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**VIOLENT LIBERALISM? STATE,  
CONFLICT AND POLITICAL REGIME IN  
COLOMBIA, 1930-2006**

**AN ANALYTICAL NARRATIVE ON  
STATE-MAKING**

**Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín  
Tatiana Acevedo  
Juan Manuel Viatela**  
Universidad Nacional de Colombia

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**Violent liberalism?  
State, conflict, and political regime in Colombia, 1930-2006**

**An analytical narrative on state-making**

Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín<sup>1</sup>

Tatiana Acevedo<sup>2</sup>

Juan Manuel Viatela<sup>3</sup>

Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales  
Universidad Nacional de Colombia

**Abstract**

*Colombia has suffered from one of the longest periods of internal political violence in the modern world. This analytical narrative explores the state's failure to ensure security within its borders whilst at the same time presiding over a competitive polity and a stable and uninterrupted moderate economic growth. How have these elements managed to coexist for so long? The narrative attempts to understand this characteristic 'Colombia puzzle' and provide insights into how macro-institutional stability has been able to exist alongside war, violence, and organised crime over such a long period of time. Despite strong elements of state failure - i.e. the state's inability to provide security and to acquire the monopolies that characterise canonical 'state-ness' (of legitimate violence, of taxes and of duties) - the country has grown and developed. Any explanation of the puzzle should therefore simultaneously account for failure and resilience. The authors claim that formal order and informal disorder are organically linked in a genuine coexistence. Colombia has had a bona fide republican-democratic experience in many fundamental senses, but this is organically connected with its enduring violence. The narrative explores the intimate historical relationship between state, regime and violence.*

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<sup>1</sup> Researcher at the Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales – Universidad Nacional de Colombia

<sup>2</sup> Anthropologist, Master in political science

<sup>3</sup> Master in anthropology

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## Introduction

Colombia has suffered from chronic political violence at least since the mid 1940s until today.<sup>4</sup> This is probably the longest spell of internal political violence anywhere in the modern world. Even if one accepts that it only started in the 1940s, and that it had a relatively brief interruption – more or less between 1964 and 1978<sup>5</sup> – this is an extraordinary phenomenon that demands some type of explanation. Naturally, it evidences that there has been a state failure, in the simple and direct sense that the state has been consistently unable to provide security – and perhaps other goods – to important sectors of its territory and population. At the same time, it is reasonable to suppose that such a prolonged period of violence and unrest has created traditions, dynamics, interactions, mutual expectations, and patterns of behavior (such as feuds and resentments) that encumber the finding of a solution to the problem. Aggregated cross national data suggest that this inverted Lamarckianism – the persistence of a problem preventing the emergence of the very organ needed to deal with it – is at work in all the cases of relatively prolonged political violence.<sup>6</sup> *A fortiori*, one would expect to find something of this sort abundantly in Colombia.

Colombia, however, is not only a country that has experienced very persistent violence. It is also a deeply competitive polity – and has been so from the beginning. Elections were institutionalised with the birth of the republic, political parties were formally created in 1849 (Colmenares 1968) – remaining dominant until 2002 – and the rotation of the elites in power was as related to the ballot box as the bivouac from the very start. The horizon of the elites' political imagination has with few exceptions been electoral-republican. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there have been only two coups followed by periods of military rule, which taken together comprise less than ten years and which were characterised by relatively mild levels of repression. These coups also consisted of a type of organic link between the moderate wing of the Conservative Party and the effort to re-incorporate the Liberal Party, which by then had been largely excluded (Bushnell 1993). In the period after the first coup, at least, their business was re-establishing a more fair and peaceful partisan competition, not eliminating it. In sum, they were far away from the stereotype of the Latin American coup. The so called 'third wave of democratisation' that, according to Huntington (1991), started in the 1970s, affected Colombia by inviting it to a gradual unfreezing of its party system – but the country's republican institutions predated the international move towards democracy by far; Colombia is actually a first wave case. Third world first wave countries are very rare, and in this sense Colombia also seems to stand in a category of its own.

Colombia differs from the Latin American standards in yet another sense. In the sub-continent there have been developmental ups and downs, but the general pattern was of fits and starts: periods of vertiginous growth punctuated by deep crises. For a very prolonged period, Colombia experienced neither. It embarked on a long term sequence of smooth but gentle – or mediocre, depending on the point of view—growth, which was only disrupted in the late 1990s but seems to have come back on track in the last few years. Only on three occasions did the country have negative GNP rates of change (1929, 1930, and 1999),

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper we will try to qualify and specify the 'at least'.

<sup>5</sup> Many Colombian scholars would maintain that there was no interruption and that in fact we are speaking of a single, long wave of disruption. However, the idea of two or three waves seems to better fit the facts. See section 2.1 and Figures 1 A and B. The figures play only an indicative role, but we will see that the mechanisms that characterize each wave are quite different.

<sup>6</sup> According to several observers, the probability of a solution falls, and the probability of a relapse grows, with the duration of the conflict. See Collier, Hoeffler, Soderbom (2002).

although the slope of growth was never stupendous (see Figure 2). Stable growth and macroeconomic stability went hand in hand. It is true that for decades the country experienced two-digit inflation rates (Montenegro and Rivas 2005), but they were always among the lowest in Latin America.

It is possible to offer other examples of these contrasting experiences, but what we have shown are the main instantiations, and suffice to illustrate the point: there is a characteristic 'Colombia puzzle', constituted by the very long coexistence of macro-institutional stability (democracy, markets, growth) with war, violence, and organised crime (Gutiérrez 1998). We want to figure out the puzzle, and to do so, the following questions at least ought to be answered:

- a. How and why is this coexistence possible?
- b. The coexistence reveals a state failure (to provide security); how can this be deciphered?
- c. How can we explain state and macro-institutional resilience? In effect, despite its inability to provide security and to acquire the monopolies that characterise canonical 'state-ness' (of legitimate violence, of taxes and of duties) the country has grown and developed. Furthermore, viewed over the long term there has been a rather impressive institutional build up. Any sensible explanation of the puzzle should *simultaneously* account for failure and resilience.
- d. In the other direction, which factors and mechanisms have impeded the country from exiting from this extraordinarily long violent cycle?
- e. How have 'formal order' and 'informal disorder' interacted?
- f. What kind of vulnerabilities and risk factors has their coexistence created?

Of course, these are hardly independent questions; they are rather a form of disaggregating and 'spelling out' the puzzle. They have also been in the air for a long time. Following several authors, we will claim here that formal order and informal disorder are organically linked. However, we will depart from the majority of them on the following crucial point: we will stress that this is a *genuine* coexistence. While various commentators have noted the coexistence, they have been tempted to reduce it to one of its factors. For example, Fluharty (1957), Oquist (1980) and Wilde (1978) have claimed, using different arguments, that the Colombian democratic experience was an epiphenomenon, simultaneously reflecting and concealing deep socio-economic inequalities. Recently, a new type of interpretation has appeared in which the inverse reductionism is proposed: inequality and poverty are completely unrelated to violence, and the prolonged coexistence of democracy and war is due to demographic or geographic factors (Montenegro, Posada and Piraquive 2000), or to the will of criminal elements (Rubio 1998; 1999). Against both reductionisms, we will argue that Colombia has had a bona fide republican-democratic experience in many fundamental senses, but that it is organically connected with its enduring violent experience. We will suggest that attempts to reduce the puzzle to one of its terms – to claim for example that the *real* process has been macroinstitutional stability, or has been violence – are untenable.

If we are right, this means that we are confronting a genuine puzzle. How can it be cracked? Its terms invoke problems related to the regime type and to the nature of the state, which quite naturally invites a 'Barringtonian' answer. Barrington Moore (1966) proposed an interpretation of macro historical regime trajectories *qua* society and state narratives. We

follow the hint, though not necessarily the interpretative style.<sup>7</sup> In particular, we are interested in Moore's reading of India. According to Moore, each of the major paths that gave rise to the modern world – democracy, fascism, and communism – was the product of a rural rupture. The type of rupture and of coalition behind it determined the final outcome.<sup>8</sup> In his reading of India, however, Moore found an anomaly: the early institutionalisation of democracy had frozen the terms of the agrarian conflict, resulting in a stale combination of archaic agrarian structures and liberal democracy. Moore and his 'Indian thesis' were taken to task for several reasons, basically due to several inexactitudes in his concrete rendering of the case (Wiener 1975; Mukherji and Sahoo 1992). Many of these criticisms appear to be correct.<sup>9</sup> Typically, the debate faded out without a clear conclusion. In the course of it, however, three very important points seem to have been lost.

First, the intuition that the adoption of liberal democracy in a context of unsolved agrarian conflict over property rights can generate anomalous types of institutions, state and regime. Given that this phenomenon has become one of the marks of our contemporary world, and that actually many peace processes today are built on a tradeoff between the stabilisation of agrarian property structures and democratisation (see for example the comparative work of Wood on South Africa and El Salvador, 2000), this is a lead that deserves to be retrieved and explored. Second, the several analytic problems of Moore's proposal need to be examined. Moore identified a very important problem, but obviated the complexity of the mechanisms he was referring to and left many subsidiary questions unsolved. For example, why – or under what circumstances – is a liberal democracy unable to solve its agrarian problems without becoming definitively destabilised, thus creating a homeostatic mechanism that leads to stagnation? And what about state and regime survival? Why – or under what conditions-- is this type of stagnated liberalism resilient? What happens with the agents that act to advance their own interests in Moore's canonical paths? Are they suspended in a vacuum? Why are they not capable of destabilising the extant arrangements? All this is naturally related to the problem of state weakness and breakdown. If state building is deeply related to developing capitalism *and* resolving the agrarian problem (a perspective shared by authors like Giddens 1985; Tilly 1985; and Hirschman 1971 among others), a liberalism that preserves backward agrarian structures deserves special attention.<sup>10</sup> Third, Moore provides a theoretical argument that *explicitly* connects state building, political regime (democracy), and violence. This seems tailored to the Colombian case. Furthermore, Moore's point of departure is interesting. He basically accepts the liberal notion of democracy (as Hobsbawm, 1981, has noted), but grounds it historically. Wiener provides a step forward: "Moore argues that democracy where it exists in the world was possible only as a result of violent social revolutions against the agrarian elite" (Wiener 1975: 315).<sup>11</sup> All this, naturally, needs to be revised and falsified.<sup>12</sup> However, we believe that an approach of this type – connecting state, regime, and violence – might help sort out 'the puzzle' of the Colombian case.

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<sup>7</sup> *Toute proportion gardée*. See Part 2.

<sup>8</sup> The majority of Moore's critics proposed different explanatory combinations, without putting into question some of the basic methodological problems of his interpretation. See for example Mukherji and Sahoo 1992.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth recalling that Moore (1966) stated in advance that one of the shortcomings of macrohistory is that it could only be done at the cost of some amount of precision.

<sup>10</sup> Please note that Moore observed that it had a special status, but did not flesh out his intuition.

<sup>11</sup> It would be a more precise exegesis to say 'violent social processes'.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Femia (1972) correctly notes that Moore's conditions for the establishment of a modern democracy are neither sufficient nor necessary.

In Colombia, the 'Indian lead' was already explored long before Moore took it up. The main reference in this regard is Fluharty (1957). However, Fluharty did not grasp the simple but fundamental point of Moore's intuition. Fluharty believed that since in Colombia there was an overlap of democracy and high levels of inequality, the former was simply an epiphenomenon, a form of window dressing by the very rich. The Colombian political parties were identical, devoid of any social content, and expressed only the petty power whims of provincial oligarchs. Moore, on the other hand, thought that democracy and old agrarian structures could really coexist without cancelling each other out, but that this would produce complex, anomalous outcomes. We will try to show that his is not only a much richer vantage point, but that it matches the empirical evidence much better. Correspondingly, we will claim that Fluharty's reading of the Colombian political parties and system – and along with this an important portion of the country's political sociology – is fundamentally flawed.<sup>13</sup>

A very relevant but much less known and cited work is Hirschman's (1962) analysis of the Colombian agrarian reform process. Characteristically, it is biased towards hope.<sup>14</sup> It is an energetic admonition against the assumption that only a large scale rupture can produce significant change. Hirschman's caveats and criticisms deserve careful attention. He warned that "Those who, in any given situation, deny the possibility of significant social and economic progress without prior fundamental, and usually violent changes in power relationships among social classes frequently cite the history of land reforms in support of their point of view" (Hirschman 1962: 1). He explained that the agrarian problem was important from the institutional point of view because it tended to produce 'frozen' structures that were difficult to change: "While the available evidence makes it impossible to argue today that the improvement in health, education or in the living standards of the urban masses require social revolution as a 'pre-condition', certain agrarian structures appear to be endowed with a special rigidity and have thereby provided the 'pre-condition' theorists with an attractive line of defense for their views" (Hirschman 1962: 1). These rigidities are critical because they produce *both* serious distributional distortions and a weakening of property rights. Against the pre-condition theorists, however, he claimed – based specifically on the Colombian agrarian experience – that reforms were possible without a foundational rupture. Although time showed that his optimism with respect to pushing forward a credible agrarian reform in Colombia was not well founded, this does not invalidate his cautionary notes. We follow them and underscore that our claim is not teleological. Thus we do not accept Wiener's prescriptions. We do not claim that *since* there was not a foundational rupture Colombia followed an 'Indian path' or that any country in a similar situation would have done the same. We claim that it followed such a path because of a series of factors, which also include historical specificities, contingency, and positive feedback mechanisms, and strive to identify the resulting institutional fabric that emerged through the stable coexistence of violence and democracy.<sup>15</sup>

Our discussion embraces a long time span, which necessarily implies the loss of some important and rich detail, and only a cursory revision of intricate conflicts, turbulent periods,

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<sup>13</sup> In compensation, his valuable book is a good source in many respects. Cfr. *infra*.

<sup>14</sup> Besides, it was written before the process floundered miserably in 1973.

<sup>15</sup> Please note that in a sense this text has a point-counterpoint structure, that dialogues with Moore's and Hirschman's perspectives. Moore stresses the crucial importance of agrarian structures and the political coalitions that derive from them. Hirschman stresses the potential of democratic arrangements and solutions. Their interpretations are in dynamic tension. A non-reductionist approach to the puzzle implies putting in contact both analytical universes.

and complex themes.<sup>16</sup> The tradeoff is that hopefully we will be able to capture the wider landscape of the evolution of the Colombian conflict, regime and state, and the persistent social mechanisms and processes behind them. Furthermore, taking a long period seemed necessary. From several points of view – especially homicidal violence – the 1948-2006 interval constitutes a unity; but at the same time the start of the long violent cycle in Colombia cannot be understood without some antecedents.

