

A wide-angle historical painting depicting a massive battle scene, likely the Battle of Borodino. The foreground shows a vast field of combat, with soldiers in blue and red uniforms engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Smoke and fire are billowing across the sky and ground. In the background, a large stone fortification is visible, with soldiers on its walls. The overall atmosphere is one of chaos and destruction.

# Why displacement? Colombia

POL 126

Prof. Juan Tellez  
Spring 2022

# TODAY

Early history

The land question

The drug trade

# Drone pilots

**<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/09/podcasts/the-daily/drones-airstrikes-military-ptsd.html>**

# Colombia - early history



# The world's oldest war

1964 – ???

200k+ dead,  
6+ million displaced

Four things:

The (left-wing) guerrillas

The (right-wing) paramilitaries



Land

Coca

# Independence

Spanish empire collapses,  
Colombia independent

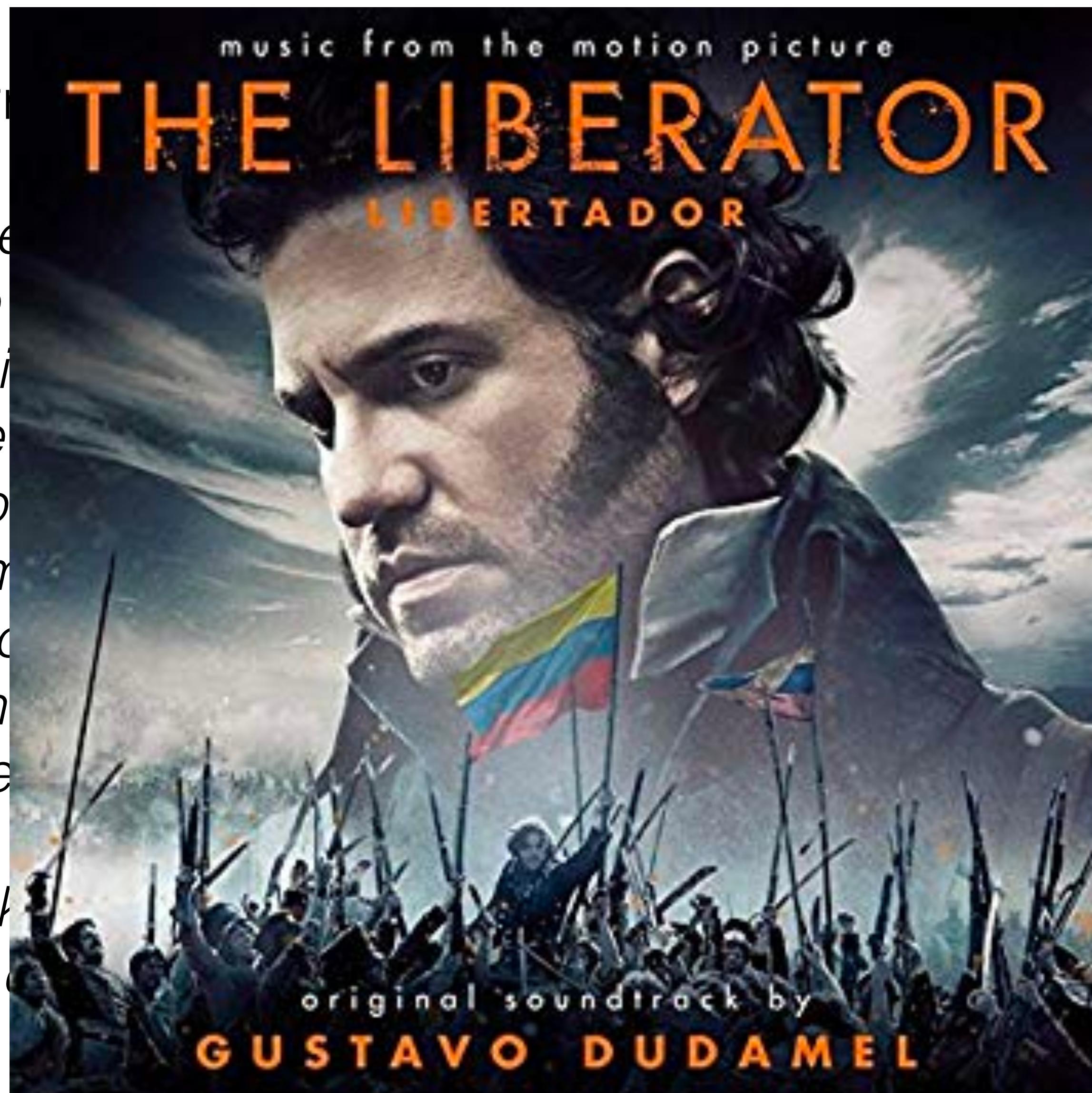


Simon Bolívar, Latin America's  
“George Washington” but better

# Manuela Saenz

Letter explaining to cur

*"You, sir, are an excellent  
only regret that you are  
you would honor Bolivia  
honorable because he  
do not live by social con  
us. So leave me be, n  
again in Heaven, but no  
boring man. Up there in  
be so English, because  
you people, who make  
without grace--who walk  
laughing...but*



Manuela Saenz

# Early politics

In LA, new republics hold elections between:

Liberals  
(think: libertarian)

Conservatives  
(think: monarchists)

Free trade, civil liberties

Tradition, church

# Puzzle I: A history of violence



In Colombia, electoral competition → violence

Winning party uses state to attack loser (rinse, repeat)



Next time: the new, winning party seeks revenge (rinse, repeat)



Puzzle: why doesn't this happen in the US?

