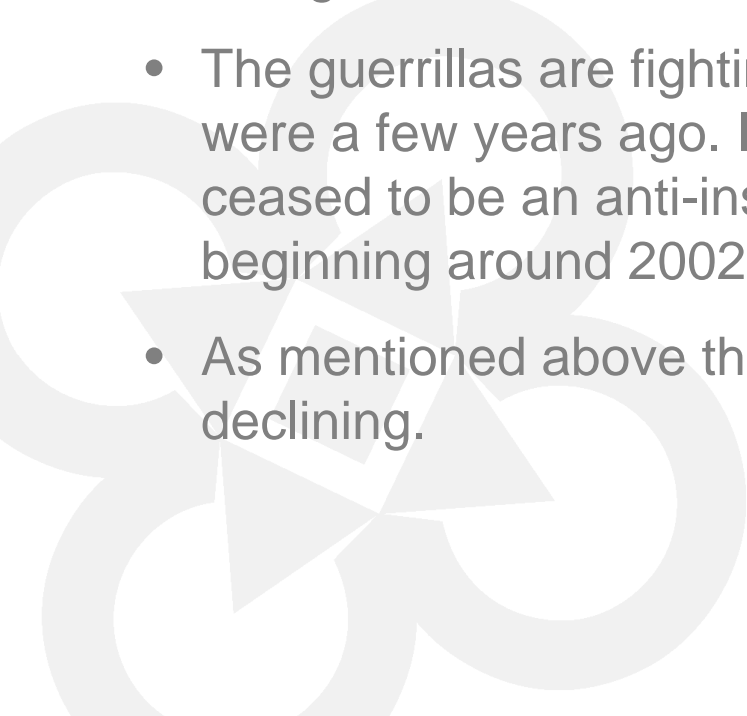
### Number of Government Forces and Guerrillas Killed by Quarter 1988 - June 30 2005