We expect to understand the Colombian puzzle and answer our basic questions through an 'analytical narrative'. If we take the tag seriously, by definition 'analytical narratives'<sup>17</sup> have the advantage – and the problem – of combining narrative and explanation. It frequently happens that the key narrative lines and analytic planes move in wholly different timeframes. For example, political chronology is indispensable for understanding state weakness (and in the Colombian literature indeed it is the main tool to illustrate it), but other much slower, macro dimensions (demographics, say) might be required to complete the explanation. Thus, we have divided this monograph in two main parts, each corresponding to a 'historical timing' and composed of several sections, followed by a third part with some concluding comments:

- a. *Political chronology.* This section fulfills three functions. First, it sets the stage for readers who are less familiar with the Colombian case. Second, it specifies the main milestones of the conflict, which will be referred to constantly in the following discussion. Third, it shows that some very common ideas and hypotheses about the Colombian path are not true (or at least not obviously true).
- b. *Macro-cycles and actors.* Here we evaluate the macro patterns of conflict, state building and political strife, discuss in detail their meaning, and propose a periodisation. This allows us to move in a longer timescale, less syncopated than that of the political chronology. We show that, despite the strong differences between the several sub-periods of the Colombian trajectory, there are some common patterns and long term trends. We strongly focus on the invariants of the Colombian conflict, and show the mechanisms through which these invariants could produce a persistently violent liberalism, given certain agrarian structures and certain type of state.
- c. *Concluding remarks.* These stress the mechanisms and microfoundations of our interpretations, and make some caveats.

This monograph is part of a research project that has produced two papers,<sup>18</sup> with others coming,<sup>19</sup> about the Colombian state and polity. In these pieces, we undertake the type of meticulous historical analysis that is necessary to understand what has really been going on, but at the same time nearly impossible to insert into a more panoramic view. Here we occasionally lean on these other papers to avoid having to prove all the key points within the text. Many of our empirical findings appear here only implicitly, sustaining and feeding the general argument.

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<sup>16</sup> Some of them have been worked out separately. See for example Gutiérrez, Francisco, Viatela, Juan Manuel, Acevedo Tatiana (2007): *¿Olivos y Aceitunos?: Los Partidos Políticos Colombianos y sus Bases Sociales en la Primera Mitad del Siglo XX*. In. *Análisis Político* (In Press).

<sup>17</sup> We use the term in a broad sense, not in the more restricted meaning of the rationalist research program put forward by Bates, Levi, Greif and others (1998). For a critical assesment of such program, see Elster (2000).

<sup>18</sup> Gutiérrez, Viatela, Acevedo (2007a) and (2007b).

<sup>19</sup> Gutiérrez, Francisco, Viatela, Juan Manuel, Acevedo Tatiana (2007): *¿Olivos y Aceitunos?: Los Partidos Políticos Colombianos y sus Bases Sociales en la Primera Mitad del Siglo XX*. In. *Análisis Político* (In Press).

Our main sources are:

- a. The literature. There is a rich and valuable literature about specific periods of the country's history. There are also already some good panoramic visions (Bushnell 1993; González, Bolívar and Vázquez 2002; Pécaut 1987; 2006)
- b. Archives. The presidential and ministry of government archives located in the Archivo General de la Nación. Personal political archives – José Vicente Concha, Alfonso López, Eduardo Santos and Carlos Lleras Restrepo – located in the Archivo General de la Nación and the Luis Angel Arango Library.
- c. Databases. Especially the political homicide database.<sup>20</sup>
- d. Censuses. We have reconstructed and digitalised the 1918, 1938, 1964, 1973, 1985 and 1993 censuses.
- e. Electoral and other records. We have rebuilt all the electoral contests that took place between 1920 and 1958.
- f. Governmental reports, documents, and time series
- g. Interviews and life histories
- h. Judicial proceedings

## **PART 1: A political chronology**

### **1.1. The antecedents**

Like other Latin American republics, Colombia lived through a turbulent 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As noted above, elections were an important factor. The two traditional Colombian political parties – Liberal and Conservative, hereafter referred to sometimes as LP and CP or alternatively Reds and Blues—were founded in 1849. Between 1863 and 1886, the LP created and (mis)managed a federal state. Each state had its own armed force, electoral regime, and currency (Colmenares 1968; Safford 1977). The federal experience eventually foundered. The CP – after several failed risings – won the elections by profiting from division within the LP, and in 1886 started a period of conservative stabilisation and state building, called 'La Regeneración' (*Regeneration*).

The CP regime re-centralised the country, creating the Central Bank and other key state institutions, including the 1886 Constitution. It also practically excluded the LP from political competition, which was the motive of the last great 19<sup>th</sup> Century war, the so-called 'Guerra de los Mil Días' (1899-1901) (Bergquist 1978; 2004). The LP was defeated, and as a catastrophic side product of the conflict the country lost Panamá to a secessionist movement supported by the United States. From then on the LP evolved very slowly but steadily, adhering to the legalistic belief that the *only* way to come back to power was through elections; beliefs that in effect would produce positive results in 1930.

After the loss of Panamá, the country entered a two decade period of stabilisation, known as 'La Hegemonía Conservadora' (Conservative Hegemony). As yet, the *Hegemonía* has not been evaluated systematically, but it combined stagnation with modernisation efforts, as Bushnell illustrates in his superb work (1993). In effect, contrary to common emphatic assertions, the *Hegemonía* was based on power sharing devices, which the Conservatives

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<sup>20</sup> Built by Gutiérrez and William Mancera Sánchez.

crafted *explicitly* as a way to prevent the reinitiating of political violence (Gutiérrez, Viatela and Acevedo 2007b). The Panamá trauma had convinced the political elites of both sides that it was necessary to create institutional buffers to tame political differences and passions. Despite the extreme fiscal penury of the state, plans of large scale investment in public works were undertaken.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, alternation in power did not seem to be on the agenda. The *Hegemonía* was quite exclusionary. It treated the first protests of the incipient working class heavily handedly, and resorted to frauds and tricks to block its main political adversary. There were several nasty repressive episodes, the main one being the 1928 United Fruit massacre deplored and immortalised by the pen of García Márquez.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, exclusion was not only political, but also social, ethnic, and cultural. The *Hegemonía* aspired to economic modernity without social reforms or the active public presence of blacks, non Catholics, and the rabble.

In the second half of the 1920s, it became evident that the *Hegemonía* was terminally sick. Economic growth had strengthened the working class, who rapidly organised and headed a wave of protests. Rural unrest also increased, and property rights started to be contested both in the field and the tribunals. When growth yielded to crisis (in 1929 and 1930) passions ran high. The CP was divided and frightened by the prospect of becoming a minority, sidelined by the very modernisation that it felt it had adumbrated. The very strong participation of the Catholic Church in its internal disputes only worsened the situation (Medina 1990; Posada-Carbo 1997). Thus, the Blues went divided to the 1930 elections. The Reds, for their part, were able to present a conciliatory candidate – Olaya Herrera (1930-1934) – who not only they but a group of moderate Conservatives backed enthusiastically. The LP won, and thus started the Liberal Republic (1930-1948).

## 1.2. The Liberal Republic

As the Liberals of that time acknowledged, the party was divided into left, center, and right, with several further subdivisions. Despite the fact that the Liberals maintained –and even strengthened—the power sharing devices inherited from the Conservatives, they were unable to prevent the radicalisation of the latter. The Conservatives argued that, through petty politics and violence, the LP had artificially conquered the majority in both Houses, and acquired uncontrolled power.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Olaya's timid efforts to promote a lay, universal education met the violent rebuttal of both the CP and the Church (Guerrero 1991).

The presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938) was yet another turning point. López launched a program of social reforms, called the 'Revolución en Marcha', whose main purposes were agrarian reform, the establishment of public lay education, and male universal suffrage. He was also supported by the trade unions, whose *de facto* leading coalition of

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<sup>21</sup> By Rafael Reyes (1905-1910) and by Pedro Nel Ospina (1922-1926). Ospina used the money of the compensation that ultimately the US paid Colombia for the Panamá intervention. Both presidents, especially Reyes, believed in modernization above politics. The following declaration by Reyes is typical: "In times past it was the Cross or the Koran, the sword or the book that accomplished the conquest of civilization; today it is the powerful locomotive, flying over the shining rail, breathing like a volcano, that awakens peoples to progress, well-being and liberty... and those who do not conform to that progress it crushes beneath its wheels" (Reyes in Bergquist 1978: 221).

<sup>22</sup> García Márquez, Gabriel (1982): *Cien Años de Soledad*. Bogotá: Oveja Negra.

<sup>23</sup> The CP lost the 1930 presidential elections, but won the parliamentary ones. However, the defection of several of its congressmen allowed Olaya Herrera to enjoy congressional majorities (Gutiérrez, Viatela, Acevedo 2007).

Liberals and Communists produced great alarm in both Liberal and Conservative Headquarters.

The genuine nature of López's efforts has been put into question – a point to which we will return in part 2. But nobody can doubt seriously that they produced real political effects. The CP saw in López a typical Popular Front representative, and insisted that Colombia was going through the same traumatic process as the Spanish Republic and Mexico: the destruction of religion, property, and civilisation. Meanwhile, the differences between the various Liberal fractions deepened. In 1938, the CP abstained from the elections and a moderate Liberal, Eduardo Santos, won. Santos detained the reformist impulse, without really being able to appease the Conservatives, and the candidate the Liberals chose for the next presidential election was once again López Pumarejo, to the CP's alarm. Lopez won in a landslide.<sup>24</sup> However, his second term was a disaster. In 1944, he produced new agrarian legislation, which in practice undermined the progress – however limited – made in his first term. Hounded by accusations of corruption, and by an implacable attack from the Conservatives – whose main slogan was 'make unlivable the republic'—he could not really govern and stepped down in 1945. He was succeeded by Alberto Lleras Camargo, a centrist who organised the following presidential elections.

In the meantime, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán – a young Liberal lawyer who had abandoned the party to create his own radical movement, and after its failure returned like the prodigal son – had become the rising star of Colombian politics. He denounced the oligarchy, and insisted that hunger was neither red nor blue. The 'political country' and the 'real country', he said, were at odds: the former did not interpret the needs of the latter. Though both parties had a long tradition of mass mobilisation, Gaitán was in many senses an innovator (Braun 1985). His presence deeply transformed the Colombian political system, and equally deeply divided the LP to the extent that after desperate efforts the party was still unable to agree on a single candidate for the 1946 elections. It was defeated,<sup>25</sup> and the Conservative Mariano Ospina Pérez came to power.

Ospina Perez was a rich man, linked to coffee production, and was convinced – perhaps due to his experience in the Federation of Coffee producers, where Liberals and Conservatives coexisted without apparent problems, perhaps due to tradition of the *Hegemonía* – that the solution to the country's dilemmas had to involve the crafting of a viable power sharing device. On the other hand, he let radical conservatives have a free hand at attacking Liberals' lives and properties. This dual strategy heightened the passions and tensions of the period. The situation was complicated by hot electoral themes such as electoral reform and the coming elections of 1950, as well as the fact that there was a split government – the Liberals had won amply in both Houses. In a certain sense, the situation mirrored that of 1930: there was a defeated majority party<sup>26</sup> unsatisfied with the result that hoped to recuperate power immediately. Now things were complicated by the fact that the probable candidates for the 1950 competition were unacceptable for their adversary. While in 1930 the Liberals had won

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<sup>24</sup> In 1942 the CP supported a dissident liberal.

<sup>25</sup> Gaitán actually obtained slightly less votes than the other candidate, Gabriel Turbay.

<sup>26</sup> In both 1930 and 1946 the defeated party (CP and LP respectively) went split to elections. Combining the votes of their two candidates, they obtained more votes than the winner, and also conquered a majority in the two houses. In 1930 Vázquez Cobo and Valencia (CP) added 453830 votes. Olaya Herrera (LP) obtained 369934 votes. In 1946, Gaitán and Turbay (LP) added 800156 votes. Ospina (CP) obtained only 566029 votes. The parliamentary triumph of the LP in 1946 was even wider (Source: Electoral Database reconstructed by Gutiérrez, Acevedo and Viatela).

with a coalition figure, and the Conservatives had refrained from supporting an extremist, now the most probable scenario was that the two parties would back their own radicals: Gaitán, on the one hand,<sup>27</sup> and Laureano Gómez on the other. Furthermore, rural violence was spreading without control, and a practice that had already been used against the Conservatives in the early 1930's – systematic violence to change the colour of municipalities or departments – was now being practiced by them on a much larger scale to take revenge, steal, and impede the return of the LP to power. Gaitán headed huge demonstrations against this officially tolerated violence, but in April 9 1948 he was assassinated.

His killing formally initiated the lugubrious period named in our historiography as *La Violencia*, and gave origin to a wild wave of blind protest and rioting that practically destroyed the capital, Bogotá, but which also expressed itself in various other forms throughout the country (See for example Sánchez 1983). Both the assassination and the explosion of anger amongst the popular sectors took the political elites by surprise, scaring them to death. Indeed, had it not been for its sheer disorder and lack of structure the April 9 episode would have toppled the government. The lack of organisation of the populace is easy to explain. Gaitán talked to the masses, but developed no structure to incorporate them organically in his project. The LP – including its left – had no revolutionary leanings, and was fully engaged in taking power through elections. Furthermore, all their 20<sup>th</sup> Century experience showed them that war-mongering was a losing strategy. There is sufficient evidence to conjecture that its leading group was also convinced that the party was supported by a majority, and thus that if only peace could be preserved for a couple of months it would inevitably return to power. So while the masses were still trying to avenge the death of their beloved caudillo in the streets, the LP leadership was once again negotiating a power sharing arrangement with the government. To interpret this as a scandalous treason, as certain historiography does, is somewhat far-fetched. The LP probably had no other realistic alternative.<sup>28</sup> The communists were a tiny group, with no leading capacity (Medina 1980). Furthermore, they had had a distinctly poor relationship with Gaitán, whom until 1947 they considered basically an enemy of the working class. They were linked instead to the Lopista wing of the LP, which by then, after the disaster of the 1942-1945 administration, had no weight within the party.

Ospina reacted to the April 9 revolt in a typical manner. On the one hand, he advanced a very broad power sharing scheme. He created a national union government, giving the Liberals some key ministries, and went so far as to propose a rotational presidency, following the example of Switzerland and Uruguay (Gutiérrez 2007). On the other, he tolerated – and probably supported – the Conservative extremist activities in the countryside. These activities had acquired a clearly genocidal colouring. The Liberals finally abandoned the National Union government, and tried to use their parliamentary power to bridle Ospina and force favorable changes in the electoral and more generally political rules of the game. Ospina closed the congress in 1949, and the same year, the Liberals decided to abstain from the presidential elections.

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<sup>27</sup> After the Liberal defeat he had been chosen as the single director ('director único') of the party, and was the only possible LP choice for 1950. At the moment of his death he was leading a campaign for the 'reconquista del poder' (Green 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Its more moderate wing would have never accepted supporting the violent protest of the populace. Divided, the party had no chance of winning, be it violently or through the ballot box. Moreover, as said above, the entire 20<sup>th</sup> Century experience of the party invited it to adhere to legality.