# Why violence?

One theory: “winner-take-all” system → abuse

USA (today)

President

Congress

Governors,  
mayors

Cabinet,  
executive

Colombia (back then)

President

Congress

Governors,  
mayors

Cabinet,  
executive

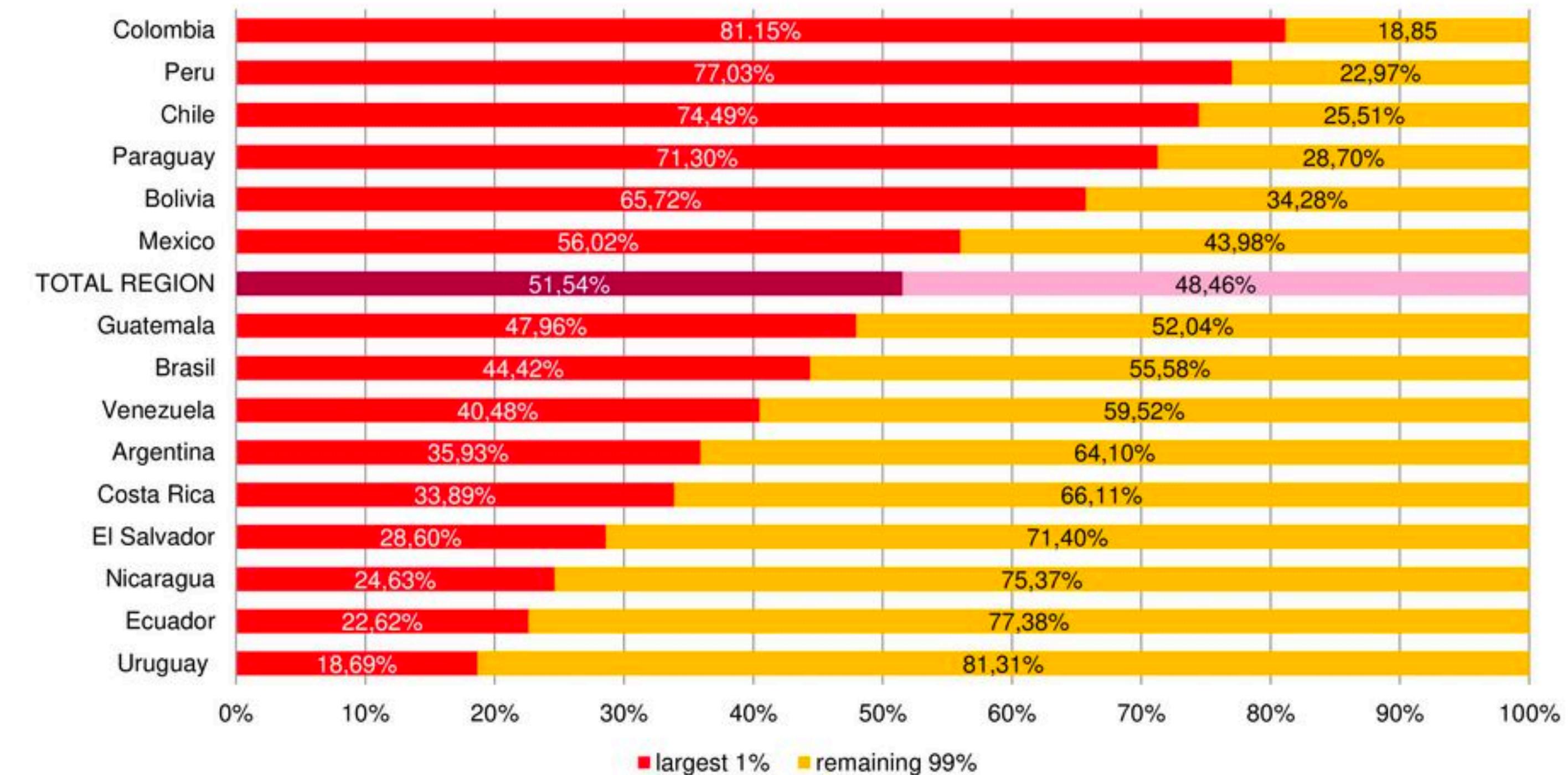
# The land question

# The land problem

Highly **unequal** ownership  
of land in Colombia  
(and elsewhere)

Why is **land** so important  
in the developing world?

