



# 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 20,000 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



**Ana Cristina Restrepo**



**Sandra P. Oviedo**



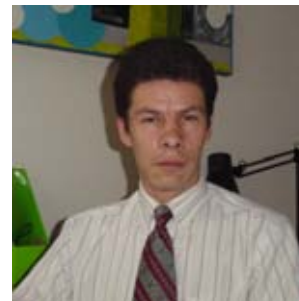
**Simón Mesa**



**Diego Velandia**

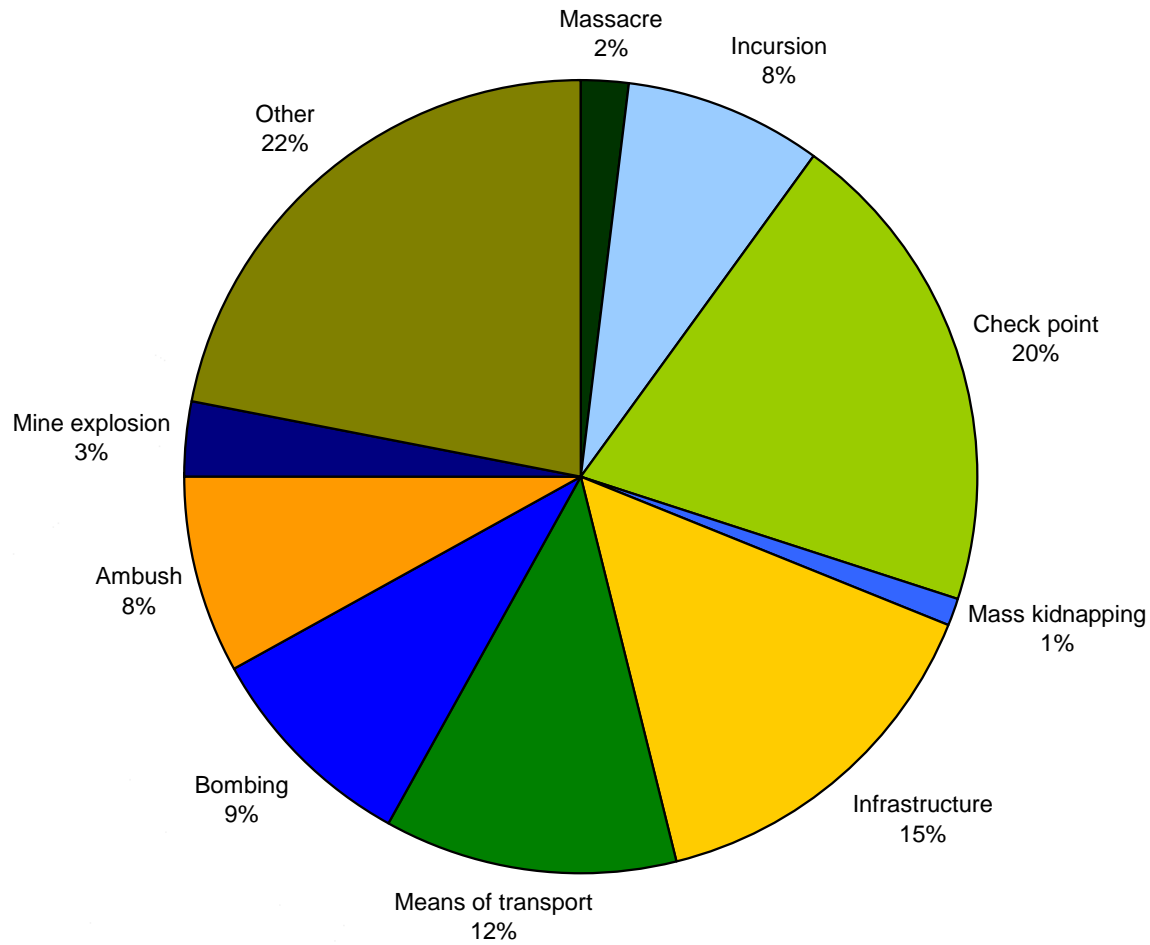


**Wilmer Marín**



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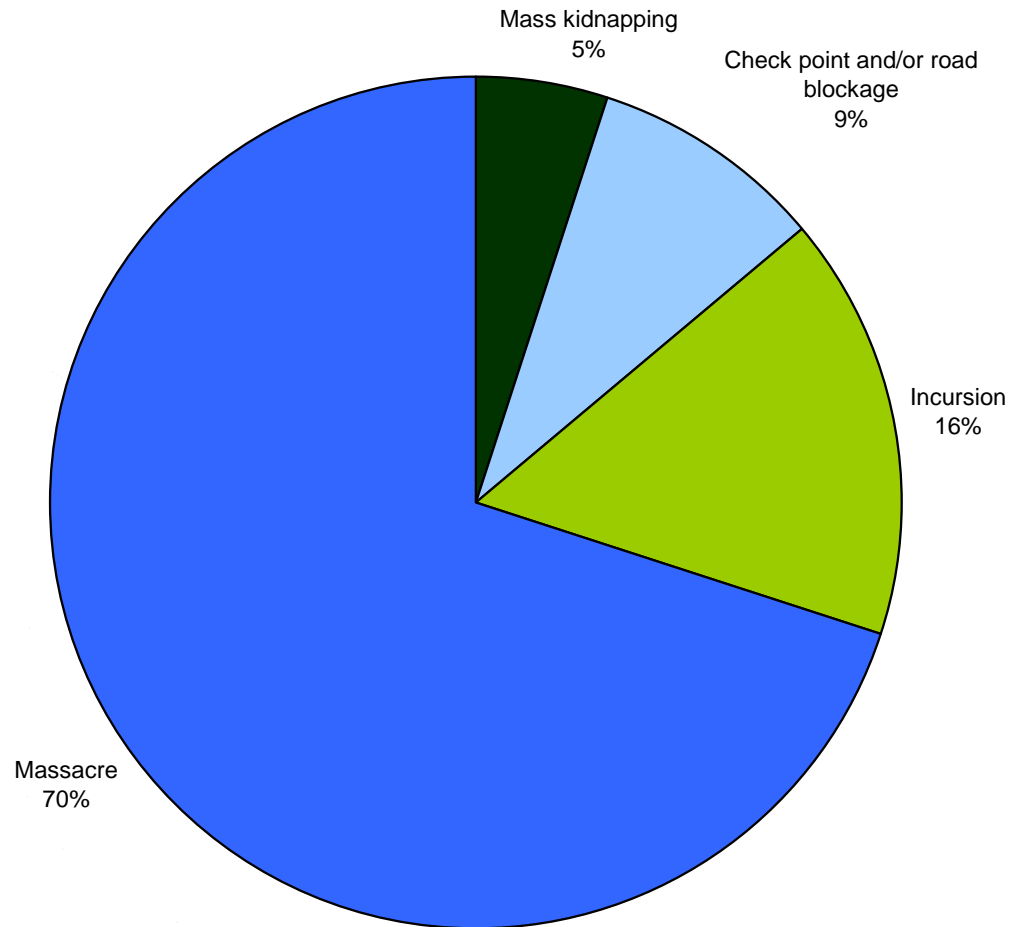
### Portfolio of Attacks by Guerrilla Groups





- Roughly half of all guerrilla attacks, including checkpoints, infrastructure attacks, 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 defenceless people in one event, have high impact but are a small fraction of all guerrilla attacks.

### Portfolio of Attacks by Paramilitaries

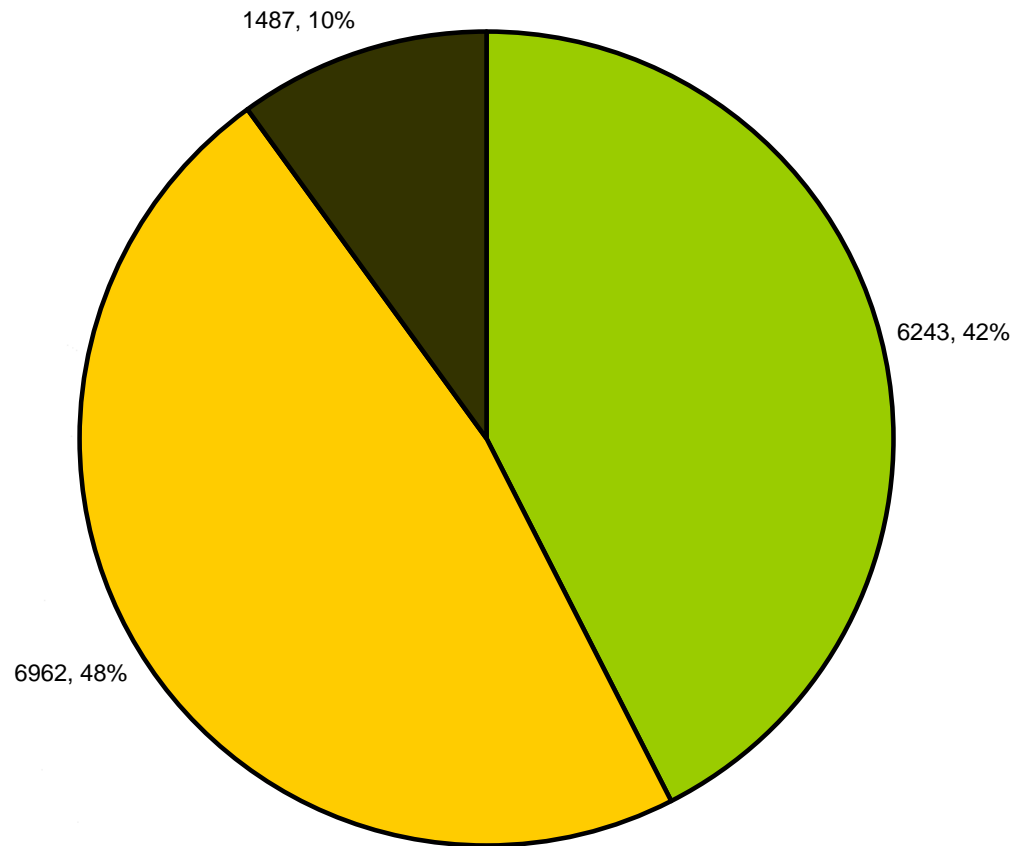




- Paramilitary attacks have consisted overwhelmingly of massacres
- It has been explicit paramilitary strategy to kill civilian whom the paramilitaries presume might be helping the guerrillas.
- However, below we will see that in 2005 the paramilitaries shifted toward killing people in ones and twos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



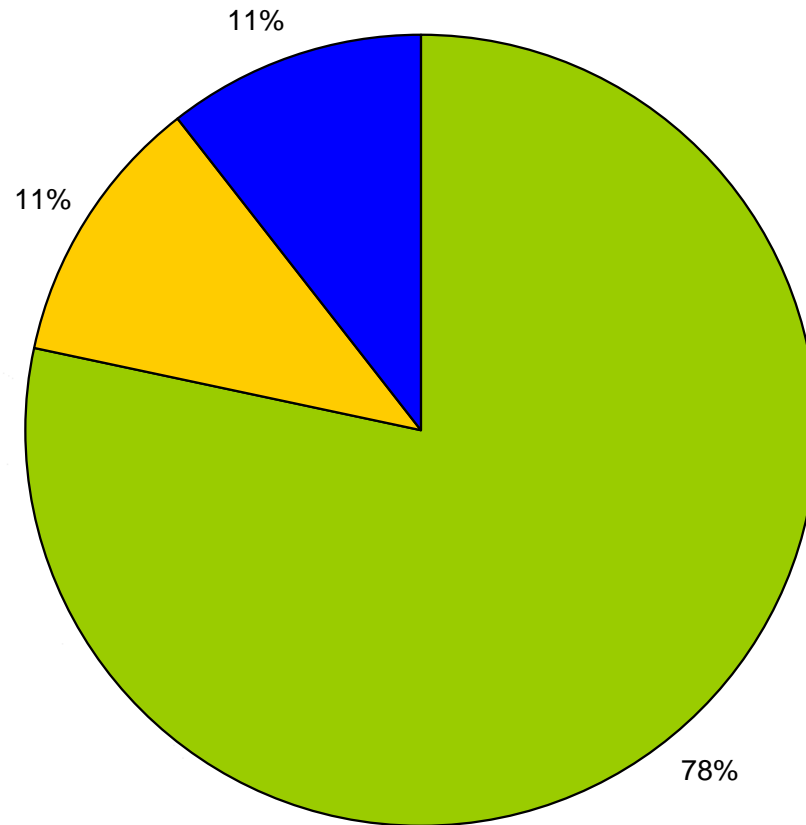
**Killings by Group  
1988 - 2005**



 Killings by guerrillas     Killings by paramilitaries     Killings by government forces

- 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.

**Distribution of Injured Civilians in Attacks by Identified Group Attacking**



■ Injured civilians by guerrilla groups

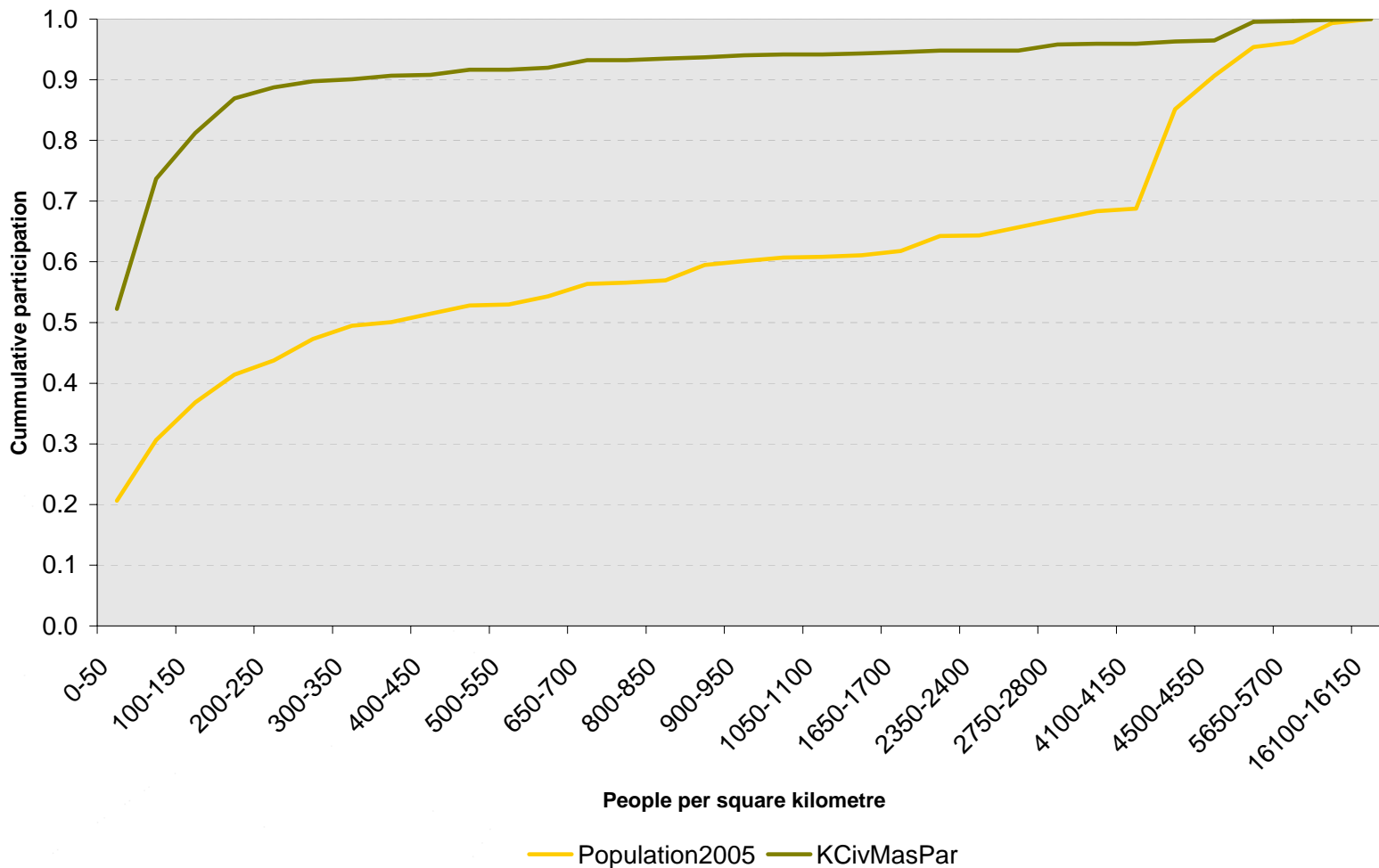
■ Injured civilians by paramilitary groups