### 1.3. *La Violencia*: a non-declared civil war

*La Violencia* was the main violent peasant mobilisation in the West in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Oquist 1980). It caused between 150,000 and 200,000 politically motivated assassinations, though some sources claim that the figure is probably substantially higher.<sup>29</sup>

It started as a confrontation between Liberals and Conservatives, but gradually (and simultaneously) evolved towards a more class based and criminalised (Henderson 1984; Sánchez and Meertens 1984) confrontation. Why did the country enter this violent wave? Why was the confrontation so lopsided? We propose a number of key reasons:

- a. The virulent opposition to the reformism of the Liberal Republic. The Alfonso López Pumarejo government (1934-1938) pushed forward an agenda of land, electoral and educational reform, which though moderate alarmed and excited the Conservative opposition. The Conservatives resented that the Liberals were putting into question the status quo of the 1886 Constitution, that they were renegeing on their power sharing commitments, and that they were aiming at the extinction of Conservatism through lay and populist demagogy (see Guerrero, 1991 and Stoller 1995). Furthermore, important sectors in the Catholic Church harbored the same fears.
- b. International variables. The spectre of the Spanish Civil War and the Mexican Revolution played a huge role in the galvanisation of the Blues. It gave them both a reason and a pretext to agitate against a Liberal-Communist cabal, which would lead ultimately to the destruction of the Catholic Church, of property, and civilisation. Like all cunning propaganda, this portrayal had an element of truth. Certainly, both in Mexico and in Spain the triumph of moderate reformers had opened the door to much more radical types. In both cases, the Church was an explicit target of both reformers and revolutionaries. And, following the instructions of the Third International, the tiny Colombian Communist Party did establish an implicit alliance with the Liberals,<sup>30</sup> especially within the recently created working class organisations.
- c. The key (and unfortunate) fact is that there was a confluence of the cues offered by the international context, the subjective animosities and fears of important Conservative sectors, and the system of incentives created by the party system. All three suggested that by radicalisation the Conservatives could develop their own mass base. Thus, the modernisation blueprint that Conservatives had at hand was the European – and especially Hispanic—extreme right.<sup>31</sup>
- d. Therefore despite the gradual fading out of Liberal reformism (Pécaut 1987; Oquist 1980), party antagonism remained intact. Furthermore, the unfinished character of the agrarian transformation perpetuated both the motives and the means for violent forms of contestation (Reyes 1988).

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<sup>29</sup> Different authors have tried to produce a reasonable aggregated evaluation of the *La Violencia* killings. The initial figure offered by all parties, 300,000 killed, is probably an abrupt overestimation. Guzmán, Umaña and Fals, in their classical work (1962) produce a 200,000 estimate. We believe this is a reasonable upper bound. The lower bound ought to be 150,000. For a country of 11,600,050 inhabitants in 1951, this is a 1.3% of the population – an enormous blood letting (Source: DNP. Estadísticas Históricas de Colombia. Chapter Población e Indicadores Sociales. Electronic Document: <http://www.dnp.gov.co>).

<sup>30</sup> It wanted an explicit one, but the Liberals never accepted it.

<sup>31</sup> See Henderson, James (2001). *Modernization in Colombia: The Laureano Gómez Years 1889-1965*. Florida: University Press.

- e. April 9 1948 scared off both Conservatives and Liberal moderates. This weakened the LP and gave windows of opportunities to the Blues to land blows on their historical antagonist without any coherent answer. The LP was utterly divided. Orthodox reformists, the center and center-right, and the populist wing (lead by Gaitán) were unable to find in 1946 a conciliation formula that would allow the party to remain in power. However, after the party was defeated and *La Violencia* started to unravel, the different factions somehow came to an accommodation against the common enemy. The broad victory of the Liberals in the 1949 parliamentary elections suggested that a relatively free contest in the presidential elections would force a new alternation in power.
- f. By then, the most extreme forces within the CP had definitively taken the upper hand, and were not ready to tolerate a new takeover by the Reds, whom they saw as disguised Communists. Shortly, Laureano Gómez, the main CP leader of the period, came to see the moderate Conservatives as (perhaps unwitting) agents of communism (Gómez 1953).
- g. The efforts of both parties to craft some kind of arrangement that would impede the unraveling of political institutions failed.<sup>32</sup> The Liberals had decided to run anyway with their own candidate in 1949 – a center-left but rather conciliatory figure, Darío Echandía – but the brutal worsening of the political conditions in 1949, including a failed attempt to murder Echandía and the closing of the Congress, forced them into abstention.<sup>33</sup> They claimed that the 1949 elections would be a farce and that the LP should not legitimise the *de facto* Conservative rule.
- h. Tradition. Since 1886, the LP had had adverse results in the battle camp. The typical agrarian military mobilisation of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had already been rather unsuccessful, and during the Hegemonía the intents of the old leaders of the party to blackmail the Conservative authorities with the prospect of armed opposition had been either irrelevant or counterproductive. The new generation of politicians was educated by the experience of the late 1920's, which suggested that legalism was more effective.

#### 1.4. *La Dictablanda*

By 1952, nearly every relevant political force, save the extreme right, felt that the country was facing the danger of political dissolution. The opposition was experiencing the majority of casualties. At the same time, Liberal guerrillas started to take control of huge expanses of nearly stateless territory in the east-south plains of the country. The guerrillas were increasingly aggressive and radical; some of them gave origin to peasant socialist tendencies (Franco Isaza 1955). The LP leadership wanted to have nothing to do with this phenomenon, so it did not provide direction or logistic support. This limited the fighting capacity of the guerrillas. But the army and the police, so successful in the repression of civilians in the highly populated Andean core of the country, were unable to vanquish the guerrillas. There were not only the customary technical constraints imposed by geography and the sparseness

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<sup>32</sup> See for example Wilde (1978).

<sup>33</sup> The liberal representation in the Congress tried to modify the 89<sup>th</sup> law of 1948 by advancing the date of the presidential elections and suppressing the articles 43 and 44 that made reference to the imposition by which the change of electoral identifications had to be finished before the presidential elections of 1950. The final approval of the liberal electoral reform brought as a consequence the refusal of the Conservative Party to continue with the conversations on public order, generalized violence and the normal course of the elections (El Tiempo. El conservatismo no considera posible ya un acuerdo político. Aug 31. 1949, p. 1-19).

of population and roads; there was also a simple political factor. Though in practice the LP was acephalous, and non-existent concerning armed resistance, the government's attempt to change the preferences of at least half the population by force created isolation and a thousand forms of resistance and support for the guerrilleros (Franco Isaza 1955; Alape 1973).

As frequently takes place in this story, political chaos and economic growth overlapped, producing a strange landscape. Certainly, the economic elites of both parties were amassing huge profits. In many senses, the combination of extreme right brutality and LP passivity can thus be pictured as an 'entrepreneurial offensive' (Sáenz Rovner 1992). At the same time, the concrete actors in the public realm were the traditional political parties, and with the exception of small radicalised peasant groups that were abandoning their Liberal political preferences, the overwhelming majority of the Colombian population found that this was a strictly political conflict, not a socio-economic one.

In 1953, Lieutenant General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla overthrew Laureano Gómez, and declared that his main objective was the restoration of peace. He struck peace agreements with the *guerrilleros*<sup>34</sup> and opened several political spaces both for the LP and the moderate Conservatives. Though the LP did not participate in the organisation of the coup, it openly supported it. It hoped that Rojas would head an ordered return to civilian life and electoral competition. However, very soon things became complicated. Rojas tried to follow, albeit timidly, the inspiration of Perón, the Argentinian leader who was able to obtain widespread working class support through the creation of social programs and welfare state agencies. Like Perón, he tried to perpetuate himself in power. This prompted an alliance of the two traditional parties, and a broad coalition that included the entrepreneurs as explicit political actors intent on toppling Rojas. This alliance formed in 1957, and after a year of a caretaking military Junta, the country returned to civilian political competition. However, the parties had apparently learned their lesson, and now were prepared to accept strong binding mechanisms to tame and administrate competition.

Before going into a discussion of the National Front – the main Colombian power sharing experience in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—it is convenient to discuss two opposing evaluations of Rojas' rule. The first, and most conventional one, has practically disappeared from serious social analysis. According to this evaluation, Rojas was a dictator and the two parties were able to return to democratic competition after he was toppled; period. This, of course, was the discourse of CP and LP leaders throughout the National Front. However, as noted above, things were much more complicated. To start with, the civilian governments of Ospina and Gómez witnessed much more repression and violence than Rojas' government. Despite this, as Dávila (1998) reminds us, the fact that in effect the Front *was* a democratic transition is an important aspect that should not be disregarded. The second analysis claims that since the guerrilleros were getting more and more radical and invulnerable, and Rojas was also moving to the left and promoting social change, the parties and the oligarchy allied to defenestrate the general (Echeverri 1978). Despite its popularity, this version does not hold water either. Though Rojas copied some of Perón's gestures, he was quite inert concerning social reform. On the crucial rural property issue, he hardly took any action despite some of his advisors having conceived a taxing mechanism – in contrast to the directly re-distributional one crafted by the Liberal Republic – that forced the big landowners and cattle ranchers to sell unutilised land. As Hirschman reports (1962), this idea rapidly fell into disfavor, partly because Rojas himself and his entourage acquired a lot of cattle during his government. In other areas –

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<sup>34</sup> This basically failed, as many of them were assassinated as soon as they returned to civilian life.

such as public works – Rojas performed much better; but this followed the Reyes tradition of industrious officers promising, and perhaps delivering, more administration than politics. He also created some important state agencies. However, there is practically no significant social reform that Rojas can claim as his heritage; to paint the fall of Rojas as a cabal against a prominent reformer is completely off the mark.

On the other hand, the increasingly radicalised peasant guerrillas *were* a real problem, but this does not explain why the oligarchy would have to ally against a General who was doing his job and fighting the guerrillas at least as well – or as poorly – as his predecessors.<sup>35</sup> This is not to deny that the political and economic elites converged against Rojas, and that this convergence, once again, captures an important aspect of the dynamics of the period. The economic elites confronted the dictator because the parties had strong organic ties with them, and were able to mobilise them. The economic elites also feared the uncertainty that an uninterrupted mandate of the General would imply. Be that as it may, a fact that both major parties overlooked was that Rojas did make important *political* reforms that allowed him to build his own social base, which was less impressive than Perón's in Argentina, but not negligible in the least. Indeed, under Rojas, the granting of vote for women – an incredibly delayed measure – and also the denunciation of congress and politicians began to ring a bell in important sectors of the population.

### 1.5. The National Front<sup>36</sup>

The National Front (NF) was a consociational accord between the LP and the CP. The agreement was made for a period of 16 years over the following issues:

- a. Forced presidential alternation between the two traditional parties. Each party would have right to two presidential periods. Each party would consult the nomination of its presidential candidate with the other.
- b. Impunity plus pacification. No violence-monger from *La Violencia* would be punished. Peace agreements would be established with the remains of the partisan bands, if possible. Bandits of any colour would be combated.
- c. Supermajorities for laws. For approval in the congress, bills would have to receive support of no less than two thirds of the congress members.
- d. Equitable sharing of seats and posts by both parties.

These rules of the game, plus other supplementary ones, were formally validated by a plebiscite (1957), which was widely supported.

The NF came in a critical moment, internationally and domestically. The Cuban revolution (1958), which captured the imagination of thousands of Latin Americans, alongside social unrest in many countries, prompted the United States to move towards promoting preventive social reform. The underlying idea was “to make reform today and avoid revolution tomorrow”. This in essence is the origin of the Alliance for Progress. Despite its multiple problems and limits, the Alliance created a favorable international environment for reformists in Latin America. Until the immediately previous years reformism was associated with communist proclivities – this association not a Laureano Gómez extravaganza but a more or

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<sup>35</sup> And allowing the assassination of those who entered the peace process.

<sup>36</sup> This section is based on Gutiérrez (2007).

less official US policy in Latin America.<sup>37</sup> Now it was not only tolerated but applauded. Together with the Alliance, development theories proliferated. Some of them became extremely influential. Rostow (1965) promised that in a clearly established sequence of stages countries could 'catch up' the industrialised modern capitalist core. Naturally, in this case hope had also a prophylactic tinge; but it was hope at least.

In Colombia, the architects of the NF shared this mix of hopes and fears, and were trying to craft a proposal that would guarantee the continued viability of the traditional parties. To achieve this, they agreed to push forward three macro tasks. The first one was to achieve a stable peace. As seen above, they attempted this through a blanket absolution of the events committed during *La Violencia* - both parties had been engaged in hideous crimes - and a power sharing arrangement that implied the forced alternation of the two parties in the presidency, as well as the distribution of the parliamentary seats between the Liberals and the Conservatives.<sup>38</sup> The second task was the transition from dictatorship to democracy: the restitution of many basic public liberties, the institutionalisation of checks and balances, and a rearrangement of civilian-military relations. The third task was the attempt at a developmental program. This point has not been highlighted by the meager academic literature dealing with the NF, but in the eyes of the political elites of the time it had an enormous importance and was an indispensable constitutive element of the pact. The Alliance for Progress and theories like Rostow's, in effect, activated several endogenous forces. In Colombia, a distinct set of politicians and social thinkers/engineers had been convinced for a long time of the necessity of making meaningful social reforms, and thought that the core of these should consist of agrarian reform. In fact, agrarian reform had not disappeared from the political agenda in the turbulent years of *La Violencia*. The experts of both the Conservative governments and Rojas Pinilla shelved the redistribution of land proposals, but replaced them with the idea of an indicative tax that would create real incentives for the appropriate productive utilisation of land. Since in Colombia the cadastral and notary records of land systematically undervalue it, the taxing option was strengthened by tying the value over which the tax was estimated to the price that the state would pay in case of an expropriation. For example, if I established the price of my land at 50, instead of its market value of 100, I would pay my tax over 50; but similarly, in the case of expropriation the state would give me back 50, not 100. The design was ingenious but did not prosper, first because it appeared in the rather isolated discussions of technicians - with the vague sponsorship of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Moncayo and Rojas 1978; Machado 1986) but with no serious political support - and second because, as Hirschman (1962) notes, expropriation by the extant governments was not a credible threat.

Contrary to common assertions and to the black legend that surrounds the NF, the pact started with a clearly reformist mandate, which was the origin of several planning agencies and the 1961 agrarian reform proposal that enthused Hirschman. However, the NF confronted two types of problems that blocked it almost completely:<sup>39</sup>

- a. Original sins. The peace accord underlying the NF was built over almost complete impunity. It is hardly conceivable that it could have done differently, as both political parties summed constituted the majority of the Colombian population,

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<sup>37</sup> Which justified, for example, the invasion of Dominican Republic.

<sup>38</sup> Also the judicial posts, and the seats of the subnational bodies (municipal councils and departmental assemblies).