## % OF LAND HELD BY LARGEST 1% OF FARMS IN LATIN AMERICA

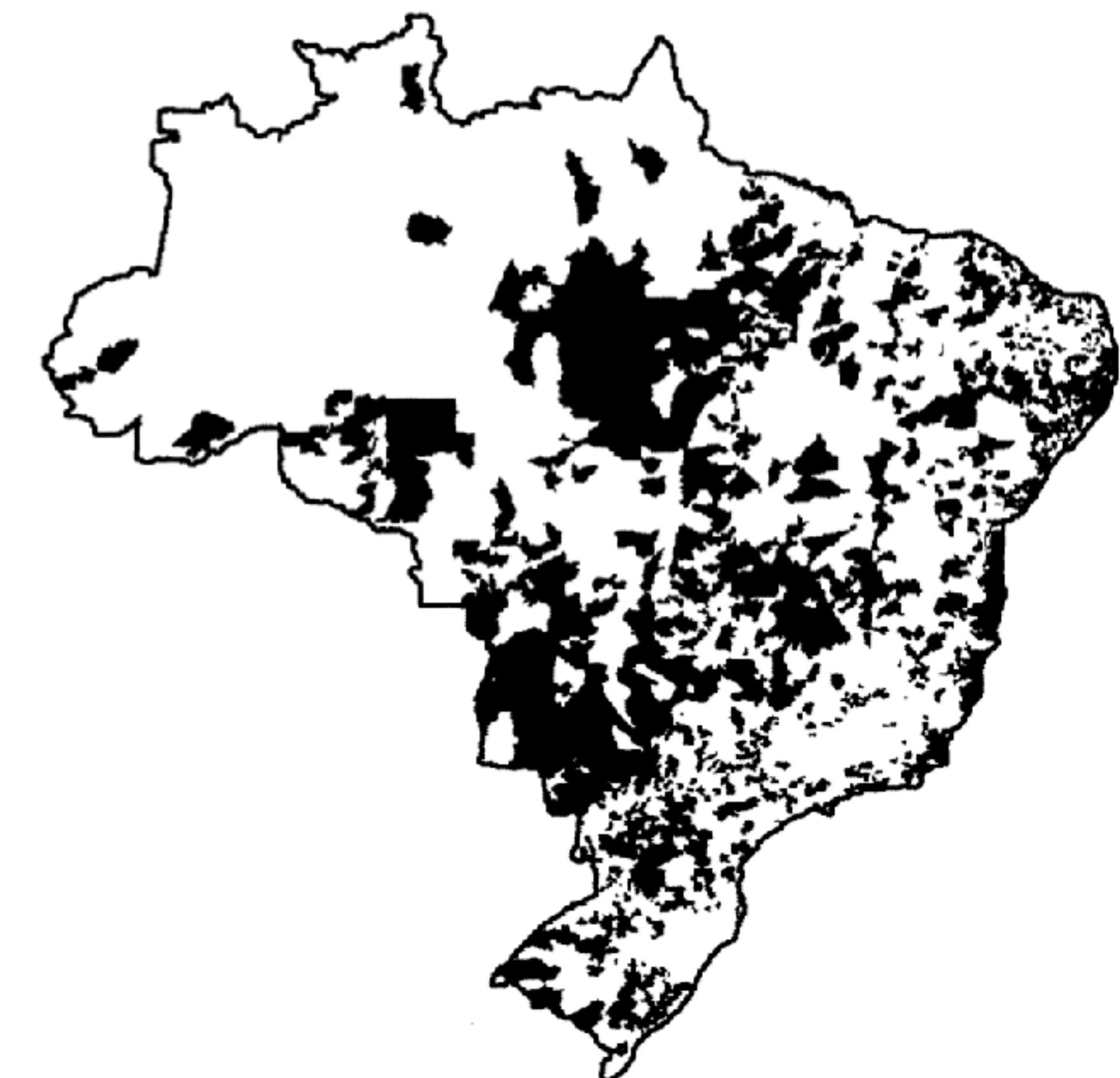


# Land and conflict

Strong association  
between land inequality  
and conflict all over the  
world

Why **land**, as opposed to  
other assets?

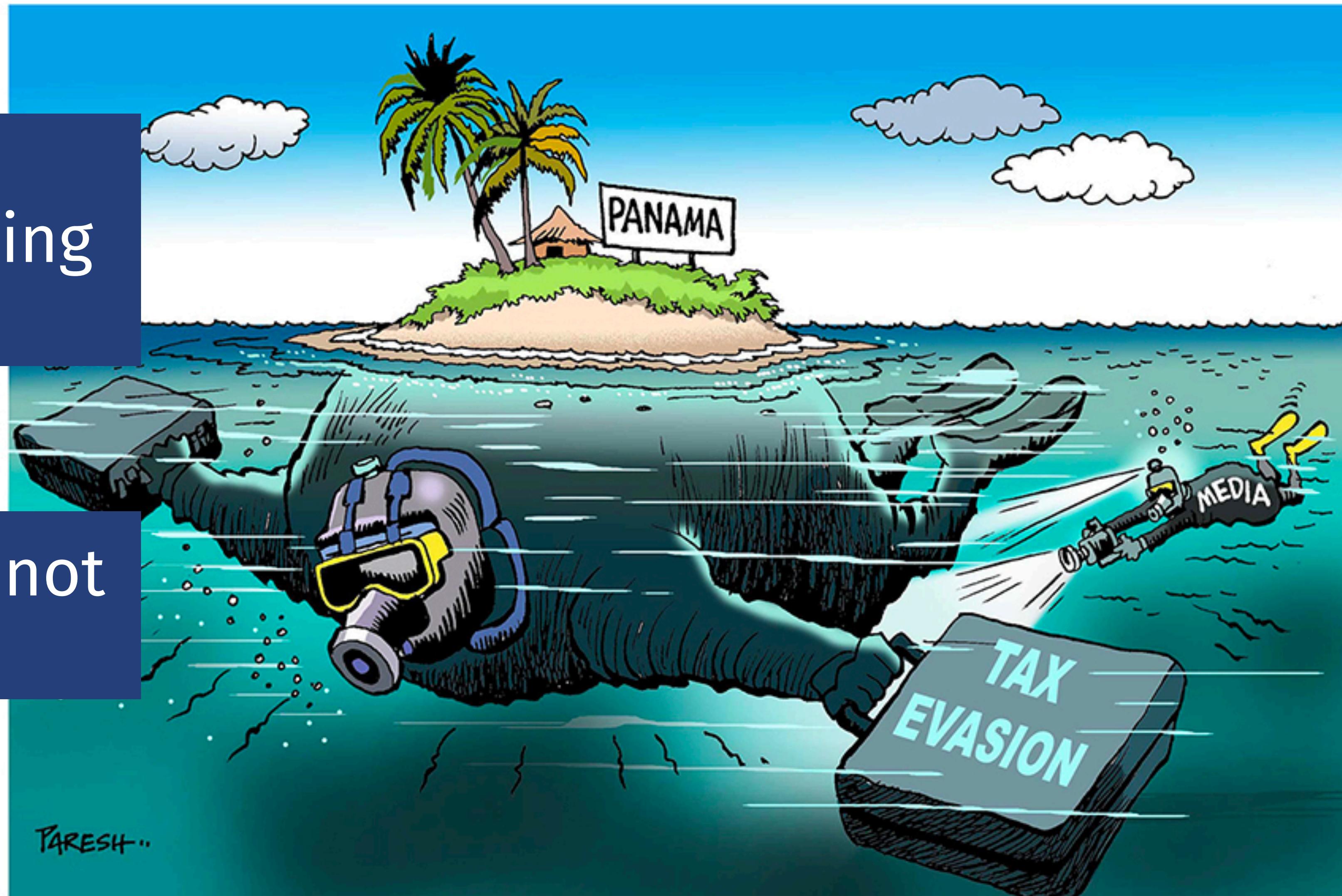
FIGURE 1.—MAP OF RURAL CONFLICT



Note: Municipalities that experienced at least one occupation between 1988 and 2004 are shaded black.  
Nonshaded municipalities did not experience land invasions.