■ Injured civilians by government



- 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



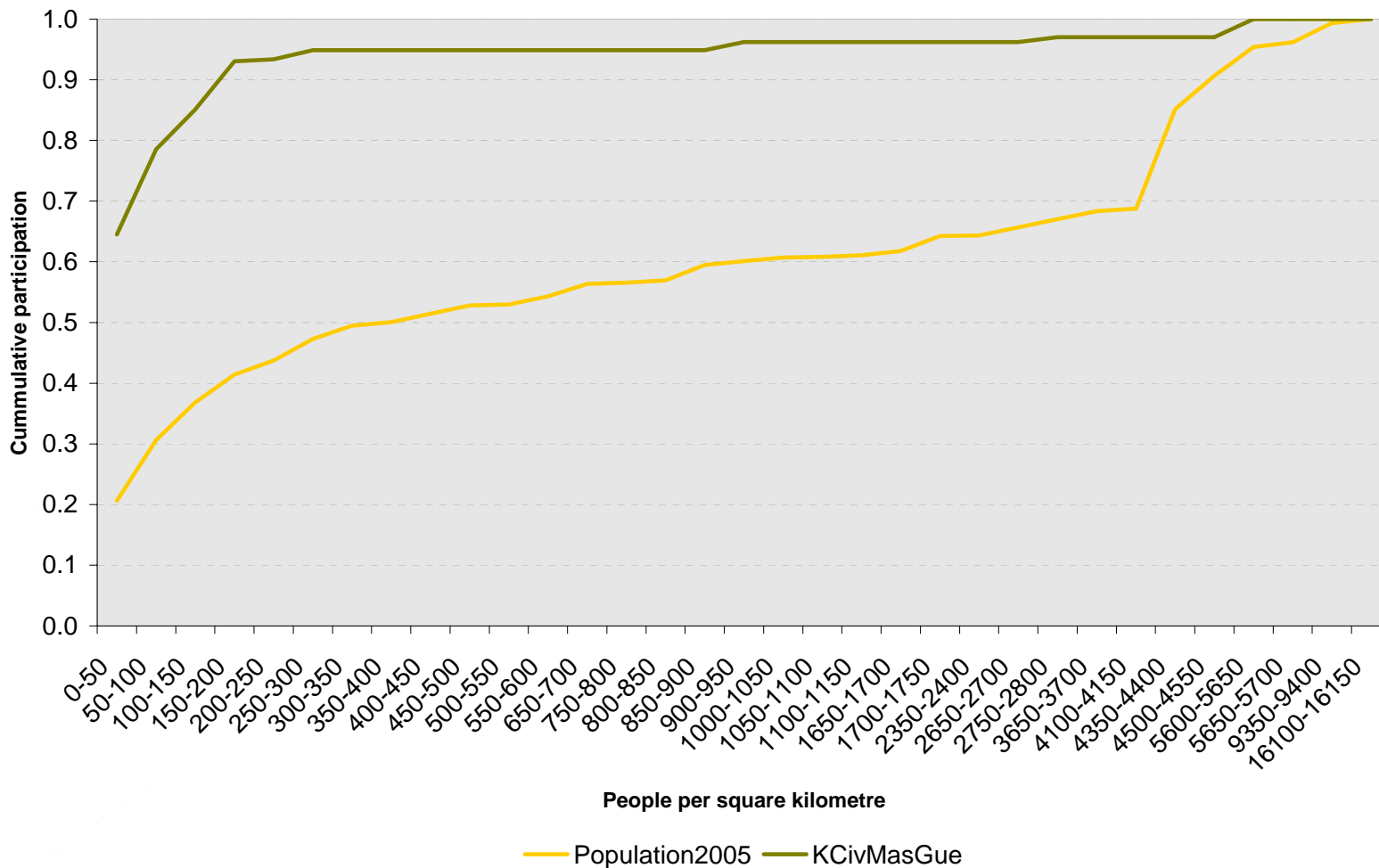


- The two curves are “cumulative distribution functions”, read as follows.
- On the horizontal axis are population densities, i.e., number of people per square kilometre, given by municipality of which there are about 1,100 in Colombia.
- Each point on the orange curve gives the fraction of the population living in municipalities of that population density *or less*.
- Each point on the brown 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 Guerilla Massacres

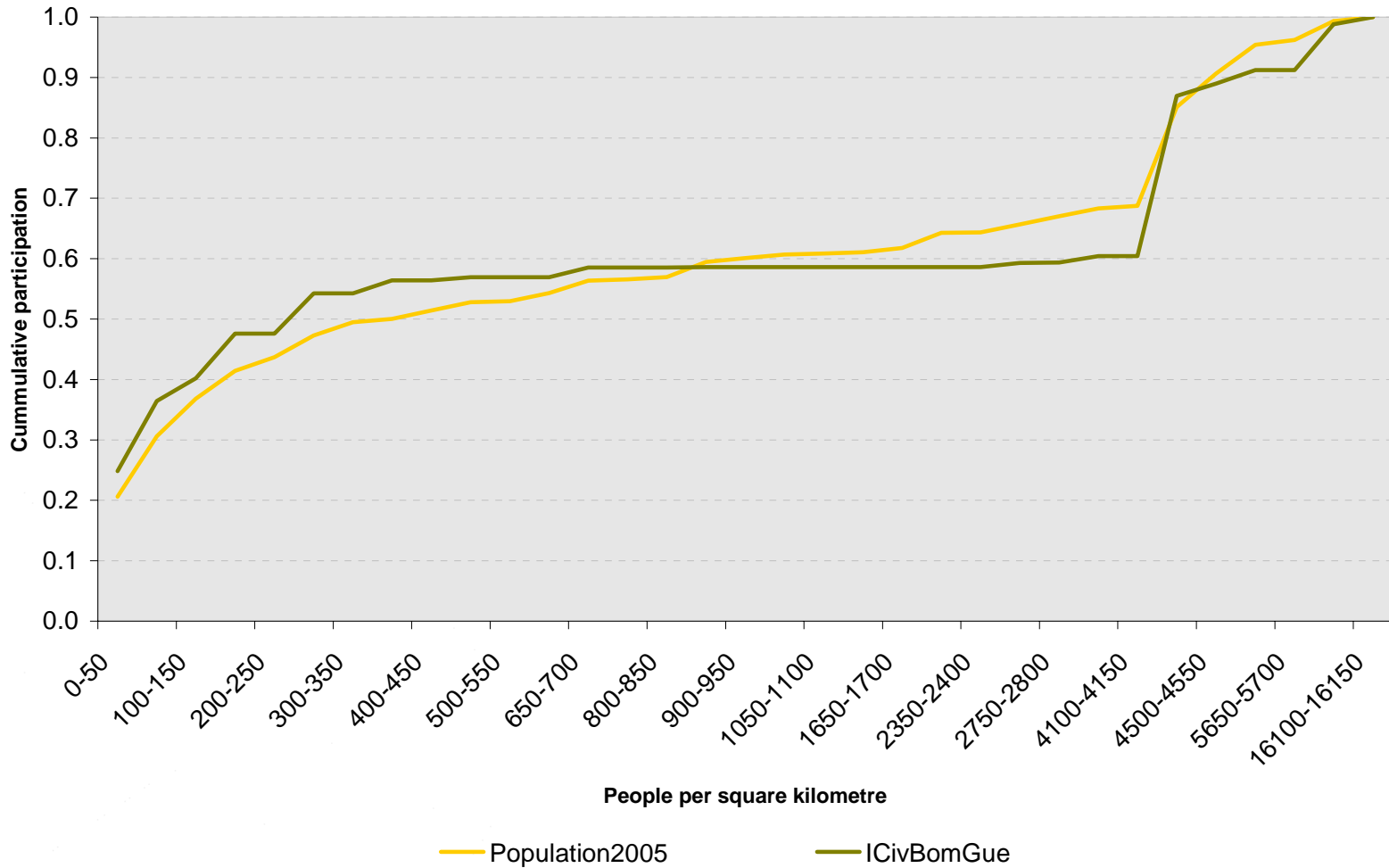






- Read the slide on guerrilla massacres in the same way as the one on paramilitary massacres.
- It shows the same general pattern but even more extreme.
- A full 2/3 or all civilians killed in guerrilla massacres were living in municipalities with population density of 50 people per square kilometre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

### Population Density and Civilians Injured in Guerrilla Bombings



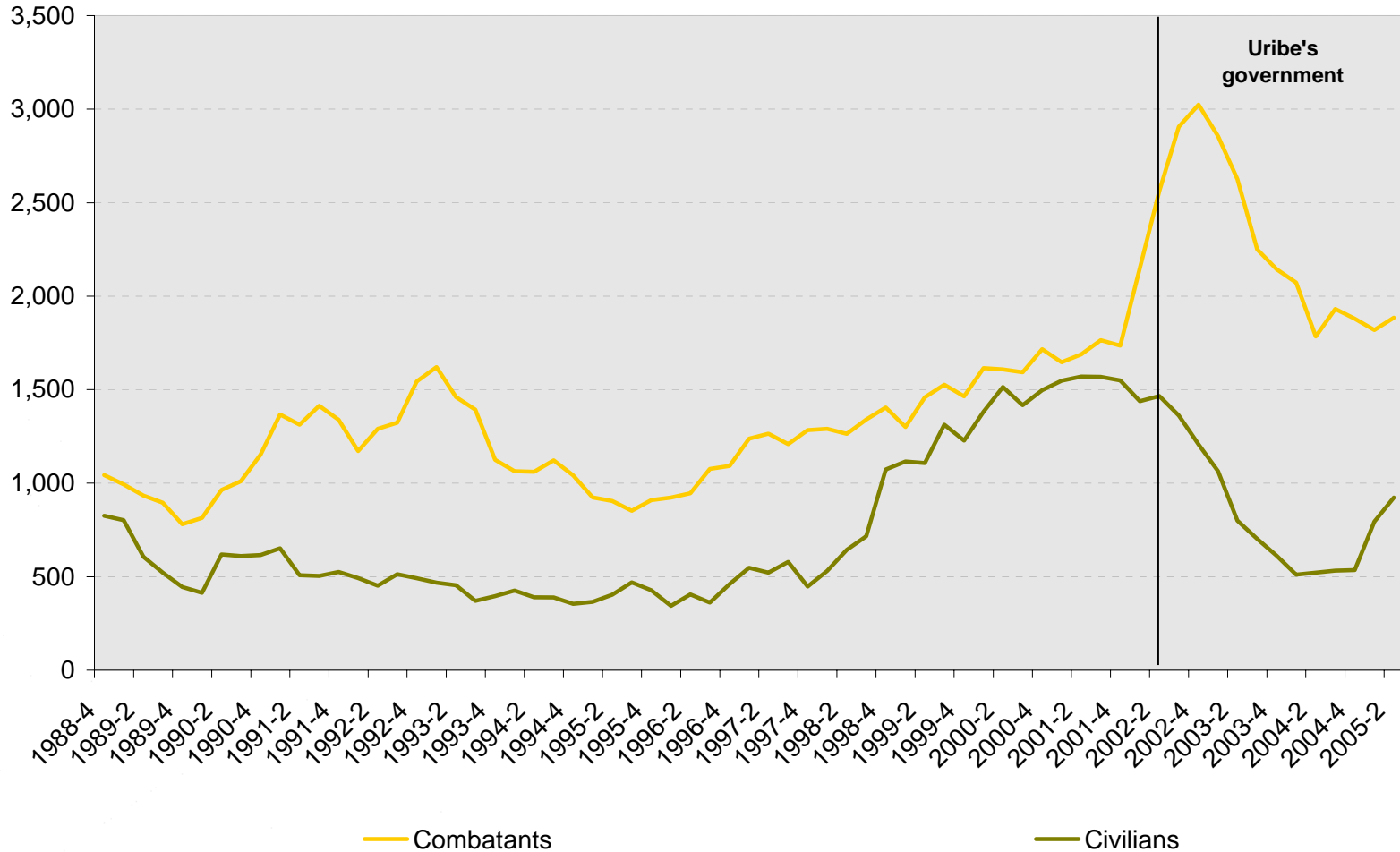


- Read the slide on civilian injuries in guerrilla bombings in the same way as the massacre slides.
- It shows a very different pattern.
- There is a slightly elevated risk in low-density municipalities but also big risks in Colombia's five biggest cities.



- 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> 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 are not smoothed.

