The relationships between food security and violent conflicts: The case of El Salvador
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The relationships between food security and violent conflicts: The case of El Salvador

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Abstract

El Salvador is a peculiar case in that over three decades it has faced two different types of violence consecutively (the civil war and widespread post-war violence), which have had different impacts on food security. The Civil War had a negative effect on food security through decreased food production, lack of foreign currency, a fall in household income, a decrease in real salaries and mass displacement of people and communities. During this period, the relationships between armed conflict and food security were mediated and conditioned by the vast aid provided by the United States, the appearance of family remittances and the implementation of economic measures. During the post-war period, in spite of its magnitude, profundity and brutality, widespread violence has not had direct repercussions for food security. The relationships have been rather indirect through the negative influence of violence and insecurity on the private investment climate and companies’ costs of production. However, this situation has begun to change in recent years due to the expansion of violence throughout the country due to the strengthening of the gangs known as maras and the broadening of their zones of territorial and social control. The experience of El Salvador shows that no matter how successful peace processes may be at putting an end to armed confrontation and ensuring a degree of political and social stability, they are not sufficient to prevent new conflicts and new forms of violence if those processes are not linked with and complemented by medium- and long-term public policies aimed at altering structural factors that generate violence and social conflict, including the persistence of food insecurity. It also shows that adverse natural phenomena and external economic shocks play a fundamental role in the relationships between food security and violent conflicts due to their persistent negative impact on agricultural production and urban and rural household income.

Keywords: civil war, violence, food security, remittances, foreign aid, El Salvador.

JEL codes: F35, F51, H56, I31, I32, Q15, Q18

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Introduction

During the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, there was a twelve-year civil war in El Salvador, which left 75,000 people dead, thousands disappeared and disabled and more than a million refugees or displaced persons within the country (United Nations, 1995). The conflict ended in 1992 thanks to the Peace Accords signed by the Salvadoran government and the guerrilla forces united in Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). However, just a few years later, a new type of social violence arose, this time taking the form of common crime and organised crime and mainly perpetrated by the so-called maras or gangs. This new class of violence has now caused more deaths than the civil war itself and in recent years it has deepened and spread throughout the country to the extent that in 2015 alone more than 6,600 killings were reported. This made the country one of the most violent in the world in that year with a homicide rate of 102.7 per 100,000 inhabitants (INCIDE, 2016).

Studying El Salvador is relevant in terms of the relationships between food security and armed conflict and widespread violence because it is a peculiar case in which a single country has faced two different types of violence consecutively, which have had different impacts on food security. It is also interesting because it shows that the mere signing of a peace agreement and even the successful implementation of peace accords is not sufficient to prevent new forms of violence associated with structural factors that have to do with the functioning of the socioeconomic system and internal and external situational factors. Moreover, the case of El Salvador is important because it is an experience in which violence has taken place at the same time as various governments have attempted to establish new economic models (Segovia, 2002) through economic and institutional reforms. These have had a profound impact on the economy in general, the agricultural sector and food security.

Our analysis of the Salvadoran experience is divided into three parts. In the first part, we present the country’s main characteristics, stressing the structural features and situational factors that have affected food security, the armed conflict and widespread violence. We have also included a brief description of the civil war and the widespread violence. In the second part, we present the main relationships that have appeared between armed conflict, violence and food security (and vice versa). Finally, in the third part we present the main conclusions and some policy recommendations aimed at improving food security within the context of the widespread violence currently affecting the country.
1 The distinctive features of El Salvador: civil war, structural change and widespread violence

1.1 The structural transformation of El Salvador and its impact on food security

El Salvador is the smallest country in the Americas, just over 21,000 square kilometres in size, and has a resident population of 6.5 million. That makes it the country with the continent's highest population density after Haiti. It is also one of the countries with the largest population living outside of its borders. It is calculated that around 2.8 million Salvadorans live abroad, mainly in the United States. Due to its geographical location, El Salvador, just like the rest of Central America, is exposed to a wide variety of natural threats such as floods, hurricanes, droughts, earthquakes and landslides, which have become more frequent in recent decades1 (CCAD, 2015; FAO, 2014; Ordaz et al., 2010).

Over the last thirty years the country has seen considerable changes to its socioeconomic and political fabric. The most important of these are the move from an agricultural economy to a service and trade economy highly integrated with other countries through migration, remittances, investment and trade;2 from a rural society to an increasingly urban and transnational society; and from a closed and authoritarian political system to a more democratic system (Segovia, 2002; 2004). The impact of these changes on the economy and on food security has been enormous. Firstly, because the civil war, the economic crisis in the 1980s and the economic policy response to that crisis, together with the implementation of public policies with a clearly anti-agricultural bias,3 the fall in international coffee prices and the disappearance of the cotton crop, as well as the persistence of adverse meteorological conditions, brought about a structural crisis in the agricultural sector, which translated into a decrease in farming production and large-scale migration from the countryside to the city. This tendency was reinforced in the 1990s by the appearance and consolidation of a new economic model based on activities related to services and trade, located mainly in urban centres and around the San Salvador Metropolitan Zone. As a result of these processes, the agricultural sector has shrunk as a proportion of national production, economic sectors linked to services and trade have increased and the country has become more urban, since around 67 percent of the population now live in urban areas.