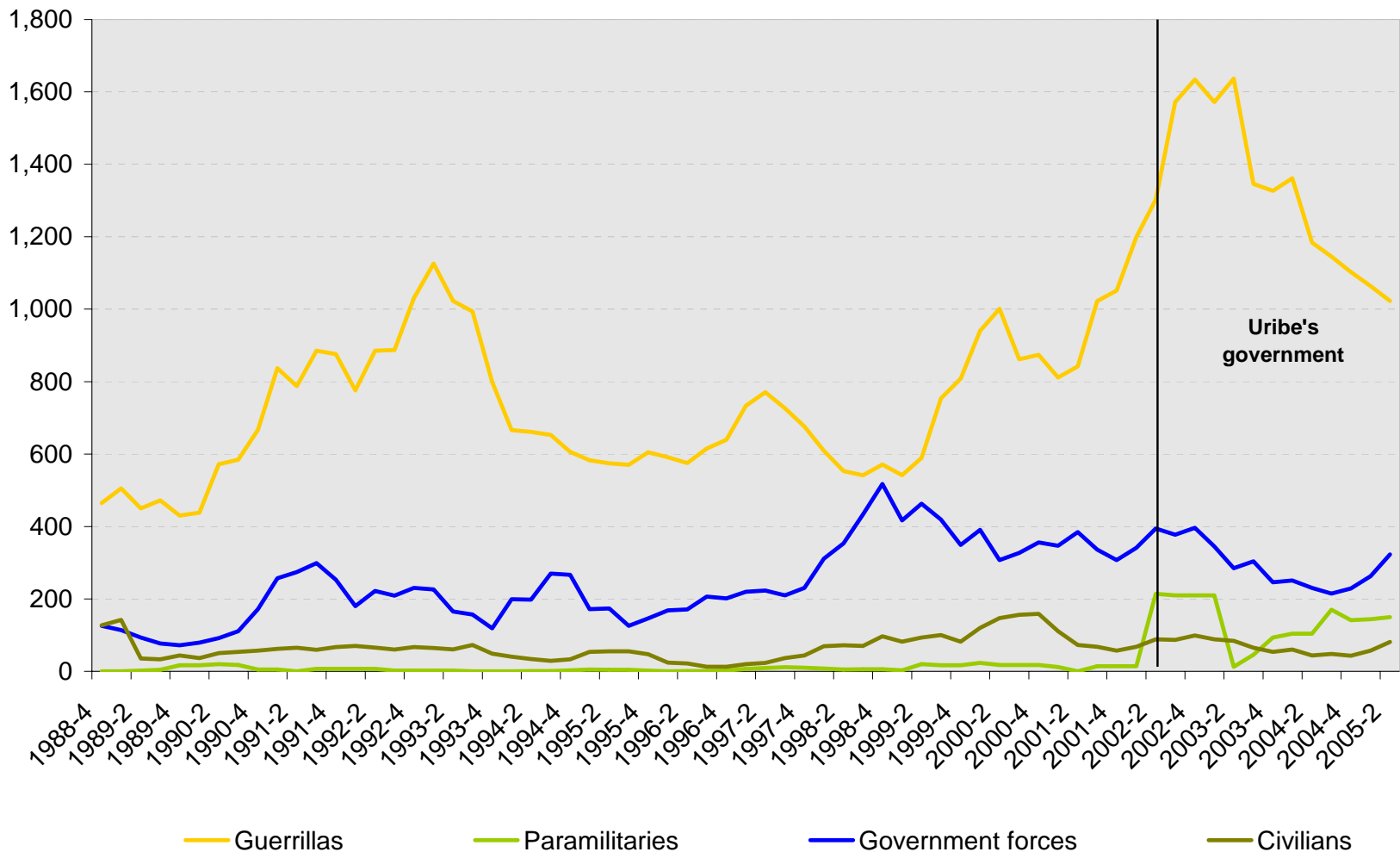
- The gap between killings of guerrillas and killings of government forces has shrunk, but still looks rather wide by historical standards.
- But the unsmoothed picture looks much worse; the ratio of guerrillas killed to government forces killed closed to 1.4 in the second quarter of 2005.
- On the other hand, the smoothing procedure is meant to iron out quarter-to-quarter fluctuation so it is probably a better indicator the current situation than the unsmoothed picture.
- Moreover, the shift in part reflects the scope of the government's ambition recently, directly challenging FARC strongholds in the south.

### Killings by Group in Guerrilla Events by Quarter 1988 - June 30 2005



- The next set of pictures (starting above) includes both clashes and attacks. First we examine all clashes and attacks involving the guerrillas.
  - The guerrillas are not behind the increase in killings of civilians.
  - The guerrillas are fighting less with the paramilitaries than they were a few years ago. In fact, the paramilitaries essentially ceased to be an anti-insurgent clashing force in the conflict beginning around 2002.
  - As mentioned above the guerrilla/government killing ratio is declining.
- 