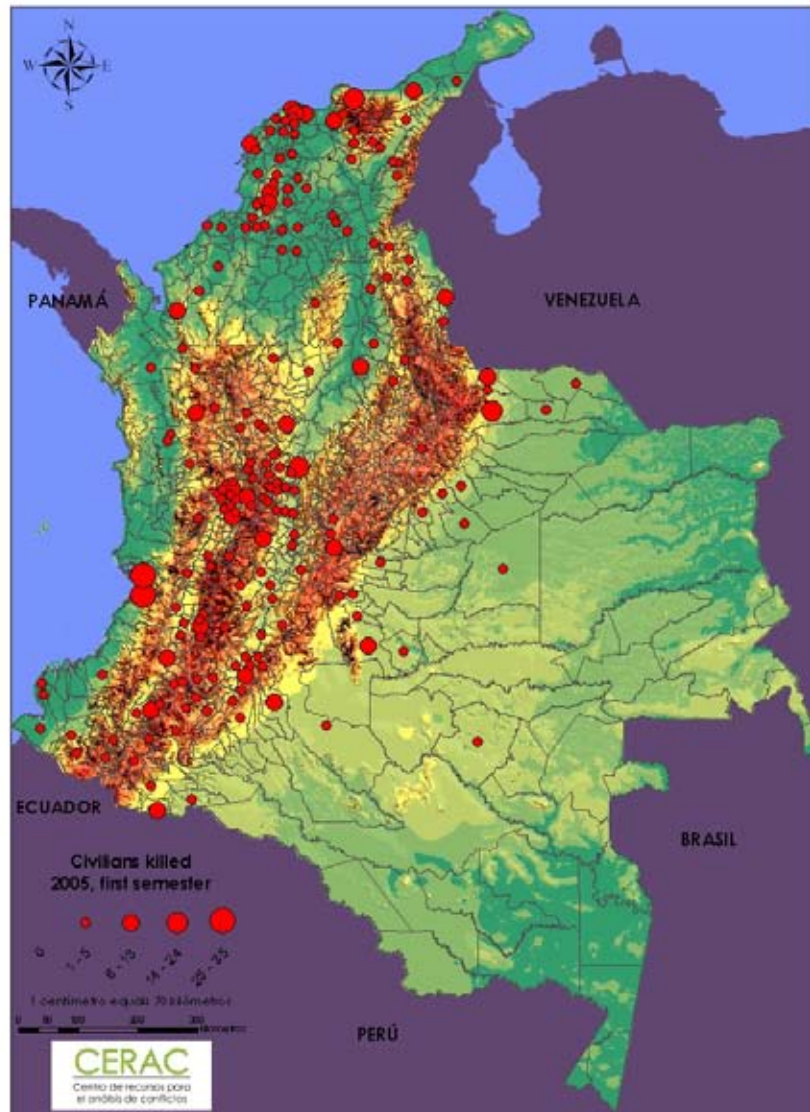
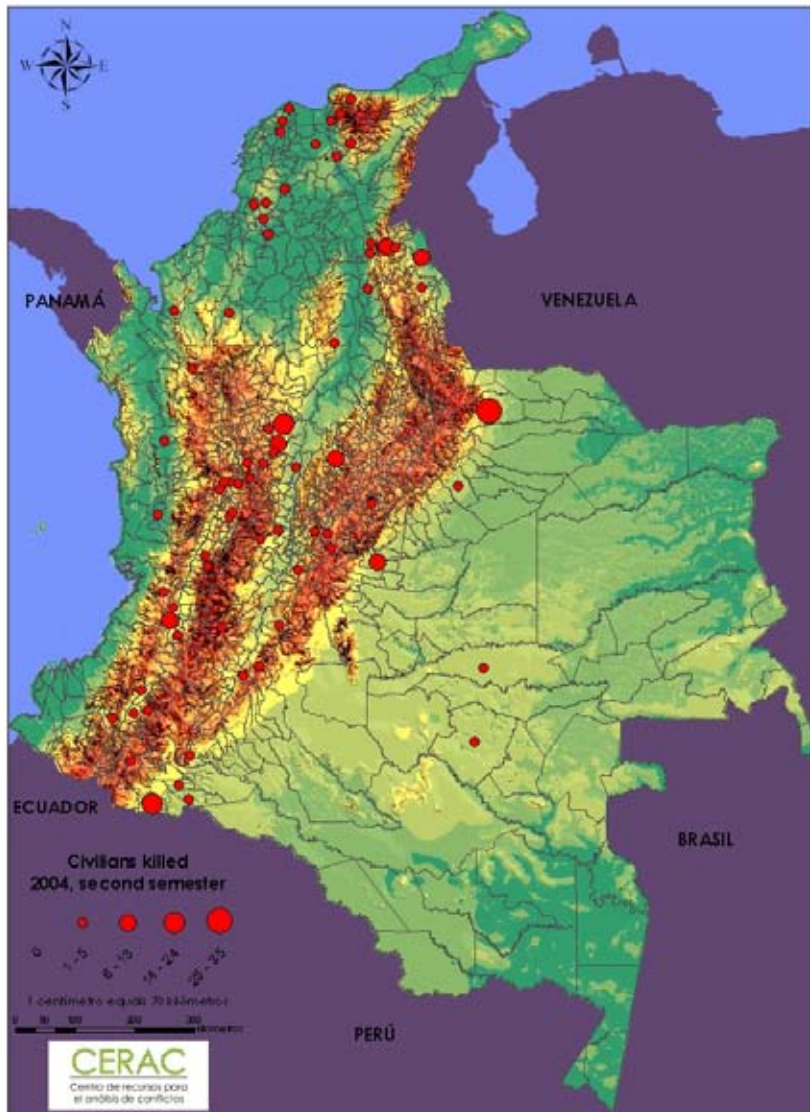
**Combatants and Civilians Killed by Quarter  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**



- 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.
- Also there are other forms of victimization including kidnapping and forced displacement that affect almost exclusively civilians.
- This finding is consistent with those in “The Human Security Report 2005” that just came out.



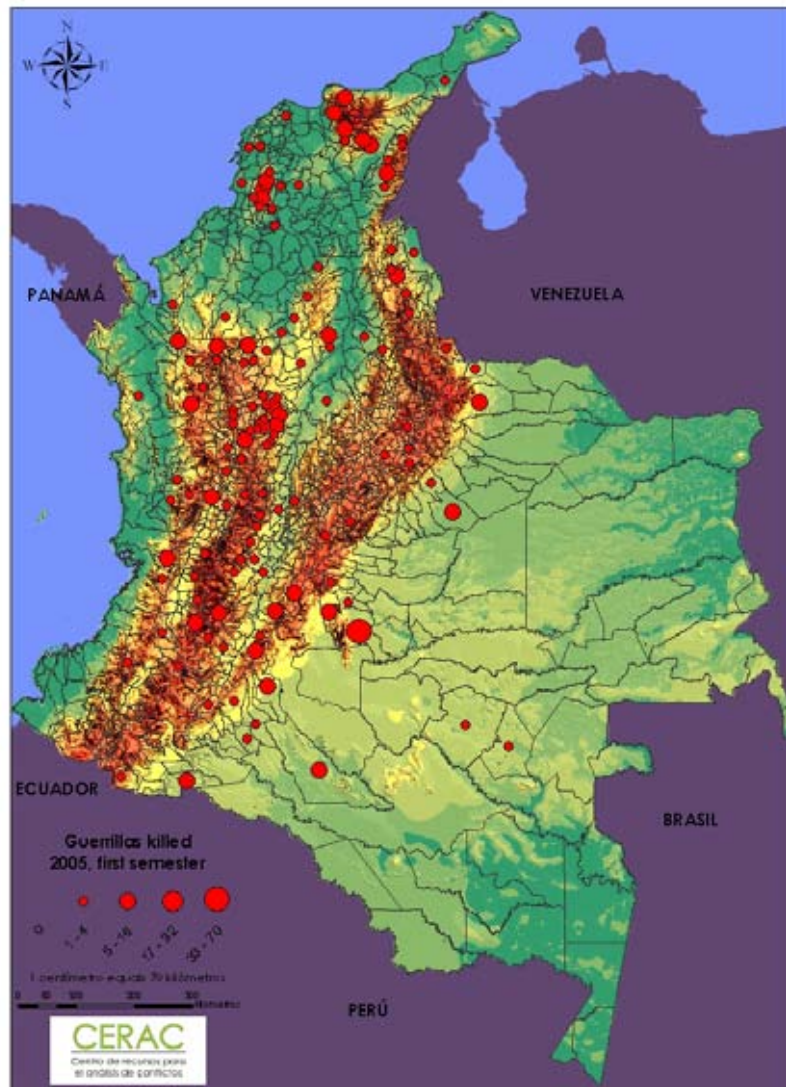
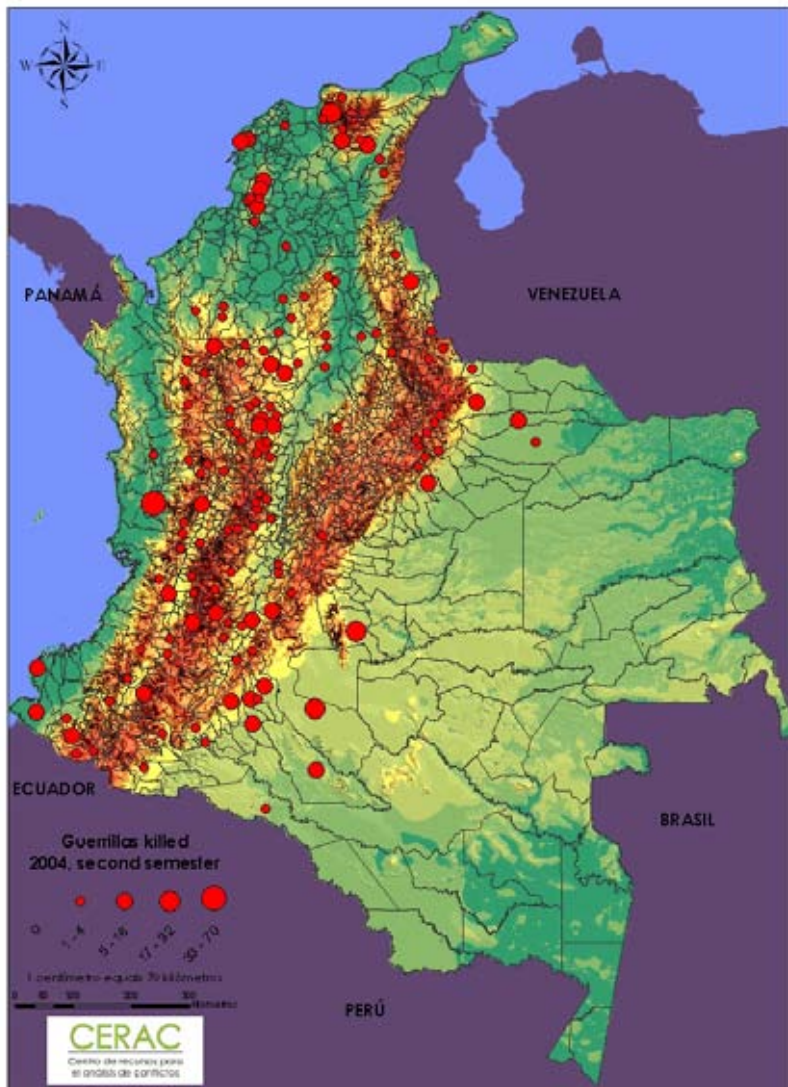
- More importantly, there are dramatic dynamics in the killing of civilians.
- There was a sharp drop that began just before Uribe took office.
- But now there is a sharp rise that is, in fact, muffled by the smoothing technique.
- Civilian killings in the first half of 2005 were only about 15% lower than civilian killings in the first half of 2002.





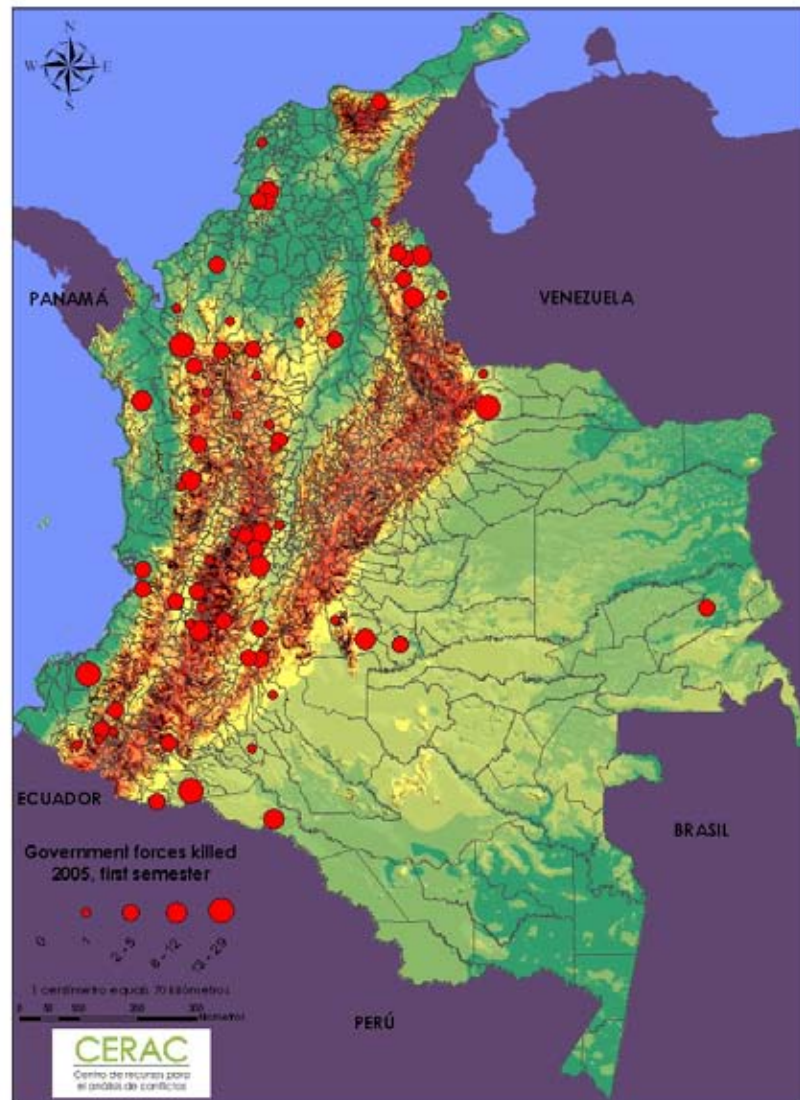
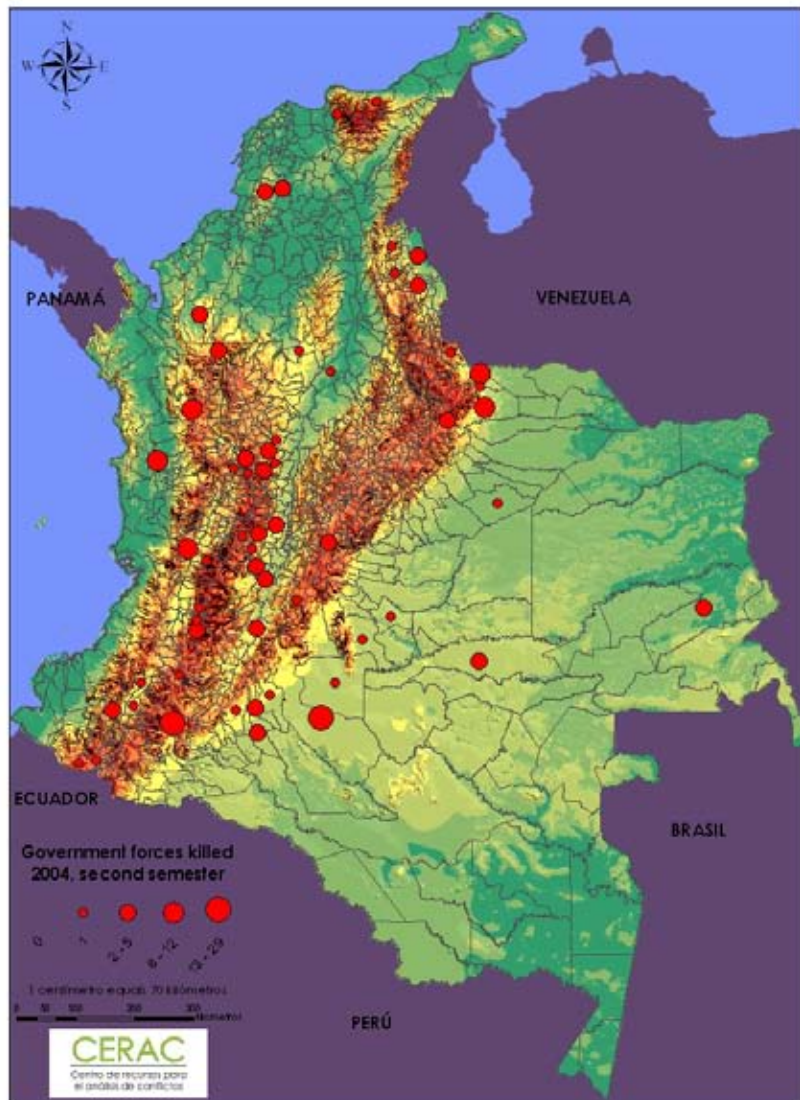


- This pair of maps shows where the emerging pockets of civilian killing are located.
- Notable trouble spots are Buenaventura (on the Pacific coast), through wide stretches of the Caribbean coast, to the southeast of Medellín, along the Venezuelan border and, to a lesser extent, along the Ecuadorian border.