Elites often avoid  
redistribution by moving  
assets overseas

Land is **immobile** and not  
going anywhere

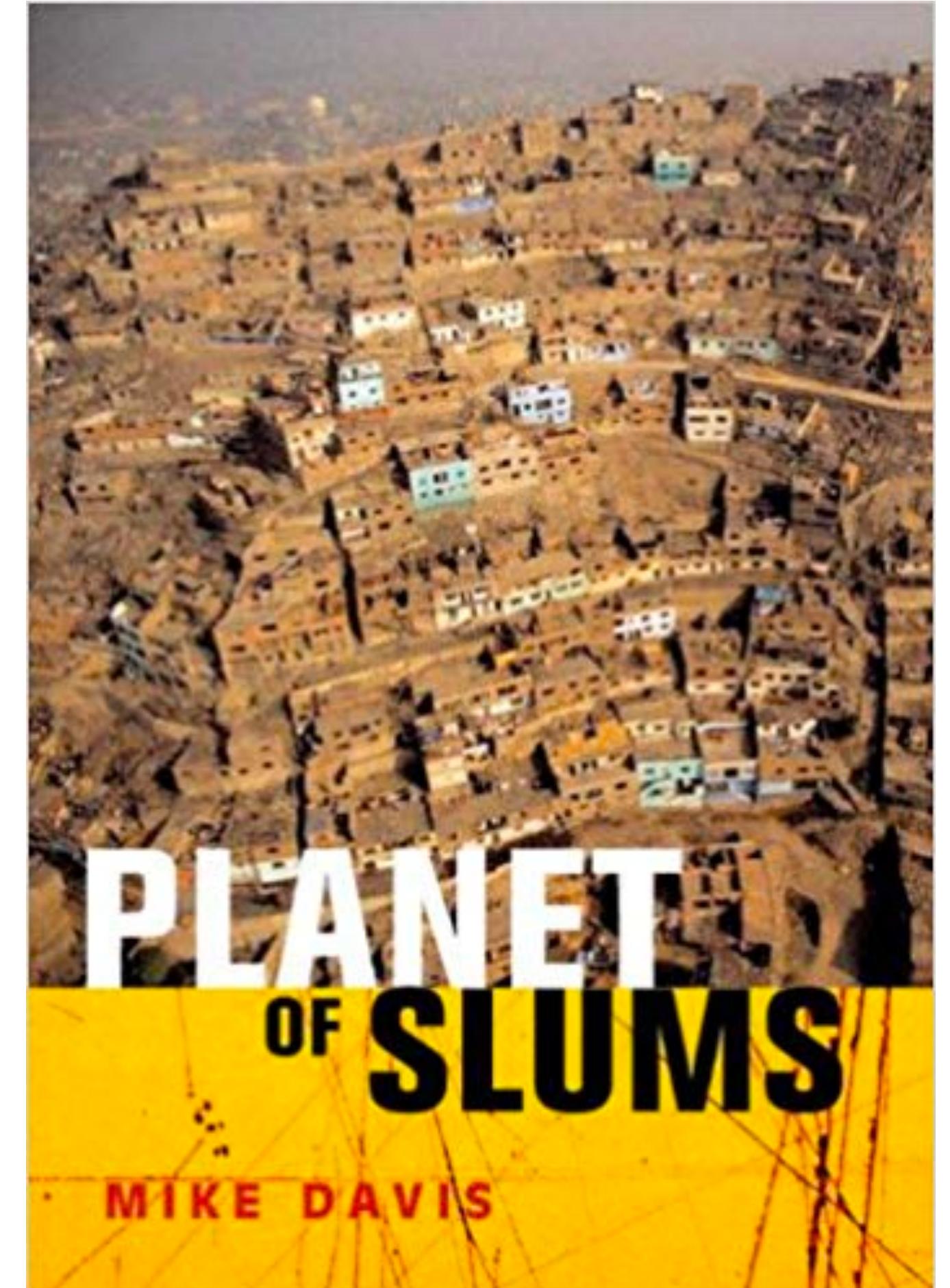


# Land invasions

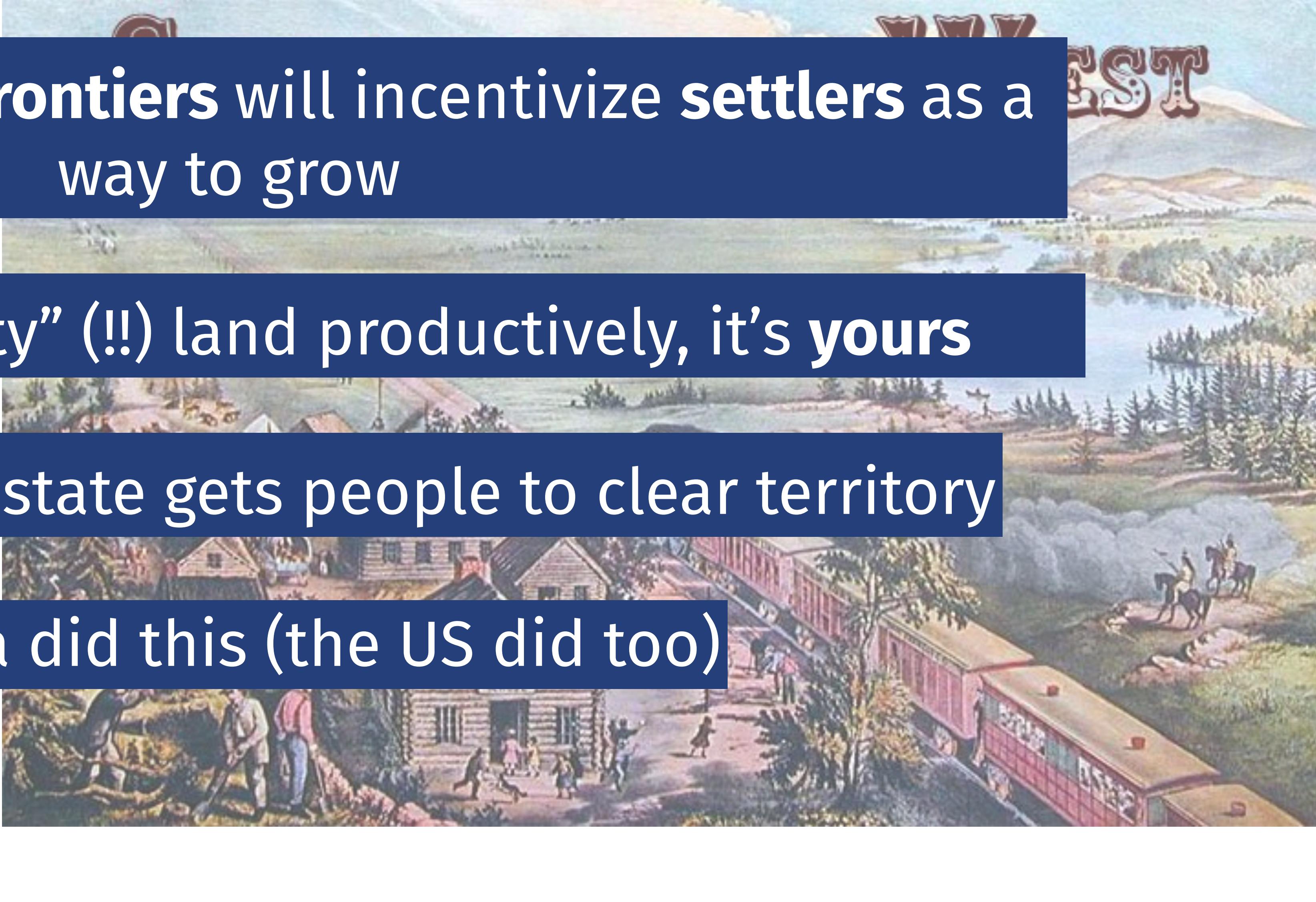
Lacking access to land, peasants often invade or squat on empty land

Conflicts with owners as state is unable (or unwilling) to adjudicate

What to do?



# Settler-expansion



Countries with big **frontiers** will incentivize **settlers** as a way to grow



Go out, use “empty” (!! land productively, it’s **yours**



Landless get **land**, state gets people to clear territory



