

# CHAPTER 9

## Colombia

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify how the three levels of analysis interact in Colombia
- Use theoretical propositions to understand political and economic development in Colombia
- Explain how and why political and economic development in Colombia differs from other Latin American countries

### TIMELINE

1819	Independence declared
1899–1902	War of the Thousand Days
1948	Jorge Eliécer Gaitán assassinated; La Violencia begins
1957	Sitges Agreement ends La Violencia
1964	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is formed
1974	Official power-sharing agreement ended
1991	New constitution ratified
1998	FARC given demilitarized zone
2000	Plan Colombia goes into effect
2002	Alvaro Uribe elected
2003	Paramilitary demobilization began
2006	Alvaro Uribe reelected
2010	Juan Manuel Santos elected

As Defense Minister in 2008, **Juan Manuel Santos** organized the bombing of Colombian guerrilla camps in neighboring Ecuador, which killed a key rebel leader and yielded laptops with intelligence but also froze relations with the Ecuadorian government. The same year, he also worked on Operation Jaque, which freed fifteen prisoners inside Colombia held by guerrillas, including the former presidential candidate and longtime hostage Ingrid Betancourt. Later as president he vowed to work at the local level to restore land that had been taken violently from peasants or abandoned as the war against guerrillas and drug traffickers raged in the country. For years, the local population was terrorized. In recent decades, political violence has been a constant challenge in Colombia, and Santos' own responses show how international, national, and local factors must all be viewed to understand Colombian politics.

Colombia has the distinction of being viewed for years as a model of political stability and modernization and then shortly thereafter as an example of pure disaster. Not unlike Venezuela, what appeared to be an equitable



Map of Colombia

distribution of power frayed at the edges and ultimately began to lose legitimacy while the party system fractured. Until the latter half of the twentieth century, Colombia's economy was heavily dependent on the export of coffee, though oil did also bring in important revenue. It has since become more diversified, though still largely reliant on primary products.

Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia's global image was not positive. Anecdotally that was evident given the plethora of movies in the United States depicting the country as a drug-infested wasteland. Given the firepower of Marxist guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and drug traffickers, sovereignty in many parts of the country seemed in doubt. Unlike many other Latin American countries, Colombia had not experienced dictatorial rule for decades, but the level of violence had begun displacing Colombians and making many fear for their lives, which also seriously disrupted local politics. The phrase *failed state* was used with more regularity. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, that situation had improved significantly. The government made inroads into disarming the paramilitaries and had won important military victories against the guerrillas. The economy was not only stable, but growing.

## Historical Roots of Political and Economic Development

Simón Bolívar declared Colombia independent in 1819 after nine years of warfare, and it required two more to defeat Spanish forces. Initially “Gran Colombia” (which had been the colonial viceroyalty) included Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela, though Bolívar's experiment with unification was short-lived, as Venezuela and Ecuador became independent in 1830. Panama, on the other hand, would not be separated until U.S. intervention in 1903. Politically the country split quite evenly into liberal and conservative camps, which by 1850 had coalesced into strong Liberal and Conservative parties. They were oligarchic and decentralized, because the country's mountainous geography made centralization initially difficult. At the same time, they were multiclass enough that they absorbed peasants and workers to an extent that other parties did not form, or were co-opted and/or intimidated.

## Local and National Legacies of Violence

There were seven civil wars in the nineteenth century, and so Colombia seemed an example of a country that was unable to achieve “modern” status. Between 1830 and 1876, 24,600 Colombians were killed as a result, and 100,000 more during the War of the Thousand Days (1899–1902).<sup>1</sup> Liberals dominated from 1863 to 1885, followed by Conservatives from 1886 to 1930. Political competition was marked by violence, which ended with the construction of consociational arrangements to find solutions that might prevent future outbreaks. Consociationalism refers to power-sharing agreements (whether formal or informal) that prevent political groups from being completely excluded and therefore resentful. It serves as a bridge between major divisions in a country, and in Colombia has traditionally

been utilized to end bouts of conflict. Colombia became an unusual combination of elite domination and political openness. Suffrage was expanded, moderate political opposition organized freely, and dictatorship was largely avoided.

## Violence With Economic Development

Coffee was the main export in the nineteenth century, and a price boom in the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century fuelled the economy. Small landowners multiplied, which has often been cited as a source of political stability. Radical ideas (such as Marxism) were less likely to take hold because relatively few felt exploited by large latifundia owners or foreigners. The economy was clearly dependent on the developed world, receiving finished goods in exchange for its raw materials. It would become more diverse in the mid-twentieth century, as Colombia embarked on import substitution industrialization precisely to reduce its dependence and to industrialize. That would lead to such industries as petrochemicals, machinery, vehicles, and glass.

However, Colombian ISI was less state-driven than elsewhere, with more of an eye toward export promotion. That meant the state was not saddled with so many inefficient industries after the debt crisis, as was the case in Mexico. Modernization theory would suggest that Colombia was moving in the “correct” direction in virtually all regards, ready to finally start moving upward into developed status. As two historians put in 1922, “Colombia’s citizens seem to have become aroused to the damage wrought their country by fierce civil wars and to have settled down to an era of regular, constitutional government.”<sup>2</sup> That assessment turned out to be completely wrong.

This goal was deferred because political conflict intensified after the global economic crash of 1929. Elections in 1930 and 1931 were marred by violence. Reforms implemented by Liberal President Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934–1938) were met with resistance, as landowners fought agrarian reform and industrialists resisted unionization, to the point that he publicly agreed not to move forward. Although López became president again in 1942 (with assistance from electoral fraud), he faced a coup attempt in 1944 and resigned the following year. Political unrest was accelerating, and the 1946 presidential election only increased polarization.

Colombia exploded in 1948, when charismatic Liberal populist presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated. His death sparked massive riots in the capital Bogotá (and therefore became known as the *Bogotazo*) and then civil war between Liberals and Conservatives. This war would last roughly a decade (1948–1958) and would take over 100,000 lives. It was characterized by such vicious tactics—dismemberment, crucifixion, bayoneting, and so on—that it became known simply as “**La Violencia**,” or “The Violence.” That outbreak of national violence left a deep imprint on Colombian politics, guiding it for several decades. In 1953, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla overthrew the Conservative Laureano Gómez and installed a dictatorship. The only silver lining was that his repressive rule served to bring the two parties together in opposition, and Rojas was forced out in 1957. An interim government served while the two sides determined the formation of a new political system.

## COLOMBIA'S POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

### Last constitution: 1991

#### Unitary system with thirty-two departments and one capital district

**Executive:** President with two five-year terms

**Legislative:** Bicameral with House of Representatives (166 members) and Senate (102 members) both elected by party-list proportional representation

**Judicial:** Supreme Court of Justice, also Constitutional Court of Colombia with power of judicial review

### Contemporary Politics in Colombia

Contemporary politics dates specifically to the Sitges Agreement of 1957, which ended La Violencia and established a formal power-sharing agreement. The National Front guaranteed power and representation to both sides as a way to end the killing. Liberal and Conservative elites agreed that the two parties would rule together, alternating the presidency every four years and guaranteeing that each party split other major administrative offices. Women were also granted the right to vote that year, but the political system was still restrictive. New political parties were not allowed to form until 1968, and legislation had to be passed with a two-thirds majority, which was intended to ensure consensus and compromise. That arrangement lasted until 1974, at which time elections became more competitive and open. Colombia was gradually held up as a model for democratization in the developing world. Despite the extreme polarization of the 1940s and 1950s, it had consolidated a polyarchy and had avoided authoritarianism of either the right or the left while many other South American countries were succumbing to dictatorship. The political ice was thin, however, and elites were periodically concerned about fresh outbreaks of violence related to presidential elections, such as when retired General Rojas managed to garner 39 percent of the vote in 1970 and came close to winning, which generated fear about popular uprisings in opposition.