Secondly, mass emigration caused by the civil war, lack of economic opportunities and, ultimately, social violence, not only contributed to the emptying out of rural areas, but also

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1 Between 1930 and 2008, 248 climate and hydro-meteorological events were recorded in Central America. The most frequent were hydro-meteorological (floods, tropical storms and landslides). However, between 1970-1989 and 1990-2008 the region suffered more from flooding and the frequency of hurricanes and tropical storms was higher than in previous periods. From 1970 recorded droughts became more intense with a drought every five or six years (CCAD, 2015).

2 Like the majority of small countries, El Salvador has a very high degree of trade openness, as the relationship between foreign trade/Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is around 70 percent.

3 The policies that have affected the agricultural sector the most are as follows: the fixed exchange rate policy and subsequent dollarization of the economy; the process of opening up to trade, which involved reducing tariffs and eliminating import barriers and agricultural subsidies; the dismantling of state institutions supporting the farming sector; and the privatization of state banks, which caused farming loans to plummet, among others.
created a new source of foreign currency for the country: family remittances. Their great size\(^4\) and duration has had a transformative impact on El Salvador because as well as ensuring financial, exchange rate and price stability, these resources have become the main source of financing for domestic investment and the main instrument for reducing poverty, since they are mainly received by poor people and families, who use them to meet their basic consumption needs. This has, in turn, increased internal demand, thus helping stimulate the economy, especially all sectors linked to services and trade.\(^5\)

Food security in the country has been affected in various ways by these transformations. Firstly, the structure of the food supply has significantly changed due to the combined effect of a decrease in local production of agricultural foodstuffs and the explosive increase in food imports driven by the availability of foreign currency, opening up to trade and changes in the population's consumption patterns. Consequently, in spite of the persistence of the crisis in the farming sector, the availability of food nationwide has increased, albeit at the cost of a greater dependency on food from abroad,\(^6\) especially with regard to basic grains (maize, beans and rice) (CONASAN, 2011). This has in turn made the country more vulnerable to fluctuations in international food prices.

Thirdly, access to food has increased due to the population's greater consumption capacity, a reduction in inflation and a decrease in urban poverty, and especially rural poverty, in the last decade. However, we should point out that this improvement in access to foodstuffs has not applied across the board since some urban and rural sectors have experienced a reduction in their purchasing power due to the lack of jobs arising from the stagnation of the country's economy since more than a decade ago, as well as the considerable loss of rural income arising from the prolonged crisis in coffee growing and the negative impact on agricultural production of a number of adverse climatic conditions (droughts, floods, landslides), which has caused major losses of production and agricultural income, increasing food insecurity and poverty among those populations (IOM and WFP, 2015; IOM, 2015).

\(^4\) Family remittances rose from US$10.9 million in 1980 to US$685.3 million in 1992, reaching a historic high of US$4,576 million in 2016. As percentage of GDP, these resources rose from 0.3 percent in 1980 to 10.4 percent in 1992 and 17.1 percent in 2016.

\(^5\) These benefits of remittances have more than counteracted their negative impact on the exchange rate (overvaluation of the currency), known as the “Dutch disease”.

\(^6\) El Salvador is a net importer of agricultural and food products and spends 13 percent of its foreign currency earnings and almost 6 percent of its GDP on financing food imports, which could suggest low capacity for financing them (FAO, 2014).
The country's agrarian structure has also undergone considerable changes, which is relevant considering the narrowness of the territory, overpopulation and the high concentration of land ownership and use. The "agrarian question" has historically been an ongoing source of social and political conflict and was one of the main factors that contributed to bringing about the conditions in which insurrectional movements arose in the 1970s and the civil war in the 1980s. That is why land redistribution was a tool used during and after the war to achieve fairer distribution and access to land. It is estimated that implementation of agrarian reform in the 1980s (Phase I and Phase III) and the Land Transfer Programme (Programa de Transferencia de Tierras - PTT) envisaged in the 1992 Peace Accords\(^7\) resulted in the distribution of 482 882 hectares. That is equivalent to one third of the country's agricultural land. The direct beneficiaries numbered 120 597 (World Bank, 2012).

As a result of this, the country's agrarian structure was altered in favour of small and medium-sized landowners to the detriment of large-scale landowners, and land distribution has become

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\(^7\) As part of the Peace Accords the Land Transfer Programme (PTT) was implemented, benefiting 47 500 former combatants, landlords and tenants. The beneficiaries received a 30-year loan at an annual interest rate of 6 percent and with a 4-year grace period. They had the option of signing as individuals or associations. Landless peasants’ organizations also benefited as part of the 1991 agreement. Seven years later, the PTT distributed 3 305 properties to 36 100 beneficiaries in an area covering approximately 100 000 hectares (World Bank, 2012).
fairer over the last four decades as the Gini coefficient for land fell from 0.81 to 0.75 and the percentage of landless rural households fell from 41 percent to 18 percent between 1971 and 2008 (World Bank, 2012).

