

Is Violence Against Union Members in Colombia Systematic and Targeted?

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Agenda for this Presentation:

1. Introduction and Motivation.
2. Stylized Facts: The evolution of violence against union members in Colombia.
3. Empirical Exercise: Does a greater intensity of union activity lead to more violence against union members?
4. Concluding Remarks.

The Debate (I):

- Violence against union members in Colombia has been at the center of a debate for the last few years...
- On the one hand, NGOs and Union Leaders in Colombia and abroad persistently argue that FTAs with Colombia should be blocked because there are no results to be seen from attempts by the current Colombian Government to halt violence against union members in Colombia:

“Most of the violence against trade unionists is a result of the victims normal union activities. While the Colombian government claims that most of the violence against trade unions is a byproduct of the armed conflict, the Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS), a respected NGO that provides training and support to the Colombian labor movement, says that the majority of the anti-union violence that takes place in Colombia is in response to the victims' normal union activities...” (see USLEAP, 2008).

The Debate (II):

- **The issue of violence against union members in Colombia even reached the previous U.S. presidential campaign:**
 - In a debate in New York, President Obama pointed to abuses in Colombia as the reason for his opposition to the FTA with Colombia, including labor leaders he said are being targets for assassination on a consistent basis.
- **On its part, the Colombian government defends itself, explaining that huge efforts have been made in order to protect unionists:**
 - In a response to a US congressman, President Uribe recently argued that huge efforts have been made in order to halt violence against union members in Colombia.
More precisely, he argued that there are about 6,000 people in Colombia receiving personal protection. Of these, a fourth of them (1,500) are union members.

The Problem (and the questions to be answered):

- The debate goes on, with many points of view contributing to the discussions, while FTAs continue to be blocked.
- However, little of a systematic nature is known about the evolution over time (and the determinants) of violence against union members in Colombia.
- More precisely, this study aims to respond the following questions:
 - i. What are the specific indicators for violence against union members in Colombia?
 - ii. Has there been any progress in solving this problem?
 - iii. Can the killings of union members in Colombia be explained by their involvement in union activities?
 - iv. What are the main determinants of violence against union members in Colombia?

What We Do in This Paper...

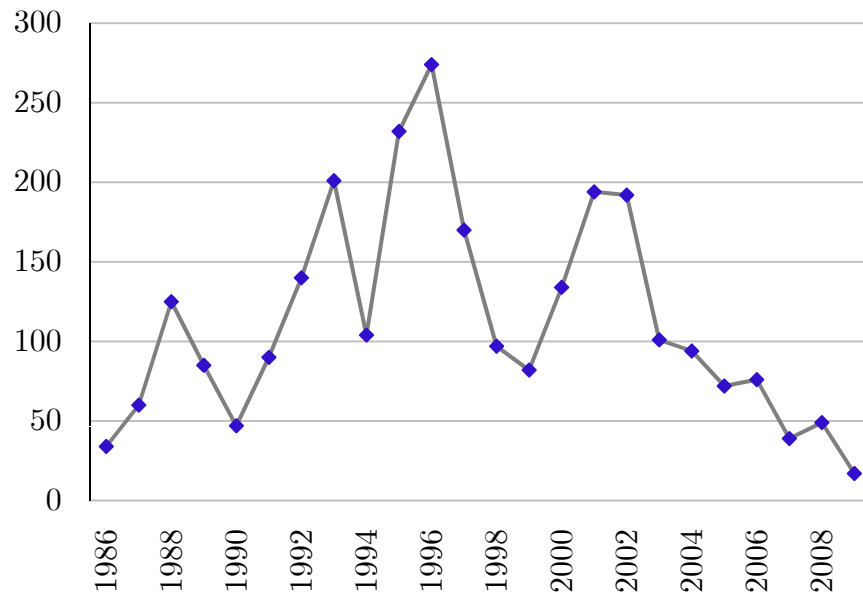
- Using different data sources (ENS – the Unions' NGO, and the Colombian Govt.), we present the main stylized facts related to the evolution of violence against union members in Colombia during the last 15-20 years.
- We compare the evolution of violence against union members with the evolution of violence against the total population in Colombia and against other vulnerable groups (journalists, councilmen, mayors, and teachers).
- We use panel data evidence for Colombian States between 2000 and 2008 in order to study the determinants of violence against union members in Colombia.
- In particular we are interested in testing the claim that a greater intensity of union activity leads to more violence against union members in Colombia.