Colombia did this (the US did too)

# Puzzle II: land conflict

Landless go to **frontier**, settle land

Elites follow right behind –  
take land (by force, legal trickery)

Cycle repeats – frontier plagued by violence

Why not (to same extent) in the US?



# The setting

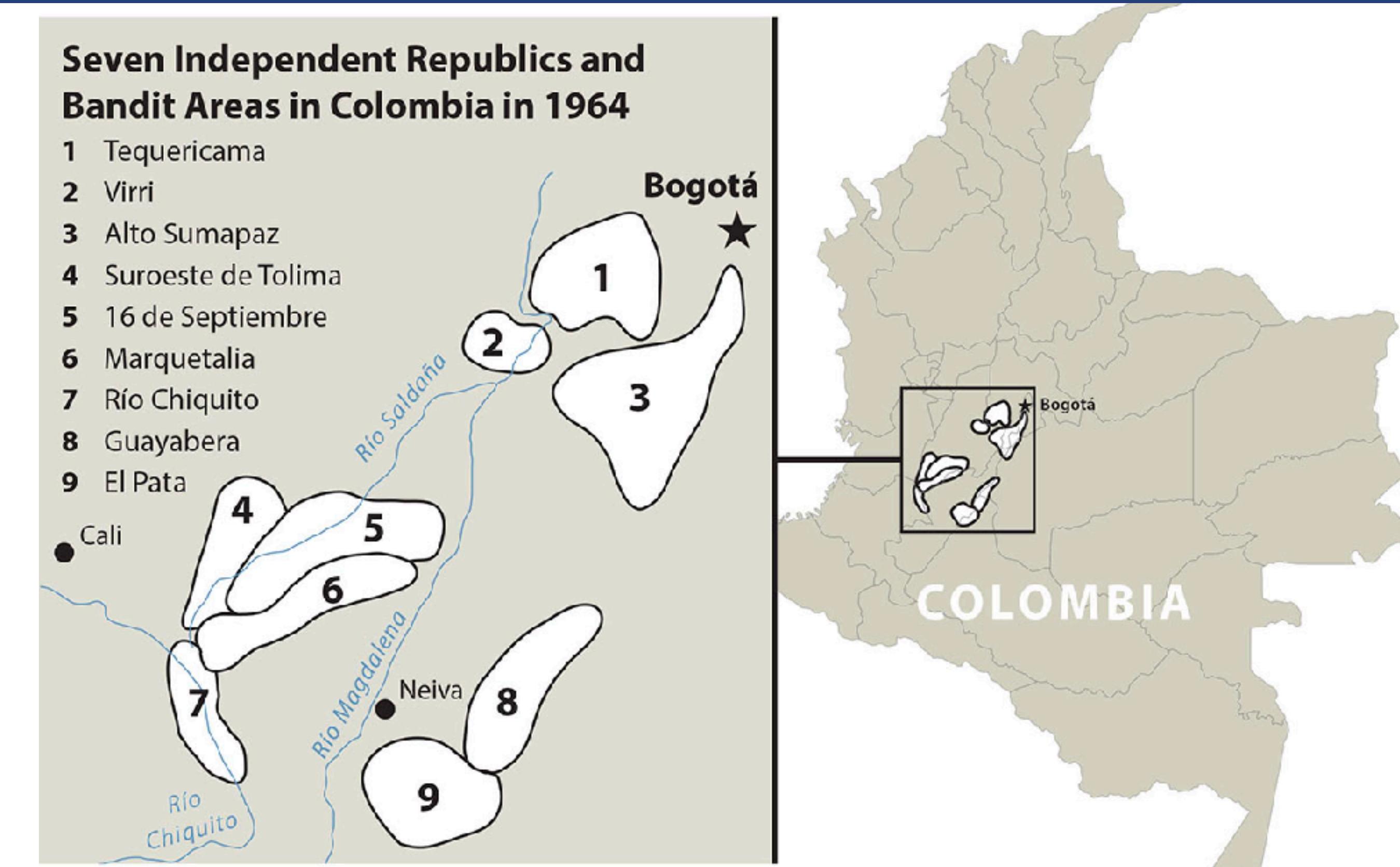
Very unequal society

Cycles of violence as government changes hands

Difficult to protect life or property –  
Capture of state by elites

# The conflict

In response: communists in 50s/60s (and others) organize peasant defense “enclaves” (mini-states)