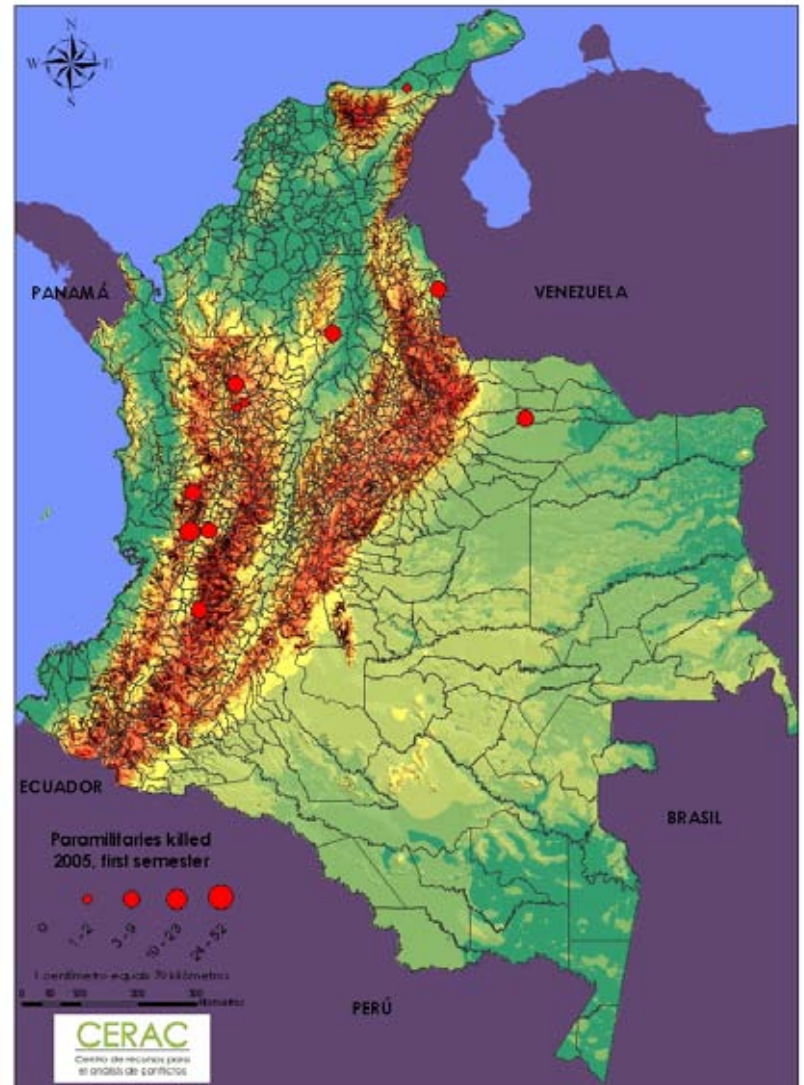




- In the second half of 2004 there were many guerrillas killed during the government's well know, and US supported, southern offensive.
- There is considerably less killing of guerrillas in the south in the first half of 2005. Probably this reflects a combination of dispersal of guerrillas who took a 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.
- There was a perceptible increase in killings of guerrillas around the Sierra Nevada mountains way up north.



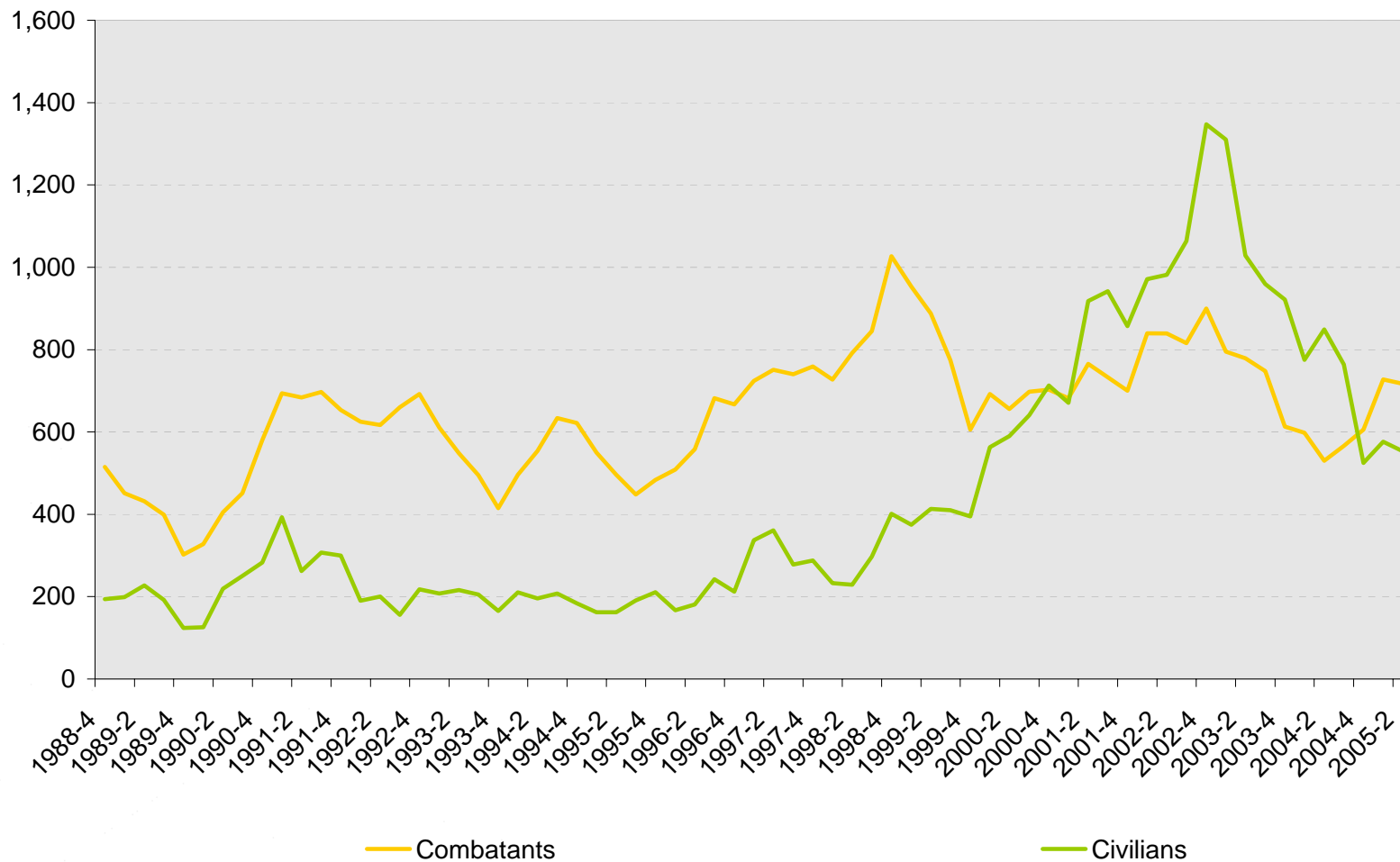
- Killings of government forces increased notably along both the Ecuadorian and Venezuelan borders in the first half of 2005.
- The maps suggest that the guerrillas are using both of these borders more actively in 2005 than they were in 2004 and that the government is hamstrung by its inability to pursue across them.
- Few government forces were killed around the Sierra Nevada mountains and just to the Southeast of Medellín so it looks like the government is succeeding there.
- But things are much worse for the government further down the central Cordillera.





- 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.

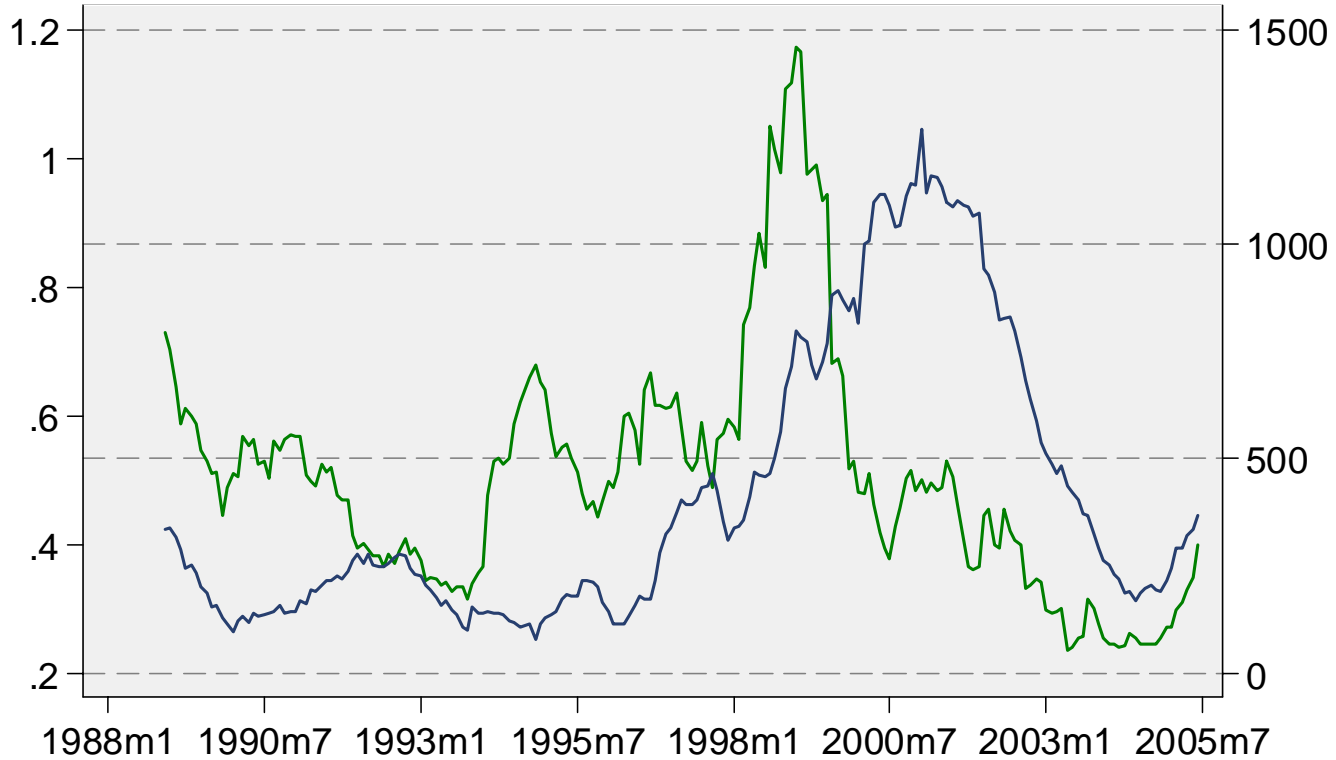
**People injured by group by quarters  
1988(I) - 1988(II)**





- 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 evacuate 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 significant quite similar to injuries.
- Still the last slide does show a big spike in civilian injuries peaking in 2002 and then abating.

### A Cointegration Relationship

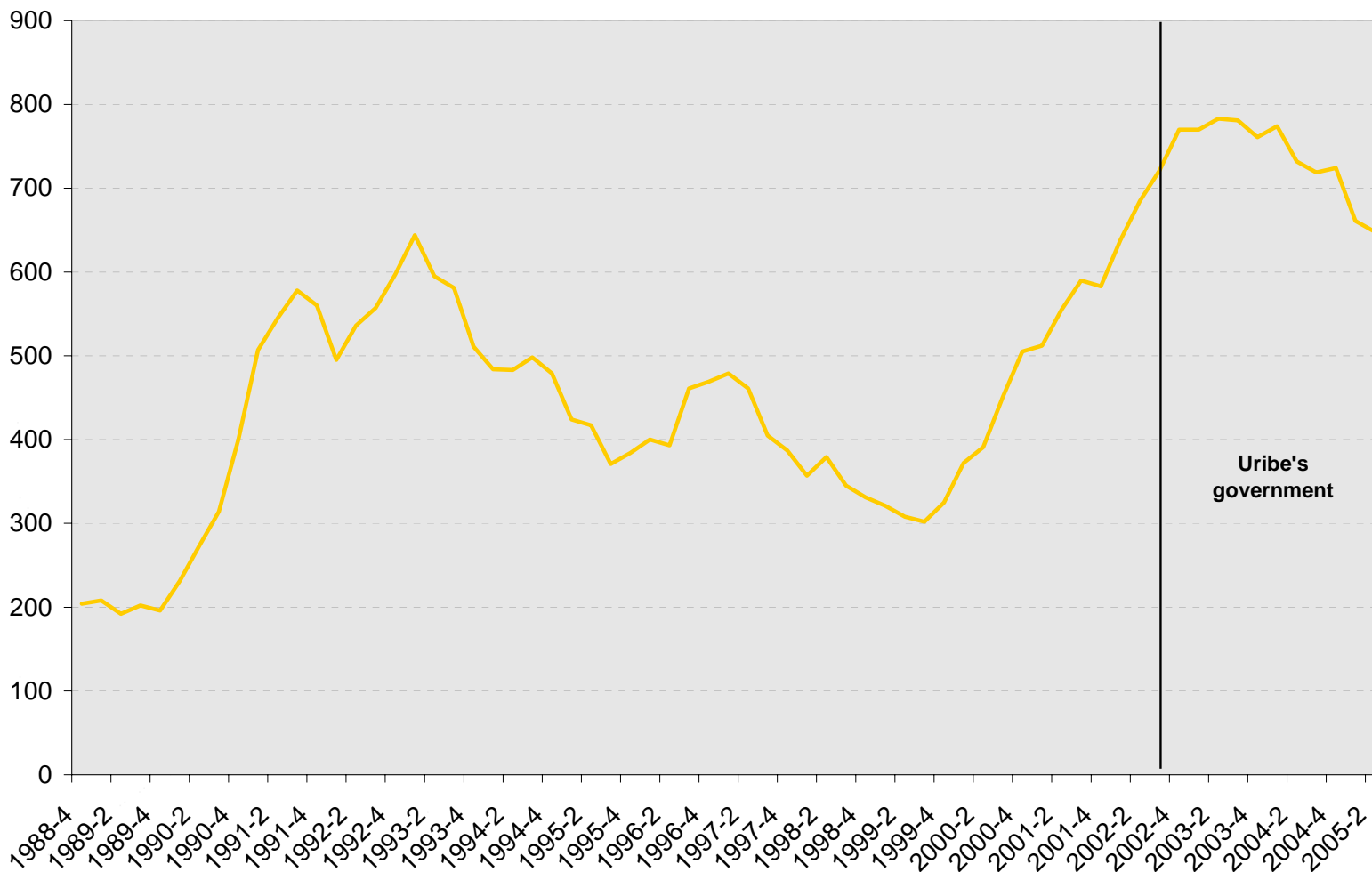


- Government forces killed - Guerrillas killed Ratio (left scale)
- Killed in paramilitary attacks (right scale)

Source: CERAC Colombian Conflict Database.