Preview of the Main Findings...

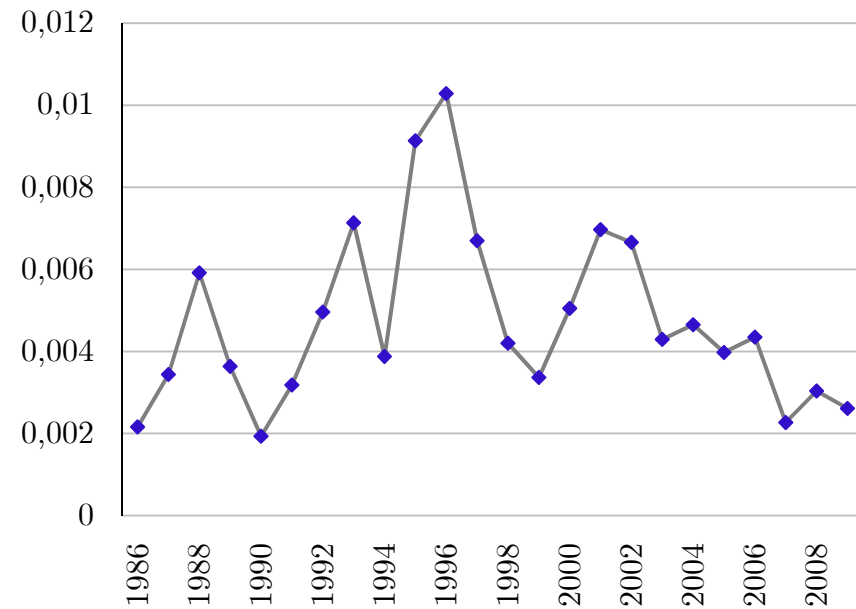
- Independently of the data source used - the Unions' NGO (Escuela Nacional Sindical) or the Colombian Government – violence against union members in Colombia has steadily declined over the last 7 or 8 years.
- In fact, violence against union members has decreased at a steeper rate than violence against the total population and against other vulnerable groups.
- Both, the amount of government resources allocated to protecting union members and the number of union members protected, have increased steadily over the last 7 or 8 years.
- Using different data sources, estimation strategies, and time periods, we find no statistical evidence supporting the claim that more union activity (of any type) leads to more violence against union members.

Stylized Facts (I):

**Union member homicides in Colombia
1986-2008**



**Number of union member homicides/
Number of total homicides
1986-2008**



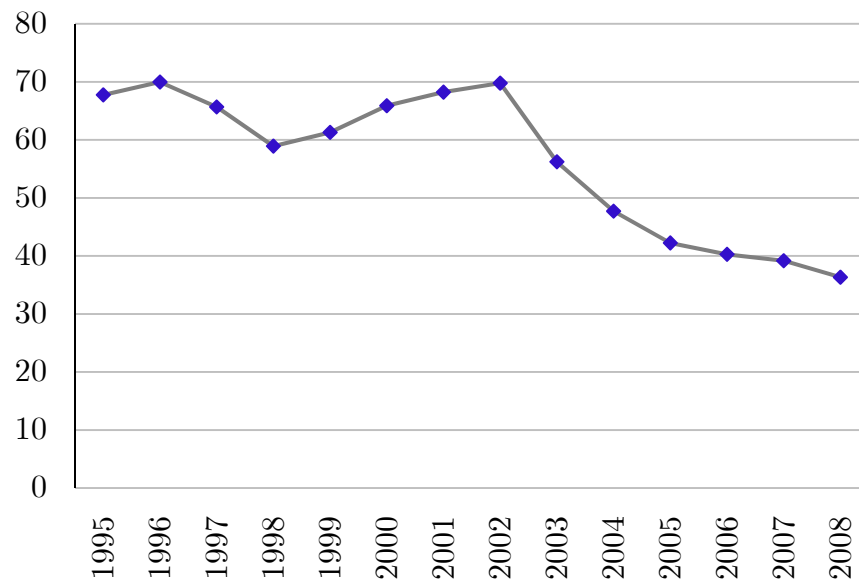
Source: Authors' calculation based on data from Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS), 2009.