Constitutional reform in 1968 allowed parties to put together multiple candidate lists for elections, which increased competition at the local level. Regional power brokers were freer from national central control, but simultaneously helped legitimize the state by providing clientelistic local benefits. At the same time, however, the reform served to splinter the National Front even further, as its constituent parties moved in different directions. Nonetheless, until the 1980s presidents sought to provide some measure of parity in the cabinet with the opposition to keep up the basic idea of national cooperation.

But the 1968 constitution also increased executive power, particularly with regard to economic policy. Although its intent was to foster (or really force) cooperation, one effect of the National Front was to emphasize presidentialism. The very nature of Colombian consociationalism, which included ensuring

no party held large legislative majorities and a two-thirds majority to get laws passed, produced gridlock. The presidential response was to use decree power under a state of siege, which could be selectively used in different parts of the country. In practice, the decrees remained in place for years if the president could not convince the legislature to pass the desired law. States of siege also became more common as a way for the executive to curb labor or student unrest. As a result, laws intended to produce partisan parity ended up reducing horizontal accountability.

Into the 1970s Colombia also began moving away from the import substitution model, even joining the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1975, which opened up the economy. The government pushed for some economic liberalization, though this was limited when the price of coffee rose in the mid-1970s, as that filled state coffers and provided latitude for more spending without the pain of allowing more foreign competition. More attention was also paid to agricultural exports, and oil remained (and remains) an important export. Overall, Colombia's economic policies have remained moderate and changes have been gradual regardless of who was in the presidency. Colombian leaders refrained from borrowing too much until a fall of coffee prices compelled them to do so in the 1980s. From 1957 to 1981, it had some of the highest growth rates in Latin America, at an average of 5.15 percent.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, sustained growth did not improve income equality, which has consistently been among the worst in the region. Within that context, the political model no longer corresponded to the demographic change and urbanization taking place in the country, which meant greater numbers of Colombians felt alienated. That, in turn, affected national politics.

In the 1980s, moreover, this model was threatened by the effects of the drug trade and guerrilla war. Very weak currency controls meant it was quite easy to launder drug money. At the same time, during the 1970s the consumption of drugs—especially cocaine—in the United States fuelled a dramatic increase in their production within Colombia. Wide swaths of the country are ideal for growing coca, the plant from which cocaine is derived. Not only is it a hardy plant, making it relatively easy to cultivate, but there are extensive areas in Colombia that are remote and therefore free from any government intrusion. As international demand grew, supply was perfectly able to meet it.

## International Influence: The Drug Trade

Drug trafficking had a huge impact on Colombian politics. It helped to hasten the end of the National Front agreement, as the corruption caused by drug money served to further delegitimize a regime that was increasingly being viewed as unresponsive to the needs of average Colombians. Urbanization had led to new social demands, which political elites were very slow to address, and so abstentionism ran high. Why vote if it seems to have no impact? Participating on some level of the drug trade therefore became more attractive to many people who felt they had little choice in the formal economy. Meanwhile, the power of drug cartels grew exponentially because of the massive profits they made.

The 1970s and 1980s also marked an increase in activity by the **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia**, or FARC. This guerrilla group formed in 1964 in the wake of the Cuban revolution to combat the National Front, though for years it was less powerful than some of its guerrilla counterparts, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN). As the drug trade spread throughout rural areas, however, the FARC began to “tax” it, which really meant extortion. That revenue allowed it to obtain weapons—even very high-tech—and other supplies, and its ranks swelled. The FARC’s goal was to emulate the Cuban revolution by destroying the government and establishing a Marxist system in its place. Unlike the Cuban revolutionaries, however, the FARC was largely unable to gain widespread popularity. Therefore it remained a serious threat but not to the point of winning a revolutionary war.

Although the military stayed out of power, it became much more repressive as it fought on multiple guerrilla fronts. The so-called M-19 was initially the only primarily urban guerrilla force but would be joined by the ELN, which even launched a bold attack on the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. In response, the army sent troops along with a tank to take the building, and in the process killed over 100 people, including 10 of 12 Supreme Court justices. It is important to note, however, that in the aftermath of that disaster, the Betancur administration successfully negotiated the M-19’s demobilization and transformation into a democratic political party, a process completed several years later.

Violence spiraled during the presidency of Julio César Turbay (1978–1982). As historian Marco Palacios puts it, “every group in Colombia with even a modicum of organization seemed to take the law into its own hands during the Turbay years.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it was during this time that Pablo Escobar, the infamous leader of the Medellín drug cartel, ran and won a seat in Congress in 1982 with the Liberal Party. That same year, the cartel created its own death squad called *Death to Kidnappers* (known as MAS) whose aim was to destroy the M-19. It received training support and weapons from the Colombian military and police, and would establish a long-standing formula by which the state could assist illegal operations as a way to fight common enemies. The MAS was implicated in hundreds of deaths.

Liberal and conservative unity began to crack in 1982, as the populist Belisario Betancur won the presidency and pushed for negotiations with the guerilla movements. Under the continued guerrilla assault, there was no longer a united party response about what to do. Betancur’s effort in 1984 to establish a national dialogue was not broadly popular, especially with the armed forces. Nonetheless, he set an important precedent by convincing the M-19 to lay down its arms and eventually became a political party. Yet Colombian consociationalism was still coming apart.

Betancur was also responsible for the initiation of political and economic decentralization in Colombia, which mirrored much of the rest of Latin America. Although Colombia remained a unitary state, mayors were elected for the first time and had their own budgets. Fiscal decentralization increased accountability at the local level, because mayors dealt directly with their constituents. Unfortunately, the strength of the FARC (and later paramilitary groups as well)

meant that mayors sometimes faced perhaps even more intense challenges than politicians at the national level. Extortion and intimidation remained a problem for years. In 1991 there were 28,284 murders in Colombia, compared to 10,713 in 1981.<sup>5</sup> During the same period, kidnappings rose from 99 to 1,550. By any measure, human rights were simply not being respected or protected in Colombia during the 1980s and into the 1990s. Presidents Virgilio Barco Vargas (1986–1990) and César Gaviria Trujillo (1990–1994) both acknowledged the need to do something about guerrilla and drug violence, but were ineffective at doing so.