Table 1  **El Salvador: Agrarian structure in 1971 and 2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property land area (ha)</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of producers</td>
<td>Land area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 0.49</td>
<td>61 257</td>
<td>18 425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.50 – 0.99</td>
<td>71 207</td>
<td>51 862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00 – 1.99</td>
<td>59 063</td>
<td>81 039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 – 2.99</td>
<td>25 357</td>
<td>61 245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 – 3.99</td>
<td>9 905</td>
<td>34 361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00 – 4.99</td>
<td>8 152</td>
<td>36 378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00 – 5.99</td>
<td>15 598</td>
<td>110 472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00 – 19.99</td>
<td>9 164</td>
<td>126 975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.00 – 49.99</td>
<td>6 986</td>
<td>215 455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.00 – 99.99</td>
<td>2 238</td>
<td>154 164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.00 – 199.99</td>
<td>1 103</td>
<td>152 056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200.00 – 499.99</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>190 821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 500</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>218 641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>270 868</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 451 894</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In spite of these changes, the problem of access to land continues, particularly for the poor rural population, since according to calculations by the World Bank, poor rural people still have less access to agricultural land than those who are not poor (World Bank, 2012). In addition, the changes to land ownership have created more smallholdings and caused greater fragmentation of agricultural land (CONASAN, 2001; World Bank, 2012). As shown in Table 1, in 1971 producers who had fewer than 2 hectares of land made up 71 percent of the distribution and had access to 10.4 percent of the total land area. In 2008 the proportion of producers with fewer than 2 hectares rose to 85 percent and they had access to 23.8 percent of land. In short, most of the country's farms are currently in the hands of small-scale producers who mainly grow basic grains. They work on farms that are small in size, which jeopardises their economic viability. The situation is more complex considering that small-scale producers do not have access to technical assistance or technology transfer, they lack financing for production and are not linked to associative marketing mechanisms. In fact, within this stratum, most of the producers grow food for their own use and the sales they make are mainly in order to raise some income rather than sell their surpluses (CONASAN, 2011).

Another major change to the agrarian structure is related to land use. The prevailing economic model is aimed more at developing real estate, commercial and industrial projects than
agricultural use. Other things that have influenced the change in land use is the crisis in coffee growing, the disappearance of cotton growing and the expansion of some agro-industrial crops involving extensive land use, such as sugarcane.

With regard to food security, in recent decades, especially after the end of the civil war, the situation improved. However, El Salvador continues to suffer from serious food insecurity in various degrees, affecting around a third of the country's households. In addition, poverty and food insecurity are closely linked. As one can see in Table 2, the incidence of poverty (particularly multidimensional poverty) is considerably higher among homes with moderate and severe food insecurity (UNDP and FAO, 2016).

### Table 2  El Salvador: Incidence of monetary and multidimensional poverty according to households' level of food security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of households by food insecurity</th>
<th>Incidence of monetary poverty</th>
<th>Incidence of multidimensional poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor food insecurity</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate food insecurity</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe food insecurity</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food security</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total households</strong></td>
<td><strong>31.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>35.2%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP and FAO, 2016, pag. 43.

The final characteristic of El Salvador to highlight is the existence of a weak state that has historically had little presence in rural areas, in spite of the country's narrowness. In terms of food security, this weakness of state institutions has had serious repercussions. On the one hand, the state's historical weak presence in rural areas together with the progressive deterioration of institutions related to support for the farming sector in recent decades, has resulted in greater fragility and vulnerability in rural areas and communities. On the other hand, centrally the state has been incapable of implementing regional and local policies to support the various rural areas, which has hindered the development of the farming sector in general and food production in particular.
1.2 Distinctive features of the civil war and social violence

1.2.1 The civil war 1980-1992

In the last 35 years El Salvador has seen various forms of violence that have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and a vast amount of damage to property. During the period 1980-1992 the country went through a bloody civil war, the main actors in which were the guerrilla forces joined together in the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), who sought revolutionary changes to the economy, politics and society, and the Salvadoran armed forces, who defended the status quo. Since the war came within the context of the East-West confrontation, both the FMLN and state forces were supported by external actors, which largely explains the long length and intensity of the conflict. The United States strongly supported the Salvadoran government by giving vast amounts of economic and military aid and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (URSS) and some of its allies in the region, such as Cuba and Nicaragua, supported the FMLN.

It is estimated that the civil war left 75 000 people dead. Thousands of people also disappeared and were disabled and more than a million people became refugees or were displaced within the country (United Nations, 1995). In addition, the war caused a very large number of people to emigrate, as many as 20 percent of the total population, and caused property damage amounting to US$1 500 million in terms of infrastructure alone. The cost of replacing this has been estimated at US$1 630 million (Segovia, 1996).

Although the civil war's main theatre of operations was the countryside most of the time, due to the country's narrowness, overpopulation and the intensity of the war, its effects were felt throughout the country. Its enormous impact nationwide was due to the military strength of the guerrillas. Throughout the conflict they were able to operate in urban areas through so-called urban commandos and constantly strike blows against the national economy. The insurgents considered this to be a strategic military objective so they used all available means to destroy physical infrastructure (the electricity grid, bridges, communication infrastructure, etc.) and damage private property, especially in the transport, farming and industrial sectors. As the United Nations has stated, the FMLN committed acts of sabotage against power plants, telephone cables and power lines, public transport, commercial establishments and other assets important to the community (United Nations, 1995).