Stylized Facts (II):

Homicide rate in Colombia

1995-2008

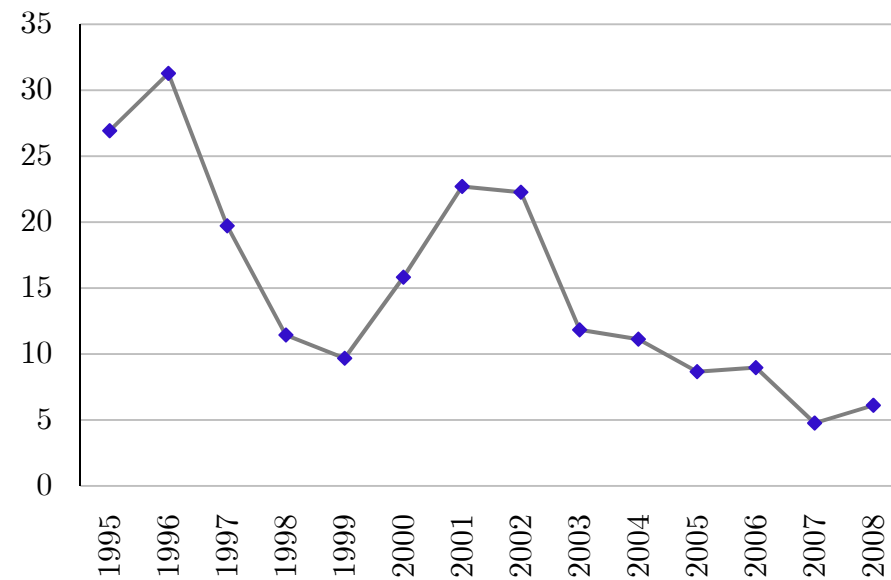
(Number of homicides per 100,000 inhab)



Homicide rate for union members

1995-2008

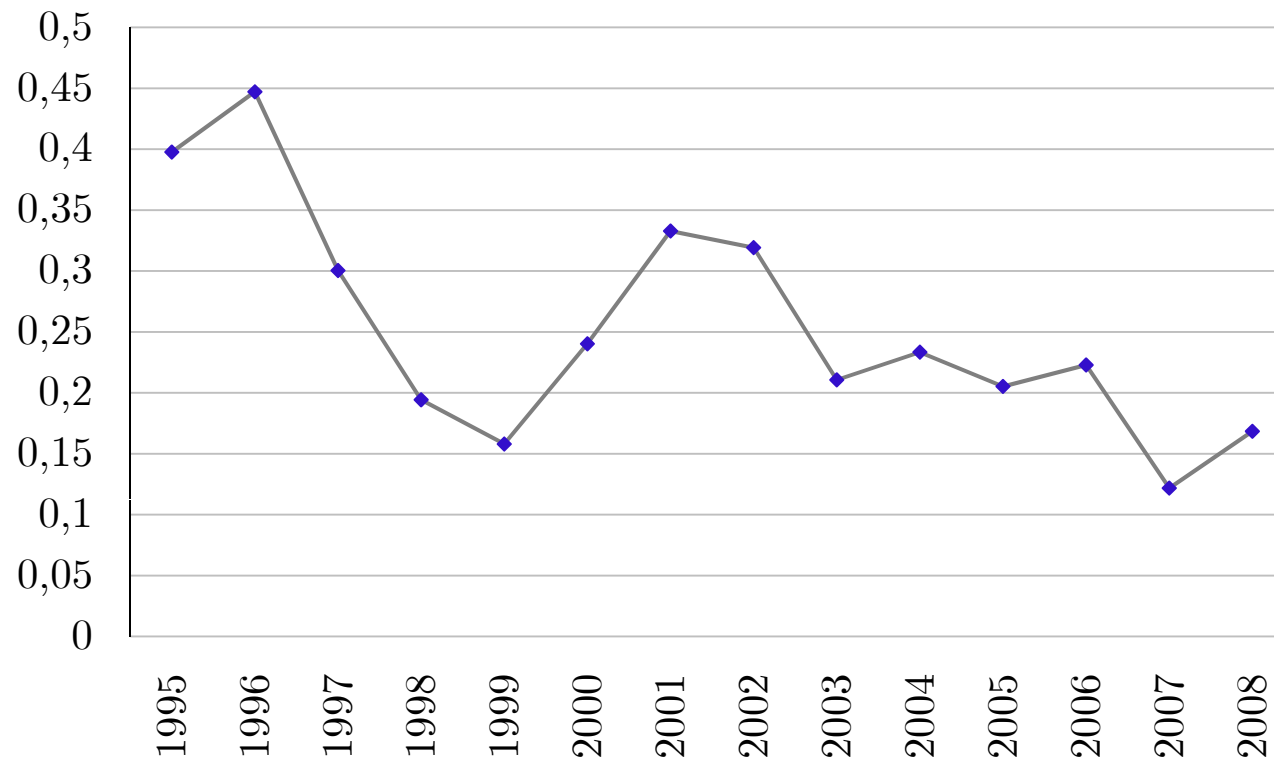
(Number of U.M. homicides per 100,000 unionists)



Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the National Police, Office of the Vice President (2009), DANE (National Statistics Department), and ENS (2009).

Stylized Facts (III):

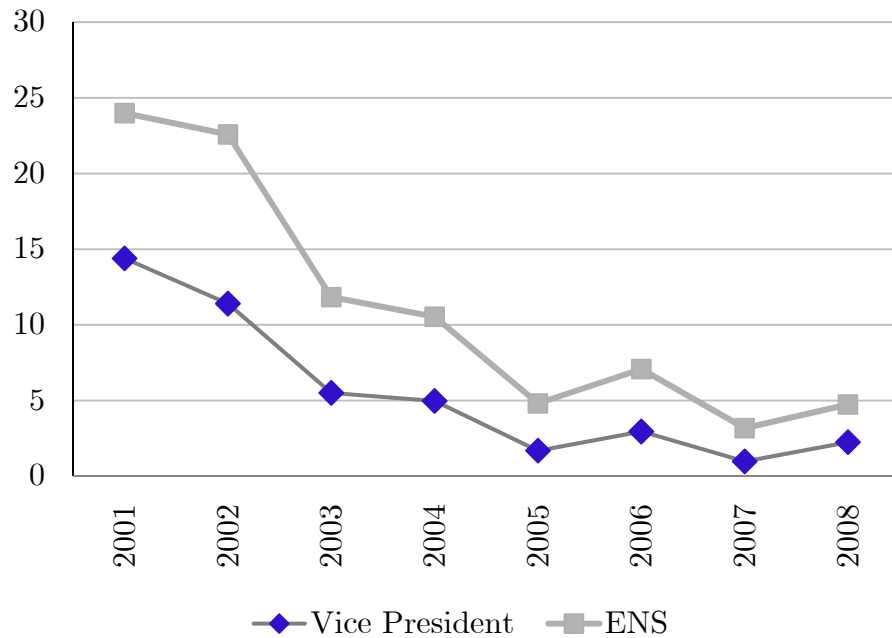
Union member homicide rate / total homicide rate
1995-2008



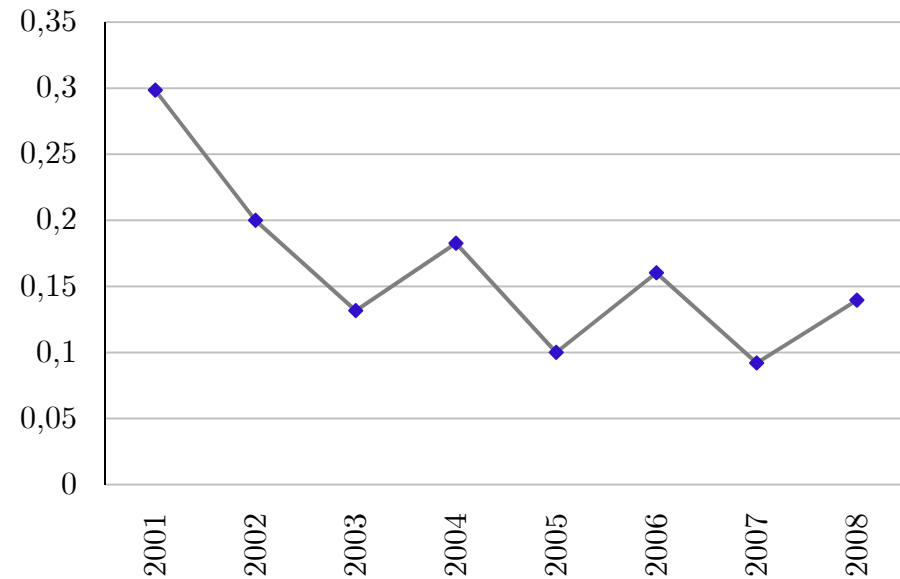
Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the National Police (2008), Office of the Vice President (2009), DANE, and ENS (2009).