The 1990 presidential election was especially brutal, as three presidential candidates were killed. This helped spark popular pressure—initiated by those candidates' upset supporters—to reform the constitution as a way to address the inequalities in the country and promote solutions that might reduce the violence. The basic idea was to incorporate human rights in specific ways and to guarantee the rights of minorities. Those reforms changed the electoral system, eliminating the traditional emphasis on rural areas (and therefore rural-based politicians) and increasing urban seats in the legislature. To break the dominance of the two main parties, senatorial elections became national, rather than regional. To increase horizontal accountability, Congress was given broader powers vis-à-vis the president, including the ability to censure cabinet ministers. Reforms also fostered the transfer of money from the central government to local counterparts, thus accelerating decentralization.

International influence was a critical factor in the 1990s, as Colombian governments faced intense and public criticism from the U.S. government, similar to the scrutiny in Bolivia. The low point was during the administration of Ernesto Samper (1994–1998) who was accused of having ties to the Cali drug cartel, which allegedly helped pay for his presidential campaign. As Russell Crandall has put it, U.S. policy was “narcotized,” so that virtually all aspects of U.S.-Colombian relations boiled down to how well the fight against drug production and trafficking was progressing.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Colombia was “de-certified” in 1996 and 1997, meaning the U.S. Congress did not believe it was participating effectively with the war on drugs (which entailed losing aid) and even had Samper’s U.S. visa revoked. Samper was dogged by accusations of drug connections throughout his presidency, and some of his political allies were indicted, though he was never formally charged. Samper discussed negotiating with the FARC, but nothing concrete ensued. But he did make strides, perhaps in response to U.S. pressure, because the Cali cartel was effectively dismantled in the mid-1990s with the arrests, extradition, and later conviction of key members of its leadership. The torrential flow of drugs continued, however, as smaller drug organizations replaced the large cartels (the Medellín Cartel met a similar fate).

So what to do? Samper’s successor, Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002), who was a vocal critic of Samper for those alleged drug ties, took a similar tack with the FARC. He was elected in large part because of his campaign promise to begin serious negotiations with the guerrillas. That included the *despeje* (roughly translated as *clear area*), a demilitarized zone about the size of Switzerland that was ceded to the FARC in exchange for peace talks. It soon became clear,



though, that the guerrillas had no intention of fulfilling their side of the bargain, and the net effect was to strengthen the FARC's hold on the Colombian countryside, which meant even greater violence and disconnect at the local level. But Pastrana also proposed a new plan to the Clinton administration and to the European Union, which would combine funding for security and economic development as a comprehensive strategy for combating drug trafficking. For the time being, it did not include funding for the guerrilla war, which the United States insisted was a domestic rather than international problem.

By that point, the guerrillas were effectively sovereign in large parts of Colombia. They filled a vacuum in remote rural areas where the Colombian state did not reach. With the money it was making from drug trafficking (or the “taxes” on drug traffickers), the FARC provided local-level services that the national government did not provide, such as rudimentary schools (with, of course, Marxist and antigovernment messages) and basic medical care. Such connections, combined with fear, consolidated the FARC's control over large jungle areas. Pastrana, and then Uribe after him, eventually shifted the government's response in a more military and police direction to dislodge the guerrillas.

## Political Violence and Economic Development

No amount of strong law enforcement, however, could effectively address the economic roots of Colombian instability. Economically, Colombia is highly unequal in numerous ways. Its Gini index is consistently one of the highest in Latin America and indeed among the highest in the world (0.56 in 2006). There is also an urban–rural divide. In rural areas poverty afflicts 80 percent of the population, with about 42 percent in extreme poverty. An absence of land reform has meant that ownership of land remains in the hands of a small elite. The Colombian state has been notably absent from the countryside, which also helps to account for why the guerrilla war has lasted so long. That conflict, in turn, increases the number of displaced, which exacerbates poverty.

When Pastrana took office, the Colombian economy was in recession and unemployment had risen above 20 percent. He devalued the currency as a way to boost exports, and then in 1999 let it float as the peso became impossible to shore up. The peso had already been under attack by investors, who were particularly leery because neighboring Ecuador had also just announced it was defaulting on its debt. As had occurred in many other countries, Pastrana then negotiated IMF loans and embarked on structural adjustment policies to cut spending and boost productivity. This made inequality worse but stabilized the economy, which began to grow again by 2000.

In large part for these economic reasons, political scientist (and longtime Colombia observer) Harvey Kline has written—paraphrasing the writer Gabriel García Márquez—that Pastrana's peace process was a “chronicle of a failure foretold.”<sup>7</sup> The country is divided into so many different constituent parts that coordinated economic growth and peaceful coexistence have yet to occur. Colombia has never been integrated, which distorts economic growth and exacerbates existing inequalities.

The National Front excluded the left, and Colombian politics was a top-down affair, which added to local disaffection and opened the door further for young people to be attracted to illegal activities as a way to make a living. The intent of the 1991 constitution was to initiate change in that regard, but it was minimal. No matter what institutional reform was implemented, the fundamentals of the Colombian economy did not augur well for the inclusion of poor youths, especially in rural areas. There were too many illegal opportunities available for those who felt politically and economically isolated from their national government.

One illegal activity that literally exploded was participation in **paramilitary** groups, which refers to armed organizations that operate apart from the military. Although often unofficially sanctioned, they are typically illegal. There was an alphabet soup of different paramilitaries, but the most important was the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (known most commonly by its Spanish acronym, AUC), which formed in 1997. Paramilitary groups had existed for years, formed and funded by local elites who were threatened by guerrilla activity (e.g., Chiquita Brands International was found guilty of paying off paramilitaries). The government was aware of them but considered them useful in the fight against the FARC. A 1989 decree ordered prison sentences for anyone (civilian or military) who participated in or funded them, but it was not well enforced. The AUC became an umbrella group for these disparate organizations, and soon became the source of more human rights abuses than the government or the FARC. Led by Carlos Castaño, the AUC moved into the drug trade, which created a permanent funding stream and broadened the group's political influence. By the 1980s, narcotraffickers owned large parcels of land, which required armed protection. Similar to the FARC, paramilitaries deliberately targeted young Colombians, using a combination of enticement and force to compel them to take up arms.

Paramilitary leaders defended their groups' right to exist, publicly presenting themselves as "a political-military movement which uses the same irregular methods as the guerrillas. Its members are not terrorists, nor common criminals, but rather persons who have found it necessary to violate the law because the Colombian state penalizes the legitimate right of self-defense even though it is incapable of providing that defense."<sup>8</sup> In other words, they break the law because the law is broken to begin with. That entailed not only protection of land but also forced displacement of people, particularly those who were deemed to be guerrilla sympathizers. In many areas, these groups became de facto law enforcement.

As the state seemed unable to fight on its multiple fronts, popular support for a hard-line national government response grew. This is particularly important because the Colombian executive is strong. The president can declare a state of siege, which provides de facto legislative powers. From 1958 until the abrogation of the constitution in 1991, the country was governed under a state of siege 75 percent of the time.<sup>9</sup> In 1991, the measure became known as a State of Internal Commotion and some restrictions were applied, such as placing a 90-day time limit. However, the president can call for a 90-day extension on

top of that—only a second extension requires consent from the Senate. Reforms have allowed Congress to revoke emergency decrees and require adherence to human rights norms, but it remains a powerful presidential tool. This followed the long tradition of including regimes of exception in Colombian constitutions.