In the 1950s: liberals and conservatives make pact – go after enclaves

# The FARC



Enclaves destroyed; some flee into the mountains, form the FARC

# The ELN



Other left-wing groups, like ELN  
(formed by priests!!) form in urban areas

# Guerrillas and the land question

Peasants with nowhere to live  
**squat** on private/public land

Legislation to redistribute land  
**thwarted or ignored** by elites

Guerrillas help **organize**  
land invasions, protect **squatters**



Why would guerrillas do this?

# Fight over land

Greed?

vs.

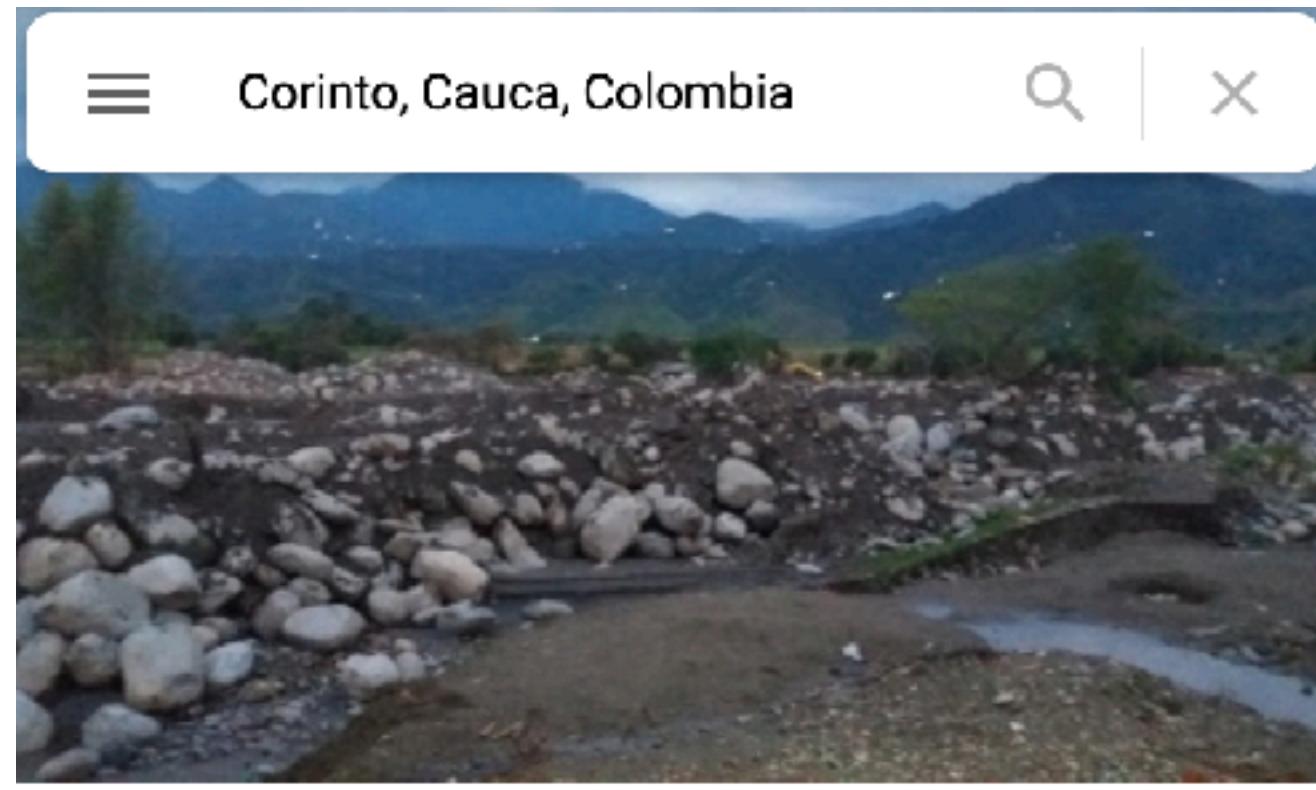
Grievance?

How could we tell?

# Irregular war: 1970s-1980s



Groups swell in size; control lots of territory;  
ambushes, extortion, kidnappings