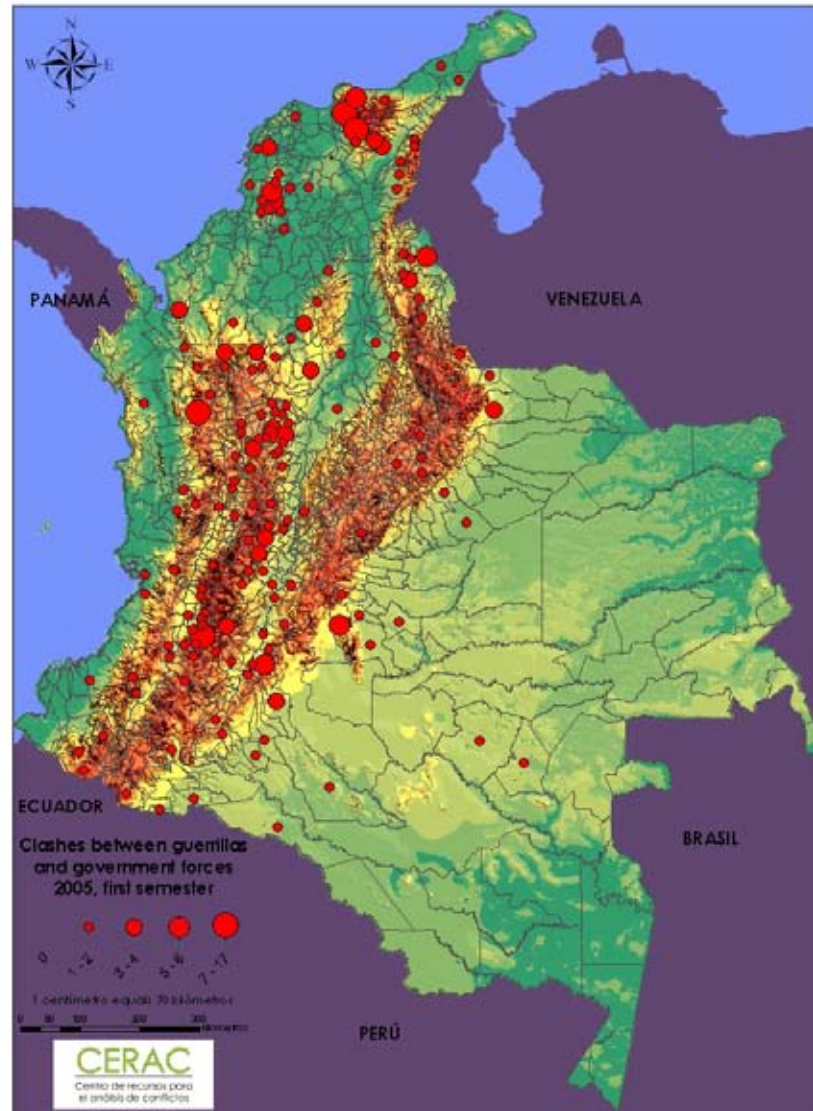
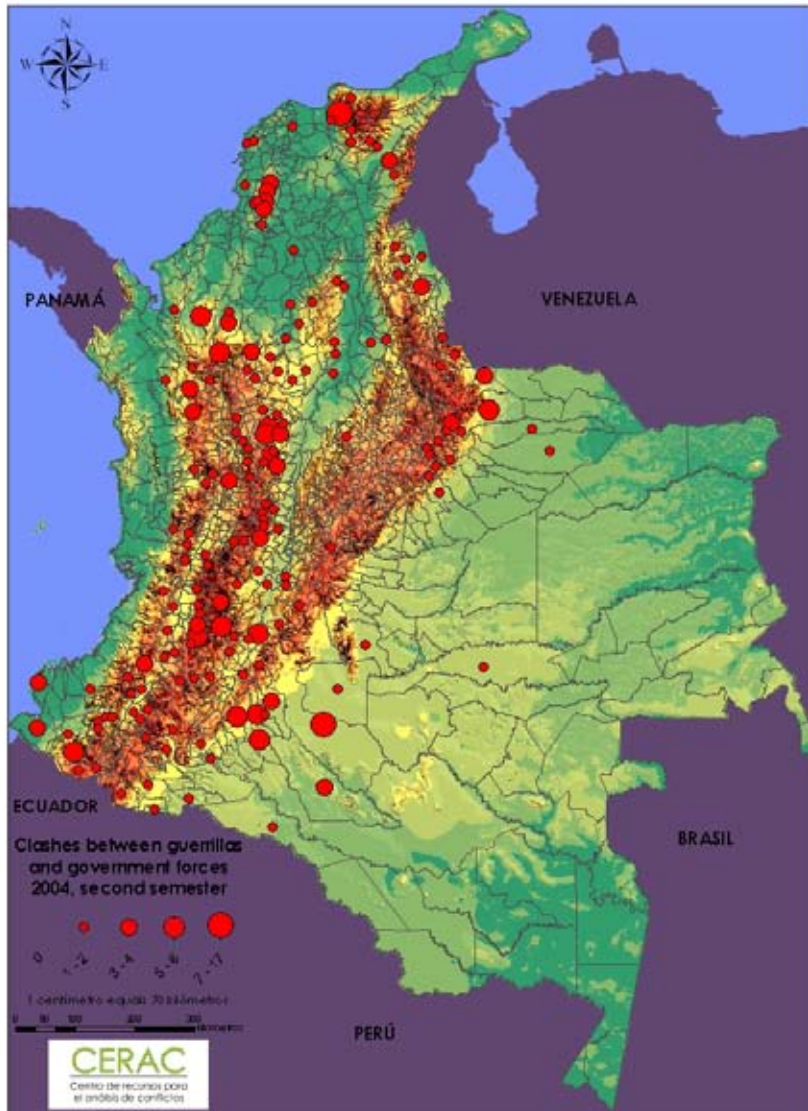
- The green curve in the above picture gives the ratio of government forces killed to guerrillas killed. It shows enormous improvement over the last five years before turning around in 2005.
- The other curve (referring to the right axis) shows killings by the paramilitaries which shows its own dramatic movement.
- The movement of the two curves is rather similar. Paramilitary activity tend to increase during periods when the government 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(I) - 2005(II)





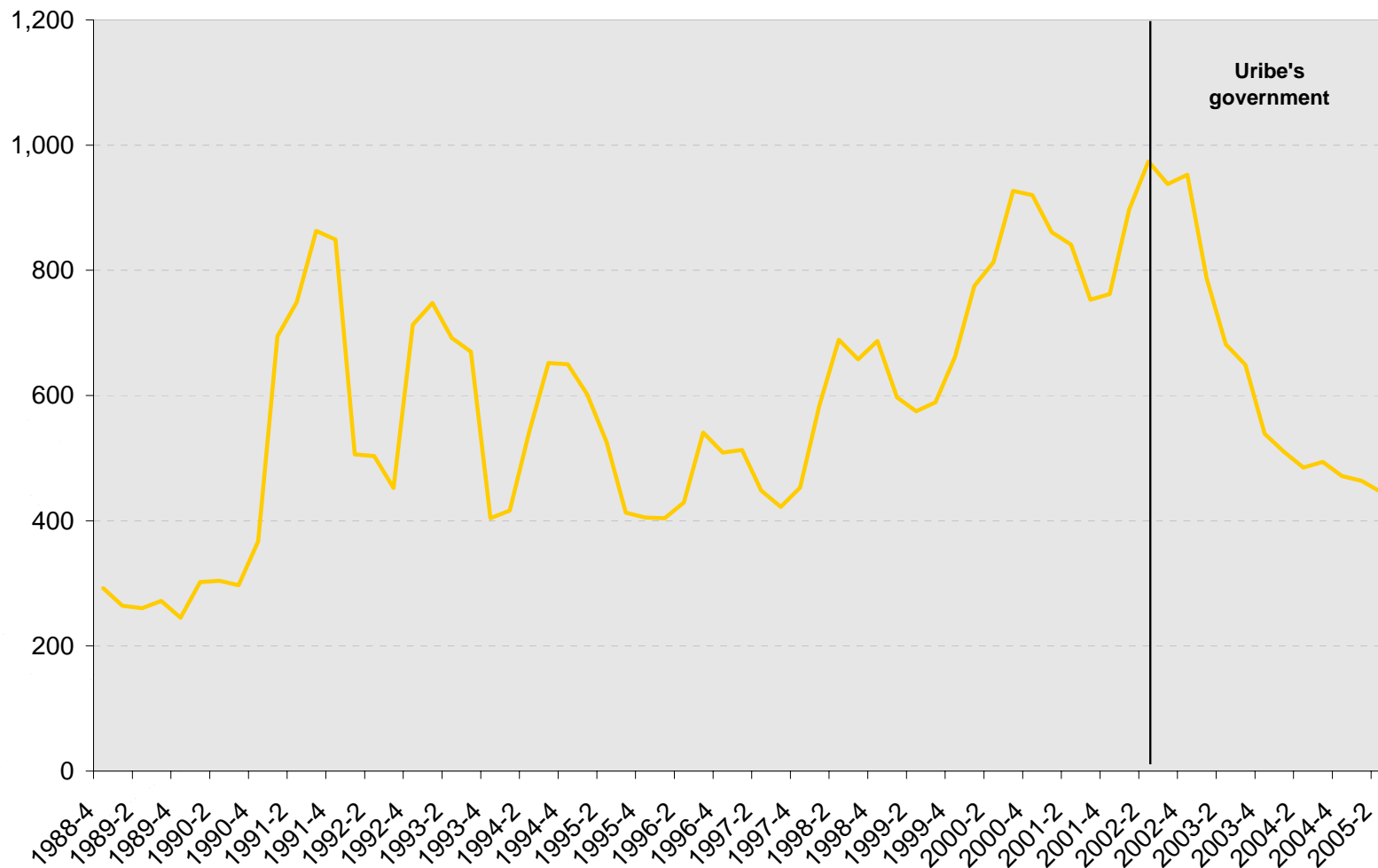
- The number of clashes between the government and the guerrillas is very high, although it has been falling from its peak of 2003.
- As a rule, lots of clashing is good for government forces and bad for the guerrillas, as the government normally gets the better of these encounters. The guerrillas tend 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.
- There are two big concentrations in the north and many clashes southeast of Medellín.
- There were significantly fewer clashes in the south in the first half of 2005 compared to the second half of 2004.

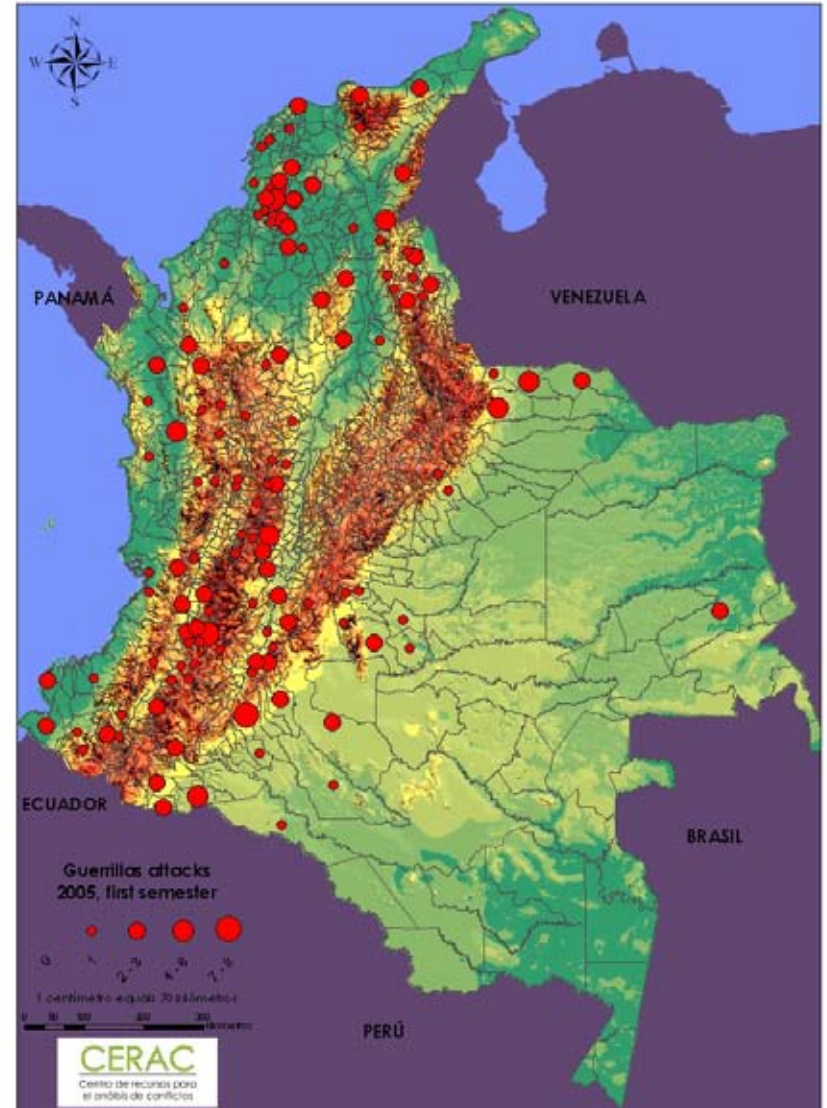
**Number of Guerrilla Attacks by Quarter  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**







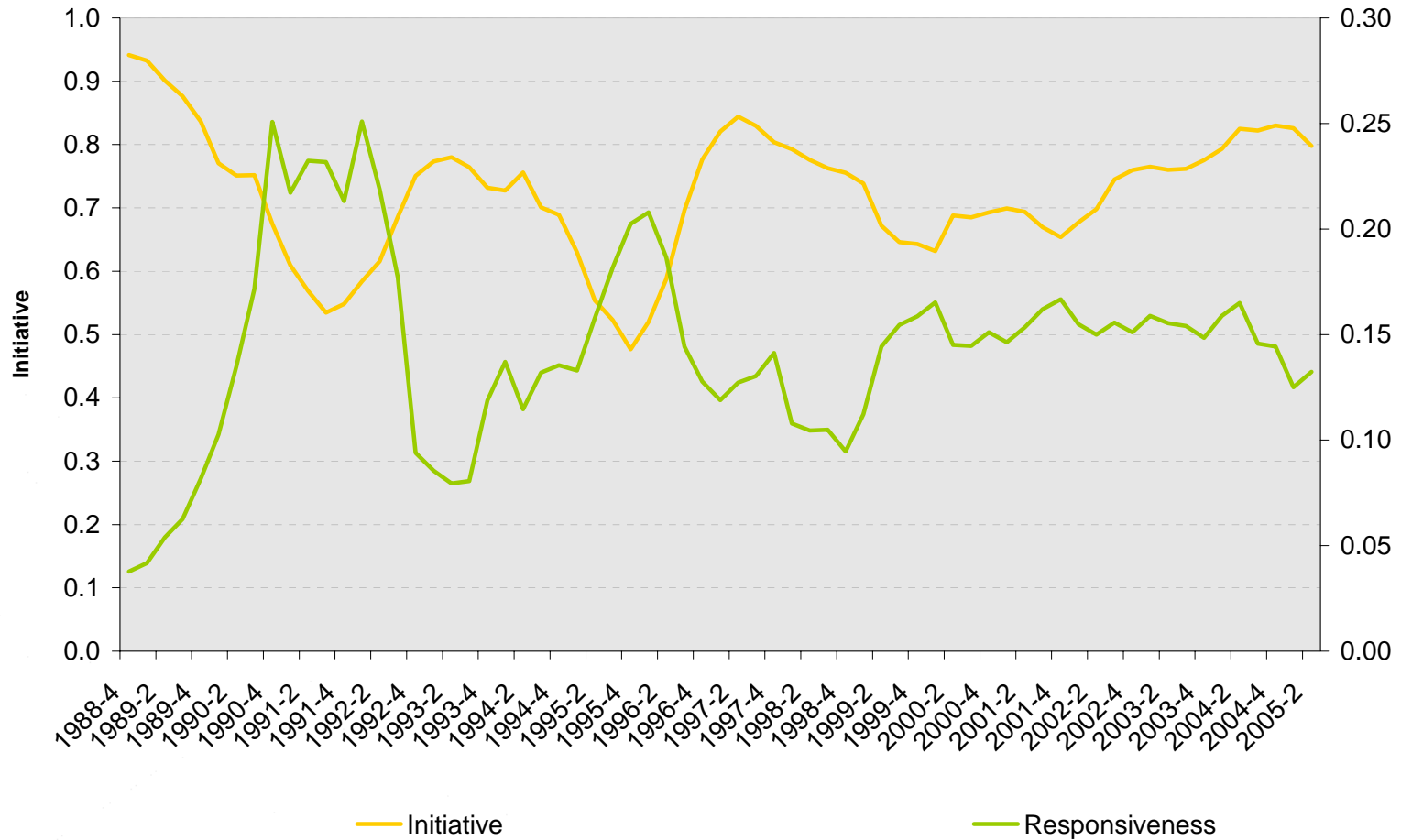
- The number of guerrilla attacks has dropped precipitously under Uribe.
- This drop continued in the first half of 2005 but the change is hardly noticeable.