<sup>39</sup> In the political language of the period, it produced 'inmovilismo'.

and none was prepared to accept the judgment of its own leadership. The alternative was between peace with impunity and no peace. However, the long term consequences of this were heavy, and fulfilling the prerequisites of achieving peace produced extremely deleterious long term effects. What the parties could have avoided was the attempt to cancel out the Rojas Pinilla experience. They proclaimed that the two parties were each one half of the country, which was a false claim.<sup>40</sup> A good example of the kind of trap in which the NF fell relates to the female vote. Rojas granted women the right to vote, but the parties would not accept that this historical task was achieved by somebody else, so they included a question about it in the plebiscite that gave origin to the NF (do you agree that women should vote?). At the same time, since Rojas had already enfranchised them, they participated in this very plebiscite! The refusal to acknowledge the achievements of Rojas Pinilla, however, was a symptom of a deeper problem: the exclusionary nature of the NF. Nobody but the members of the two traditional parties could participate in public life. Opponents of the Front had to take seats in the parliament in the name of one of the two parties. The whole of public life was overwhelmed by bipartisan presence.

- b. Growing incompatibilities between the three main objectives: democratising, achieving peace, and promoting development are good sounding expressions; but they can get in the way of each other. The NF was an extreme example of this. The peace arrangements oriented towards deflating passions and offering proper guarantees to the biggest minority gave a *de facto* veto power to even relatively modest fractions of one of the two parties. This made life extremely difficult for reformists, whose only chance to take a step forward was by building very broad coalitions, and thus substantially watering down their proposals. Bounding political competition was good for peace, but since it blocked inter-party competition it opened the doors to intra-party competition. Factionalism grew without control in the traditional parties – especially in the LP – empowering regional bosses. This further weakened the developmental agenda. The key reformist figures of the NF conceived the parties as chains of command that would transmit the developmental directives from the center to the periphery. With highly factionalised parties, in which the regional bosses had a substantial power quota, this was impossible.
- c. Another example of mutual incompatibility was between peace and state strengthening. To achieve state strength was a key task that some of the NF architects engaged in. They reflected that without creating an independent civil service – a Weberian bureaucracy – clientelism and the privatisation of the state would thrive, and development would be impossible (Lleras Alberto 1959; Lleras Carlos 1959). At the same time, one of the main conclusions of their analysis of *La Violencia* was that the fuel of that deadly experience had been bureaucratic appetites. Every alternation in power, the story went, had produced a revolution in the pay roll, and thus the members of the parties had had the incentive to prevent with violence the access of the adversary to power.<sup>41</sup> Thus peace was directly related to the equitable allotment of positions to each party. As a result, the program of creating an independent bureaucracy produced a rather strange result. The NF civil service mimicked the canonical version in that bureaucrats were relatively stable and immune to wholesale removals in the moment of a change of

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<sup>40</sup> Summed up they constituted a majority, which is quite different.

<sup>41</sup> This diagnostic, by the way, is totally wrong.

government. But they were dependent on the parties, which in practice meant on the regional bosses, and therefore had to respond to their interests, appetites, and whims.

Despite this, the NF can claim several successes. First, security. As seen in figures 1 B and 1 F, it is plausible to argue that the NF period, or at least part of it, was a non-war period. The old partisan violence faded out, and in 1963-4 was marginal. As in the rest of Latin America, guerrillas of several denominations were created, but none of them was particularly successful. By the end of the NF, the Castroist ELN was completely defeated, the Maoist EPL vegetated in the margins, and the Communist FARC was small and only semi-active. Second, economic success. The NF enjoyed continuous economic growth, which was less moderate than the Colombian historical trend, with manageable inflation and fiscal slack. Growth came with a very, very slow – but unequivocal – reduction of inequality (see Figure 4). Modernisation and de-ruralisation of the country also took place (see Figure 5). The combined effect of *La Violencia* and growth was a hike in urbanisation. Third, political stability. While in the rest of Latin America dictatorships (many of them short lived) were in vogue, the NF achieved for Colombia a stable and highly institutionalised succession in power.

And reforms? It is easy to document that a substantial portion of the political elite wanted them for several reasons. As seen, prophylaxis was very important. Some thought that the question was not whether to reform or not to reform, but whether to reform or suffer a revolution. It is not clear what they would have chosen in the first dilemma, but their preference in the second one was self evident. Important for understanding what follows is that many politicians not only thought that the choice was between reform and revolution, but that time was very short.<sup>42</sup> Thus there was a strong sense of urgency in the reformist message. Party competition also played an important role. In the LP in particular<sup>43</sup> there was a strong tradition of reformist thought, which had hatched a series of purely operational and technical devices to push forward the desired changes. The contention of the parties that violence and instability had prevented them from entering the path of gradual change was not absurd. Now they thought they had a nearly ideal environment to do it. In relation to this, long term calculation seems to have played a role. If reformist politicians were favored by votes and support, then they would be the losers in case of destabilisation. In the other direction, moderate political competition could only be founded over a less unequal society.

However, against Hirschman's expectations, the 1961 agrarian reform ultimately foundered. The new CP administration (Guillermo León Valencia, 1962-1966) was not terribly interested in it, and besides it faced severe technical difficulties. Valencia's government faced permanent unrest, and was mainly concerned with pacification. But when the LP chose Carlos Lleras as its candidate for 1966 it became evident that big scale reforms would come back to the center of the political agenda.

Lleras is a peculiar figure. He can be described as an obsessive state builder. He was the motor of both the agrarian reform and the developmental agenda in the NF. Of his administration it can be said that it put forward all the fundamental problems and made all the

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<sup>42</sup> Relevant to the themes introduced at the beginning of the text is that some of the key leaders of the NF claimed that, in view of the stark inequalities characterizing Colombia, it could not be claimed that its regime was democratic. See for example Alberto Lleras (1959) and Carlos Lleras (1959).

<sup>43</sup> And not only in its leftist wing. Carlos Lleras, for example, belonged to the center of the party; at the beginning of his career he had been an adversary of both Alfonso López Pumarejo and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.

important bets – losing them all. That somebody of his calibre – acting in nearly the best possible conditions: support, or at least benevolent indifference, from the United States; political stability; vigorous growth; fiscal slack – was unable to push forward at least a significant part of his socio-economic program puts a question mark on the feasibility of the NF objectives.

Lleras had reflected about the problems of the 1961 episode, and decided that a new attempt would need to have support from above but also from below. To understand the meaning of this, it must be pointed out that Lleras can hardly be tagged as a populist in any sense. He was a party man, with a clear grasp of – and lifelong craze for – technical problems, and a firm believer in what can be called the majesty of the state. However, the 1961 experience had taught him – or rather, shown him once again – that regional forces would be able to distort or sabotage any national proposal in the field. The nation's center would have to appeal to the masses for support against the backward peripheral forces. Thus, Lleras pushed forward a two-thronged campaign. In the Congress, he proposed a sweeping constitutional reform that involved a credible agrarian reform, the change of the electoral and political rules of the game – basically unlocking the system – and the foundation of a series of new developmental agencies. In the field, he promoted the creation of the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (ANUC), composed of tenants, holders, and workers, which eventually became the biggest peasant movement in Latin America.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the broad support that he enjoyed at the outset, in both these areas Lleras found steep resistance. In the congress, not surprisingly, several factions that opposed the government had sufficient power to cause problems. The LP was not united either – scores of its congressmen were themselves big landowners, and were occasionally shooting against the ANUC cadres in their regions (Escobar 1998) – and the sector of the CP that supported Lleras had several fears concerning the reform and the opening of the system. Below this level, members of the parliament simply used the occasion to blackmail Lleras: if you do not accept this or that particularistic demand (for my regions or for me) I will not support your reform. Since the supermajorities mechanism was so stringent, this was a credible threat.

The evolution of the ANUC was equally preoccupying. Lleras expected to mobilise the peasantry to support the reform *and* the LP (and him). None of this happened. The LP had always had a substantial presence of cattle ranchers in its leadership. This was especially obvious in the Atlantic Coast, which was the region of the country in which the party enjoyed broader and more stable majorities. At the same time, it became a hotbed of land owner resistance, which some times acquired violent expressions. All this did not tie the hands of Lleras,<sup>45</sup> but finally sapped his energy. The LP simply could not do without the Atlantic Coast vote, but while the *costeño* LP voters were peasants, the bosses were huge landowners. This rapidly corroded the political support of the LP within the ANUC. The peasant leadership and the masses – or at least the intermediate cadres - drifted towards the Marxist left, which had the language to explain inequalities, and the skills to promote direct action. The effect of this was to scare to death all the moderates within the traditional parties: what could be said about this Frankenstein that Lleras had created? Was reform preventing revolution, or was it rather fueling it?

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<sup>44</sup> There is an admirable history of the ANUC by Leon Zamosc (1978).

<sup>45</sup> Actually, he sent a liberal radical – Díaz Callejas – to the Cesar department, one in which land distribution was worse, to promote the agrarian reform. He faced a brutal resistance. Díaz eventually evolved towards the left.

The 1968 project of agrarian reform also stumbled, both in the Congress and in the country, and in 1973 Lleras' successor, Misael Pastrana, put an end to it in the Chicoral pact. The Chicoral pact can be described without exaggeration as an agreement between the government and the big land owners to preserve the agrarian property structure of the country. From then on, the theme would disappear from the national political agenda, only to return in later years, in much worse conditions.

To approve his constitutional reform Lleras had had to resign from the presidency. It was a ritual, theatrical resignation,<sup>46</sup> and the political elites begged him to stay, as he had expected. But it was an indication of his feeling of impotency, and it was not only he who felt this. The overall results of his transformative effort appeared meagre to the common voter. This may seem unjust, as the shreds of welfarism that existed in Colombia until the 1990s were in good measure a result of his activity. He also had successes promoting national industry, another of his obsessions. At the same time, voters had already waited long enough.

The Lleras government, in effect, was a turning point in the NF, and probably in Colombian contemporary history. His inability to defeat the NF 'inmovilismo' – he weakened it, but no more than that—deepened the mistrust that the population felt for the traditional political elites. Since here it is easy to indulge in good sounding phraseology, we might as well substantiate this assertion. The pro-NF coalition lost popular support in at least three forms. First, the vote for dissident traditional politicians that presented their names in the presidential elections gradually grew (save in 1966). Second, the same can be said about the vote for non-traditional alternatives, especially the populist creature of General Rojas Pinilla, the Alianza Popular Nacional (ANAPO), which lost the elections by a razor edge margin in 1970.<sup>47</sup> Third, abstention burst forth alarmingly. It is true that relatively high levels of abstention are not necessarily a symptom of disaffection or lack of legitimacy, or even of a lack of interest. But the NF abstention went beyond every conceivable threshold, suggesting that skepticism towards the public affairs was widespread. All this is shown in detail in Table 2. What were probably among the first systematic public opinion polls made in the country help to complete the landscape: citizens stated that the NF was closed, inefficient, and that it discriminated against the young and the poor (Camacho and Rojas 1970). The shady – in the optimistic hypothesis – behavior of the Lleras administration in the 1970 presidential elections made things even worse.

The failure of agrarian reform had other long-term consequences. As the demographic pressures over land were already intolerable, there were only two solutions: a) slightly push the 'system' (the agrarian productive apparatus) towards the frontier of optimality, redistributing land and forcing big tenants to be more efficient; or b) the expansion of the agrarian frontier. Those who argued in favor of the latter option claimed that the country had plenty of unoccupied land (*territorios baldíos*) and in this they were completely right. Colombia was a coffee growing country, and this implied that it had concentrated its population, its productive apparatus, its cities, its roads, and its economic resources in the Andean region, between two of the three great mountain ranges that traverse the country (the Cordillera Central and Occidental).<sup>48</sup> This, in turn, meant that the state waived the full territorial occupation of the country. As long as the unoccupied zones remained

<sup>46</sup> Of which there are plenty in his career.

<sup>47</sup> There are strong suspicions that Lleras and his government minister orchestrated a fraud to avoid the access of Rojas Pinilla to the government. Though this has not been proved, it is not implausible either.

<sup>48</sup> By the way, while *La Violencia* had affected the Andean core, the 1960 Marxist guerrillas had not been able to penetrate it in the least (Vélez 2001).

demographically negligible (See Figure 3), and as long as the country had no external military threat, this was no great deal. Actually, in some non Andean parts of the country the traditional form of making politics could work perfectly well, despite the extreme precariousness of the state and of the economy.<sup>49</sup> *La Violencia*, however, had shown what could happen if the stateless Colombia suddenly activated, for one reason or another. The lack of state institutions, of roads, and of markets, made these territories extremely difficult to control. In contrast, the brutal repression in the Andean core had been more spectacular, but militarily it had not meant a particularly hard challenge for the government.

The Lleras administration witnessed the confrontation between the defenders of reform and the defenders of the expansion of the agrarian frontier through colonisation. The latter position was openly and aggressively advocated by the big landowners, their pressure groups, and political supporters (Moncayo 1975). Colonisation was not traumatic, they argued; it was the 'Colombian way',<sup>50</sup> and would permit the access of land to thousands of people without affecting investment or weakening property rights. The triumph of colonisation over reform meant that gradually huge and stateless expanses of land became populated by un-rooted populations of peasants, who were followed by landowners and/or crooks that stole or bought their land. Certainly, colonisation could be seen as well as a non-policy, as this process of expansion of the agrarian frontier was already taking place: given the property structures of the country, the Andean core had to expel peasants, be it to the cities or to other territories.<sup>51</sup> However, the basic point is that the triumph of colonisation over reform activated the unoccupied territories, and strengthened them demographically while maintaining a complete state vacuum. Once reform was blocked this last factor was inevitable, as no rational politician would have proposed making huge investments in sparsely populated, not particularly fertile or powerful territories; still less in a country in a vertiginous process of urbanisation that needed all its effort to respond to the demands of cities. Furthermore, the catastrophe that was approaching fully confirmed the fears of some reformists: time was short, and if the opportunity was wasted (as indeed it had been) the window would close.

The vulnerability of the state that resulted from colonisation and non-reform would very soon acquire concrete forms.

## 1.6. Enter the second wave of political violence

In 1970, Tirofijo, the legendary leader of the FARC, wrote an angry letter to the main Colombia daily, *El Tiempo*. *El Tiempo* had been publishing clips that reported that Tirofijo had been abducted to the Soviet Union, where the Russians, intent on pursuing their policy of pacific coexistence, had forced him to abjure from armed struggle. Several months later, in an indignant tone, Tirofijo reported that he was alive, well, and very active (Gutiérrez 2004a). By the end of the NF, if *La Violencia* seemed far away in time, the guerrillas appeared to be very far away in space.

The NF ended in 1974, and open political competition was gradually restored.<sup>52</sup> It was supposed that with the end of the NF, and of *inmovilismo*, the country would enter a new phase of progress and peace. However, four factors destabilised the regime. The first one

<sup>49</sup> For example, the Chocó department in the Pacific Coast, inhabited mainly by Afro-Colombians.

<sup>50</sup> The coffee productive apparatus also came to life through colonization.