## Corinto

Cauca  
Colombia

Cloudy · 76°F  
11:54 AM



Directions



Save



Nearby



Send to your phone

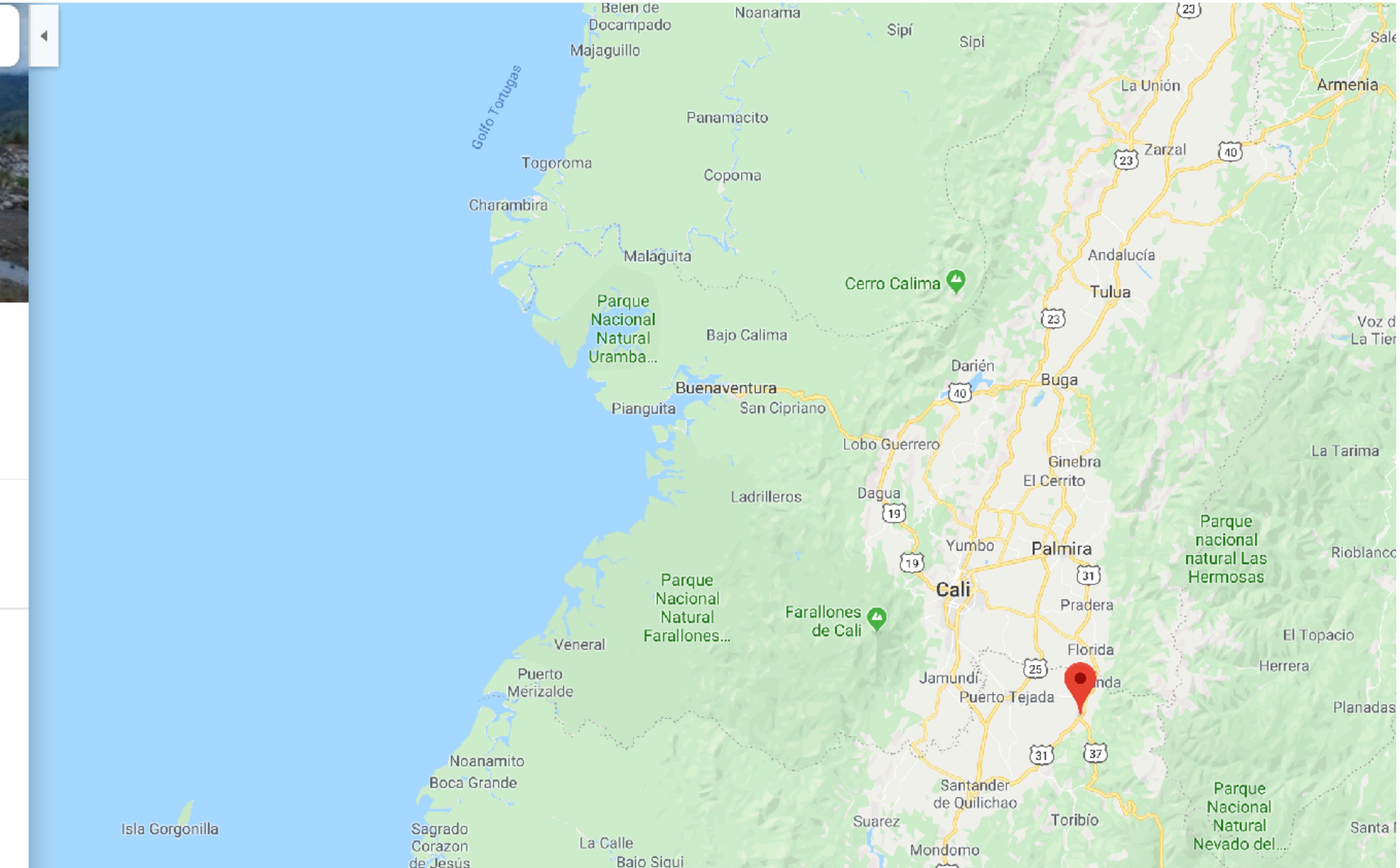


Share

## Photos



Photos



# FARC dominated for 20-30 years



# FARC (mostly) demobilize in 2016

**Q: “You were here before and after the FARC. What has been the biggest change since they left?”**

**A: “*Social crime* (theft, murder, abuse, people cheating each other) is way up. Before, people would go to the FARC with these problems and [they] would punish criminals, without mercy. Now there is no one to fill that role and we have [low capacity].”**



# The (right-wing) paramilitaries

Small self-defense  
groups to fight guerrillas

Received direct and indirect  
support from state

What tradeoffs does  
the state face here?



# Paramilitaries

Blend of *formal* and *informal* base

Victims of the guerrillas

Drug traffickers

The military

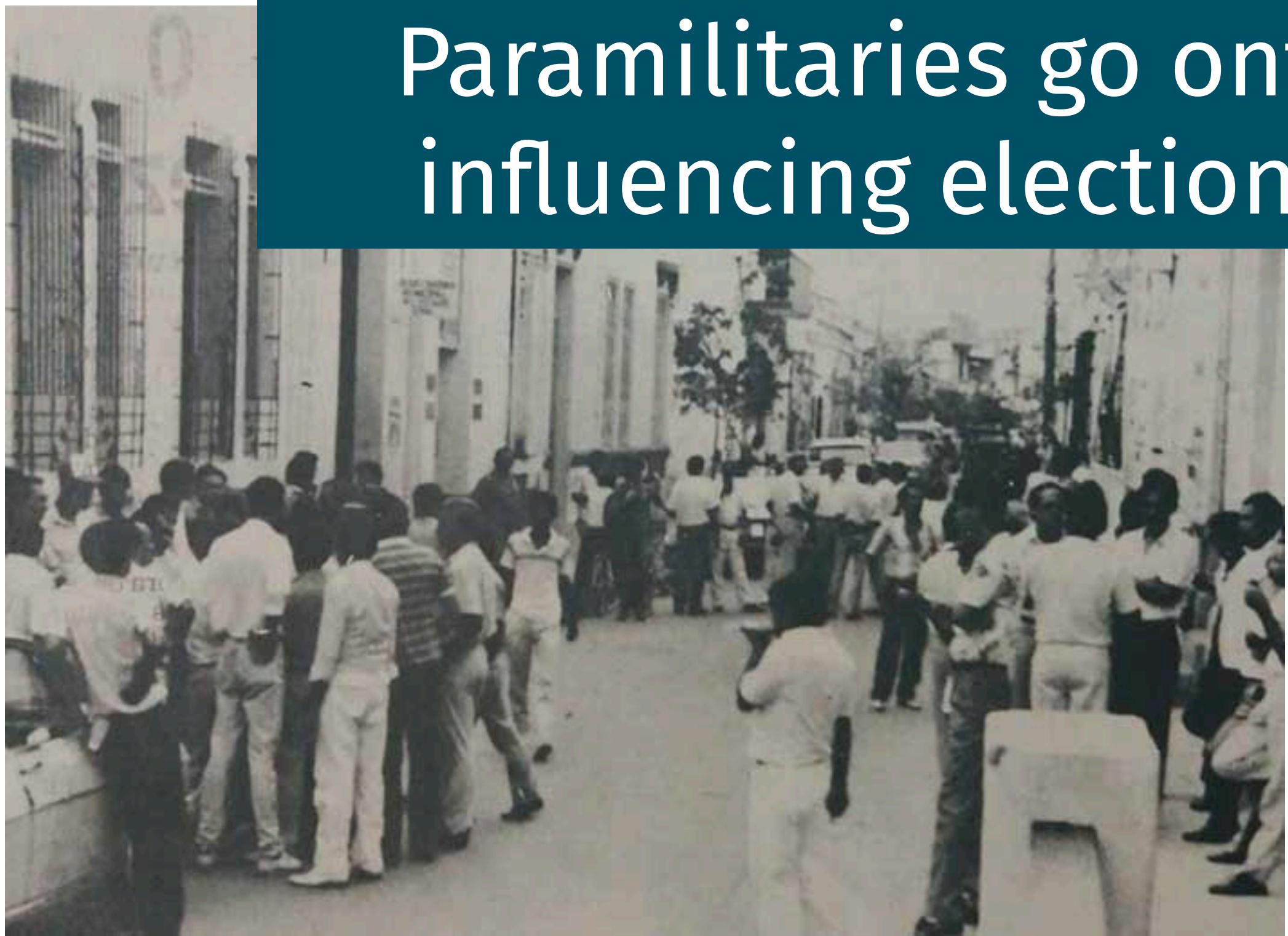
Reminder: militias can have their own agenda