Due to its extent and intensity and its negative effects on the economy, the war directly or indirectly affected the entire population, including the urban population. It was naturally those who lived or worked in areas and villages under the control or constant influence of the guerrilla forces who were most affected since these areas (basically rural) were the main theatres of the war. These areas were the stage for the main military confrontations between the insurgent forces and the Salvadoran army, which used weapons of war that caused vast property damage, mainly through aerial and land-based bombardment. One of the most critical periods in the civil war took place between 1980 and 1983, in which there was the systematic establishment of violence, terror and distrust in the civil population (Truth Commission, 1993). During this period, the number of displaced people rose to 400 000. Added to the approximately 500 000 Salvadorans that the UNHCR estimates were in the United States and the 200 000 in Mexico

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8 The FMLN was made up of five guerrilla organizations: Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL), Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), Resistencia Nacional (RN), Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (PCS) and Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC).
and Central America, that gives a figure equivalent to 20 percent of the country's total population (UN, 1995). Therefore, especially in the first half of the 1980s, forced displacement caused by military confrontation and military campaigns by the Salvadoran army in areas considered sanctuaries for the guerrillas, was one of the main mechanisms whereby the war affected the population, with the consequent negative effects on food security, especially in the countryside.

1.2.2 From the civil war to widespread violence during the post-war period

The civil war ended in a military stalemate and was ended through negotiations. This process culminated in the signing and subsequent implementation of the Peace Accords of January 1992. However, just a few years after the Peace Accords were signed, El Salvador was struck by a new wave of violence. Unlike the civil war this was not politically motivated and it has now claimed more lives than the war itself at a vast cost to society. In the 2010-2015 period alone, 24,049 people were murdered and 18,853 people were deprived of their liberty or simply “disappeared”, (INCIDE, 2015). This new form of violence is not the result of the existence of a conventional internal armed conflict between state forces and irregular armed groups. It is the product of violence resulting from common crime and organised crime, mainly perpetrated by the so-called maras against the civil population, conflict between them, and the growing armed confrontation between these groups and government forces (police and military).

In recent years the violence has become bloodier due to the strengthening and expansion of the maras' operations throughout the country and through the greater territorial and social control they exercise. This explains how violence is increasingly affecting broad swathes of rural and urban areas, as well as the appearance of new victims, such as the displaced population (INCIDE, 2016; Insight Crime, 2016; Mesa de la Sociedad Civil, 2016). In addition, the deepening and spreading of the violence has resulted in persistent internal and external migration and is increasingly having a negative effect on economic growth due to its perverse effects on domestic and international private investment and its negative impacts on companies' profits due to extortion, increased security costs and restrictions on the movement of people and companies in territories controlled by the maras. There is a rather broad consensus that violence and insecurity is one of the main obstacles to the country achieving high, sustained growth due to its negative effect on the investment climate and the costs associated with it.

The civil war caused vast property damage to public and private infrastructure and had a devastating impact on national production, especially farming. Post-war violence, however, is not causing major property damage nor directly affecting the national population through physical destruction. Until very recently, social violence in the country was not expressed in the traditional form of direct armed confrontations between the maras, gangs and state forces.

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9 It was during this period that the worst massacres during the war took place, including the Mozote massacre, the largest in Latin America, in which army forces murdered around a thousand people in the eastern department of Morazán.

10 Various studies have calculated the annual cost to the country of violence and insecurity. Peñate Guerra, et al. (2016) estimates the cost at 16 percent of GDP in 2014. Other studies have put the cost within a range between 13 percent and 24 percent of GDP (Acevedo, 2008; Londoño and Guerrero, 1999; UNDP, 2005).

11 According to Insight Crime (2016), violence in the post-war stage phase has had two phases. The first phase, after the war, involved former soldiers and combatants. Many former guerrillas, for example, did not sign up to the accords, never gave up their weapons and did not reintegrate into civil life. They created their own criminal enterprises, such as vehicle theft, kidnapping and people trafficking. The second phase came about with the appearance of street gangs, the so-called maras. There are two main gangs in El Salvador: Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS13) and Barrio 18, which operate in several countries in the Central American region and in some areas of the United States and even in some European countries.
In contrast, for decades, the maras have exercised violence through control of territory (residential areas, neighbourhoods and, recently, rural areas and villages), where they have implemented various forms of territorial and social control over the civil population. The main mechanisms of violence and terror used by the maras and organised crime include extortion, direct threats, selective assassinations and forced disappearances. Recent studies show the vast economic and social effects that the maras have in the territories they control, including restrictions on the movement of people and entire communities (INCIDE, 2016).
2 The relationships between food security, the civil war and widespread violence

2.1 The relationships between armed conflict and widespread violence, and food security

Below we present the main relationships between armed conflict and widespread violence, on the one hand, and food security, on the other. In order to provide a clearer explanation, taking into account the different natures of the civil war and post-war violence, the relationships between these kinds of violence and food security are presented separately.