Stylized Facts (IV):

Unionists' homicide rate in Colombia 2001-2008



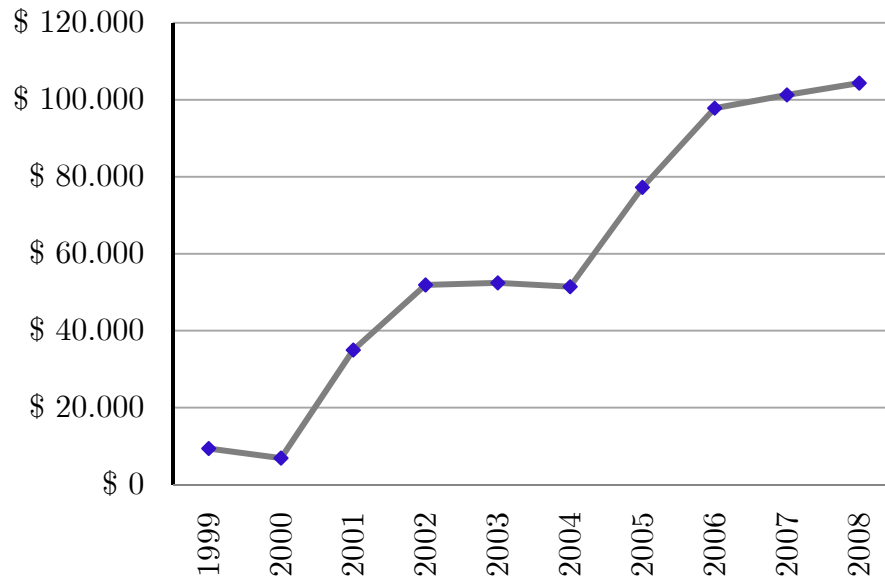
Unionists' homicides/total homicides of vulnerable groups in Colombia 2001-2008



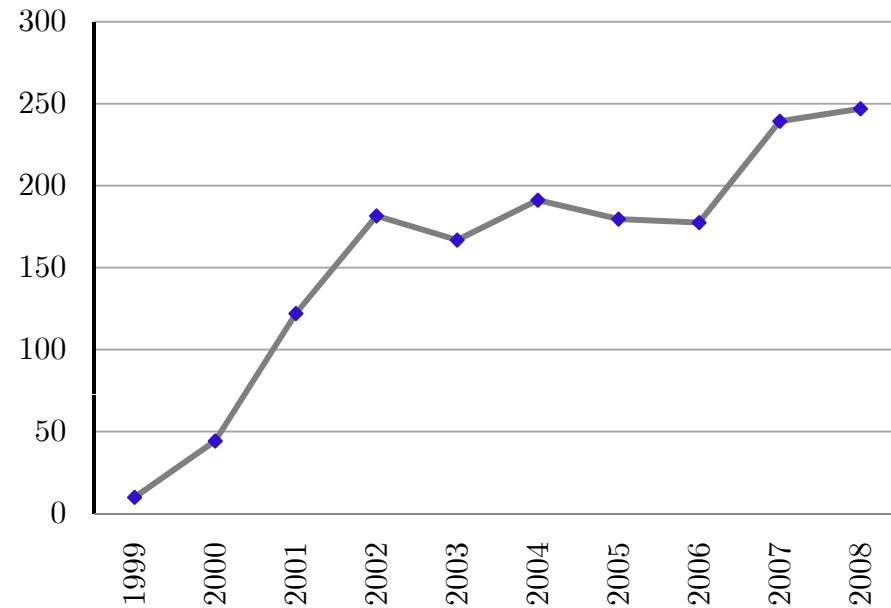
Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the Office of the Vice President (2009), and ENS (2009).