Carlos Castaño,  
Founder of largest paramilitary org



# Paramilitary agendas

Paramilitaries go onto get involved in drug trade, influencing elections, threatening social leaders



1988: Colombia begins electing mayors,  
Wave of violence against new parties



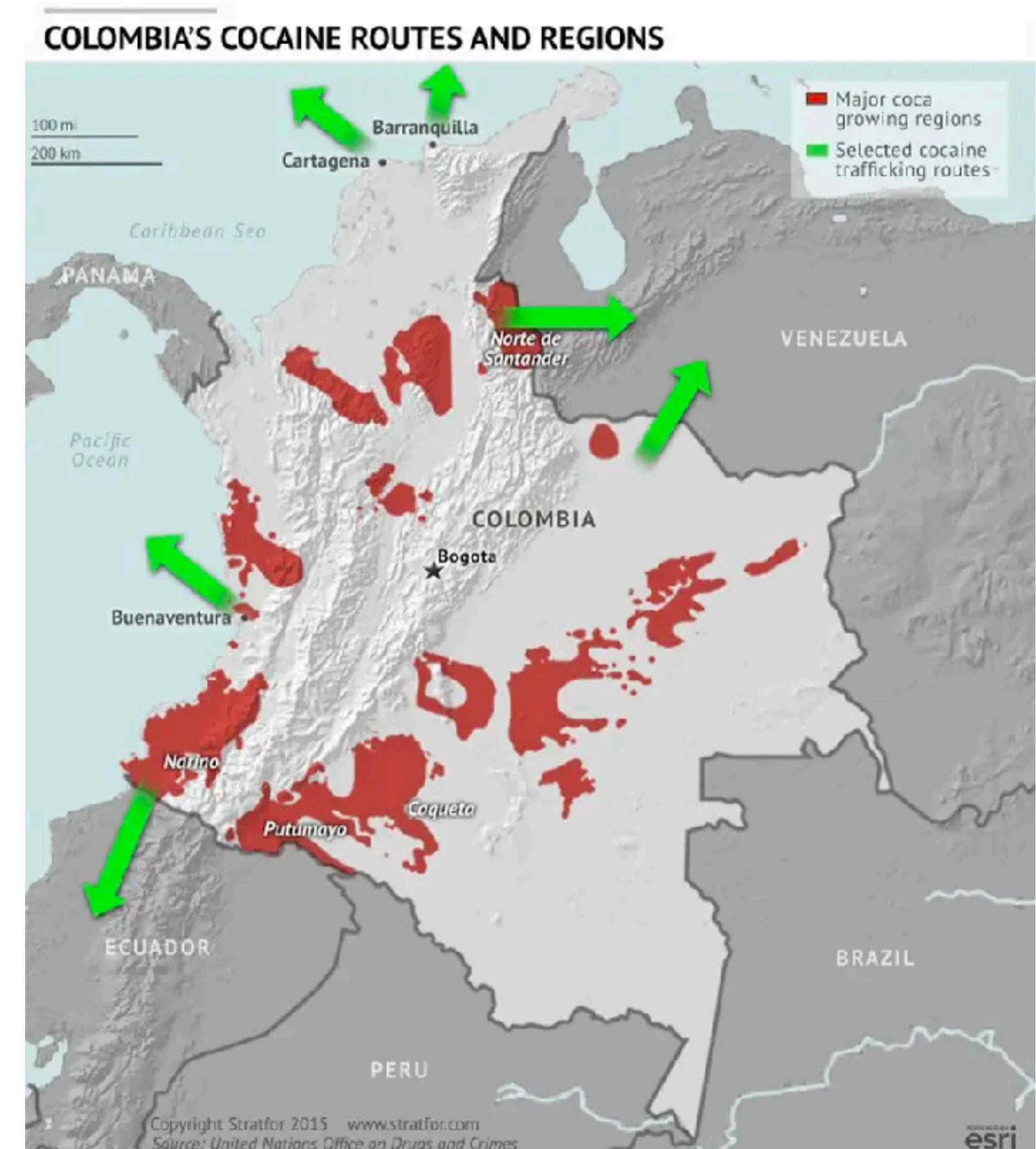
Protest against killing of social  
leaders in Colombia

# So complicated: the coca trade

Colombia major source of coca

In the 1980s, drug trafficking cartels become very powerful

Coca interacts with conflict in particular ways



# Coca and the conflict

At first: guerrillas extort / “protect”  
drug traffickers (why them?)

Eventually: go from “guarding” fields  
—> production (why?)

Conflict with cartels, paramilitaries  
over coca – violence explodes



M-19 kidnap daughter  
of the Ochoas