Congressional fragmentation has served to solidify presidential power. As mentioned, reforms have been crafted to rectify the problem, but the executive maintains the upper hand. Congress has historically been both unwilling and unable to pursue major initiatives on its own. Members of Congress who wish to advance a particular issue look instead to the executive branch to get it done. The flip side of this situation is that the president can often find it difficult to get legislation passed at all. As in Brazil, the multiplicity of interests and party factions can stymie action. The result is a powerful president who nonetheless cannot necessarily run roughshod over the legislature given the limits of decrees.

The judicial system has gradually increased horizontal accountability. The two main judicial institutions in Colombia are the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court. As its name suggests, the charge of the Constitutional Court is to ensure that all laws and policies conform to the constitution. It has become a powerful player and has routinely overturned legislation, including economic policies. That is an important exception to the otherwise executive-dominant system. The Supreme Court acts as the highest court for all civil and criminal cases, but it cannot rule on the law. Judges in both courts have proved willing to make rulings that contradict the interests of the government in power, which have created a reputation for independence and reinforced horizontal accountability. At the same time, the law very clearly does not extend to all parts of the country, and so local judicial reality is very different. Citizens in rural areas have little chance to have their grievances addressed, and even existing cases face a massive backlog that makes long delays inevitable. Indeed, the sheer number of new laws and reforms has placed large burdens on judges, who are therefore slower to make rulings. One improvement for transparency has been a shift from the traditional Napoleonic system to an accusatorial one in which people have the right to a public trial decided by a judge or jury. Public prosecutors no longer have judicial powers.

A serious problem for the Colombian judiciary at all levels is fear. This includes fear of reporting crimes (especially those that might implicate members of organized crime), of acting as witness, or even for judges to prosecute. The growth of private militia reflects in part the privatization of justice. If for whatever reason a desired settlement was not reached by legal means, then the extralegal became more common.

## National and International Implications of Political Violence

Reforms in 2003 required all parties to submit a single list in each district, which was intended to increase party unity and reduce fragmentation. In the past, each party had multiple lists in each district, which had the effect of pitting candidates from the same party against each other. The Liberal and Conservative parties had

already splintered badly, echoing other countries like Peru and Venezuela. **Alvaro Uribe** ran for president in 2002 without a party label, though he had strong ties to the Liberal Party. He would never return to the party, however, and instead would create his own vaguely defined electoral coalition, “Colombia First.” His supporters, particularly former members of the Liberal Party, coalesced around the Party of National Social Unity (known as *la U*). He advocated a hard-line response to guerrilla violence, and soon after taking office decreed a “State of Internal Commotion,” which granted him broad powers that circumvented Congress. He maintained it for nine months until the Constitutional Court finally struck it down. The hard-line approach also involved encouraging citizens to become informers as a way to provide intelligence to the government.

By 2006, the traditional two-party system was gone. President Uribe successfully lobbied for a constitutional amendment to allow consecutive reelection, which was approved by the Constitutional Court in 2005. Uribe handily won a second term with 62 percent of the vote, while the Conservative Party did not even run a candidate. The Liberal Party candidate garnered only 12 percent of the vote. In the 2006 elections in the Chamber of Deputies, twenty-three different parties were represented, fourteen of which won only one or two seats. The Liberal Party did have the most seats at thirty-five, but that was only 21 percent of all seats.

The 2010 legislative elections saw the rise of a new phenomenon, the Party of National Integration (PIN). Because of ties to paramilitary groups, a number of political parties had been deemed illegal and some of their members jailed. Their members re-coalesced in the PIN, whose newly elected legislators had strong connections (in some cases relatives) to those imprisoned former members. The PIN then won nine seats in the legislature. The two parties most closely tied to Uribe, the Party of the U and the Conservatives, won fifty seats. Along with other parties of the right, including the PIN, the government maintained a comfortable majority.

There was also a new movement on the left. The Independent Democratic Pole (PDI) formed in 2003. Perhaps its most controversial platform is a negotiated settlement with the FARC to end the guerrilla war. For the 2006 presidential election, the PDI allied with another small party of the left, Democratic Alternative, to create the Alternative Democratic Pole (PDA). Their candidate, Carlos Gaviria (a former judge of the Constitutional Court, no relation to the former president), won 22 percent of the vote. The coalition won nine seats in the lower house and eleven in the Senate. The moderate left faces a particularly difficult challenge in Colombia, as the radical left still remains committed to a violent overthrow of the government and a Marxist vision for the country. It is therefore more difficult for the left to win support because it becomes tainted in the public eye as a result.

## The International Politics of Economic Reform

In the 1990s, when the administration of César Gaviria began liberalizing the economy and dismantling the state-led development model, Colombia experienced generally sluggish or even negative growth compared to three percent

gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the 1970s. The high level of violence disrupted economic activity all across the country. The reduction of violence in the 2000s, however, opened the door for more investment and trade. Manufacturing (such as chemicals), textiles, and mining in particular have become stronger, as well as some areas of agriculture.

Growth in exports was enhanced by the United States' Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPDEA). Begun in 2002, the ATPDEA provides tariff-free access for many Andean exports. Colombia, Bolivia (though it was eventually removed), Peru, and Ecuador all benefit from the agreement, which must be reconfirmed by the U.S. Congress, sometimes as often as six months at a time. In 2006, the U.S. Trade Representative signed a free trade agreement with Colombia, which was ratified by the U.S. Congress in 2011. For the Colombian government, a free trade agreement provides access to more goods in the U.S. market and is permanent, thus eliminating the need to continue approving the ATPDEA.

Exports are still focused largely on agriculture, and so the country faces a dependency dilemma for international trade. However, Colombia diversified away from such heavy reliance on coffee, which means the economy is no longer tied to its price, which was the case for decades. By the 1980s, in addition to oil Colombia was also producing cut flowers (paying specific attention to the U.S. market, where demand surges for Valentine's and Mother's Days), cotton, corn, bananas, and sugar. Economic growth after 2002 has been strong, while both inflation and unemployment declined. The decrease of violence during that time has been central to growth. A rise in commodity prices even prompted the government to begin buying dollars in 2011 as a way to curb the appreciation of the peso, which was threatening exports. Nonetheless, the informal economy is still very large, so as always the overall growth numbers obscure the plight of a large proportion of the Colombian population.

The economic program of the Uribe government and that of his successor Juan Manuel Santos has been pro-market and export oriented. Colombia produces about 700,000 barrels of oil a day (and is the ninth largest supplier of oil to the United States). It exports about half of that. There is a state-owned oil company, Ecopetrol, which is the largest producer in the country, though unlike Mexico's Pemex it has been partially privatized and also competes with private companies. Oil constitutes 25 percent of the state's revenue and pipelines have thus also become popular targets for guerrillas, as it is relatively easy to disrupt the flow in remote areas. Nonetheless, production grew in the 2000s because increased security limited the number of pipeline attacks.

Colombia has not faced the same inflationary pressures as some of its neighbors, particularly Venezuela. Inflation was over 20 percent in the mid-1990s, but dipped into single digit even before Uribe took office. By 2013, it was around 2 percent. Monetary policy helped explain this, as the Central Bank kept interest rates stable and there was a floating exchange rate. The Central Bank, in fact, aggressively purchased foreign exchange to keep the domestic currency down and avoid any inflationary pressures. Along with increased security, the investment climate has therefore become more favorable.