2.1.1 The relationships between the civil war and food security

Since it was a more traditional armed conflict, i.e. a war between an irregular army and a regular army, and due to its long length, spread and intensity, the Salvadoran civil war affected the various facets of food security both nationwide and regionally and locally. The main transmission mechanisms were as follows:

a) The decrease in food production due to physical destruction of crops and harvests, abandonment of crops and farming land and their negative effects on the private investment climate, which resulted in a significant drop in farm production, especially during the first half of the 1980s. Moreover, the war's profound impact on national production can be seen in the fact that annual economic growth fell by an average of -3.6 percent between 1980 and 1989 (World Bank, 2016).

b) Lack of foreign currency caused by capital flight and the direct and indirect damage caused to the export sector, particularly agricultural exports (coffee, cotton and sugarcane), which caused a balance of payments crisis that forced the government to ration foreign currency. This significantly reduced the ability to import food. Consequently, the availability of food decreased, putting upward pressure on domestic price levels. The severe shortage of foreign currency in the first half of the 1980s ended the rather stable exchange rates the country had had for more than 50 years through the establishment of a fixed exchange rate ($2.50 per US dollar). The progressive devaluation of the currency during that period, together with the fall in national production and the impossibility of importing inputs, raw materials and finished products, resulted in an increase in inflation, which reached its high point in 1986 (32 percent). In that year the government introduced a stabilization programme, which included an official devaluation of the currency.13

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12 There were also complaints made in international courts that the Salvadoran army resorted to confiscating food intended for refugees and destruction of crops in zones under guerrilla control.

13 Inflation had traditionally been low in El Salvador due to the rather stable exchange rate and conservative handling of monetary policy. It was not until the 1970s that there was a rise in inflation due to the 1973-74 oil shock.
c) The fall in household income due to large-scale urban and rural job losses as a result of the widespread economic crisis caused by the war and the decrease in salaries due to a passive wage policy. The situation was particularly serious for the rural population due to the hostilities, the fall in international coffee prices and the drastic fall in cotton production, as they suddenly found themselves without access to their traditional sources of temporary employment.

d) The mass displacement of people and communities caused by the direct confrontations between the two armies and by the policy of repression of the civil population living in areas under guerrilla control employed by the Salvadoran state forces during the initial phases of the war, which caused a prolonged humanitarian and food crisis.

It is important to stress, however, that in the case of El Salvador, the relationships between armed conflict and food security were mediated and strongly conditioned by three fundamental factors:

a) The vast economic aid (financial and in kind) from the United States,\textsuperscript{14} which contributed to keeping the economic apparatus functioning by providing foreign currency, which was used to import food, raw materials, intermediate goods and capital goods, and the subsequent devaluation of 1986 in the subsequent period\textsuperscript{15} contributed to preventing the implementation of adjustment measures with high social costs.

\textsuperscript{14} Economic aid from the United States in the form of food donations (PL-480) and direct balance of payments support. Balance of payments support rose from US$108.2 million in 1982 (equivalent to 3.1 percent of GDP) to a historic high of US$341.5 million in 1987 (equivalent to 7.7 percent of GDP). In total, the balance of payments support during the 1982-1989 period was US$1,682 million (Segovia, 2002).

\textsuperscript{15} Due to the economic, social and political deadlock caused by the Economic Stabilization Programme of 1986, the government of President José Napoleón Duarte categorically refused to devalue the currency again, in spite of enormous pressure from the United States to do so. Paradoxically, the government was able to avoid further devaluations through the direct economic aid provided by the United States (Segovia, 2002).
b) The appearance of and constant growth in family remittances, which brought foreign currency into the country that was received directly by the poor population, gradually contributed to overcoming the balance of payment crisis from the second half of the 1980s, and increased income and consumption among recipient families, which in turn counteracted the loss of household income caused by the extremely high unemployment during that period.

c) The implementation of economic measures in some cases worsened the negative effects of the war and in other cases generated new processes affecting food security. The most important measures that affected the relationships between the conflict and food security were the economic reforms of 1980, which included nationalization of private banks and
foreign trade in coffee, cotton and sugarcane, and implementation of agrarian reform; and
the stabilization and adjustment measures implemented in the first half of the decade, which
culminated in the official devaluation of the colón in January 1986. The reforms of 1980
reinforced the negative effects of the war on the farming industry, as they caused a strong
outflow of private capital and the abandonment of many farms, as well as a reduction in
private sector lending. In addition, the transfer of production units from private hands to
peasant cooperatives created by the government, further worsened the fall in farming
production, which was accentuated by guerrilla sabotage of the reform process. Meanwhile,
the stabilization and adjustment measures implemented by the various governments during
the 1980-1986 period had high social costs, especially due to the constant increase in
inflation, the reduction in social expenditure and the drastic fall in real wages as a
consequence of the passive wage policy implemented during that period.

2.1.2 The relationships between widespread violence and food security in the
post-war period

Due to its nature, geographical concentration and pattern of effects and victimization, until very
recently, post-war violence, in spite of its magnitude, depth and brutality, had not directly or
greatly affected food security, at least at national and regional level. This is due to the fact that
violence exercised by organised crime, mainly by the maras, was directly exercised against
people and communities and did not involve the use of powerful war material or direct, constant
permanent confrontations between such illegal groups and state forces. In addition, until very
recently, the maras mainly operated in urban areas (residential areas and neighbourhoods),
which they used as their operational base and over which they exercised territorial and social
control. In this scenario, the effects of violence on food security at national level were minimal
as they did not directly affect food production and did not cause major problems with access to
food. Violence, however, did lead to restrictions on the movement of vehicles and people at
certain times of day and night in residential areas and neighbourhoods controlled by the maras
and gangs and to the decrease in household income due to the loss of a member of the family
who economically contributed to household finances.