<sup>51</sup> "Between 1951 and 1964 almost 600 thousand people moved into new colonization areas" (Adams 1969: 528)

<sup>52</sup> The process of opening was completed by 1986, when the last consociational mechanisms were dropped.

was the exhaustion of the NF model of development. The Alliance for Progress disappeared in 1973 at the same moment in which the country started to discover its fiscal limits. Everywhere, inward development – what in Latin America is known as *Cepalismo* – produced several good results, but inevitably got exhausted (Kryzanek 1985). The moment of the exhaustion of the Colombian model, which was never fully *Cepalista* anyway,<sup>53</sup> can be placed by the mid 1970s. The first post-NF government –Alfonso López Michelsen – adopted a new, non-Cepalista tone, and placed its bets on a sharp increase in exportations that would transform Colombia in the 'South American Japan'

Second, the exportation model of the country changed abruptly. Until the 1960s, Colombia was an agro-exporting, rural country. In the 1960s, it became predominantly urban (see Figure 5). While in 1975 Colombia's main export was coffee, in 1990 its primary exports were mining products and coca (and eventually people, see Figure 6). The fact that what is probably Colombia's main crop – according to the most reasonable guestimates it accounts for between 5 and 7% of the GNP, against coffee's 1.5% and remittances at 2.5% – is illegal has deeply transformed and weakened the Colombian state. It is easy to understand why. State and regulation building depend on the capacity of harnessing the markets. If by international dictum the state cannot do it, this opens windows of opportunity to other actors to fulfill this function. While the Colombian state, in the period of *La Violencia*, had been unable to guarantee the monopoly of organised force, and had never been particularly strong in the regulatory realm, it had maintained full control over the most important markets (or nearly so<sup>54</sup>). Now, this absolutely central role – one could say, the last line of defense of the monopolist role of the Colombian state – was lost.

Why did this happen? A combination of exogenous and endogenous factors comes into play – a reminder of the power and permanence of what can be called the Porfirio Díaz sociology.<sup>55</sup> The consumption of narcotics in affluent countries had been steadily growing, and became both a cultural constant and one of the main world markets. Smuggling drugs into the United States opened windows of opportunity for illegal entrepreneurs in neighboring countries. But it also allowed the utilisation of the peripheral, non-Andean Colombia, which enjoyed a much weaker presence of the state, for illegal crops. At both levels – smuggling and cultivating – the nexus with well connected politicians played a key role. The fragmentation of the two traditional parties, (especially the LP) by the end of the NF, and their growing independence from the center, boomed precisely at the moment in which illegal merchants and producers were looking for somebody with whom to exchange protection and information for big money. Had the independence of the electoral barons not been achieved, the transformation of Colombia in a big scale drug producing country might have anyway taken place; coca is a huge global market. However, it would probably have taken a much less virulent modality.

This takes us to the third destabilising factor, the deep crisis of the traditional political system. To speak about crisis may seem counter-intuitive, as while in the NF the support for the traditional parties was significantly eroded, between 1974 and 1991 they performed extremely

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<sup>53</sup> For example, the Carlos Lleras creed was to combine the protection of the national industry with aggressive pro-exportation policies. The Colombian state never engaged in macro scale organizational building, which was typical of the *Cepalista* periods of other Latin American countries.

<sup>54</sup> The fighters of *La Violencia*, transformed into bandits, bled the coffee production (Henderson 1984). These are practices that already evoke what is happening today. Then they were still marginal.

<sup>55</sup> The Mexican dictator famously declared: “Pobre México, tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos” (Poor Mexico, so far away from God and so near the United States).

well. This applies especially to the LP. It obtained overwhelming advantage in all kind of elections – presidential, congressional, and subnational – throughout the period, with only one exception (1982). Thus, to speak of a generalised loss of legitimacy seems to be an abuse of terminology. The other side of the coin is the institutional earthquake that affected all the political forces, but once again especially the LP. With the *de facto* fragmentation and decentralisation of the political system that took place as an unplanned and undesired consequence of the NF, the regional bosses of the LP, who were deeply linked with rural forces and particularistic regional interests, took the upper hand. Instead of the traditional clientelism that had predominated in Colombia, the lopsided friendship of which the students talk, they fostered a market clientelism, in which there was an on the spot transaction of scarce goods between the voter and the politician, and where party loyalties counted less and less. When the drug economy hit the country by the mid 1970s, these bosses were in the midst of a ferocious competition among them for scarce votes. They needed the fresh resources offered by the narcos, and were not above getting them. The result was that the biggest party of the political system, and the most efficacious vote gatherer, underwent a deep transformation towards its criminalisation. The LP vote also suffered a gradual de-urbanisation; from being *the* party of the cities, by the 1960s it ended up being the rural, peripheral association it is today.

The criminalisation of the Colombian political system, and especially of its main force, produced a climate of continuous instability, scandal, and difficulty in aggregating interests; furthermore it created a situation in which it is impossible to fit the political system within legality (Gutiérrez 2003). This situation continues today.

The fourth and last factor, of course, is that war came back to the national agenda with force – and finally became its main issue. In the elections of 1974, the winner – Alfonso López Michelsen – was already speaking of a peace accord with the guerrillas. Lleras' 1970 alleged electoral fraud poisoned the public debate, and eventually gave origin to a new guerrilla organisation, the M19. While as a military body the performance of the M19 was always at best utterly unskilled, it was the first Colombian guerrilla organisation that really understood politics. It knew how to address a broad public. Through spectacular actions, which imitated the Uruguayan Tupamaros and other urban guerrillas, the M19 was able to capture the imagination of broad sectors of public opinion. When it took the Dominican Republic embassy in 1978 – abducting several ambassadors, among them the US Diego Asensio – there were strong hints that it was widely popular. This could be one of the first and last cases of genuine mass support for the Colombian post-*Violencia* guerrillas (Pécaut 2006). On the other hand, as happens with many innovators, it was not the M19 but other slower and more solid groups who profited from its new socio-techniques. The M19 had the fantasy of a fast military victory, which violated all the guerrilla war principles; the repressive 1978-1982 administration hit it very hard, and when it tried to make a comeback it had already lost public favor without improving too much its military performance. Instead, the FARC and the ELN grew very fast. In 1978 the FARC had less than 800 combatants (Ferro and Uribe, 2002); by 1982 it had nearly 5000, and had worked out a long term strategic plan. The ELN lagged behind, but by any standard also fared quite well. The Maoist forces ran to extinction.

To sustain this new level of activity, the *guerrilleros* resorted to three main methods. First, the extraction of rents – and here the transformation of the country into a mining and coca producing one played a very central role. By the late 1980s, the FARC had specialised in coca areas, and the ELN in gold and oil. Second, attacks on banks (which would eventually disappear from the repertoire, as the neoliberal transformation of the state would entail the

closure of the Agrarian Fund, the favorite victim of the guerrillas). Third, kidnapping. This was an extremely juicy business, with which they hit *all* of the rich – including the rapidly increasing illegal sector.

The Mafiosi, who had the adequate skills and routines, responded in kind. This is the origin of the paramilitary groups. In a very short period they spread throughout the country, supported on a social tripod: narcos (and other illegal actors), cattle ranchers, and military officers (Gutiérrez and Barón 2005). By the late 1980s, the paramilitaries – with the support or connivance of the army, the very broad participation of cattle ranchers, and the huge resources of narco-trafficking – were growing even faster than the guerrillas.

The decade of the 1980s was very traumatic for Colombia. After the repressive, anti-reformist, and highly corrupt Liberal administration of Turbay, came a CP and an LP government. Each one in its style proposed peace, state modernisation, and reform plans. The peace process of the Conservative Betancur (1982-1986) failed, and the party that it brought to life, the Unión Patriótica, was victim of a politicide that killed nearly 3000 of its leaders and cadres (Dudley. 2004).<sup>56</sup> Social reforms yielded to anti-poverty policies that did not have any redistributive effect. The state was effectively transformed, especially through decentralisation; but from this change, however progressive – and in many senses it was deeply so – many others also profited. This includes the guerrillas, who suddenly discovered the blessings of socialism in one municipality, the narcos, and the paramilitaries, all of whom found that the regional units were the ideal niches to capture rents and chunks of power.

With the political system completely discredited,<sup>57</sup> the narcos declaring a narco-terrorist war against the state and against extradition, and the guerrillas and paramilitaries thriving, it seemed obvious to broad sectors that it was high time to re-state the compact of Colombian society. In the 1990 election, three presidential candidates – among them the almost certain winner, a Liberal dissident who had had the courage to denounce narco-trafficking – were killed.

## 1.7. The 1991 Constitution

The idea of summoning a Constitutional Assembly was approved by the Barco administration, with the support of the majority of the public opinion, student activists, a sector of the traditional parties, and new political forces. After the successful peace accord with the M19 signed in March 1990, its leaders were able to create a broad pro-constitution coalition, which had an excellent showing in the 1990 elections, won by the neoliberal LP candidate César Gaviria. The M19 candidate arrived second. In the 1991 elections for the Constitutional Assembly the preferences of the electors went to three sectors: the LP, the M19, and a dissident conservative movement (Movement of National Salvation (MSN)). The resulting constitution was long and prolix, but in compensation it was inspired by clear objectives, of which the following were the main ones:

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<sup>56</sup> Symmetrically, the FARC would wipe out the reinserted EPL, claiming that it was in the service of the army.

<sup>57</sup> In 1993, a survey applied by Hart Research Associates revealed the following results to the question: “who, by your judgment, is most responsible for the problems Colombia currently faces; The narcos, guerrilla groups, politicians, entrepreneurs, ‘the rich’ or multinational companies?” Responses were: Narcos (15%), Guerilla Groups (10%), Politicians (46%), Entrepreneurs (1%), The Rich (4%) and Multinational Companies (6%) (Gutierrez 2007).

- a. To act as a peace pact
- b. To democratise the country
- c. To force a modernising political process
- d. To purify the political realm.

It was supposed that these objectives were highly inter-related. For example, in 1991 by far and large the predominant diagnosis of the country's violence in the academia was that it was a function of the closure of its political system.<sup>58</sup> A broad sector of the political elites adopted this interpretation. Thus to democratise and open were pre-requisites of a viable peace process; peace, on the other hand, would deepen democratisation, and so on.

The 1991 Constitution was backed by a heterogeneous coalition with different objectives. The modernising sector of the LP aspired to combine a set of the party's historical themes – decentralisation, inclusion of minorities—with neoliberalism and, naturally, maintain its political dominance. The CP dissidents veered towards a rather authoritarian discourse, which in practice, though, manifested itself as a criticism of traditional politics. Finally, the reinserted guerrillas – M19 – wanted the renovation of the political system and the inclusion of social movements as legitimate partners (Fals Borda 1986).<sup>59</sup>

As said above, the members of the coalition –save, perhaps, the MSN—had had a very good electoral performance in 1990 (See Table 3). But it was short lived. Within the LP a new majority took the upper hand. This faction (Oficialismo-Samperismo) combined traditional politics, social reformism – in a very watered-down version – and a tepid attitude towards neoliberalism. The MSN died out.<sup>60</sup> The Alianza Democrática M19 suffered a political knock out in the following two successive elections, and its leaders decided to dissolve it. With no organic political force to defend it and staunchly uphold its principles, the Constitution has been gradually transformed and mellowed through multiple Constitutional reforms.

In 1994, Ernesto Samper won the elections by a razor edge margin. However, as soon as he acceded to power he was accused of having received 5 million dollars from the Cali Cartel narcotraffickers to fund his campaign. He somehow managed to serve out his presidential term, which was characterised by permanent scandal. The intervention of the United States in Colombian affairs via the narcotics theme had been more or less permanent from 1978 on (Matthiessen 2000), but the Samper period opened the door to a new wave and level of activism, in which the US ambassador operated more or less as another Colombia politician, only with much more power (and without the need of gathering the votes). The US, additionally, intervened quite directly in actions that it thought would neutralise the influence of narcotraffickers. For example, it was behind the reform of the police and the naming of the national police director, Gral. Serrano, in an attempt to insulate the force from what they considered to be a more narcotised army (Gutierrez 2003). This deepened the brutal tensions between the police and the army, which have had periodic – and many times homicidal – expressions until today.

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<sup>58</sup> This is the central message of a famous IEPRI report for the Barco government. (Comisión de Estudios sobre la Violencia 1987).

<sup>59</sup> Fals is an academic who participated as a member of the Constitutional Assembly.

<sup>60</sup> It eventually disappeared after its main leader was assassinated. It returned to the CP.

Samper was succeeded by his conservative antagonist, Andrés Pastrana. Despite Samper's social democratic rhetoric, in the field of peace and war he had been quite equivocal, playing alternatively the hawk and the dove. Much more than Gaviria, he left a free hand to the paramilitaries, and for strategic reasons avoided carefully any move that would irritate what he called after his survival 'the key factors of power': the military, the very rich ('los cacaos'), and the United States.<sup>61</sup> Pastrana had a much wider margin of manoeuvre, since at the beginning at least he was strongly supported by the US, hailed by the rich and the technocrats,<sup>62</sup> and accepted by the new military leadership.<sup>63</sup> He spent this popularity on two agendas: a new peace process with the FARC (the idea that he was the man who would bring peace to Colombia contributed decisively to his electoral victory), and the fight against traditional politics (and particularly against the LP), which implied disciplining political parties, promoting independents, and trimming down (both quantitatively and qualitatively) the Congress. He failed on both scores. The FARC accepted participating in peace talks, but from the very beginning it became evident that these would be extremely tortuous. The FARC had some short-term military objectives – mainly, the exchange of prisoners with the state, to which it gave obvious precedence over any long-term agreement. Also, it did not have a clear idea of what a modern state meant, and hardly knew what to ask for. The Pastrana administration, in its turn, did not know what to offer.<sup>64</sup> Beyond the gestures of confidence building, no concrete steps were taken. At the same time, the confidence building measures were compromising enough – for example, giving the FARC a 40,000 squared kilometre demilitarised zone – to create deep concerns within the military, the agrarian rich, the media, and a substantial portion of public opinion. Some of the actors that felt more vexed by the peace process belonged to the core of Pastrana's coalition. Eventually, Rodrigo Lloreda, Minister of Defense, resigned, and this triggered the resignation of 18 Generals as a means of protest against the concessions to the FARC.

When the peace agreement with the FARC became obviously unfeasible, the government turned its attention to the ELN. But the ELN was much weaker militarily, and its grip over the territories it influenced was much weaker. When another demilitarised zone for the ELN was being agreed, the paramilitaries combined violence, military threats, public denunciations and mass mobilisation to force Pastrana to back off (Gutiérrez Omar 2004).