## Political Development: The Local Level

The political crisis engendered by drug-related and ideological violence often overshadowed the important process of decentralization, which began in earnest after the adoption of the 1991 constitution. It gave new functions to departments and municipalities, such as decision-making autonomy and fiscal responsibilities. These local institutions now exert extensive influence over agricultural policies, education, health, and infrastructure.

Roughly 50 percent of the national budget was eventually shifted to local and state governments.<sup>10</sup> This effort was implemented unevenly and imperfectly, as the transfer of resources was not accompanied by the institution-building necessary to coordinate it. As a result, a lot of money was wasted or used inefficiently. Individual departments are generally not well-equipped to administer and distribute the funds they receive. In practice, this has meant that departments have gone into debt providing services, assuming that they would eventually be bailed out by the central government.

More scholarly attention is being paid to the position of Colombian mayors, who have become the main face of the government for many citizens who, especially amidst the collapse of the traditional parties, otherwise view the parties as disconnected from them. The constitution allowed for their direct election, and since 2004 their terms are four years with no immediate reelection. Because they are not in office a long time, the qualities they bring immediately to office are critical. The educational level of the mayor, for example, correlates to administrative effectiveness, particularly in terms of improved tax collection and spending on social programs.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, the presence of illegal armed groups harms effectiveness, as mayors are forced to abandon certain policies or are extorted, both of which are obstacles to the mayor being able to do his or her job well.

## International Influences: The Drug Trade

The drug trade relates to basic supply and demand on an international level, which then greatly affects both national and local levels. In the 1970s, the use of cocaine in the United States grew rapidly. Given the immense profit to be made, supply rose to meet the demand. People like Pablo Escobar organized large-scale production and trafficking organizations. The level of violence increased dramatically as well, both in Colombia and in the United States. The origins of the drug trade also have local elements, such as the lack of a government presence in the countryside where coca is grown and processed, but the ultimate demand for drugs comes overwhelmingly from abroad, and mostly from the United States (though the European market is also being tapped).

In the late 1990s, President Pastrana proposed a new “**Plan Colombia**,” the purpose of which was to attract aid from both the United States and Europe. It would have both military and social components to combat coca cultivation and promote economic development projects that would lead Colombians away from the drug trade. With little interest in Europe, Plan Colombia’s final form

was heavily militarized and funded by the United States. By 2010, the United States had spent approximately \$10 billion, and Colombia was the third largest recipient of U.S. aid, behind only Israel and Egypt. Determining the effects of the plan is complex. Given the continued flow of cocaine to the United States, it has not achieved a core objective because the movement of drugs has simply shifted to more remote parts of Colombia and/or to other countries, which is the so-called balloon effect. The aerial spraying of coca fields has proved unpopular because the pesticides kill fields of legitimate crops, thus leaving the rural poor in an even worsened condition.

On the other hand, Plan Colombia meshed well with President Uribe's military-oriented Plan Patriota, created in 2004 with the support of the United States to fight the FARC and the ELN. The guerrilla groups are far weaker than they were at the beginning of Uribe's first term. The FARC is much more on the defensive, and its ability to terrorize rural areas has likewise diminished. One of the FARC's key leaders, Raúl Reyes, was killed in 2008 just over the border with Ecuador, which raised a serious diplomatic dispute with the Ecuadorian government but served as an example of how the Colombian military was succeeding in tracking and attacking the guerrillas. Intelligence work also led to the rescue of a number of hostages, including U.S. citizens. Thus, Plan Colombia was successful from Colombia's point of view, even though fighting guerrillas was not its original objective. Over time it has transformed into the "National Consolidation Plan," which is intended to provide more of a nonmilitary government presence in the country (which, in fact, had been the original intent of Plan Colombia).

Despite the heavily securitized nature of Colombian antiguerrilla and antidrug policies, the armed forces remain outside politics. Political scientist William Avilés has argued that in Colombia, as in Peru, the widespread violence greatly weakened civil society's ability to contest market reforms.<sup>12</sup> This weakened statist or populist elements in the military as well, and opened the door for reduction in military prerogatives. The armed forces have remained content to play a critical role in fighting insurgencies rather than challenging democratic leaders.

In 2009, the administration of Barack Obama negotiated a new defense pact with Colombia, which provided access to seven Colombian military bases. The agreement was forged in response to the decision of the Ecuadorian government not to renew a lease at its Manta airbase, which was used for drug interdiction. The pact sparked regional controversy, with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez likening it to war, while Brazilian President Lula emphasized the lack of transparency and failure to anticipate the concerns that neighboring countries might have. The FARC responded with a blistering communiqué that emphasized its continued, though seemingly fruitless, hope of gaining adherents from the armed forces to fight against the perceived loss of sovereignty and to "halt the threatening flight of the eagle of the Monroe Doctrine over the skies of Our America."

The overall emphasis on security has raised questions about the effects on the population. Both in and out of office President Uribe has faced considerable

criticism for human rights in Colombia (both at home and abroad), which he clearly disliked. He gave a speech in 2009 to the General Assembly of the United Nations, in which—as in many other instances—he emphasized the reduction of violence and displacement. He argued that fighting terrorism did not have to mean compromising democracy. Colombia was fighting a “heroic battle” against narcoterrorism and it was winning.

## ANALYZING DOCUMENTS

*Alvaro Uribe's two terms in office marked a substantial change from the past. He obtained international support (from the United States) to fight the national and local problems of guerrilla violence. His hard-line policies were both popular and controversial, which prompted speeches like this one to defend them.*

### **Alvaro Uribe, Speech to the United Nations (2009)**

I would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, and by reiterating to the United Nations the recognition for its beneficial presence and collaboration with the people of Colombia. The Government that I preside has the objective of increasing the confidence of the national and international community in our Country.

We support that search for confidence on three pillars: security with democratic values, promotion of investment and entrepreneurship with social responsibility, and social cohesion with freedoms. We continue to make progress in security but also with pending challenges. I would like to highlight intangible achievements that validate the democratic credentials of our security project:

- We have recovered two monopolies that we never should have lost: the monopoly of institutional forces to combat criminals and the monopoly of justice that terrorists once wanted to displace. Paramilitarism, a term that emerged to describe private criminal gangs whose objective was to combat drug trafficking guerrillas, has been dismantled. Today, the State is the only one that combats all criminals. These, in all their forms, drug-trafficking guerrillas, criminal gangs, are brought together in a mafia-style relationship that unites them or pits them against each other to share or fight over the profits of the criminal drug enterprise. Justice, with the Supreme Court assassinated in 1985 in an assault by drug traffickers and guerrillas, tormented by the threat and assassination of judges and displaced in many regions by terrorists leaders of guerrillas and paramilitaries that attempted to replace it, has recovered in the entirety of the Country its full effectiveness.
- Victims did not stand up out of fear of retaliation or belief that it would be useless. Now, thanks to the recovery of security, 239,758 victims have been registered, and we are carrying out a determined reparation effort with them, that is never complete, but that will lead to reconciliation as it advances, by cancelling spirits of vengeance and hatred.
- We have recovered the independence of decentralization and of political exercise. Terrorism had displaced 30% of mayors, stolen and corrupted large amounts of municipal and departmental budgets and coerced political sectors. Mayors have



recovered the security for the free exercise of their mandates and the transparent management of resources. Politics are freely exercised in the expression of all forms of thought.

