

# Forced migration as a deterrence strategy in civil conflict\*

Paola Palacios<sup>†</sup>

March 14, 2009

## Abstract

The forced rural-urban migration in Colombia is a phenomenon that could be seen as the collateral damage of an armed conflict that takes place mainly in rural areas (i.e. peasants, feeling unsafe in the midst of combat, decide to move to the cities). Nevertheless there is a significant percentage of cases in which the main reason to flee is a direct threat by an armed actor. This paper proposes a possible reason why an illegal armed group displaces population from rural to urban areas. We consider a two stage game in which the central government struggles over the control of a region with the insurgents. In the first stage, rebels have the choice of forcing a proportion of peasants out of the rural areas or not. In the second stage, both players choose the level of military expenditure. It is found that, under certain circumstances, the displaced population could be used by the insurgents as a mean to deter the central government from fighting. This model predicts that the larger the value rebels attached to the contested region (i.e. strategic for the drug business), the higher the proportion of forced migrants. It is also consistent with the idea that if the central government can commit to warfare, then forced migration will be useless for rebels.

---

\*I would like to thank Jean-Paul Azam for his helpful comments and guidance. I am solely responsible for any mistakes and errors.

<sup>†</sup>Toulouse School of Economics, p\_palaci@hotmail.com