Stylized Facts (V):

**Amount of Govt. resources invested to protect unionists
1999-2008**
(2009 real \$COP per union member)



**Number of unionists with Government protection
1999-2008**
(Number per 100,000 unionists)



Source: Authors' calculation based on data from the Ministry of Labor (MPS) (2009); and ENS, 2009.

Empirical Exercise:

The empirical exercise:

In order to test the hypothesis that a greater intensity of union activity leads to more violence against union members, we use different econometric techniques that allow us to estimate the **causal impact**, if any, **of the intensity union activity on the degree of violence against union members.**

Data used:

We use a panel of Colombian States that contains data on: violence against union members, different dimensions of union activity, the homicide rate for the total population, income per capita, and proxy variables for government presence and protection, and paramilitary and guerrilla presence.

Data: Union activity.

Our measures of the intensity of union activity:

Both, The *Escuela Nacional Sindical* (ENS) – the Unions' NGO - and the Ministry of Labor (ML) report data on different types of union activity.

We classify these activities into two groups:

1. **Type I Union activity:** wage agreements and negotiations between firms and unions.
2. **Type II Union activity :** active acts of protest by unions, such as strikes, work stoppages, marches, etc.

→ In order to control for the fact that larger States, which normally tend to have more unionists and thus more union activity of either type, we construct **measures of union activity per 100,000 union members** (e.g. a measure of the intensity of union activity per capita).

Data: Violence against union members (and “controls”).

Our measure of the degree of violence against union members:

Again, both The *Escuela Nacional Sindical* (ENS) – the Unions’ NGO - and the Ministry of Labor (ML) report data on the number of homicides of union members at the State level.

With these figures and the number of union members by State and year we construct the **homicide rate for union members (# of union member homicides per 100,000 union members)** for each State and for each year between 2000 and 2008.

Other “controls” (e.g. determinants of violence against union members):

Level of economic development (GDP per capita), general level of violence (homicide rate for the total population), State presence (# of police arrests per capita), guerrilla and paramilitary presence (# of attacks of each group per capita).

Empirical Strategy: Main hypothesis to be tested.

The claim (hypothesis) that we want to test:

A greater intensity of union activity leads to more violence against union members.

Or, in the words of an NGO (US Labor Education in the Americas Project, USLEAP, 2008):

“Most of the violence against trade unionists is a result of the victims normal union activities”

“... the majority of the anti-union violence that takes place in Colombia is in response to the victims' normal union activities...”

Empirical Test of the Main Hypothesis:

- If this claim (hypothesis) is indeed true, one should find a positive and significant **causal effect** of the intensity of union activity on the degree of violence against union members.
- Using the available data we test the following econometric specification:

$$HRUM_{s,t} = c + \gamma UA_{s,t} + \beta X_{s,t} + \varepsilon_{s,t}$$

Where:

$HRUM_{s,t}$: Homicide rate of union members in State s and year t .

$UA_{s,t}$: Union activity in State s and year t .

$X_{s,t}$: Set of controls (GDP pc, general level of violence, State protection, etc) in State s and year t .

Empirical Estimation: Potential problems and solutions.

- **Potential endogeneity problem:** it can be argued that the intensity of union activity is in fact affected (e.g. endogenous) by the degree of violence against union members...
 - If this is indeed true, then the problem should be solved in order to estimate the **causal effect** of union activity on violence against union members (if any).
- **Possible Solutions:**
 - i. Use the lagged value of union activity when estimating the model (as it would be hard to argue that more violence against union members in year t affects union activity in year $t-1$).
 - ii. Use a (well known) instrumental variable approach (IV) (where one “instruments” the intensity of union activity using variables that affect this variable but are not, affected by the degree of violence against union members).