- 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.
- The Ecuadorian border has emerged and 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 south of Cartagena on the Caribbean coast.

**Initiative and responsiveness by quarter  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**



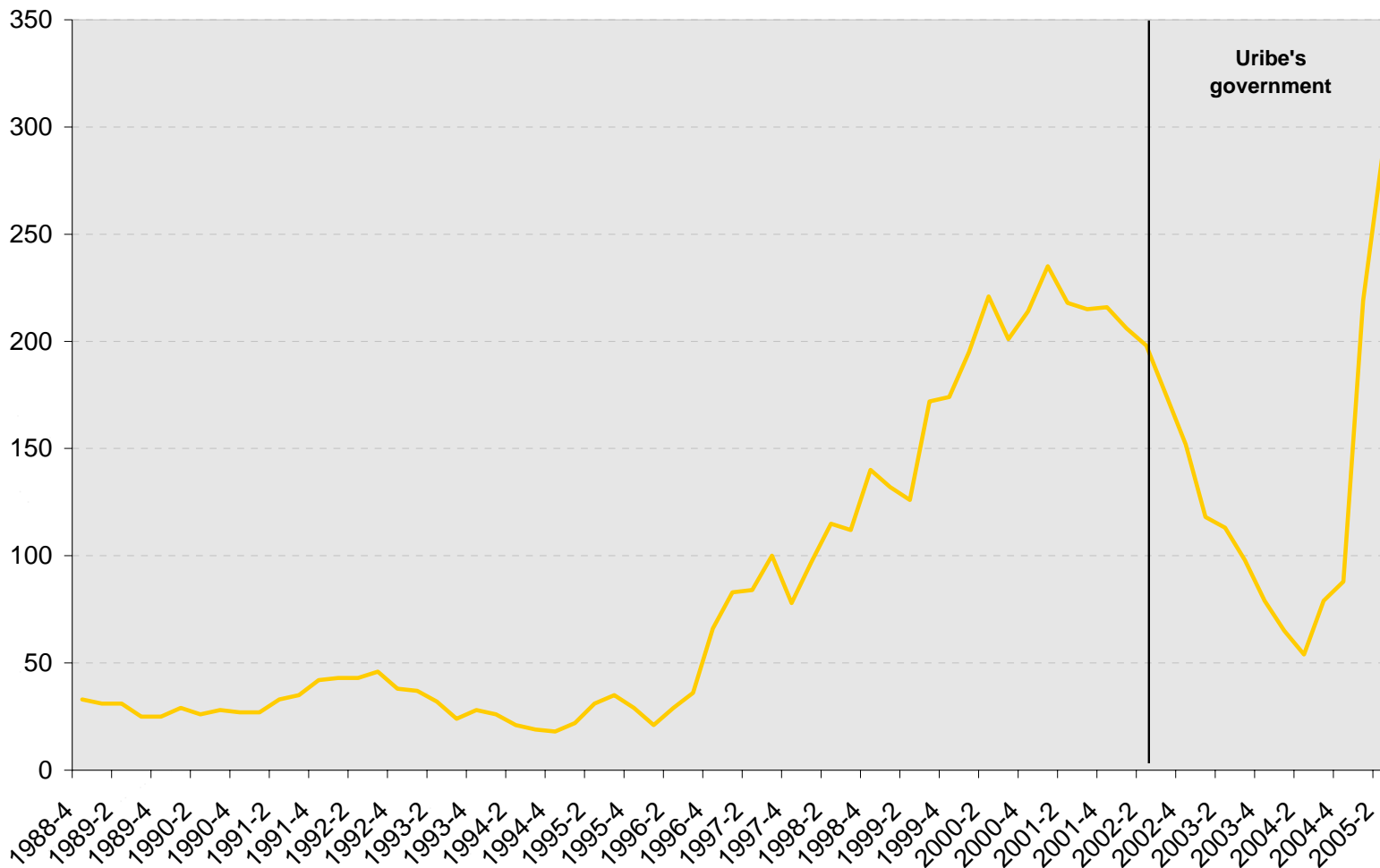


- We give two measures of the performance of the government forces above.
- “Initiative” gives (on the left axis) the fraction of government-guerrilla clashes that are not tied to a guerrilla attack on the same day in the same place. The idea is to measure the degree to which the government forces are 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.



- “Responsiveness” gives (on the right axis) is 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.

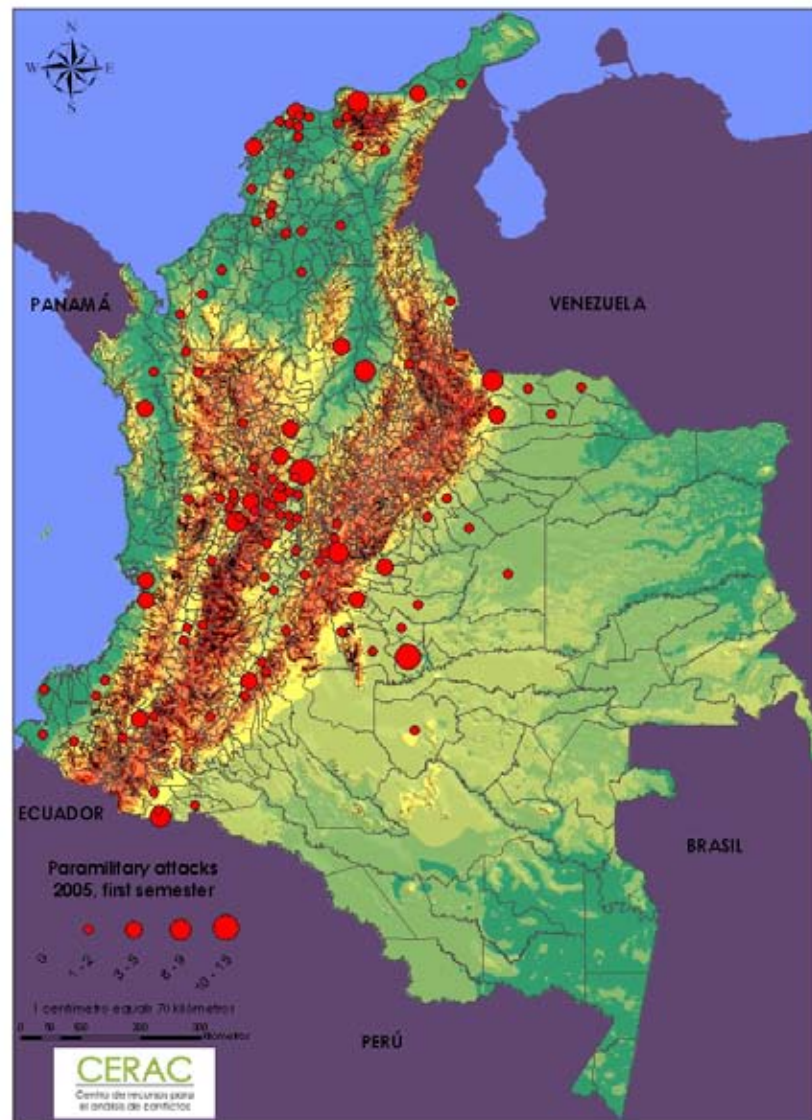
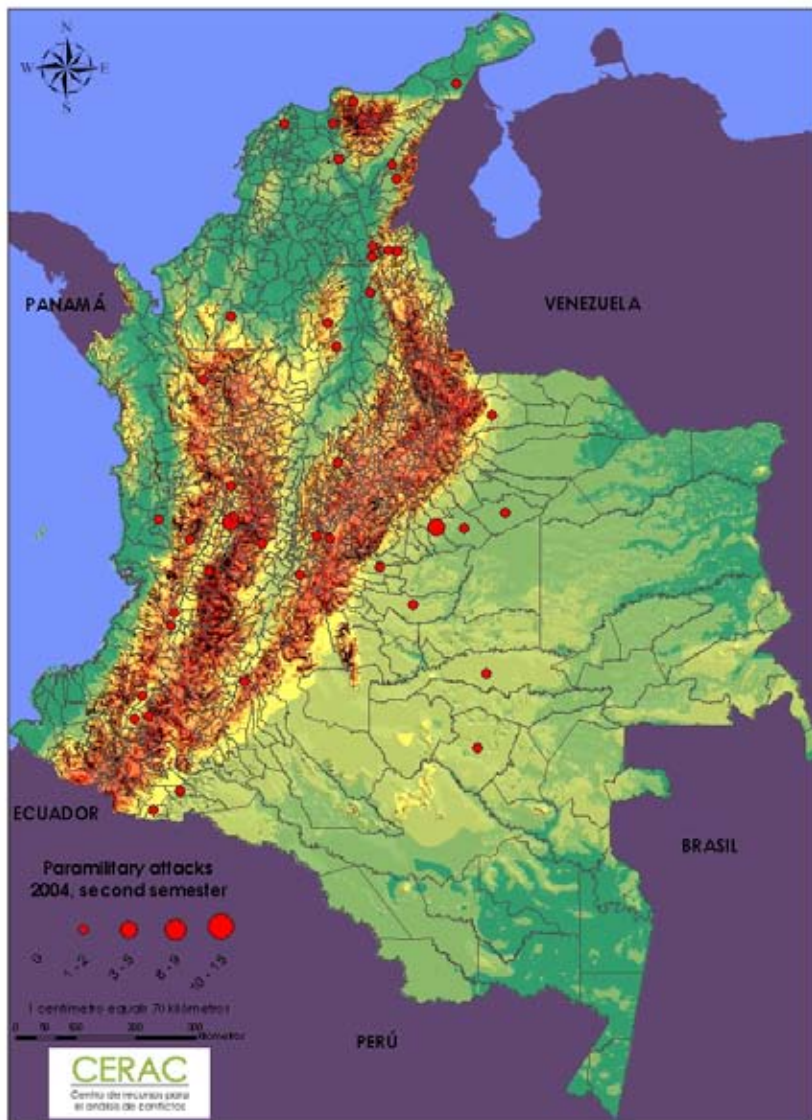
**Number of Paramilitary Attacks by Quarters  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**

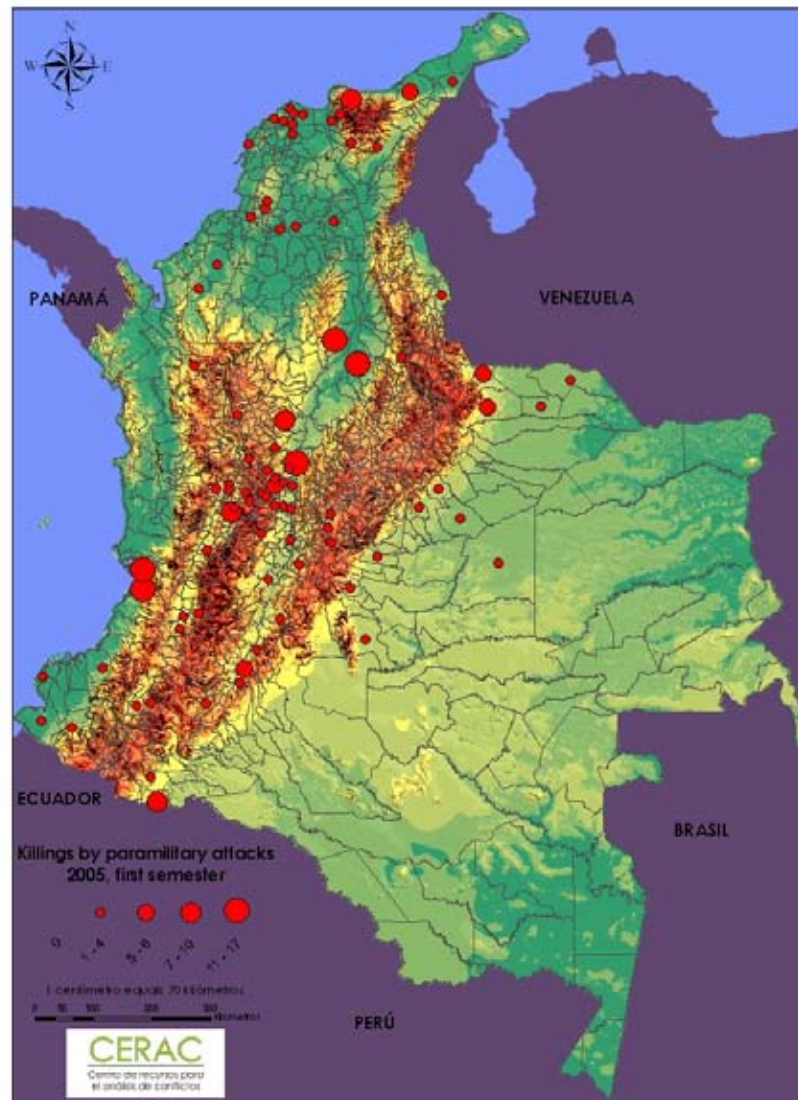
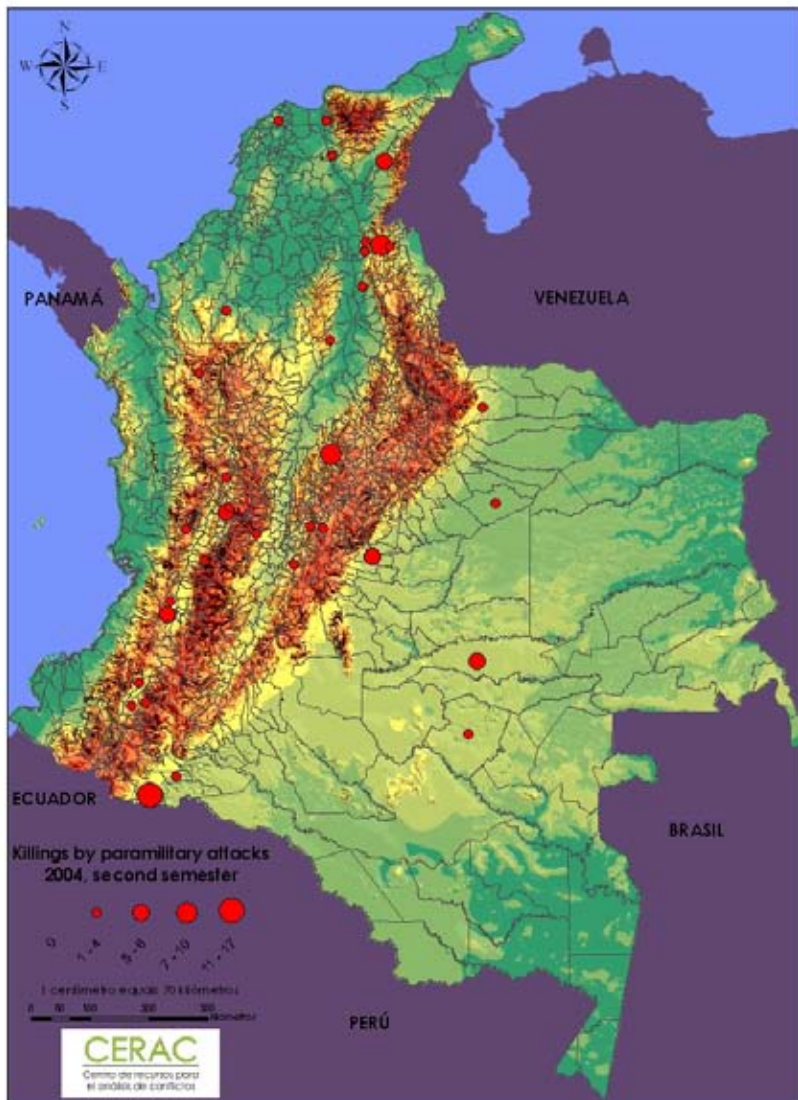




