The Determinants of Land-Grabbing in the Colombian Civil War: A Preliminary Analysis

Presentation by:
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Land issues are recognized to be at the core of the Colombian armed conflict. However, little academic attention has been devoted to explain the latest chapter of land-related conflicts in the country, when millions of people were forced to displace from their homes and their property rights were affected during their absence.

In short, their land was stolen while they were running for their lives. This is referred to as land-grabbing.

The government of Colombia has been executing a land restitution policy since 2012, which has provided the country with previously un-existing data allowing more detailed analysis.
Political economy of war

Public opinion in Colombia relates land-grabbing to an issue of political economy of war (greed over grievance) stole the land.

Large agribusiness

Juanita Goebertus, “Palma de aceite y desplazamiento forzado en zona Bananera: “trayectorias” entre recursos naturales y conflicto” Colombia Internacional, 2008, (enero-junio)

Counter-agrarian reform

Massive extensions of land were stolen - Range from 1.2 million to 10 million


Landed elites (Historical role - Not so much on land grabbing)

Traditional literature on land issues/conflict in the country devote a lot of attention to rural elites

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Research Objectives
Analyze the main features of Land grabbing in the Colombian context
Explore potential determinants of the issue

Hypotheses
Land-grabbing is a massive national phenomenon – Counter agrarian reform
It responds to a systematic planned strategy
Interests of large land owners are related to land-grabbing

Methods
GIS – Average Nearest Neighbor
Negative binomial regression
Features

- Land-Grabbing a local phenomenon.
  Forty five percent of the claims (43,357) are concentrated in five percent of the municipalities (56).

- It can be described as massive only at a local level.
  Fifty seven percent of the municipalities (642) have less than fifty claims total, and almost eighty percent (765) have less than one hundred total.

- A clear clustering pattern emerges
  Geographically, land claims are concentrated in a few regions.
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Determinants

- The analysis identifies correlations between cattle ranching municipalities, an economic activity historically related to rural elites.
- A correlation also arises between the number of claims and the continuous presence of illegal crops.
- When analyzed by the level of rurality, grabbed land was particularly in the intermediate levels.
- Given the clustered nature of the phenomenon, explanations concerning national determinants do not seem to hold. i.e. Agri-business, armed conflict (greed)
Analysis

• In contrast with common belief, land-grabbing is not a national phenomenon.

• It can be described as massive only when analyzed at a local level. If counter-agrarian reform, only in certain areas, but this is still open for discussion.

• However, being clearly clustered, rather than random, leads to suggest that it was not circumstantial; the results suggest that there was some sort of logic behind the decision about what land to steal.
Analysis

• In terms of the type of land targeted, the analysis shows a special interest in land located in areas with the right balance of low coercion capacity and fair access to infrastructure and public goods.

• Illegal land seizure is correlated with extensive cattle ranching, an activity that has historically been linked with status and power in rural Colombia.

• All of this together suggests that, contrary to what has been the case so far, the study of land grabbing in the Colombian context would benefit from specific frameworks of analyses that observe particular local contexts in which special powerful interests enter into play.
Thank you