Results (I): The effect of type I UA on violence against union members

Table 2e

Second stage

IV estimation (instruments for Type I union activity : % of full time employees and social security payments per capita) (ENS)

Dependant variable: Unionists homicide rate

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Type I union activity	-0.021** (0.010)	-0.020* (0.010)	-0.012 (0.010)	-0.011 (0.009)	-0.010 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.008)	0.057 (0.051)
Total homicide rate		0.144** (0.068)	0.147** (0.065)	0.150** (0.069)	0.113** (0.051)	0.113* (0.059)	0.112* (0.060)	0.015 (0.086)
GDP pc			-1.689* (0.874)	-1.413* (0.744)	-0.981 (0.783)	-1.052 (0.789)	-0.768 (0.905)	2.093 (2.923)
Police arrests					0.470 (0.346)	0.372 (0.587)	0.305 (0.556)	0.400 (0.621)
Guerrilla presence						-0.038 (1.856)	1.015 (2.406)	-2.473 (3.797)
Paramilitary presence						4.409 (6.560)	6.397 (13.289)	0.257 (9.113)
Union act *guerrilla presence							-0.052 (0.060)	-0.014 (0.105)
Union act *paramilitary presence							0.011 (0.206)	0.120 (0.189)
Constant	13.459*** (1.754)	7.900*** (2.563)	14.697*** (3.932)	17.946*** (3.853)	13.308** (5.220)	13.026** (5.141)	12.544** (5.775)	-6.979 (16.298)
Year dummy variables	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State dummy variables	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	88	88	88	88	88	88	88	88
R-squared	0.002	0.092	0.175	0.250	0.296	0.306	0.274	0.486

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Results (II): The effect of type II UA on violence against union members

Table 3e

Second stage

IV estimation (instruments for Type II union activity: Industrial energy consumption pc and # of industrial establishments per capita) (MPS)

Dependant variable: Unionists homicide rate

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Type II union activity	0.076*** (0.029)	0.051* (0.027)	0.044 (0.027)	0.036 (0.024)	0.010 (0.030)	-0.055 (0.035)	-0.047 (0.029)	-0.040 (0.151)
Total homicide rate		0.238*** (0.056)	0.275*** (0.060)	0.250*** (0.056)	0.230*** (0.053)	0.207*** (0.066)	0.198*** (0.062)	0.134 (0.135)
GDP pc			-1.074*** (0.353)	-1.050*** (0.376)	-1.430*** (0.522)	-3.535*** (1.130)	-2.978 (2.094)	7.627 (18.865)
Police arrests					0.286 (0.217)	0.223 (0.246)	0.118 (0.293)	0.128 (0.400)
Guerrilla presence						2.023 (1.864)	-0.121 (5.653)	6.463 (7.172)
Paramilitary presence						3.155* (1.776)	1.663 (10.836)	-6.856 (17.985)
Union act *guerrilla presence							0.005 (0.014)	-0.010 (0.016)
Union act *paramilitary presence							0.011 (0.048)	0.042 (0.068)
Constant	5.253 (5.530)	-1.931 (4.612)	2.422 (4.947)	3.527 (8.219)	10.337 (8.883)	29.956*** (10.847)	27.009*** (10.052)	-30.336 (88.584)
Year dummy variables	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State dummy variables	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
R-squared	0,0662	0.080	0.147	0.313	0.392	0.129	0.303	0.270

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The Empirical Results in a Few Words

Using different estimation methods, time periods, data sources, and types of union activity...

Main result:

- i. We find no statistical evidence supporting the claim that a greater intensity of union activity leads to more violence against union members.

Other results:

- i. We find that in those States where there is more violence and less economic development, there is more violence against union members.
- ii. Neither guerrilla or paramilitary presence seem to affect violence against union members.

Concluding Remarks (I)

- This paper studies the evolution and determinants of violence against union members in Colombia for the 2000 - 2008 period.
- Using different data sources we show that, contrary to the claim used by different NGOs and union members (in Colombia and abroad), there has been a steady decline of violence against union members during the last 8 years.
- We find no statistical evidence supporting the claim that “... *the majority of the anti-union violence that takes place in Colombia is in response to the victims' normal union activities...*”
- The previous results suggest that, on average, violence against union members in Colombia is neither systematic nor targeted.

Concluding Remarks (II)

- Of course, any murder is a very serious matter and more so when the driving motivation for the crime is the victim's ideological or political stance.
- However, an evaluation of the progress made in confronting such a serious problem as violence against union members in Colombia must necessarily look at the figures and the statistical evidence, and study specific indicators for the results.
- This is particularly so if the conclusions of such an assessment are to be used to block important economic reforms such as the Free Trade Agreements.

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