- The drop and rise in the number of paramilitary attacks under Uribe is stunning as is the rise preceding Uribe.
- These changes must be viewed within the context of the next few slides.





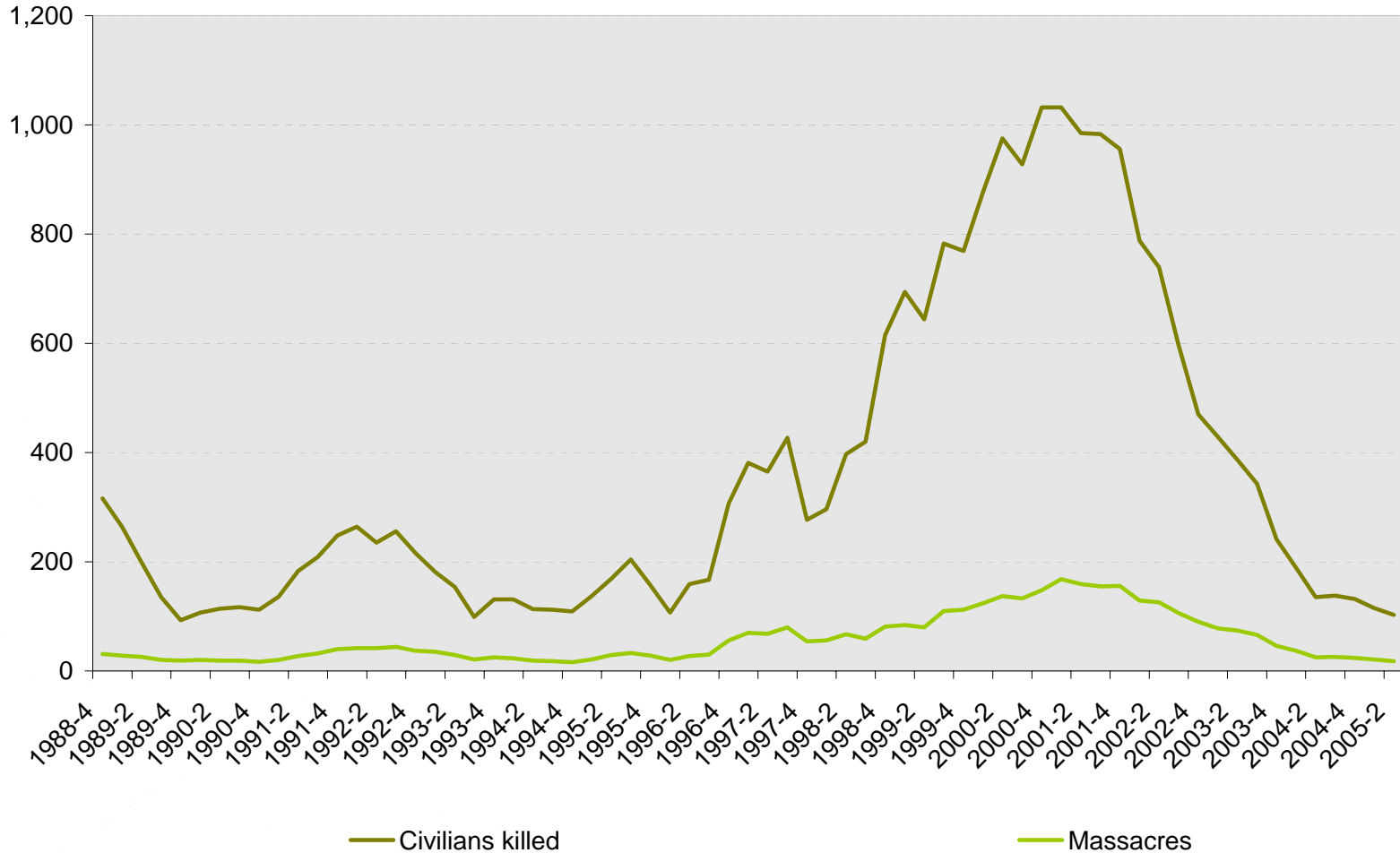




- The maps show that the takeoff in paramilitary activity is happening in many different places.
- This cannot be attributed to the few paramilitary groups that are not negotiating disarmament and demobilization with the government.



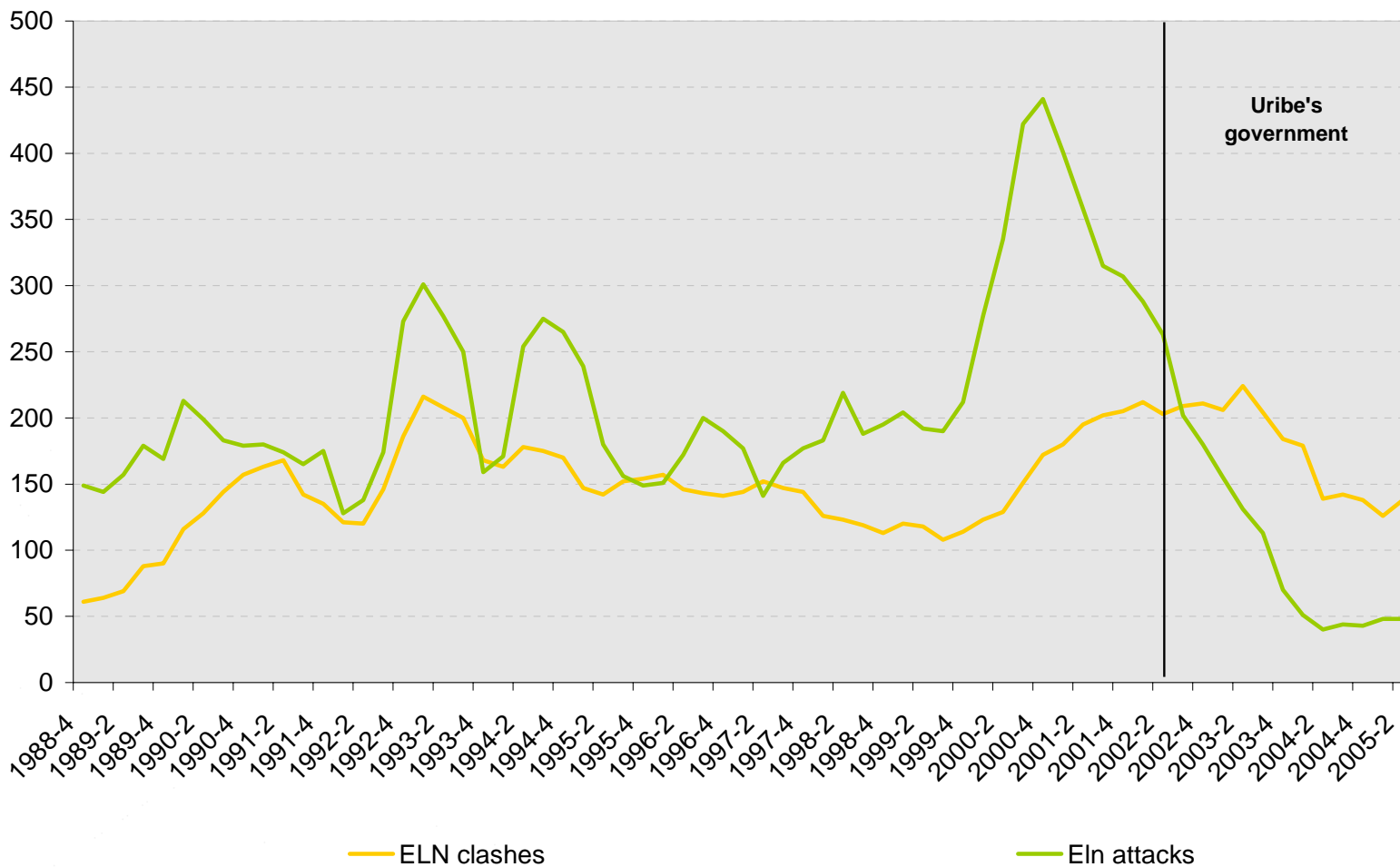
**Civilians Killed in Paramilitary Massacres by Quarters  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**





- 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.
- 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.

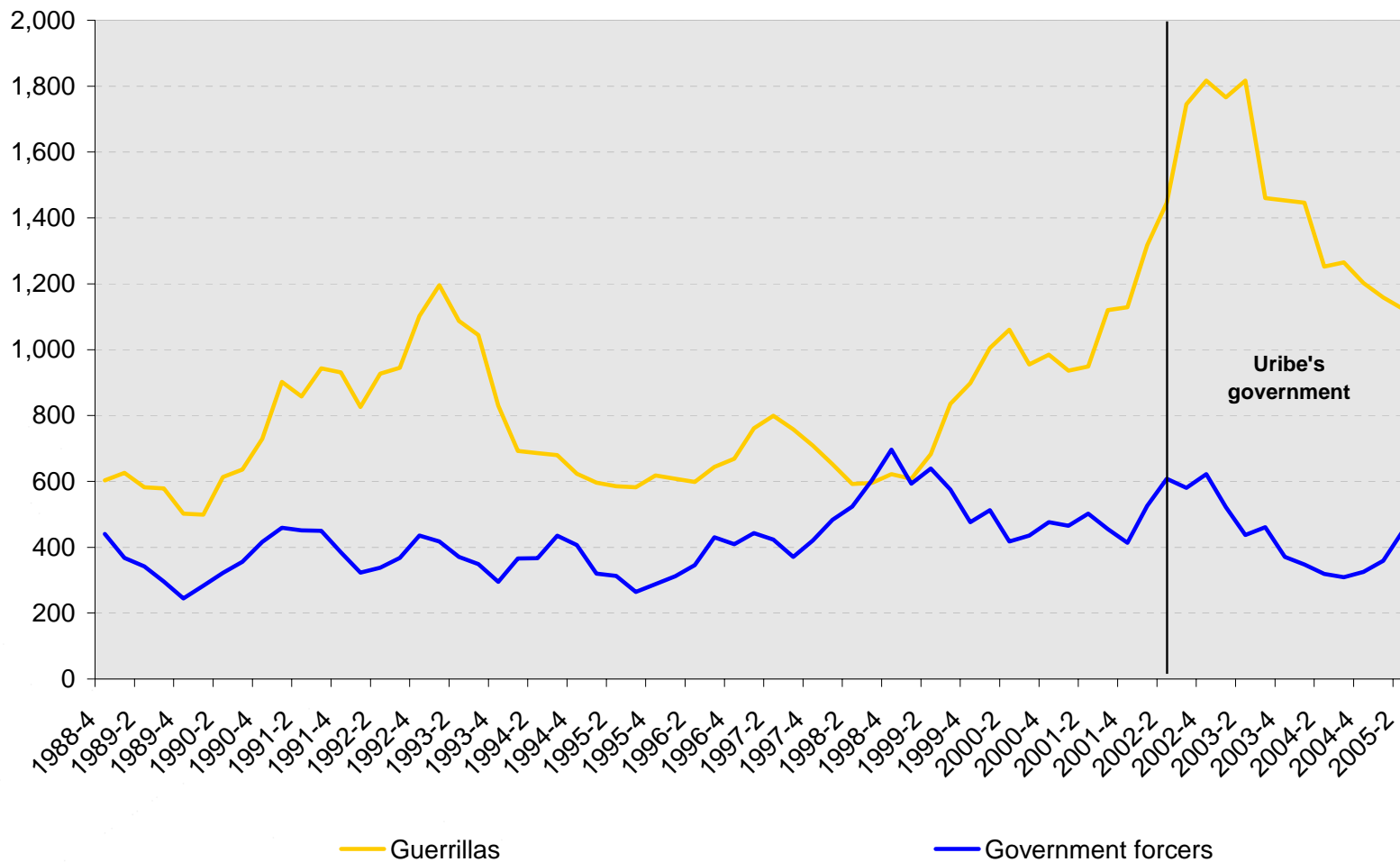
**Number of ELN Clashes and Attacks by Quarters  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**





- 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 kept them engaged.