**Killings by Group in Government Events by Quarter  
1988 - June 30 2005**



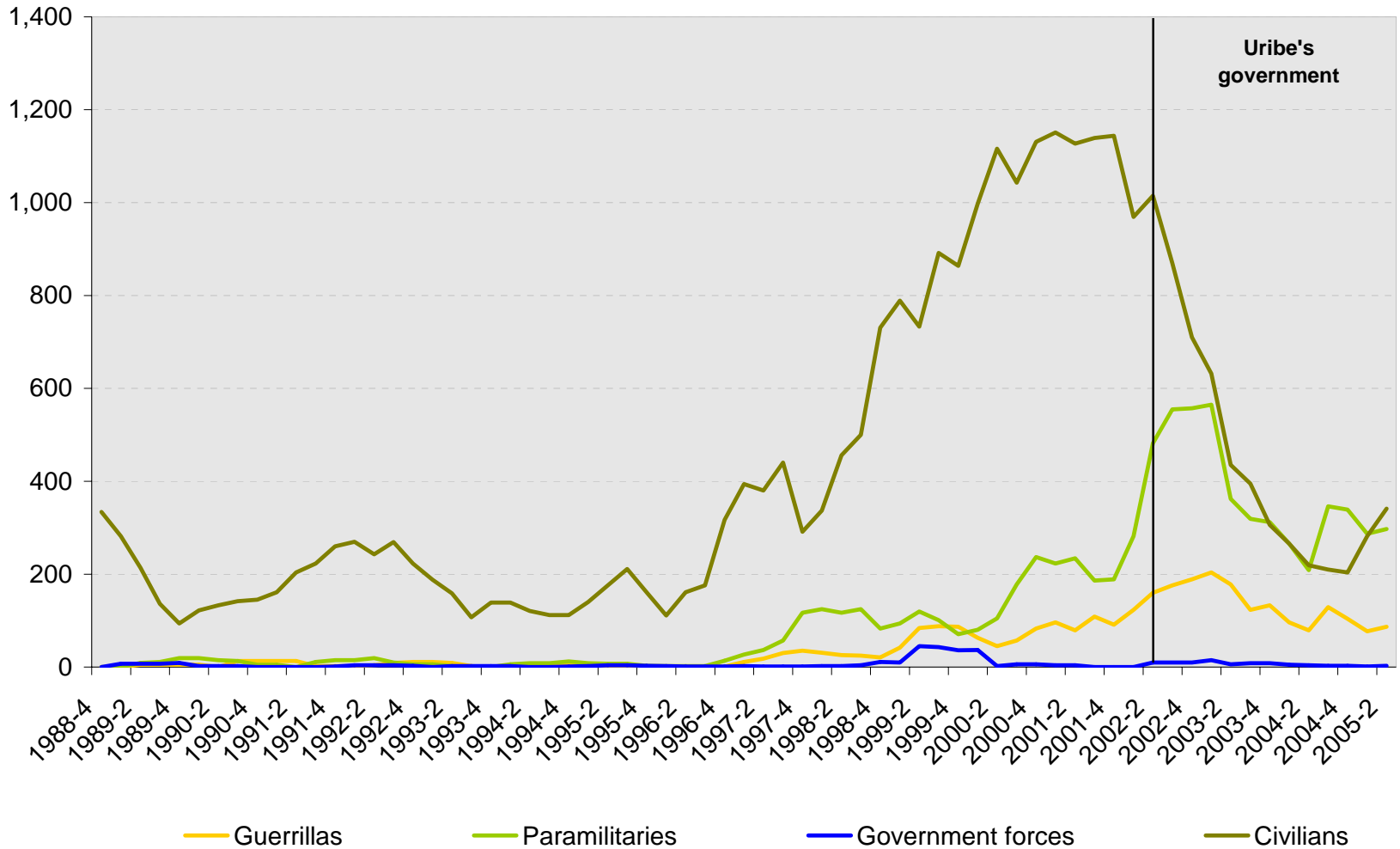
Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database, 2005



- There was an increase in government killings of civilians in the first half of 2005. This trend, although from a very low level, is worrisome, and the government needs to study in detail where these are occurring and why.
- This government has actually been fighting with the paramilitaries more than previous ones have.