- This terrorist threat has been confronted without martial legislation, with full civil and political guarantees and absolute respect for the liberties that we promote through security.
- We work towards both the effectiveness of the Public Forces and the respect for human rights. We do not hesitate to punish those who violate them nor do we back away from defending our soldiers and policemen, sometimes victims of a dirty legal war. Colombia has voluntarily presented itself to the United Nations human rights review. Furthermore, in spite of suffering caused by the anti-personnel landmines planted by terrorist groups, the State destroyed those in possession of the Public Forces for training purposes. Our country is one of the leaders of the Ottawa Convention for the destruction of such landmines and will host its next meeting in Cartagena.
- We combat terrorism with wholehearted determination and we practice democracy with full devotion. That is why Colombia's doors have been open without restrictions to international vigilance. We deliberate and disagree, but impartial observers and biased critics alike have had guaranteed spaces in Colombia.
- Our interest is not the fanatical confrontation between left and right, which is dangerous as it is obsolete, we are betting on a modern democracy, safe, free, builder of social cohesion, with independent institutions, with confidence derived from the transparency that is based on a high degree of citizen participation.
- We have not been able to completely overcome displacement but we have multiplied by 12 the budgetary resources allocated to provide assistance to displaced persons. We promote confidence links between state forces and communities so that operations against drug-trafficking are not frustrated by the displacement provoked by drug-traffickers. 51,783 members of terrorist groups have demobilized and the size of these groups has been reduced from nearly 60,000 to less than 8,000. We have shown complete generosity with the demobilized and full severity with the 7% who have relapsed into criminal behavior. The Justice and Peace Law that covers them has allowed for the revelation of 29,555 criminal acts, the confession of 12,104, the discovery of 2,492 corpses in 2,043 graves, the identification of 708 bodies and the return of 581 to their families. The participation of the victims and new procedures for the restitution and redress of their rights are a determining component of this demobilization process. Terrorism cannot be ignored in the name of good international relations. On the contrary, multilateralism and diplomacy must lead to collaborative actions among States to overcome this drama and its accomplices like trafficking in arms, illicit drugs, money and asset laundering, terrorist havens, among others. We reiterate our commitment to multilateralism, in all its legitimate expressions, from the organizations of neighboring countries to the most global, but believe that multilateralism has to demonstrate effectiveness in defeating international crime.

*(Continued)*

- Colombia has recognized the internal problem of narco-terrorism, has led a heroic battle that will ultimately prevail, cooperates with the international community and requests more effective cooperation. We cooperate with Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Afghanistan and other countries. We recognize the efforts of the United States to work jointly with us in dismantling narco-terrorism. We ask for more cooperation from more countries and from the international community.
- Our objective is recovering domestic security, never participating in the arms race for the bloody game of international war. Our tradition is one of respect for the global community.

### Discussion Questions

- In what ways did President Uribe acknowledge the importance of international influence in Colombia?
- How does he envision the connection between the national government and the local population?

Source: [http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/CO\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/pdf/CO_en.pdf)

Critics point to the scandals that have broken out with regard to security. Many members of the government and the armed forces have been found to have ties to paramilitary groups. Since 2008, the military has also been implicated in the case of so-called false positives, where civilians were killed and their bodies put in FARC uniforms as a way to increase the body count of the guerrilla war. Over 500 officers have been implicated, and the death toll is estimated to be at least 2,000. Human rights activists also point to the high number of trade unionists killed (51 were murdered in 2010, though that was down from 184 in 2002 as Uribe took office), as Colombia is one of the more dangerous countries in the region for union leaders. The Uribe government repeatedly referred to various human rights groups as potential subversives, perhaps linked to the FARC, which raises the specter of making them into targets.

Supporters of security-oriented policies point to the decreased rate of murder and kidnappings, arguing that such an entrenched problem cannot be solved overnight. Homicides dropped over time. There were 29,000 in 2002, and 16,000 in 2008, a 45 percent decrease. Kidnappings fell 73 percent from 2002 to 2005. Eventually, Mexico took over the ignominious crown of the country with most kidnappings. Supporters also argue that the country is far more secure than in the not-too-distant past when many Colombians were fearful of traveling even short distances because of the possibility of coming into contact with paramilitary and/or guerrilla forces. The government also points to the successful campaign against the FARC, which yielded important military victories and extended the state's presence more into remote areas of the country. This in turn has also prompted higher levels of foreign investment. Thus, local, national, and international are tightly intertwined.

Beginning in 2002, the government also organized the large-scale demobilization of the AUC. By the completion of the process in 2006, roughly 20,000 members—representing the vast majority—had laid down their arms. More than a dozen have been extradited to the United States to stand trial. In 2006 the government created the High Council for the Social and Economic Reintegration of Disarmed People and Groups to organize the disarming process, under the auspices of the Administrative Department of the Presidency. There have been a number of obstacles, the most pressing of which was disillusionment on the part of the participants, who felt the government did an inadequate job providing jobs and they were not given sufficient protection from still armed combatants who targeted them for betrayal.<sup>13</sup> There remains a strong incentive to return to a life of violence, which is much more lucrative.

Questions related to reparations, information about murders, and justice for crimes committed remain also unanswered, and new groups have appeared (such as the so-called Black Eagles) that carry out the same types of violent activities of the AUC. Similarly, the ELN has demobilized considerably, though it has resisted a formal agreement with the government, and currently has only around 1,000 members. It has become weakened to the point that its members have been much more likely to defect than the FARC.

The cost of these successes has been considerable. According to the Colombian Defense Ministry, between 2002 and 2010 there were a total of 20,915 combat deaths.<sup>14</sup> This includes individuals identified as “subversives,” members of illegal militia and criminal gangs, as well as the Colombian security forces (of which 4,571 were killed). Of course, a body count does not take into consideration the millions of people whose lives were permanently affected one way or another as a result of the guerrillas, paramilitaries, drug traffickers, and government security forces. Local disruption is a continuing and serious problem.

Understanding the dynamics of human rights in Colombia is therefore complicated. The issue of human rights has spilled over into international relations, especially with regard to passing a free trade agreement with the United States. Opponents in the United States, particularly in the Democratic Party, argued that a free trade agreement should not be ratified until the Colombian demonstrated more progress with improving its human rights record. Quantifying that can be a slippery and imperfect process.

The growth of organizations dedicated to human rights is a relatively recent phenomenon in Colombia. In the 1980s, the political left learned from the Southern Cone countries how to incorporate human rights ideals into their discourse and to create formal groups to counteract politically motivated violence. As the problem worsened, human rights became more mainstream and institutionalized. The 1990s saw the creation of the Defensoría del Pueblo, which coordinates ombudsmen to inform citizens of their rights, as well as a number of different human rights initiatives within government agencies and ministries, including the Ministry of Defense. President Uribe created the Vice President’s Human Rights Program, though it has little political influence. Nonetheless, the combination of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies has raised the profile of human rights to an unprecedented degree.

