



Chapter Title: INTRODUCTION

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The people of Colombia live in the midst of violent crime and political revolution. Although the source of this instability may not be obvious, it nevertheless affects the everyday activities of ordinary individuals. The violence comes in the form of theft, kidnapping, murder, and guerrilla assaults. It affects the poor farmer, the teacher, the banker, and the rich industrialist alike. And behind all of this violence is small-arms trafficking.

This report follows two distinct analytical threads:

First, we examine the scope and dimensions of small-arms trafficking into and within Colombia. In Chapters Two through Four, we identify the weapons sources and routes used by traffickers to transport weapons into the country.¹ We also examine the various guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, criminals, and ordinary citizens who purchase and use these munitions. However, these chapters focus primarily on small arms and light weapons acquired by guerrillas and paramilitaries for the purpose of confronting the Colombian state.

Second, we examine Colombia's political conflict through the lens of small-arms trafficking. In Chapters Five and Six, we explore the interaction among Colombia's guerrillas, paramilitaries, security forces, criminals, and average citizens. Chapter Six concludes with policy implications for the U.S. government.

¹We collected information on small-arms trafficking from January 1998 through September 2001.

At the core of both lines of analysis lies the question of how state governments in general can control their domestic security in the face of increasingly transnational threats. This issue is explored in Chapter Five, in which we argue that small-arms trafficking patterns provide an interesting framework for addressing this challenge.

At first glance, solving the problem of illegal weapons use in a society such as Colombia's would appear to be a simple matter of tightening internal regulations. However, weapons are becoming increasingly easy to move across borders, and like other nonperishable commodities, weapons can be resold and recycled. Indeed, the cyclical nature of small-arms trafficking is precisely what makes it an issue affecting *regional* and not just national stability. Confronting the challenge of illegal arms trafficking is problematic, largely because small-arms trafficking does not conform to traditional definitions of a security threat. This report attempts to put forth a first step toward finding a solution to this difficult problem.