As the paramilitaries forced the hand of the state, Pastrana became the lamest of ducks. He had lost the trust of the right wing, the Liberals hated his guts, and the left saw in him just another president that had let the paramilitaries run amok and intensify the decimation of the opposition and the social movements. At the end of his term, Pastrana was completely discredited. In the 2002 elections it was evident that some kind of opposition figure would win (ultimately, the CP decided that it would not present candidate), but it was not clear whom. The campaign started under good auspices for the LP oficialismo, and the left also put up a good showing. But the winner was finally Alvaro Uribe, who obtained an overwhelming

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<sup>61</sup> According to Samper he realised "that the real factors of power were with me: the Congress, the economic groups, the ambassadors of the friendly countries, the governors of the provinces and, of course, half of the Colombian inhabitants, that never abandoned me in the middle of the crisis" (Revista Semana. Samper Responde a Semana, July 20 1998, p. 34).

<sup>62</sup> The very rich were divided, but after Pastrana won they supported him.

<sup>63</sup> Pastrana chose officers that were less virulent in their opposition to civilian meddling in security affairs than Samper's.

<sup>64</sup> What was really damning was the combination of both factors. If either party had had some clearly established agenda of negotiation things could have gone differently.

advantage in 2002 and 2006.<sup>65</sup> In 2006 the left – which had coalesced around the Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA) – became the second political force of the country, outvoting the LP.

These six years of Uribe government have been marked by two essential factors. First, the enormous popularity of the president, whose support in the opinion polls never sank, until 2007, below 70%. Political scientists and pundits have had a hard time trying to explain this unique phenomenon. What can be said at the moment is that Uribe owes his popularity to three key factors, though not necessarily in the order we present them. First, he was able to reinvent himself as an anti-politician, without losing the vote of his party of origin, the LP. His continuous denunciations of corrupt politics have had a high impact on public opinion, but at the same time he has been able to appeal to the remains of the traditional party audiences. Second, the country returned to the path of sustained economic growth –modest but sustained, very much in the country’s historical tradition. Third, he has been able to provide increased security. It is clear that many of the predictions and claims of the government officials are wildly off the mark.<sup>66</sup> The FARC are not defeated, and the narco economy is thriving. At the same time, the government claims that common and political violence fell gradually but distinctly (see Figures 1 D and 1 F) – and indeed there is a new, much more optimistic, public climate concerning security issues. Uribe re-opened the roads – which had become particularly dangerous in the Pastrana period – for the citizens, and cornered the FARC, albeit without ever landing it a decisive blow.<sup>67</sup> He thus empathised with the broad citizen concern about security –a concern that was at the same time broad and intense. Many sectors would accept the weakening of public liberties in exchange for security. In this sense, Uribe’s discourse and successes have an obvious Hobbesian tinge.<sup>68</sup> However, the authoritarian tradeoff has never been fully implemented, in part because of international restrictions, but also because the long established checks and balances of the political institutional framework have a powerful inertia that is difficult to deal with.<sup>69</sup>

The second factor marking the Uribe government is the centrality of the paramilitary theme – or indeed the paramilitary scandal – which was cooked on a low flame until 2006 and 2007, by which time it had reached white hot temperatures. In the decade of the 1980s, the paramilitaries had grown and proliferated, with the connivance – and often open support – of the army and other state agencies. In the 1990s, they established new alliances both with narcos and the state – especially in the fight against Pablo Escobar, which put in a single front Colombian and US security agencies, Cali cartel leaders, and paramilitaries (Gómez and Giraldo 1992) – and scaled up their armament and activity. Some of their leaders launched the idea of a paramilitary federation, which would amount to the constitution of a national anti-subversive army. This project became reality in 1997, with the constitution of the

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<sup>65</sup> In 2005, the Colombian Congress approved the immediate re-election of the President. In spite of the polemic generated by the decision, Uribe was reelected in May of 2006. For an analysis of the re-election see Gutiérrez (2006a) and Rodríguez (2006).

<sup>66</sup> In 2003, the Interior Minister promised that by December Colombia would not have a single bush of coca.

<sup>67</sup> The financial costs that Uribe has incurred are quite substantial (see Figure 7), so it is not clear if his capacity of dealing with the FARC from a position of force is sustainable.

<sup>68</sup> Boetian, according to critical NGOs.

<sup>69</sup> This became quite obvious when Uribe promoted a referendum that in large measure targeted the congress. The idea was widely popular, but it was tamed both by the constitutional court and the congress itself. When it arrived to the streets, it was a rather grey technical proposal, which did not have the capacity to trigger the passions of anybody. For details, see (Gutiérrez 2004b).

Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, but broke down shortly after, in 2002 (Gutiérrez and Barón 2005). The centrifugal and regionalist tendencies of the paramilitary barred the establishment of a clear line of command. Furthermore, in that period the link between the paramilitaries and the narco economy changed qualitatively. As Gustavo Duncan (2004) has noted, in the 1980s the paramilitary acted in their regions as protectors of the narcos, but as the security apparatus of the former grew they acquired a strategic advantage in the market. Additionally, the internal organisational and incentive structure of the groups allowed a rapid enrichment of officers and combatants (Gutiérrez and Barón 2005), which pushed them in an entrepreneurial (more than military) direction. By the late 1990s, the majority of the paramilitaries were already heavyweight narcos in their own right. The paradox is that the organisational catastrophe of the armed extreme right went in parallel with a huge economic and political success. Big money, long clientelistic networks, the establishment of the most diverse extortion businesses, the regulation of illegal markets, and a highly increased political capacity – which grew both with experience and with the ability to buy off technicians, experts in mobilisation, intellectuals, cadres and leaders, many of them coming from the left – plus a renewed homicidal dash, allowed them to consolidate very strong regional coalitions. They had scores of politicians, decided electoral results in many regions, and penetrated the state apparatus at diverse points.<sup>70</sup> In the late 1990s, they also felt strong enough to launch an assault on big cities – among them, Medellín, the second in the country – and were successful. The Pastrana government saw that they had already obtained the power to sabotage, even to block, national governmental projects. They attacked the peace process with the FARC by means of a massacre offensive – in which hundreds of civilians were killed and maimed.

When Uribe arrived to the presidency, he initiated peace talks with the paramilitaries. The latter had several reasons for wanting peace. The majority of them had instinctively supported Uribe in the 2002 elections, as the candidate further to the right. There is already hard evidence that narco-paramilitary money was funneled into the presidential campaign.<sup>71</sup> Many of the biggest traffickers expected to legalise their capital through politicisation. The best part of the paramilitary armed activity was being invested in bloody internecine conflicts to settle territorial or narco route conflicts. They probably also had problems confronting the FARC.<sup>72</sup> Uribe and his staff had planned a smooth reinsertion, with high levels of impunity<sup>73</sup> in exchange for the devolution of the paramilitary territories to the state. This was not possible, because: a) the opposition and the constitutional court changed slightly the terms of the peace agreement, giving clear incentives to the paramilitary leaders to tell the truth about their crimes; b) the prosecutor's office made a series of spectacular discoveries, which linked an important portion of the governmental caucus to the paramilitary network. The chief of the presidential intelligence (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS) was also jailed, on the grounds of having strong ties (also linking him to homicidal activities) with the paramilitary. The situation was new in the following sense: though the paramilitaries had

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<sup>70</sup> All this has been judicially demonstrated without doubt. See: Revista Semana. Hay Gata Encerrada. February 11 2006. Some academic works played a decisive role in uncovering the paramilitary hegemony in key regions. (López 2005).

<sup>71</sup> See: El Proyecto Paramilitar y la Actividad Política. Consideraciones de la Corte Suprema de Justicia. Online Document. Consulted on: Revista Cambio: [http://www.cambio.com.co/portadacambio/712/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA\\_INTERIOR\\_CAMBIO-3444866.html](http://www.cambio.com.co/portadacambio/712/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR_CAMBIO-3444866.html)

<sup>72</sup> They continued to do so successfully, but only with the support of the army. Without it, there is evidence that they were having a hard time. This contrasts with the previous decades, when they had been able to evict the FARC from some key territories.

<sup>73</sup> There is a contrast here with the NF peace. While in 1958 the political elites had virtually no choice, in the case of the paramilitaries there was a wide margin of manoeuvre to choose the 'optimal level of impunity'. The government's option was: very high. Some have read in this a case of self interest.

steadily amassed power and land, and infiltrated the state throughout the 1990s, they had remained at the regional level.<sup>74</sup> Now, it is irrefutable that they are participating in the national coalition. Apart from its purely juridical implications, this is an adequately paradoxical culmination of the trajectory we have been describing: the attempted takeover of the state by a strongly ruralist, criminalised – in reality, Mafioso-type – force, in a country that has quintupled its GNP per capita in the twentieth century (GRECO 2002), and has gone through a very strong process of modernisation and urbanisation.

## **PART 2: Macro-cycles**

In the previous part we sketched what can be called the linear trajectory of the country; the sequence of relevant events that form the current of public life as, for example, it is immediately perceived by political actors. Here we concentrate on 'longer', 'deeper' – not in the sense of 'more important', but of 'more concealed' – processes, patterns, and continuities. We start with a description of what has happened in terms of violence. Without doubt, 1948-2006 (and counting) seem to constitute a single period, basically because of the persistence of very high levels of communal and political violence (possibly with one or two oases). How has lethal violence behaved? What are the differences and continuities between *La Violencia* and what is happening today? What does this tell us about the configuration of the state? Once we have dealt with this fundamental invariant – one of the basic poles of our puzzle – we direct our attention to the workings of the political regime. Can we find some obvious characteristic of the regime that explains or determines the behavior of Colombian violence? Third, we focus on state strength. In what sense can we say that the state is chronically weak? This leads us into the theme of state failures. Fourth, we deal with the rural problem.

### **2.1. The aggregated behavior of violence: the two 'humped' waves of violence**

We ask the reader to return to Figures 1 A to 1 F. There is a very simple story that brings together the narrative of part 1 with the trends reflected in the Figures. Though the details may be open to several corrections,<sup>75</sup> those trends match the general developments described above well. First of all, we observe that we lack data for the 1949-1957 period, in which there was a brutal homicidal explosion that caused probably over 100,000 dead. However, this does not represent a major problem because we know more or less what happened in the missing segment.

In the Liberal Republic, violence has a two-hump structure (Figure 1 E). The Conservative opposition to the LP, and the latter's effort to 'reddeñ' certain key electoral districts, gave origin to intense confrontation. The López Pumarejo agrarian reform at first triggered even more unrest, but then probably helped calm things down. Violence increased steeply in 1946, in the face of another alternation and the mutual fears of radicalisation of the adversary. Now please observe Figures 1 C and 1 D. They suggest that this was a conflict 'with society but

<sup>74</sup> Uribe was governor of the department of Antioquia between 1994 and 1997. In this period, paramilitary violence clearly grew. The opposition demonstrated in several parliamentary debates during Uribe's governorship, and a couple of security cooperatives in which paramilitaries and narcos had prominent participation were legalized. On the other hand, no proof of any kind of illegal connection has been provided.

<sup>75</sup> Increasingly, it has been found that the quantitative data on homicidal violence is highly problematic. Our reconstruction is careful, but has many obvious biases. We only indulge in the conjecture that the general 'form' of the evolution (constituted by two humps or inverted Us) approximates quite well what really happened. Our claim is that this is corroborated by quantitative and qualitative data, as well as political history.

without armies'. Until 1948, practically all the human losses were due to clashes between civilians – basically, between highly mobilised and motivated members of both parties. The qualitative evidence points in the same direction. After the assassination of Gaitán and the resultant dynamics of violent protest and brutal repression, small groups of Liberal peasants organised guerrillas – some of which eventually came under Communist influence. Consequently, combat between the army and rebels appeared. The combat casualties hiked, but even then the majority of those killed were civilians. In perspective, the guerrillas were never terribly strong –among other factors, they were never supported by the LP leadership— and the punitive killing of civilians always had a primary role.

The second war also has two humps, and thus it has an aggregated semblance to the previous one. The Rojas Pinilla government, and after it the National Front, were able to deflate the confrontation/criminalisation dynamics that came from *La Violencia*. By 1965-1966, Colombia can hardly be classified as a country in conflict, though it was still 'convalescent' (as the political elites explicitly acknowledged; Gutierrez 2007). From the late 1970s on there is a distinct process of heating up, culminating in the 1980s explosion. However, the disaggregated behavior is different from the first war; this appears to be a conflict 'with armies and without society'. The casualties in combat grow steadily. The civilian killings also grow – until 2002, after which they start to fall down – but the authors are by far and large armed structures, not civilians.

The 'with armies and without society' characterisation needs to be qualified. Though the political isolation of the armed apparatuses in the second Colombian conflict is frequently stressed, this represents a rather one-sided understanding of what politics is. As seen at the end of Part 2, both the FARC and the paramilitaries were able to build complex political networks based on different forms of management of the conflict and of market regulation of the coca and other illegal businesses. But the 'instrumental' clout of these forces is not matched by an 'affective' power that would allow them to mobilise the population around relatively abstract, long range themes. Operationally, the armed apparatuses obtain real social support through networks that transfer goods in one direction or another, but are completely isolated with regard to explicit support.<sup>76</sup>

In sum, each violent sub-period has a 'two humped process'.<sup>77</sup> In the first one, the 1930 presidential alternation plus agrarian unrest (Hirschman 1962) produced a flare of confrontations between the two traditional parties, which gradually cooled down. The following alternation triggered once again a violent clash, this time irreversibly. In the second sub-period, the NF was gradually able to tame the remnants of political and criminal activity that came from *La Violencia*. However, by the mid 1970s, coinciding both with the success of the M19 and the development of the narcotics economy, the country relapsed into war. In a couple of years the rate of common and political homicides – which until 1990 were intimately linked (Gutiérrez 2006b) – tripled. For almost two decades, the intensity of the conflict increased practically without interruption, until 2000-2001, when it reached its peak. After this, it started to fall; but, as seen in Figures 1 D and 1 F, this aggregated view hides a more complicated process. While killings out of combat diminished<sup>78</sup> – without doubt, mainly

<sup>76</sup> For example, as captured by opinion polls. The paramilitaries and the guerrillas are consistently at the bottom of the sympathy-support scales.

<sup>77</sup> Two humped if we count the years previous to the initiation of war proper.

<sup>78</sup> Common homicides in Colombia have diminished in the following way: -18% in 2003; -14% in 2004; -10% 2005; - 5% in 2006 (Source: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional. Centro de Estadísticas. Online Document. Consulted on: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional <http://alpha.mindefensa.gov.co>).

due to the reinsertion of the paramilitaries – casualties in combat actually grew. Common violence, in the meantime, also fell.