Regardless, throughout his two terms President Uribe maintained some of the highest approval ratings of any Latin American president, even topping 80 percent in 2008. His predecessors, Pastrana and Samper, had average ratings of 20 and 33 percent, respectively. Even the various scandals did not puncture that popularity to a large degree, and he left office as one of the most popular presidents in Colombian history.

As his second term progressed, supporters of President Uribe floated the possibility of amending the constitution once more to allow for a third term. Uribe himself remained largely close-lipped about the matter, though periodically he made comments indicating he would welcome the development. After extensive discussions, Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled in 2010 that a draft referendum on the issue was unconstitutional, and therefore could not be put to a vote, which was a sign of horizontal accountability. Uribe then made it clear that his preferred candidate was Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, who won a plurality in the first round of the 2010 presidential election against Green Party candidate Antanas Mockus, a dark horse former mayor of Bogotá who rose rapidly in the polls. Santos then won convincingly in the second round. A key question for a Santos presidency was how much he would maintain Uribe's policies, particularly with regard to security. He sent mixed signals, on the one hand emphasizing continuity as a way to garner votes, but on the other asserting that he was not simply a carbon copy. That issue became most evident when, just before leaving office, Uribe accused the Venezuelan government of harboring the FARC. Hugo Chávez responded that he would not hold a dialogue with Colombia until Santos had assumed power. One in office, the two met and Santos announced—how seriously or not is open to question—that Chávez was his new best friend. He also worked to reestablish diplomatic ties with Ecuador, which had not appreciated being bombed, and the two countries once again exchanged ambassadors.

Although he had been central to the security-oriented strategies of the Uribe government and was often portrayed as essentially carrying on Uribe's legacy, Santos' overall tone tended to be more moderate than his predecessor. He has been more open to returning peasant land stolen by paramilitary groups, for example. Their differences led to Uribe criticizing Santos' decisions publicly, even through Twitter. Nonetheless, he maintained an aggressive counterinsurgency strategy intended to keep the FARC on the run and kill its leadership, while starting negotiations in Cuba without a ceasefire.

## **National Meet Local: Indigenous, Racial, and Gender Issues**

Insecurity in Colombia has greatly affected underrepresented groups. Yet especially when compared to other countries in the region, Colombia has a relatively positive record in addressing the needs of its indigenous population, which is approximately 3.4 percent of the total population and is composed of 85 different groups. Such efforts have aimed at increasing local autonomy. Between 1960 and 1990, the state established more than 200 local reserves, or

*resguardos*, a concept that dated back to colonial times, and in 1989 created special rights for Indians living in the Amazonian area.<sup>15</sup> About two-thirds of the indigenous population lives on such a reserve. Within the *resguardos*, native languages are official, whereas outside them Spanish is the official language. There has been encroachment on these lands, however, as well as controversy over whether the central government should be allowed to spray herbicides there as part of its anticoca efforts.

Activism increased after 1991, including a blockade of the Pan-American Highway in 1999 that involved 12,000 people and lasted eleven days, followed by others of even greater scope. Not only were these mobilizations intended to advance indigenous rights but also to remind the government that the indigenous deserved the same type of attention that the FARC was receiving simply because it was so violent. That stance became more difficult when the peace talks failed and the government pursued a more military-oriented policy toward the guerrillas. So, for example, when large protests were held in 2006 in southwestern Colombia, they were met with helicopters and tear gas.

Indigenous activists expressed fear that they were being targeted as part of the government's focus on destroying subversion in the country, as activists sometimes used land seizures as a protest strategy. In fact, the government openly accused activists of being tied to the FARC, and people of indigenous descent account for 7 percent of the displaced in Colombia, a disproportionate share. This led in 2004 to increased attention to broadening the scope of protests to connect better to both national and international actors. One result has been the "minga," a word that means *collective work* in Quechua. In 2008, 40,000 people came together for six weeks of protests against the Uribe's government economic and security policies. They marched from southwest Colombia to Bogotá, and even had a debate with government ministers.

With regard to race, Colombia has the second largest black population in Latin America, after Brazil, though political leaders have been overwhelmingly white. Estimates range from 15 to 35 percent of the entire population of 44 million, with the highest concentration living on the Pacific Coast.<sup>16</sup> Afro-Colombian student groups began organizing in the 1970s and became particularly active in the debate over drafting the new constitution which, although mentioning race only briefly, emphasizes equality. Further, groups like the Process of Black Communities (PCN) emerged at the local level and have been successful in interpreting existing laws related to race in ways that benefit poor black communities.

This activism has been especially relevant for the implementation of Law 70, which provides collective ownership of land for Afro-Colombians on the Pacific Coast. The passage of Law 70 focused national attention on the economic plight of the rural black population, while also sparking the creation of new local NGOs aimed at addressing the problems faced by Afro-Colombians while also preserving their culture. Although complaints have surfaced about how few land titles have actually been granted, the existence of the law provides a basis for further activism and increased vertical accountability. At the same time, political

violence in rural areas has hit black populations hard. Roughly one-third of displaced people in Colombia are black. That entails an increase of urban poor, because internal refugees avoid the conflict by making their way to cities.

A certain growth of vertical accountability is also apparent with regard to gender. Colombian women first began organizing politically in the 1930s, primarily to achieve suffrage, which took twenty years to pass. The 1991 constitution guarantees equality before the law, but in practice discrimination is still a problem. The government has made efforts to provide economic opportunities for women, such as microcredit. The Women's World Bank in Colombia has been successful in this regard, funding tens of thousands of women. Women have been entering the workforce in greater numbers, and the gender wage gap slowly narrowed from the 1990s onward. It should be noted that the growing workforce was not always positive, as at times it reflected greater internal migration prompted either by local violence or by a lack of opportunities in rural towns.

Women face unique problems in Colombia because rape and other types of abuse (such as forced abortions) have become common for both guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries. More women (and, of course, children) than men make up the population of the displaced, and Colombia's human rights ombudsman estimated that 40 percent are subject to sexual violence. On the flip side of the conflict, women attempting to flee the violence must face serious risks as they migrate internally to find refuge. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented that women are often not taken seriously and find it difficult to convince officials to investigate, much less prosecute, human rights abuses. Meanwhile, women are also involved, on the other side, in the rebel movements themselves. They play prominent roles within the FARC (see Box 9.1).

## BOX 9.1

### Local Connections Women in the FARC

**International:** As in other revolutionary forces in Latin America (such as the Cuban revolution or the FMLN in El Salvador), women play an important role in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Marxist guerrilla groups have often welcomed women, ostensibly offering them the opportunity to fight not only the capitalist system but also gender discrimination at both the local and national levels. At least on the surface, they provide something that women cannot obtain otherwise—money, some type of education, belonging,

and respect.<sup>17</sup> Many women find attractive the idea that they can challenge existing social conventions through membership in the FARC.