For the foregoing reasons, in post-war El Salvador, the relationships between widespread
violence and food security were rather indirect, i.e. the negative influence of violence and
insecurity on the private investment climate and companies' costs of production due to extortion
and the additional security measures businesspeople had to implement protect companies' goods,
facilities and staff.

This situation started to change in recent years as the pattern of violence altered. Among other
aspects, there was an expansion of violence throughout the country as a result of the maras
growing stronger and expanding their areas of territorial and social control (INCIDE, 2016). As
violence and insecurity have spread to practically the entire country and territorial and social
control has expanded and deepened, violence has started to directly affect food security
regionally and locally through the following mechanisms:

a) Forced displacement of people, families and communities, a phenomenon that had
completely disappeared since the end of the civil war, but which started to re-emerge in
2014 in both urban and rural areas. This directly affects the food security of victims due
them suddenly having to leave their original homes and the consequent temporary or
permanent abandonment of their property, workplaces and, in the case of the rural
population, temporary or permanent abandonment of their crops and land. The causes leading to people to resort to displacement are the murder or disappearance of a family member, threats and extortion. Although there are no official statistics regarding forced displacement, there are studies that record the appearance of forced displacement as a consequence of violence. From August 2014 to December 2015 La Mesa de Sociedad Civil contra Desplazamiento Forzado por Violencia Generalizada y Crimen Organizado en El Salvador recorded that 7 of its member organizations had helped with 146 specific cases of displacement involving 385 people, 97 children under 12 years old and 141 adolescents. Of the 146 cases dealt with, 19 forced displacements were caused by the armed forces and 8 forced displacements were caused by the National Civil Police (Mesa Sociedad Civil, 2016). A recent study of the ways in which violence has affected territories controlled by the maras found that many people and families have been forced out of their communities by the maras with threats or because one of their family members had been victimised (INCIDE, 2016). A recent report in a Costa Rican newspaper (Tico Times) states that increasing numbers of Central Americans are fleeing the south to escape gang violence and seeking asylum in Costa Rica. It claims that the proportion of refugees from El Salvador has suddenly increased as, according to the Costa Rican immigration authorities, Salvadorans account for 46 percent of asylum seekers.

b) Restrictions on the movement of people living in rural territories controlled by the maras prevent them from properly caring for their crops and fully developing their productive activities, resulting in lower income and reducing their ability to access basic foodstuffs. One case is the fishermen in Jiquilisco Bay, in the east of the country, prevented from fishing at night time by the maras, who have faced hunger for extended periods (INCIDE, 2016). In urban and rural areas, restrictions on movement imposed by the maras have also affected food distribution and marketing chains as in some places these groups restrict the entry of vehicles delivering mass-market products at certain times of day and obstruct the free movement of travelling salespeople.

c) Extortion of peasants, farmers and traders, which increases the cost of food production or forces the abandonment of crops or closure of businesses. There are documented cases that show that when the maras demand payments from landowners the amount depends on the size of the property or the business (INCIDE, 2016). As stated elsewhere, forms of violence such as extortion, homicide and fights between gangs can have a negative effect on security, for example by weakening small businesses and raising the price of food and loss of income (IOM and WFP, 2015).

Just like during the civil war period, in the post-war period the relationships between widespread violence and food security have been influenced and conditioned by factors related to the domestic and international context. The most important of these include the following:

a) Implementing economic measures inspired by neoliberal paradigms and motivated by the interests of the different governments in power. The most important of these were re-privatization of government owned banks, which resulted in a decrease in lending to the farming sector in general and the reformed and peasant sector in particular; the dismantling of state institutions linked to support for the farming sector, which resulted in a drastic

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16 To date, the Salvadoran government has not accepted that there are victims of forced displacement in the country, in spite of the testimony of victims and press reports frequently recounting the forced displacement of families and even entire communities.
reduction in lending to the sector, a decrease in technical assistance and the elimination of price floors for basic grains; the liberalization of foreign trade and the signing of free trade agreements, which resulted in the elimination of barriers to trade and a decrease in tariff protection; and a macroeconomic policy with a clear anti-agricultural and anti-export bias.

b) The mass receipt of family remittances and their capture by the private banking system, which had a positive impact on the income and consumption of recipient households and solved the balance of payments problems, enabling mass importing of products from abroad in an atmosphere of openness to trade. In addition, the mass receipt of remittances ensured financial and exchange rate stability\textsuperscript{17} and made the dollarization of the economy viable from 2001.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{El Salvador: Level of net international reserves, 1960–2016}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{17} From the 1990s onwards, due to the availability of foreign currency from remittances, inflation started to fall to its current level of close to 1 percent. Inflation in El Salvador is now at one of the lowest levels in Latin America (See Figure 2).