## 2.2. Good guys – bad guys

After watching the Colombian violent cycles, the first – and perhaps last—reaction is to blame the traditional political parties. It may be hypothesised that: a) the first wave was caused by their failure to accept alternation in power; and b) the second was caused by the NF, which closed the political system in such a way that it prevented the democratic expression of an alternative force. Can this intuition be defended? Many authors believe that it can. The attempt to establish a straightforward connection between violence and the closure of the political system is one of the central themes of the literature about both Colombian parties and conflict. It has given origin to a debate in which at least three alternative interpretations compete. The first one claims that the LP represented the progressive bourgeoisie, and that the CP was the party of the feudal landowners (Posada 1969). This is a position that roughly matches the vision that the reformist sector of the LP had of itself – and probably the beliefs of part of the Communist Party, until the time of the NF (Medina 1980). This notion has the advantage of being logically consistent. It can explain *both* waves of violence (first, as a result of the resistance of the reactionary landowners to reforms; second, as a product of the complicity of the two parties, once the Liberals became reactionary). It is, however, impossible to sustain. As in many other developing countries, in Colombia there was never a neat separation between the landowners and the industrialists. The majority of the pressure groups of the propertied class were impeccably bipartisan, and actually the agrarian federation was headed by a Liberal in the period of the *Violencia*. In the other direction, the National Federation of Coffee Producers, and the National Association of Industrialists, had strong ties with the CP (Echeverri 1987). In addition to their political heterogeneity, the economic elites had different interests and objectives, which varied according to temporary contexts (Sáenz Rovner 2002).

Less convincingly, it has been argued (Safford 1985) that the political elites of both parties were essentially identical, coming in both cases from the rich. But this is a point that has been wildly overrated,<sup>79</sup> and it has never been really established. For this research we built a database of first and second level political leaders of both parties in the 1930s and the 1940s, and the results do not neatly support Safford's and others' claims. Neither party was led exclusively by high class characters; in fact, people coming from the nascent urban middle class abounded – as was the case with Gaitán himself and Esteban Jaramillo, an important economist and leader of the CP. On the other hand, the existence of real differences between LP and CP leaderships cannot be ruled out.

As a certain overreaction to Posada's assertion, several writers have insisted on the basic similarity of the Colombian traditional parties. This argument in reality consisted in two not necessarily complementary parts: the parties have always been basically the same; and the parties gradually converged to the center. The second part is basically true, but even then convergence was not total (Gutiérrez 2007). The first part was never proved, and we have shored up good enough evidence to suggest that it does not hold water. Finally, some have said that the parties had real differences, though these were not strictly class based (for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Gutiérrez 1995 and Sanders 2004; for the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dix 1967; González

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<sup>79</sup> The theory of political parties established long ago that in the long run party leaderships tend to look like each other.

1997 and Silva 2005). Using electoral results, the censuses of the period, and archival work, we arrived at the conclusion that the latter are right (Gutiérrez, Viatela, Acevedo 2007a). In view of the existing evidence, it seems reasonable to suggest that the social base of the traditional parties was differentiated in the following ways:

1. Regarding ethnicity. Black Colombians tended to vote Red.
2. Regarding the urban-rural cleavage. The urban centers tended to have higher levels of LP vote.
3. Regarding the level of control of the Catholic Church. Areas in which Catholic control was weak, liberals were strong (González 1997).
4. Regarding political discourse. Both parties shared several exclusionary discursive codes, but the LP appealed more consistently to the *pueblo* (Silva 2005).

All this has to be nuanced (as we do in Gutiérrez, Viatela, Acevedo 2007a), but shows that the Colombian party system cannot be described as a simple exclusionary artifice, conceived to hide and maintain social differences. Actually, it strengthens Sander's point: the social tensions over which the Colombian party system was built sat well with the republican traditions of the 'Atlantic Civilisations', and were not quaint or strange. The pillars of the system were not class differences, but the same can be said of tens of countries in which the building blocks that constitute the party system are related to the rural-urban or ethnic cleavages (Rokkan *et al* 1999). Each party was a complex multi-class coalition that expressed shifting constellations of interests, rational calculations of their leadership and cadres, and programmatic shades.

There is yet another very popular story, which suggests that persistent violence is the result of the intolerance of the Colombian politicians. Here regime and state are linked in an explicit manner. The idea is that, since the parties were in fact separated – though perhaps only by their appetites – they tried to exclude each other (and in the second period their common adversaries). The leaders might have had an ideological or class interest in doing so, while the followers were interested in the payroll. The main employer in the Colombian economy has been the state, so the triumph of one's own party was an admission pass to a decent living. Losing power, on the other hand, meant tragedy and destitution; this is why in Colombia each election was a battle (Acevedo 2003).<sup>80</sup> Contrary to other plausible stories that have been revised here, this one has microfoundations that explain clearly why the followers followed, so it sounds convincing. But it is totally wrong. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Colombian parties developed power sharing devices. These were bounded, imperfect, and sometimes manipulative and malicious, but they were always there – even, or especially, in the moments of utmost crisis. They included electoral guarantees, mixed cabinets, forced alternation, super-majorities for certain or all themes, handing control agencies to the opposition, and constitutional control (from the beginning of the century), among other mechanisms. Furthermore, the available evidence strongly suggests that Oquist's and others' ruminations about the fact that the state was the main employer, that alternation in power caused a bureaucratic revolution and that this was *the* effective cause of *La Violencia*, are untenable. Archives reveal that tens of employees maintained their posts after the 1930 alternation.<sup>81</sup> After the Guerra de los Mil Días every alternation – actually, every single elected government – protected itself by carefully trying to distribute the cabinet between the

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<sup>80</sup> Some of these authors, rather surprisingly, simultaneously maintain that the second hump of violence appeared because the parties were too similar.

<sup>81</sup> 1946 was probably more troublesome.

two parties.<sup>82</sup> This practice was finally interrupted in 1986, and then from 2002 onwards – but by this time violence had nothing to do with the animadversion between the two traditional parties.

Against facile commonsensical narrations, then, the Colombian competition was *never* a winner-takes-all game. In a sense, the Colombian political elites have been as much peace seekers as violence mongers. It is true that sometimes an excessively good power sharing device can protect the status quo so strongly that it makes alternation in power prohibitively expensive, and eventually violent (Gutiérrez, Viatela, Acevedo 2007b). This, however, is completely different from the notion that total exclusion was the cause of violence; a view that is held very widely. The mechanisms crafted by the Colombian political elites to incorporate their adversaries have been so variegated and have appeared in such different circumstances that it is rather surprising the persistence of violence is attributed to the *lack* of them. In the NF, the bipartisan collusion in effect excluded other competitors. This was deplorable, but in the Latin American context not particularly dramatic. Despite the institutional restrictions, the left participated in the elections and in the street, sometimes with good results. In the 1980s, when violence and war started in earnest, political assassination brutally hit the opposition, but even then the landscape was rather complex. The main broadenings of the political system were relentlessly promoted from above – and this includes the movement that ended with the summoning of the Constitutional Assembly. This in itself is interesting enough. The Barco administration (1986-1990) proclaimed itself as a government of the LP, a party that in that moment was full of remarkably sinister characters and that seemed nearer to Madame Tussauds than to the Socialist International to which it wanted to be admitted. This very president provoked an institutional rupture to *open* the system, with full knowledge that this would push it into new, complex and broader power sharing schemes.

Nevertheless, perhaps the system was closed in another sense, and one which is relevant to this monograph: it rejected demands from below. Against this, Hirschman (1962) noted that *au contraire* the Colombian political system had shown great permeability to the input of the subordinate sectors. The other part of the story, that Hirschman did not adequately stress, is that the output was poor and distorted. Certainly, the fiscal and technical penury of the Colombian state made reforms particularly difficult; this has been noted by various authors (Adams 1966; Eder 1968). In this plight, however, the Colombian elites were not alone; yet the recurrent trajectory of their failed reformism is quite idiosyncratic. The obvious example is the 1968 agrarian reform. Colombia attempted this in a context of democracy, US tolerance or support, the activism of the president, and widespread mass mobilisation to foster it; but even then it failed. By contrast, Perú, Ecuador, and Bolivia – poorer countries, with numerous dictatorships and weaker economies – were able to implement agrarian reform.<sup>83</sup> So while the analysts were concentrating in the 'input problems' (closure) of the political system, the real issues were down the way, near the 'output section' of the process. There are also other examples.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> As we show in Gutiérrez, Viatela, Acevedo (2007a), the loser invariably received quite important ministries.

<sup>83</sup> In Peru and Ecuador by military governments; in Bolivia by the 1952 revolutions, but after it was institutionalized by Gral. Rene Barrientos.

<sup>84</sup> In 1974 Alfonso López Michelsen made a tributary reform in spite of the pressure from the associations of the bourgeoisie (FENALCO – National Federation of Merchants; and ANDI – National Association of Industrialists). In the short run, though, these groups were able to totally neutralize the reform (Pécaut 2006).

It is clear that both parties were linked in different ways with the two waves of violence. The confrontation around reforms, and the growth of radical sectors in both parties, initiated *La Violencia*. Two hidden factors played a crucial role. First, the CP understood that increased electoral competition – remember that universal male suffrage was re-institutionalised in 1936 – confronted it with a dilemma: either it modernised or it would disappear. However, the only available blueprint for conservative modernisation was European extremism (especially in its Hispanic variant). Second, the LP and the CP believed they had asymmetric assets. The LP had discovered in 1930 the power of the strictly legalistic script, and many of its leaders probably thought that they were the majority party. On the other hand, the CP had accumulated an impressive and triumphant experience in those contests that required the use of force. At the same time, some of its leaders felt that open electoral competition could shrink it in the long run. That strategic calculations of this sort plus identity could mobilise hundreds of thousands of citizens into high risk collective action is not surprising in the least; the system was built effectively over real, though somewhat oblique, social cleavages and long and deep traditions.

The second wave of violence is related to political exclusion, but also to reforms, albeit more indirectly than the first wave. The consociational arrangements of the NF had two consequences: the fragmentation of the traditional parties, especially the LP, and the failure of the agrarian reform, which in turn resulted in a vigorous expansion of the agrarian frontier. Disaffection and the sense that changes within the system were impossible due to the alleged 1970 fraud provided motives to rebel, while the expansion of the agrarian frontier and the fragmentation of the LP produced a *de facto* regionalisation that fueled violence of all kinds. Throughout this period the crucial invariants are blocked reformism,<sup>85</sup> the difficulty of aggregating interests, and the capacity of actors in crucial moments to promote – or participate in private – violence.

### 2.3. State failures

These invariants are an obvious – indeed, tautological—indicator of state weakness. Weakness, of course, is a descriptive, not an explanatory category.<sup>86</sup> In reality, the only way to explain resilience and failure at the same time is to examine the long patterns of weakness/strength of the state taken together. It is the combination of weaknesses and strength that may explain the persistence of the Colombian conflict.

The long term processes by which the Colombian state was strengthened in several key domains are relatively straightforward. First, it has acquired fiscal muscle. In the 1930s, many agencies could hardly function because of sheer lack of resources. The continuous growth of the country has guaranteed that the situation today is different. This said, it is important to note that fiscal laziness has also been an important invariant (See Figure 8). Second, the state has increased its technical power. The Colombian bureaucracy is strong and educated; there is a national statistical system, a justice apparatus, and so on. Roads and communications networks have grown at a relatively rapid pace. Third, public services – such as those relating to health and education – have been sustained for decades, with obvious results in terms of the quality of life of the population (see Table 1). Fourth, it is not the case that the state has lost its legitimacy; or at least this has not been proven. Perhaps at the end of

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<sup>85</sup> Which is completely different from non-existent, or sham, reformism.

<sup>86</sup> When used as an explanatory category, it is circular. Why is Colombia at war? Because the state is weak. How do we know it is weak? Because the country is at war.

the NF something of this sort could have been asserted, but while today some agencies are highly discredited, there is a generalised clamor for state presence.<sup>87</sup>

The other side of the coin is that, as said above, there are some obvious weaknesses/failures. The basic list is the following:

- a. Territorial failures.<sup>88</sup> The Colombian state has proven time and again its inability to fully occupy its territory. During *La Violencia*, the periphery was demographically negligible, and successive governments tried to change the political preferences of whole populations through the use of force. Both these factors amounted to a successful peripheral resistance<sup>89</sup> – successful in the sense that it avoided defeat *and* impeded stable state occupation of some territories. *La Violencia* created organisations – the FARC, mainly – traditions, and skills, that spilled over into the next period. Instead of the redistribution and optimisation of resources, the triumphant project promoted a stateless demographic occupation, precisely at the moment in which the coca economy was hitting the country. This, in turn, allowed illegal actors to capture rents, launch massive armed challenges to the state, and penetrate state agencies. With the growth of the illegal economy, full control also snapped in the Andean periphery.
- b. The state as implausible monopolist. The Colombian state has not been able to achieve full control of the use of legitimate force, which it lost during *La Violencia*. Since it does not occupy all of its territory, both non-state rent extraction – through extortion, the sale of security, or other methods – and smuggling have thrived. With the US prohibitionist regime (the 'war on drugs'), it also lost the control over the regulation of key markets.
- c. Regulatory failures. The defeat of reformism is associated with the capacity of private agents to penetrate political coalitions and state agencies to dictate their own terms (see for example Pécaut's analysis of *La Violencia*). In the second wave of violence this deepened, and the state found itself dealing with huge illegal undertakings backed by global markets. The takeover by the paramilitary of significant portions of the state was the last step of this process. It may be the case that in its process of state building, the 'correct' agencies have been created. But soon they were overcome by private agents, who have the capacity to distort them. A characteristic of the analyzed period is that state regulation has been rapidly captured by the very agents it purports to regulate. This also explains why elites have not been able to establish a stable, genuinely closed alliance – they face very serious collective action dilemmas precisely because they have too much unmediated power.
- d. Political failures. In both waves of violence, the Colombian state faced intolerable political tensions – though of a quite different nature in each case. During the first wave, the permanence of the government depended on the extirpation of the political preferences of a very substantial portion of the population. This made it unviable. During the second wave, the non-reformist path adopted in Colombia entailed that in practice the state was supported in the regions by paramilitarised coalitions that included cattle ranchers and other rural elites, narcotraffickers, and

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<sup>87</sup> See for example the results of IEPRI's opinion poll in 2005, Online Document. Consulted On: [www.unal.edu.co/iepri/encuesta.html](http://www.unal.edu.co/iepri/encuesta.html)

<sup>88</sup> See Pécaut(1991).

<sup>89</sup> See for example Roldán (2003) for a description of this process in Antioquia.

army officers (Gutiérrez and Barón 2005). It was this coalition that could potentially constitute an effective anti-insurgent project. On the other hand, the Colombian state was participating in the war on drugs. Thus, the political and territorial sustainability of the Colombian state and its international viability contradict each other. The concrete solution to this quandary has taken the following form: the establishment of a sanitary circle around regional politics, so that the national level is impermeable to its workings. In other terms, a division of labor has been developed, in which the national and regional level are each supported by different coalitions. The national coalition needs to be legal, antiradical, and antinarco, while at the regional level it is sufficient to be antiradical and the coalition can include legal and illegal actors. This has resulted in permanent and extremely traumatic convulsions in the last twenty-three years.