**Number of Government Forces and Guerrillas Killed by Quarter  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**

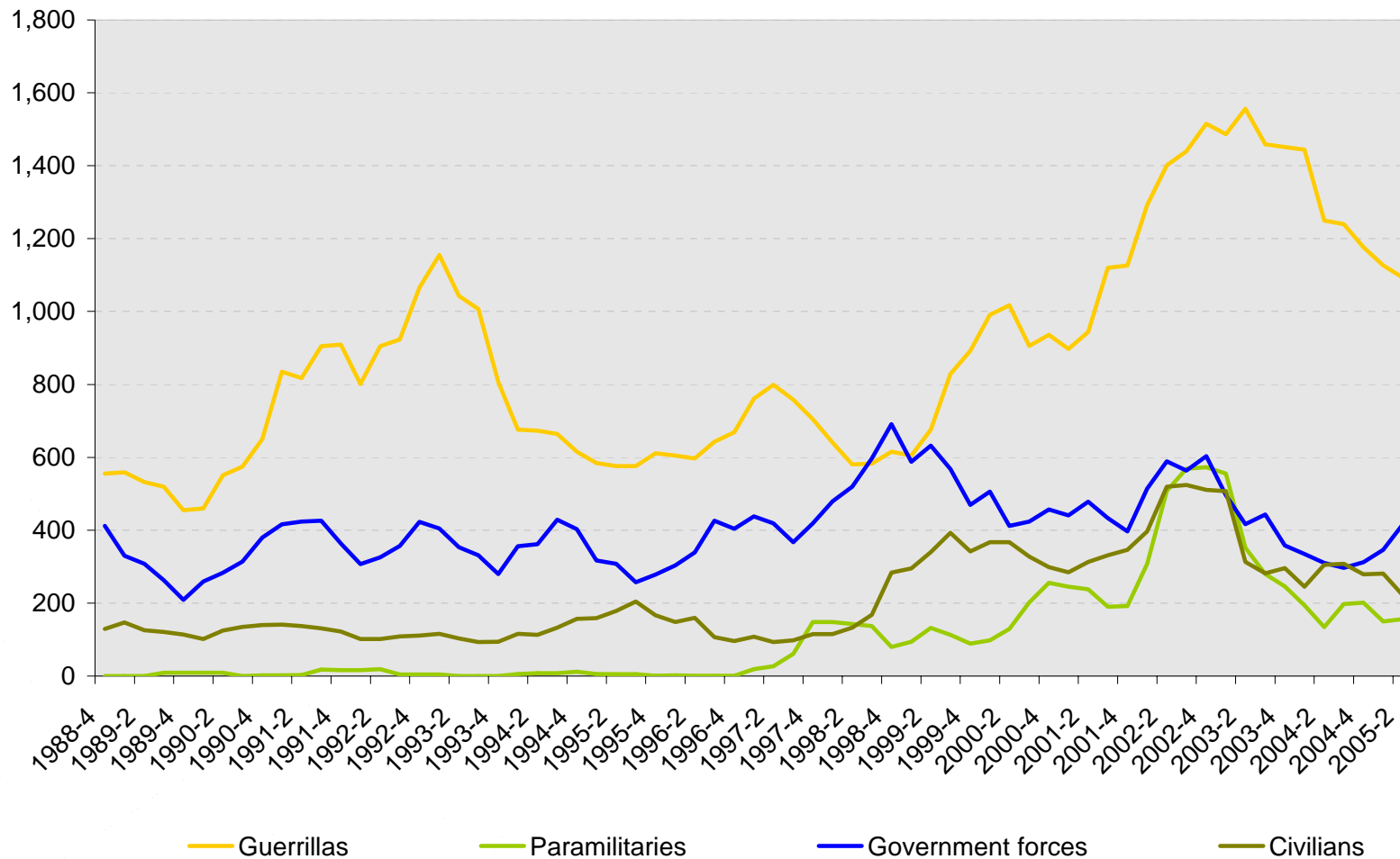






- The gap between killings of guerrillas and killings of government forces has shrunk, but still looks rather wide by historical standards.
- But the unsmoothed picture looks much worse; the ratio of guerrillas killed to government forces killed closed to 1.4 in the second quarter of 2005.
- On the other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

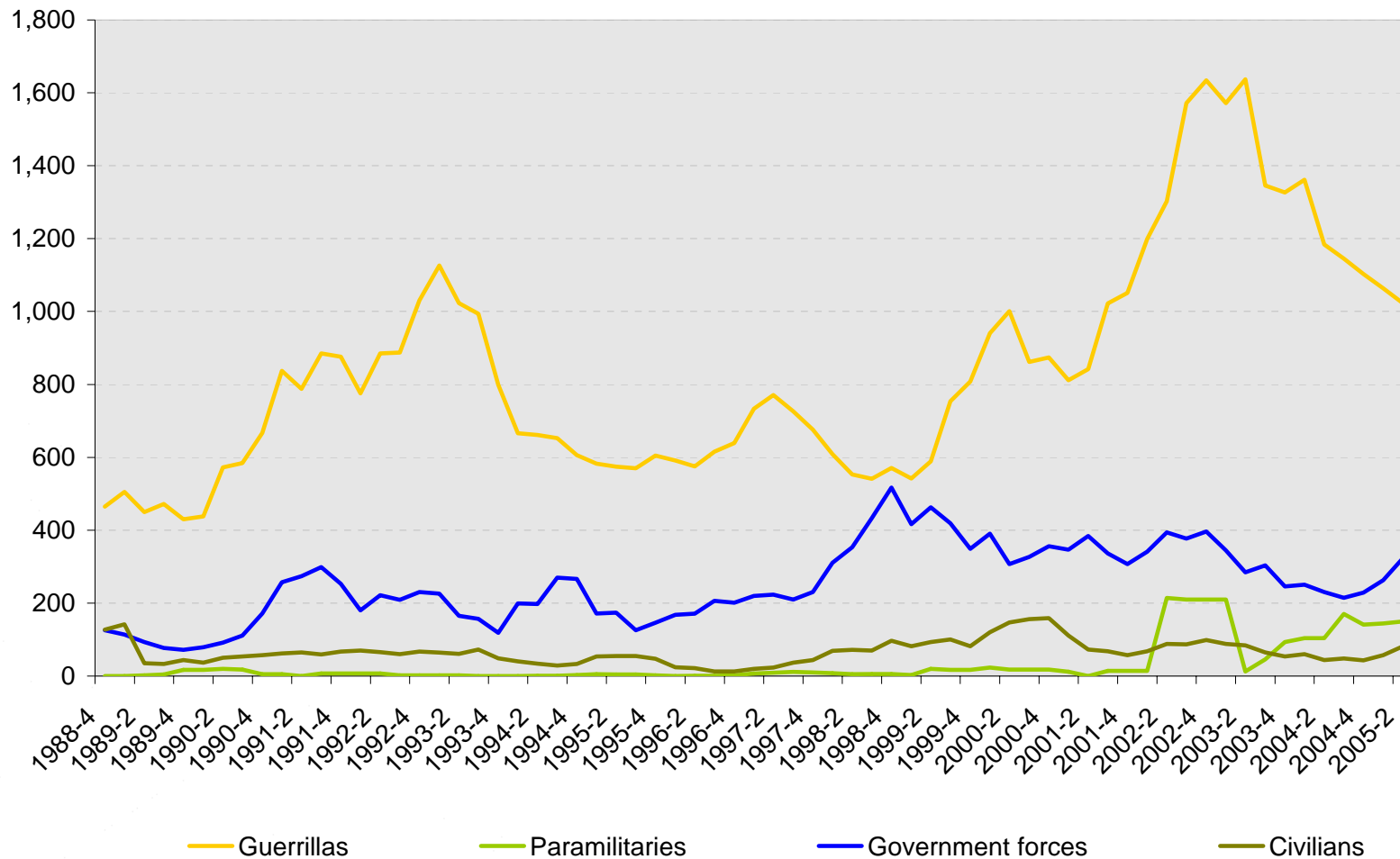
### Killings by Group in Guerrilla Events by Quarter 1988(I) - 2005(II)





- The next set of pictures 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.
- As mentioned above the guerrilla/government killing ratio is declining.

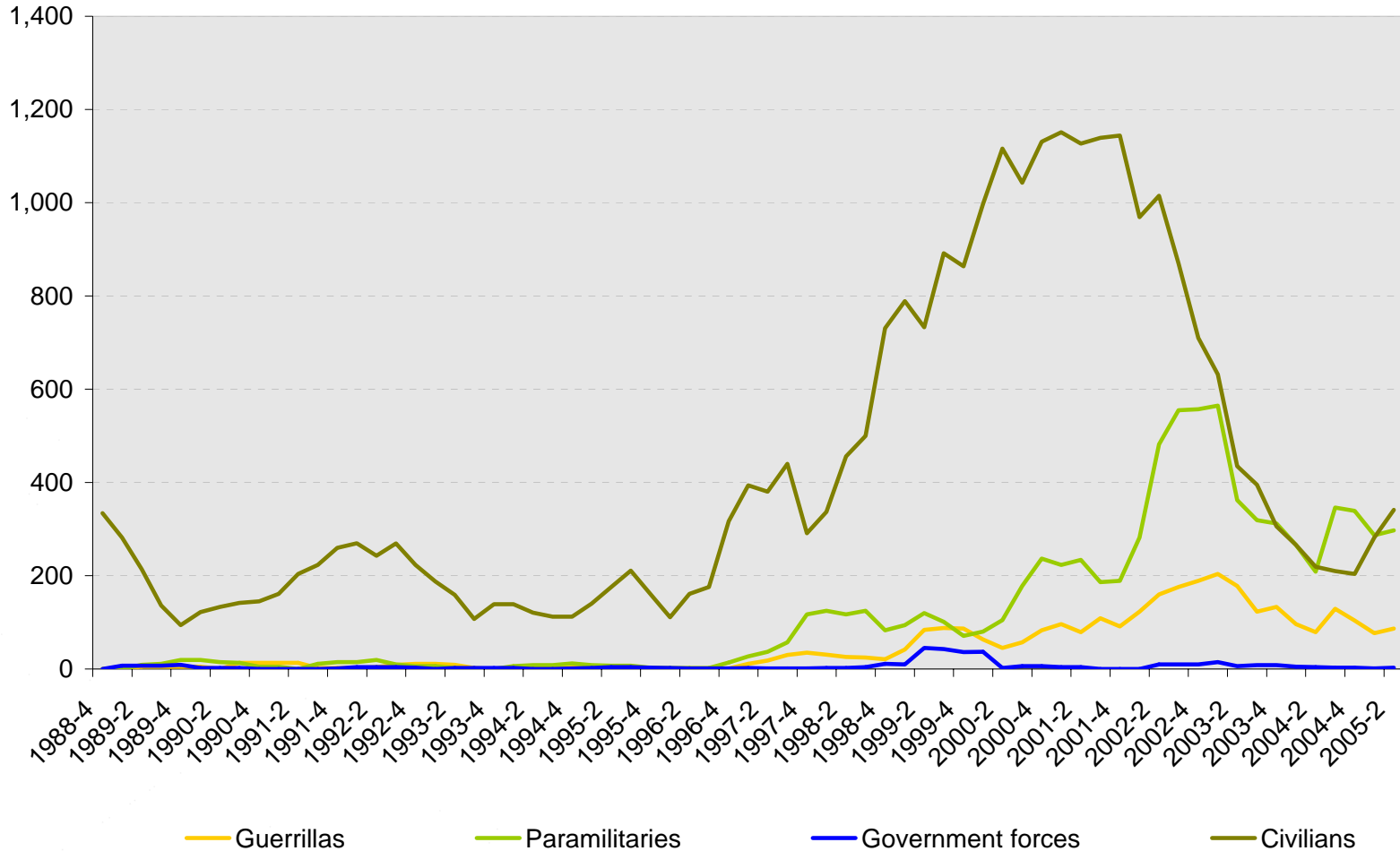
**Killings by Group in Government Events by Quarter  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**





- There was an increase in government killings of civilians in the first half of 2005.
- This government has actually been fighting with the paramilitaries more than previous ones.

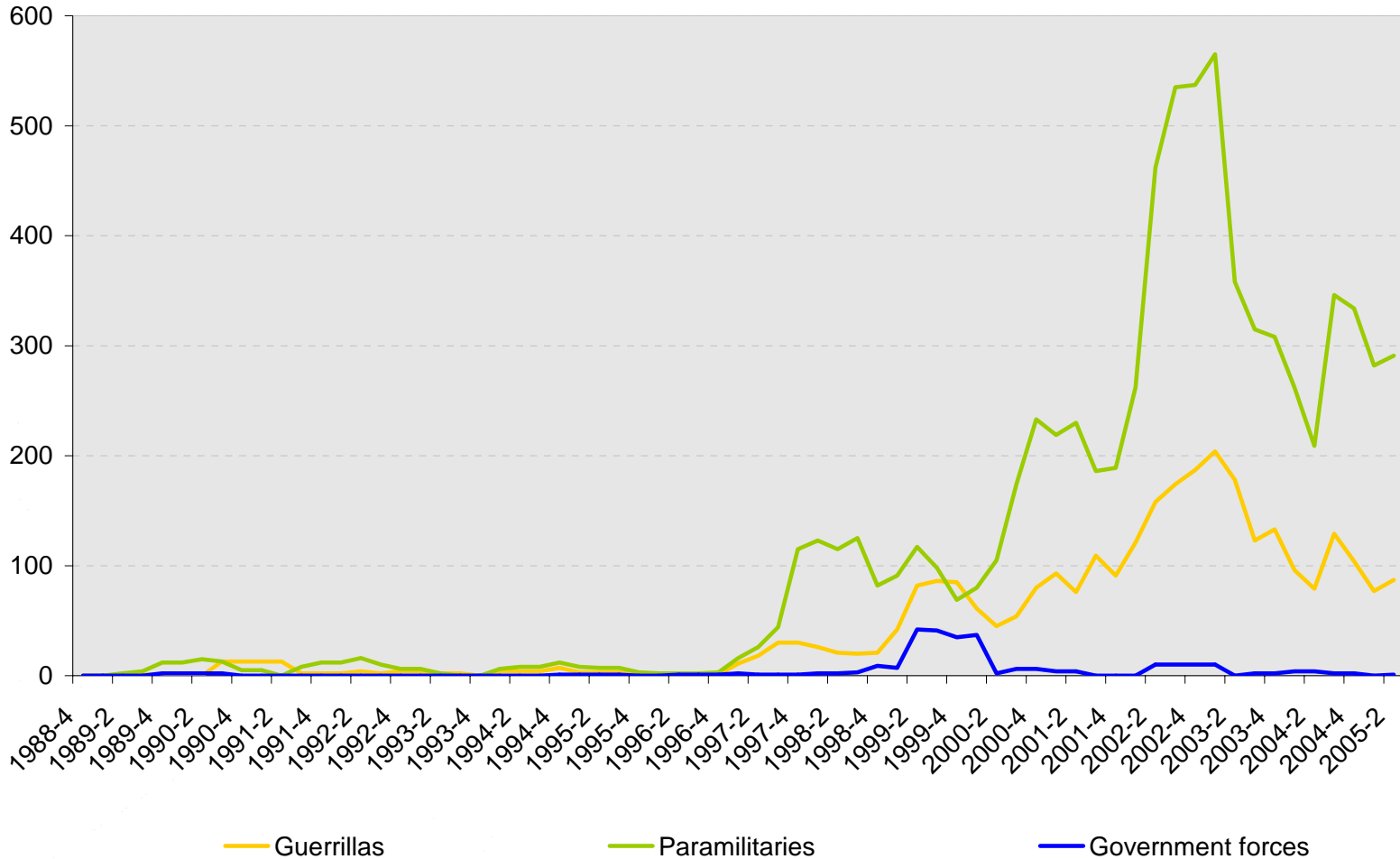
### Killings by Group in Paramilitary Events by Quarter 1988(I) - 2005(II)





- Civilians have been the main victims in paramilitary events.
- Remarkably, the paramilitaries themselves are the second victims.

**Killings by Group in Paramilitary Clashes by Quarters  
1988(I) - 2005(II)**







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



## Big Picture

- Most indicators are moving in the wrong direction although their levels are generally still good compared to the recent past.
- Paramilitary behaviour is 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.



## Big Picture

- Killing of civilians by government forces increased over the last six months.
- Problems have been increasing along the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian borders.