

DEFORESTATION, LAND CONFLICTS AND VIOLENCE IN BRAZIL

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Abstract:

This paper examines the correlation between deforestation, land conflicts and violence, measured by homicides, in Rural Brazil. It follows the framework proposed by Santanna and Young (2011), originally applied to the Brazilian Amazon, extending it to the rest of the country. As there is institutional uncertainty concerning property rights, landholders and squatters engage in a dispute to evict/expropriate each other. In such an environment, violence upsurges. In order to avoid expropriation efforts by squatters, landholders preemptively clear land as a means to attain definite property rights over land, since deforested areas are considered land with productive use, for legal considerations. As a result of deforestation, which increases land value, landholders become more prone to react violently to squatter's efforts. The result of deforestation for squatters, however, is ambiguous. On the one hand, violent efforts from landholders tend to push them away. On the other hand, the perceived increased value of land attracts squatters, that may, in turn, increase their fight efforts.

This paper also presents empirical evidence supporting the model's predictions. A two-stage regression analysis was carried out and the main results remain the same as previous studies: deforestation and violence are associated and supports the hypothesis that both result from a poor definition of property rights.