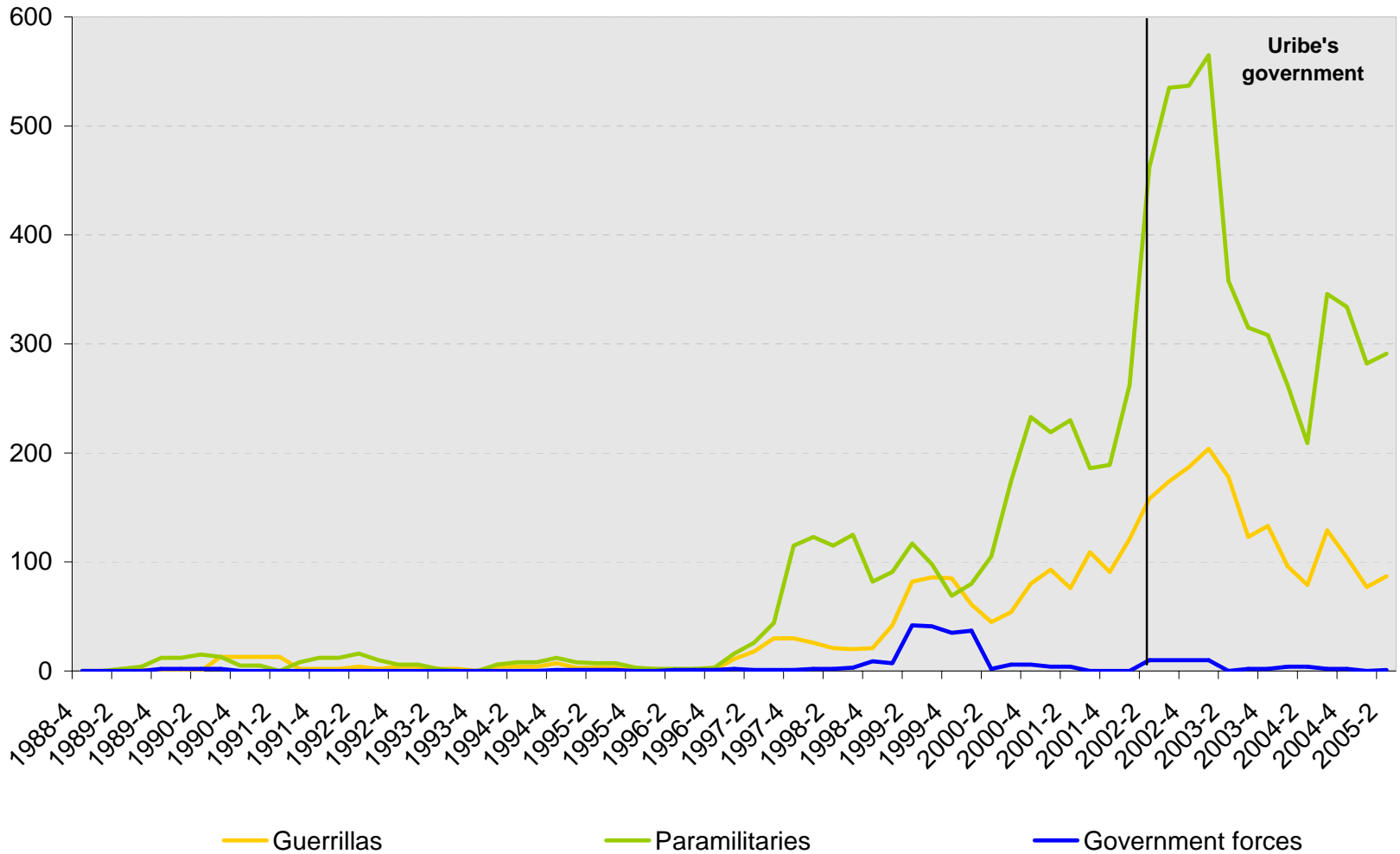
### Killings by Group in Paramilitary Events by Quarter 1988 - June 30 2005



- Civilians have been the main victims in paramilitary events.
- Remarkably, the paramilitaries themselves are the second victims.
- This indicates that the paramilitaries are vulnerable to military pressure.



### Killings by Group in Paramilitary Clashes by Quarter 1988 - June 30 2005



- The above slide shows what bad fighters the paramilitaries are.
- The guerrillas have generally pushed them around except in a few areas.



## Big Picture

- Most indicators are moving in the wrong direction although their levels are generally still good compared to the recent past.
- The conflict is still hot, but not getting hotter.
- Paramilitary behavior has taken a sharp turn for the worse.
- The ratio of guerrillas killed to government forces killed has been declining although, averaging over the last year, it is still high.
- The initiative of government forces shows steady improvement.
- There are new trouble spots and a general change in the geography of the conflict

## Big Picture

- In particular, the eastern *Antioquia* region, *Arauca*, the *Montes de María* and the east of the *Sierra Nevada* have consolidated as problematic regions; while the *Cañón de las Garrapatas*, *Meta* and *Cauca* departments appear as emerging problematic regions.
- Killing of civilians by government forces increased over the last six months.
- Problems have been increasing along the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian borders.