\section*{2.2 The relationships between food security and civil war and widespread violence}

As in other experiences, the effects of food security on armed conflict and widespread violence are not clear and certainly do not appear to be direct but rather mediated by other factors that have been triggered by this relationship. These factors include:

a) Adverse climatological conditions, particularly prolonged droughts and floods which, throughout the last three decades, have increasingly caused major losses of food production and income for the rural population, which has increased food security and caused a major rise in poverty and hunger, forcing the population to migrate from the countryside to the city or abroad and, in certain cases, to resort to illegal acts to survive. This relationship between variations in the climate, an increase in food insecurity and rural
migration has been found by various studies. For example, a joint study conducted by the IOM and the WFP in countries in the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) found that the drought and prolonged summer heat that affected the region in 2014 and caused a 60 percent decrease in maize crops and as much as an 80 percent fall in bean crops, resulted in migration as a strategy to survive the hot weather (IOM and WFP, 2015). In addition, it found a positive relationship between food security and migration in the three countries; a proven relationship between food security and migration, in particular migration and violence and, to a lesser extent, between food security and violence (IOM and WFP, 2015). It clarifies that, however, in the case of the last-mentioned relationship there is available evidence but it is not conclusive. In the cases in which one can reasonably affirm that there is evidence of a relationship, there is a great lack of knowledge regarding its level, magnitude and consistency throughout the three countries studied. The study also found a positive correlation between food security and migration in the 3 countries studied and that in the case of El Salvador the relationship is highly significant since greater food insecurity creates a greater likelihood of people emigrating in search of better living conditions (IOM and WFP, 2015). It also cites evaluations by the WFP of the areas affected by the drought in which high levels of emigration were found to be a strategy to combat deteriorating food security. The results of the survey underlined that in 5 percent to 12 percent of households one or more members of the household had emigrated in the month prior to the survey due to the prolonged dry season (5 percent in the case of El Salvador). Another important finding in the cited study is that during the investigation informants mentioned examples of real-life cases of violent or illegal behaviour resulting from hunger, including attacks on women receiving the bolsa solidaria benefit or benefit for mothers of infant children in school; extortion of consumers and sellers in markets and other public spaces, with the effect of jeopardising the food security of families and communities; and people suffering from food insecurity who resort to unlawful activities in order to survive (IOM and WFP, 2015).

b) The decrease in coffee prices throughout recent decades, which has had a devastating effect on rural families and communities whose main income depends on that activity, as it is estimated that employment in coffee and cotton harvesting for the 1988/89 harvest was 70 percent lower than in 1979/80. In the case of coffee, the minimum harvesting wage fell by almost 70 percent between 1980 and 1988 (Barry and Rosa, 1995). As those authors state, the impact of the fall in coffee prices on peasant family welfare was so severe that it joined the war as a factor driving the rural population to urban centres and abroad and caused increased environmental damage by pushing a large part of the rural population in extreme poverty into survival strategies that degrade or pillage natural resources, as in the case of the sowing of hillsides and overexploited pasture, overexploitation in firewood gathering and trade in wild animals (Barry and Rosa, 1995). More recently, in 2014, the

18 According to press reports, the drought affected 3.5 million people in the dry corridor in Central America and it continued throughout 2015 due to erratic and insufficient rainfall, which caused loss of harvests and death of cattle, further accentuating the food and security crisis.
19 According to the WFP, El Salvador is more vulnerable to climate events and drought cycles due to the country's small size.
20 This relationship between food insecurity and migration was also found in another study on Guatemala: “in rural areas (migration) is a survival strategy and a mechanism to improve living conditions in the face of unemployment, low agricultural prices and climate effects … Lack of food causes internal migration (FLACSO, 2014).
combination of the fall in international coffee prices, combined with adverse climatological conditions caused a serious humanitarian crisis in the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras), especially in coffee-growing areas, where families lost their income and their harvests (IOM and WFP, 2015).

c) The increase in international food prices has had a negative effect on the population's purchasing power. In the case of El Salvador this has been extremely negative due to the country's high dependence on imported food and inputs for its production, such as wheat. The cost of the Basic Food Basket (Canasta Básica Alimentaria - CBA) has increased significantly in recent years. This is associated in part with the international food crisis, as well as other factors such as the energy crisis, the impact of climate change on production, and speculative mechanisms. Between 2007 and 2008 this led to a vast increase in food prices, which seriously affected the population's access to food. Likewise, in 2010 prices continued to be impacted by the same factors (CONASAN, 2011).

d) The persistence of the problem of access to land by poor rural families forces them to emigrate or work on small plots, the size of which is insufficient to generate the minimum household income needed to meet their basic needs. This aspect is significant considering the notable changes to the country's agrarian structure in recent decades.

e) The failure of programmes to reintegrate people into production implemented in the 1990s within the framework of the implementation of the 1992 Peace Accords forced many former combatants to resort to criminal and antisocial behaviour. As we have pointed out elsewhere (1996), the failure of these programmes has to do with the fact that in spite of the majority of them targeting farming, the serious structural crisis the agricultural sector was undergoing was underestimated in their design and implementation. Simply put, reintegration failed because it was attempted in a productive sector of low productivity and profitability. In addition, reintegration programmes were designed with a short-term vision and implemented outside of the macroeconomic and sectoral policy that had a clear anti-agricultural bias.