**National:** Formally, the FARC enforces gender equality as part of its ongoing struggle to “free” the Colombian people. Women play the same roles as men, including combat, and can move up the leadership ranks, though the Secretariat is entirely male. Women make up approximately 30 percent of the FARC, which is a larger proportion than most conventional armies. They

are expected to perform the same tasks as men, which are often very arduous given their life as an illegal fighting force in the jungle.

**Local:** Thus, the FARC works at the local level to find new recruits for its national war, which in turn has important international consequences. Conditions for the poor in small towns and rural areas create a ripe environment, as it is not difficult to find a receptive audience for an antigovernment message.

From a practical standpoint, however, there is considerable discrimination. Women who become pregnant, for example, are sometimes forced to have abortions in very primitive conditions

(or they desert, an option that has become increasingly popular in recent years for both men and women as the Colombian government has had more successful military campaigns). There is also harassment and rape. The FARC recruits young girls, in their early teens, and despite the official declarations of equality, discrimination is common.

### Discussion Questions

- Why would it be important for the FARC to present an image of gender equality?
- Can you think of reasons why women at the local level might be attracted by the FARC's gendered message?

## Conclusion and Comparative Perspective

Like so many of his predecessors, Juan Manuel Santos came to office promising his fellow citizens and the international community to reduce the level of political violence in a country that has suffered from it for much of its history. That promise, though, did come from someone who had coordinated the bombing of a neighboring country. It is notable that, as one political scientist has put it, Colombians continue to “vote amid violence.”<sup>18</sup> Despite all the international pressures, local intimidation (especially in rural areas), urban violence, paramilitary scandals, and even questions about reelection at the national level, electoral democracy perseveres. Violence remains a major problem, and tens of thousands are displaced, yet both horizontal and vertical accountability persist and the armed forces remain in the barracks, while Colombians are less afraid than in the past. Nonetheless, the state still does not extend effective rule of law or even infrastructure in all parts of the country. The national and local levels are often not well-connected, which creates a power vacuum filled by guerrillas and paramilitaries.

Economically, Colombia still faces the age-old problem of extending opportunity to rural areas where collaboration with drug traffickers and/or the FARC remains a profitable alternative. Rural land remains both badly underutilized and highly concentrated in the hands of a relatively small elite. Inflation has remained low, and before economic contraction in 2008, GDP growth was very favorable. Unfortunately, many of the benefits of macroeconomic stability have not reached a large proportion of the population. Primarily because of the security threat, unlike other Latin American cases, Colombians have not voted for a candidate of the left.

Colombia is an unusual case where a tremendous amount of political violence occurs in the context of electoral democracy. In that sense it is unlike Central America in the 1980s or Peru in the 1990s, but more like Mexico after 2006. The particular mix of drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare yields an especially vicious type of internal conflict. Yet it also shares characteristics with

**TABLE 9.1 Colombian Economic Indicators, 1991–2011**

Year	GDP Growth	Inflation	Unemployment	Poverty Rate	Human Development Index
1991	1.6	26.8	10.2	50.5	0.836
1992	3.9	25.1	10.2	—	0.813
1993	4.5	22.6	8.6	—	0.840
1994	6.3	22.6	8.9	47.3	0.848
1995	5.4	19.5	8.8	—	0.758
1996	2.1	21.6	11.2	—	—
1997	3.0	17.9	12.4	44.9	0.768
1998	0.6	16.7	15.3	—	0.764
1999	-4.2	9.2	19.4	48.7	—
2000	2.9	8.8	17.3	—	—
2001	2.2	7.6	18.2	—	0.779
2002	2.5	7.0	17.6	51.5	0.773
2003	4.6	6.5	16.6	—	—
2004	4.7	5.5	15.3	51.1	—
2005	5.7	4.9	13.9	46.8	0.791
2006	6.8	4.5	12.9	46.8	—
2007	7.7	5.7	11.4	—	0.807
2008	3.0	7.7	11.5	—	—
2009	0.8	2.0	13.0	45.7	—
2010	4.0	2.6	12.4	—	0.714
2011	5.9	3.4	11.5	—	0.717

Sources: Unemployment: *GDP and Inflation: Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean*, 1994–2012.

Poverty rate: *Social Panorama of Latin America*. Economic Commission for Latin America, 1990–2012.

Human development index: United Nations, *Human Development Report*, 1990–2013.



Venezuela because both countries suffered a period of intense violence in the middle of the twentieth century, followed by a stable pacted transition that excluded a large proportion of the population. Unlike other countries where party systems fell apart, populism did not emerge in Colombia. Politicians have fairly smoothly shifted into new parties and coalitions, and the military has stayed out of politics.

From an economic perspective, Colombia is very similar to other countries that rely heavily on the export of commodities. It does have oil, which provides it more of a cushion at a time when oil prices are high, and successive governments have endeavored to diversify the primary products being exported. Similar to Mexico, it has a strong economic relationship with the United States and for years actively lobbied for completing of a free trade agreement. Unlike many other South American countries, in recent years its international orientation has been much more toward the United States than to its neighbors.

## Key Terms

- Juan Manuel Santos
- La Violencia
- Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
- Paramilitary
- Alvaro Uribe
- Plan Colombia

## Discussion Questions

- In what ways has Colombian consociationalism after 1957 contributed to or hindered the long-term development of democracy?
- Colombia has suffered tremendous violence, yet remains a polyarchy. How has it avoided dictatorships?
- Discuss the evolution of counterinsurgency strategies in Colombia. What has seemed to be most effective against guerrillas and why?
- How well have Colombia's efforts to promote racial equality succeeded in achieving their goals? Have they been different from those employed in other countries?
- What has driven economic growth in Colombia? In what ways have governments succeeded in diversifying its economy?

## Further Sources

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- Russell, Crandall. *Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia*, 2nd edition (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008). Given the strong influence of U.S. policy, this book provides a good analysis of how the emphasis on narcotics has affected Colombian politics. In particular, it offers a good framework for understanding the dynamics of Plan Colombia.

- Tate, Winifred. *Counting the Dead: The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Rooted in an anthropological analysis, the book examines the development of human rights activism in Colombia. It also includes the perspectives of the armed forces and international NGOs.
- Taylor, Steven L. *Voting Amid Violence: Electoral Democracy in Colombia* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2009). This book provides a very clear overview of Colombian politics, focusing in particular on the formal institutional elements of democracy. Taylor argues that Colombia is an electoral democracy seeking to become a liberal one.
- Welna, Christopher and Gustavo Gallón (eds.). *Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights in Colombia* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). This edited volume offers a comprehensive look at Colombian politics, broken into sections on peace, democracy, and human rights. Chapters range from the peace process to political reform.

### Web Sites

- The Central Bank of Colombia* (<http://www.banrep.gov.co/en>). The Central Bank maintains a useful Web site in English, including many different statistics, reports, speeches, and press releases. Particular attention is paid to prices, inflation, and interest rates.
- Colombia Reports* (<http://colombiareports.com/>). A useful English-language news organization based in Medellín, Colombia. It has articles on a broad range of topics (including culture, travel, and sports), but it focuses particularly on political news.
- Washington Office on Latin America* (<http://www.wola.org/country/colombia>). This is a nonprofit with extensive analysis and commentary on Colombian politics, with a focus on human rights.

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