The relationship between food security and violent conflict has basically been the same: floods, droughts, rises in international food prices or a decrease in the prices of traditional export products immediately causes poverty and hunger, which forces families and communities to take desperate action to survive, including migration from the countryside to the city or abroad, minor crime to obtain food, and risky action such as illegal migration.
3 Conclusions and recommendations

The experience of El Salvador allows us to draw certain relevant conclusions for countries that have suffered from violent conflicts, the ending of which has been the result of complex negotiation processes and implementation of peace accords in the post-war phase. The first conclusion is that no matter how successful peace processes may be at putting an end to armed confrontation and ensuring a degree of political and social stability, they are not sufficient to prevent new conflicts and new forms of violence if those processes are not linked with and complemented by medium- and long-term public policies aimed at altering structural factors that generate violence and social conflict, including the persistence of food insecurity. In the case of El Salvador, the peace process was highly successful at bringing the war to an end and bringing those who had taken up arms into the political process in the context of notable political reform. However, they categorically failed in their aim of reintegrating former combatants on both sides into productive activity, largely due to the short-term vision with which programmes and projects to reintegrate such people into farming were designed; and because the peace process was not aligned with the economic reforms being carried out independently and in parallel with implementation of the peace commitments. In fact, instead of encouraging former combatants to reintegrate into the farming sector, these reforms had a negative impact on the sector’s profitability and production, which caused the majority of the reintegration projects to fail (Segovia, 1996).

The second lesson that can be learned from the experience of El Salvador is that the role of the state (by act or omission) is crucial in terms of the form it takes and the impact that has on the relationships between violent conflicts and food security (and vice versa). As in the case of other Latin American countries, the presence of the Salvadoran state in the regions, especially the countryside, has been weak and sometimes non-existent. This has resulted in few and inefficient public services, including security and justice, thus creating fertile conditions for illegal armed groups to occupy and control territories and victimize the local population. In the case of El Salvador, both in the civil war period and in the post-war stage, state intervention through implementation of macroeconomic and sectoral policies has had a profound impact on changes in food security and, in some cases, has boosted and amplified the negative effects of the conflict and violence.

The third lesson from the case of El Salvador is that adverse natural phenomena and external economic shocks play a fundamental role in the relationships between food security and violent conflicts due to their persistent negative impact on agricultural production and urban and rural household income. In fact, in the last three decades, these factors have caused poverty and food insecurity and have driven the affected people to take desperate steps to survive and tackle the calamities they face.

The fourth relevant lesson has to do with the role the agrarian question plays before, during and after conflicts. In the case of El Salvador, the agrarian question, in particular the great concentration of land ownership, was a fundamental factor in the beginning and development of the civil war, which caused such bloodshed in the country over a twelve-year period. Because of this, over the last four decades, measures have been taken to achieve fairer land distribution and promote access to land by the poorest peasants. The impact of the measures has been important in terms of better land distribution but the fundamental problems of access to land and productive use of it have continued due to the absence of a comprehensive policy to transform agricultural production and comprehensive programmes to support agricultural
producers. In this sense, the experience of El Salvador is important because it points to the need to supplement land distribution policies with comprehensive policies to support agricultural production, especially food production which, in the case of El Salvador, is mainly in the hands of small-scale producers living in poverty.

Taking into account the analysis presented in this report, below are some key recommendations to strengthen food security in El Salvador and turn it into an instrument contributing to reduced poverty and enhanced social peace:

a) Resume efforts to seek greater access to land by the poorest peasant population, including speeding up the provision of property title to people who do not yet have their plots and farms legalised, and implement a policy to distribute land to peasant families that do not have any. These measures should be accompanied by a comprehensive policy to support production by small and medium-sized producers, including lending support, technical assistance and the construction of efficient marketing channels. In addition, from a medium-term perspective, the national system for the supply of farmed food products should be implemented. This includes providing storage systems for basic grains, establishing a system of state guarantees for lost harvests and the implementation of mechanisms that ensure minimum price stability for basic grains paid to producers.

b) Urgently design and implement a support strategy for families and communities who, in recent years, have been profoundly affected by adverse climatological conditions (droughts, floods, etc.) and external economic shocks (the fall in international coffee prices, for example). Support for combating food insecurity should be a priority in this strategy.

c) Implement a comprehensive strategy to prevent violence, including, as one of the central components, strengthening food security in territories controlled by the maras, the main beneficiaries of which should be young people and women.

d) Design and implement a system to monitor and permanently assess internal forced displacement, making it possible to quantify and measure the impact of that phenomenon on the food security of the affected people and take adequate preventive measures to prevent an increase in food insecurity.

e) Further the comprehensive health reform that started to be implemented several years ago, as it contributes to expanding and improving public health services in rural areas, thus helping to alleviate the difficult health conditions among the poorest population in the country.

f) Due to how climate change and natural disasters have a significant effect on generating and perpetuating violence, we recommend implementing a comprehensive strategy to relocate food crops and introduce new varieties taking into consideration the climate changes that are taking place in the country, which will worsen in the coming decades. In this context, it is fundamental to promote the use of suitable technologies to conserve land, retain humidity and reduce disaster risks. We also recommend encouraging research to take advantage of technology applied in other countries and some regions of El Salvador so that crops can adapt to warmer climates, make more efficient use of water resources and implement enhanced control of diseases caused by pests.
References


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