- e. Policy failures. The capture of regulatory agencies by private agents is in itself a severe policy failure; but there is more. The feeble public nature of regulation creates among several sectors and agents both severe problems of collective action and an 'exit' alternative, which weakens voice and the possibilities of improvement of the given course of action. The best examples of this are probably security and justice policies. It has been frequently claimed that the Colombian state only has an armed presence in certain regions (De Rementería 1986: 336). However, it has also been incredibly inert in terms of investment in these matters. As seen in Figure 7, the percentage of the GNP put into justice and security has barely evolved in the last sixty years! Only in the last few years has it started to grow, which indeed explains part of Uribe's fortune. This complacency in a country that faces such a persistent violence (plus severe problems of organised crime) is hard to understand.<sup>90</sup> There are some explanations for certain sub-periods;<sup>91</sup> but what can be said about the whole period? The elucidation of the phenomenon might be quite simple. When the state is challenged, key actors, such as regional elites, face two options: pay taxes or engage in private forms of violence. Sometimes they did pay taxes (See Table 5), but in most cases, they felt that paying them was costly and risky, and they organised (or supported) a private undertaking. In effect, state meddling can be as troublesome as the challenge of security itself.<sup>92</sup> But the private response allows a handsome amount of free riding by agents that want to enjoy security but not incur in the costs of having it. At the same time it weakens the capacity of the state in terms of taxing and providing security vis-à-vis *all* agents, as those with private security will always have the possibility of opting for exit if the state becomes too intrusive. In this sense, the prolonged lack of a serious security investment in a country at war is the result of a social dilemma among the economic elites.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> It is also surprisingly under-analyzed.

<sup>91</sup> For example, in the NF the political elites were convinced that the best ways to prevent violence were social investments. This belief was not necessarily proved wrong, as the other part of the equation (reforms) never appeared.

<sup>92</sup> Alejandro Reyes claims that the regional elites "perceive that democratic management of conflict would alter substantially situations of privilege derived from property structures" (Reyes 1991: 428).

<sup>93</sup> Of which there are historical precedents. According to the CP's 19<sup>th</sup> century leader, Mariano Ospina Rodríguez (1884), the great problem of Colombia was the egotism of the rich, which did not allow them to participate forcefully in high cost collective action (like war).

## 2.4. Rural themes

Our 'agrarian story' is not built from a strictly agrarian perspective, but from a political coalitions and state building perspective. We do not delve into any technical detail unless it is vital from the state-political point of view. We want to see from an institutional point of view how agrarian conflicts were dealt with, and consign the basic legal-technical details to Table 4.

What are the continuities of the Colombian agrarian problem? There at least five that are relevant to this text. *First*, the type of political process it was linked to. The party that fostered an agrarian program in Colombia (from 1930 to 1970) was the LP. The LP was divided in several factions and wings, many of which were indifferent, or openly hostile, to reform. The reformist LP leaders had the dual challenge of building broad political coalitions to support their reforms and at the same time trying to guarantee that these would be genuine. Thus they resorted both to congressional cajoling and to mass mobilisation. However, the latter had two problems:

- a. It had to be indirect. The reformists would not risk the destabilisation of the political system to direct the masses towards change. This was one of the real differences between Gaitán and other liberal reformists (the other difference being that the latter were much stronger technically). Thus the LP reformists typically incited the masses, but never directed them.
- b. It had to be profitable. The LP leaders would want the mobilisation to favor their careers and promote the party objectives. But the type of mobilisation (incitation without direction) they engaged in threatened this objective. The popular sectors, aroused by the discourse of change, searched for some kind of organic direction, and found other interlocutors.

This in turn had two consequences. On the one hand, the institutional interface created by the reformists was never successful in creating the convergence of the forces from above and from below. The idea was that the masses would inspire and push forward the political leadership, while the latter would contribute its knowledge and connections. However, indirect promotion resulted in another outcome. The coalition from above faltered and procrastinated, and the coalition from below got out of hand. The former, instead of pushing the latter forward, merely scared it. The latter, instead of directing the former, merely provoked it.

This type of mobilisation also probably created a highly atomistic 'system of notification' (Hirschman 1963). Systems of notification are signal economies, in which agents choose the best form to notify their dissatisfaction to policy and decision makers according to the probability of transforming their malaise into observable changes in the desired direction. The peasants, coaxed by the LP but lacking any stable national directive, profited from the opportunities that institutional designs, activated by chance, presented them. Those designs frequently allowed for the application of individual or small group pressure over individual landowners. The latter responded in kind (in fact, on many occasions they started the dynamic). Thus, peasant conflicts frequently derived not from more or less clearly stated social conflicts, but from macro-feuds.<sup>94</sup> Rojas Pinilla once declared that the Colombian

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<sup>94</sup> If this is true, the discussion about the 'true' content of the López Pumarejo reforms may have no sense. López simply triggered a process, and waited the outcome. This, however, changed in a clearly tangible way the power

*Violencia* had been a combination of 'grandes odios y pequeñas rencillas' (great hates and small quarrels), and this declaration captures quite neatly the core of this system of notification. In other terms, the concrete nature that LP reformism acquired in Colombia may have been a factor that fostered violence.

*Second*, the type of economy and territorial occupation they were linked to. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, the main problem was the sub-utilisation of land. Fertile land was used for cattle ranching (Adams 1966), and this made ranchers an extremely conservative sector, vitally interested in preventing any productive transformation of the rural productive apparatus. Until the late 1970s an economy based mainly on coffee favored two patterns of territorial occupation: geographical concentration and unequal land distribution. While large haciendas dominated the early period (1870-1930), they gradually lost importance to the peasant production, which became increasingly significant after 1900 when the agrarian frontier expanded. These changes in land structure – which mostly occurred during the 1930s – accelerated the process of land fragmentation (See Table 6) and the colonisation of unoccupied land (*teritorios baldíos*), which was concentrated in the Andean region.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, with this geographical concentration, the coffee economy grew dynamically between 1905 and 1970, promoting the emergence of a national bourgeoisie based on the export sector, which rapidly developed a great influence on governmental policy. In 1927, this economic group promoted, with the support of the National Government, the creation of a National Coffeemakers Federation – *Federación Nacional de Cafeteros* – which fostered several developmental programs within the Andean Region (Palacios 1983). However, the coffee census of 1970 showed that – at least since 1930 and surely in the 1950s – the growth of coffee production had had its origins in the augmentation of cultivated areas, instead of in the augmentation of productivity.<sup>96</sup>

The unequal land distribution deepened during the 70s and in the later 'bonanza' years. In 1970 (according to 1970s Coffee Census) the coffee properties with less than four hectares represented 77% of the grand total and 26% of the production, but only occupied the 29% of the land surface. On the other hand, 1,908 farmers (0.7% of the total of the producers), who each owned more than 40 hectares, and each had, an appropriation of 12.5% of the land, produced 15.5% of the grand total (Ruíz and Low Murtra 1980: 164). To this was juxtaposed

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coordinates in rural conflicts. Hirschman (1962) correctly whacks the arguments according to which, since López's reforms did not go far enough (true) they had negligible impact (completely incorrect).

<sup>95</sup> Palacios (1983) states that the haciendas – the precursors of coffee development – became atrophied and overloaded by economic and social contradictions. Mainly, the success of the large coffee properties became problematic when the country's monetary unit stabilized. The inflation benefited haciendas' proprietors because of the non-coincidence between the coffee prices and the (very low) salaries (*jornales*), but the diminished inflation of the 1930s damaged proprietors' interests. When – in the 1930s – coffee prices descended, it was impossible to cut off the salaries and the haciendas stopped being profitable. This is when the land fragmentation process accelerated. (Urrutia 1980). Some authors have argued that the fragmentation of the land and institutionalization of smaller peasant production can be analyzed by comparing east and west land structures: while western departments had a more democratic land possession, eastern ones showed a consistent land concentration (in the form of large haciendas) (Urrutia 1980). Due to the coincidence between western departments and the birth of the first textile and tobacco industries, it is possible to affirm that the fragmentation of large haciendas (leading to a more democratic land structure) lead to the emergence of a rural middle class, which functioned as a market, benefiting the consolidation of incipient industry. Despite this coincidence, Palacios' close examination of the structure of landholding indicates that the coffee peasantry was not transformed into a prosperous rural middle class, ready to act as a market; peasants did not participate significantly in coffee production benefits.

<sup>96</sup> Until the early 1970s the predominant technology was the same one used at the beginning of the century.

the problem of the illegal occupation of land when Colombia changed from an agrarian, coffee producer, to an urban, coca and mining country.

*Third*, the interaction between the rural problem and state weakness/failure. This interaction has taken place on several levels:

- a. Fiscal limits. To reform involved technical acts and gestures that a poor state could not sustain. Indeed, the Colombian state gradually grew stronger, but many of the operations involved in the process of reform still taxed its capacities. An obvious and important example was the cadastral records. Even today they are quite poor and unrealistic.
- b. The lack of reform hindered 'horizontal' and 'vertical' state integration. By horizontal integration we mean the capacity of the state of acting over the whole of its territory. By vertical integration we mean its capacity to maintain its basic monopolies.
- c. Rural problems also transformed political actors, thus changing the nature and quality of political agency. The most prominent example is the de-urbanisation of the LP vote. The LP was not able to carry out the reform, but the defeat of reformism deeply transformed the party.
- d. Rural problems traditionally spilled over the whole of society in other ways. Industrialists and rural owners were often the same people. Crucially, given the system of notification produced by rural unrest, agrarian agents responded with the creation of security apparatuses that were also instrumental in dealing with urban problems and controlling territories and markets.
- e. These problems are not only an extremely important invariant, but also explain why a very urban society like the Colombian one is still strangled by essentially rural (agro-exporting, more precisely) conflict and dynamics.
- f. Last but not least, the lack of reform – as narrated in part one – brutally increased the vulnerability of the country to exogenous shocks.

*Fourth*, the oblique relation between aborted agrarian reformism and political violence. Though we are not aware of any systematic study of the issue, we risk the conjecture that it is probably *not* the case that the main flashes of homicidal violence occurred in the places where the distribution of land was most unequal. Certainly, many coffee regions strongly hit by *La Violencia* were typically *minifundista*. Long established wealthy landowners do not thrive in the expanses to the South of the country. The reality of the issue is a bit more oblique. The key relation between aborted agrarian reformism and political violence consists in the fact that the latter activated – economically, politically and militarily – regions where the state was semi-absent, and where the political system did not, and could not, offer an effective incentive to invest. Please note that to have persistent turbulence both conditions are necessary. The state was absent because it never had to consider full occupation of the territory due to scarce (though not totally absent) armed competition with its neighbours. The political system could not offer a premium to politicians that gathered resources for those regions, due mainly to their demographic weakness. Aborted reformism created a problem, and at the same time a set of incentives that prevented anybody from engaging seriously in its solution.

*Fifth*, violence deepened agrarian inequality. This is so obvious that it can be easily overlooked. During *La Violencia*, several actors took advantage of the situation to accumulate land (see Posada 1969, and especially the excellent Carlos Miguel Ortiz 1985).

This has happened again during the second wave, only on a much broader scale. At least 2.5 million peasants have been displaced, mainly by the paramilitary, and their lands have passed to the hands of armed actors. Further thousands of peasants sold –many times under duress – their land to narcotraffickers. By 1995, Alejandro Reyes calculated that at least one million hectares of fertile land were owned by the narcos. Despite there being an overlap between narcos and paras, they are not the same set, and without hesitation it can be asserted that presently Colombia's real rural Gini index is much higher than the standard figure, which does not take into account illegal factors and which is already incredibly high (according to Deininger and Lavadenz 2004, it is of the order of 0.85). No modern society can resist such concentrations of wealth for too long.

### **PART 3: Concluding remarks**

We have shown in this paper how liberalism (in this context referring to democracy) managed to coexist with violence. It is not the case that the political system was completely closed, or sterile. Demands, including those from below, were processed. But the output did not resolve the problem. Since the state could not resolve it, it allowed violent dynamics to get the upper hand. Violence, in turn, made it extremely difficult to achieve the essential reforms. This long-term vicious cycle took grip of the country. Despite Colombia becoming highly urbanised, the change in the agro-exporting model and the fact that the main historical tasks had remained unsolved maintained the centrality of rural problems.

All this explains the persistence of circumstances – in other terminology, the equilibrium – that gives origin to the 'Colombian puzzle' and suggests that in effect we have in front of us an 'Indian trajectory'. But it does not clarify the underlying mechanisms and the 'sub-puzzles'. Why did war not strengthen the Colombian state? Why did the elites not opt for higher levels of investment in security? Why did reformists not opt for a different strategy? Why were authoritarian actors unable to promote a long lasting, stabilising and repressive coup, as happened in practically all the rest of Latin America? Why did the state weaknesses not deteriorate into a full blown state failure?

We think that the elements needed to answer these questions are to be found in parts 1 and 2. The big Colombian political parties were simultaneously mass actors and very lax multi-class coalitions. Each one almost covered the entire political spectrum. Thus a reformer had to build very broad coalitions *within* his own party, which meant that if reforms were feasible they had to be very limited and if they were desirable they were unfeasible. Therefore the LP – the most urban party, and the one where all the significant intents of agrarian reform were initiated – chose a model of mobilisation that implied promotion without direction. Direction would have broken the intra-party coalition, scaring and revolting moderates and rightists.<sup>97</sup> This model, in turn: a) impeded the convergence of popular pressure from below and reformist designs from above, which ultimately frustrated change; and b) gave origin to a system of notification that dissolved macro social conflict in prolonged atomistic feuds. The rural rich answered in kind.

The violence of the rural rich was more potent, because it *did* have direction (in both waves of violence). In this sense, Colombian conflicts have always been asymmetric (generalising the conclusion in Gutiérrez and Barón 2005). At the outset the LP and the CP had asymmetric

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<sup>97</sup> Immobility would *also* have divided the party, alienating leftists and reformists.

capitals, and the right, authoritarian, wing of the CP was fully conscious of this. In the second wave the paramilitaries had much more organic links to social sectors than the guerrillas (Gutiérrez and Barón 2005). Thus, the use of private violence and the construction of private apparatuses of security became an important part of the repertoire of the big landowners in their effort to defend themselves, establish their property rights and maintain Colombia's backward rural property structure. This had serious consequences. In the long run, it gave them the opportunity of surrounding cities and markets and forcing urban actors to buy the security offered by them; a distinctly Sicilian outcome. On the other hand, it gave the elites – all of them – an exit option. They could respond to armed challenges by privatised violence, and this typically deflated the pressure to increase the quantity and quality of collective, bureaucratised violence (it also decreased the probability of a coup).<sup>98</sup> Once again, this shows quite strongly the link between violent liberalism and state weakness.

This narrative is a reminder that developmental and state building processes are neither simple nor not necessarily pacific – rather the contrary.<sup>99</sup> In particular, it suggests that NF reformers were right: they had a real chance of pushing the country out of its cycle of violence, but very limited time in which to achieve this.<sup>100</sup> Windows of opportunity open and close and it may be an important analytical and policy theme to understand when (and why) they do so. In Colombia, the underlying long term problem was the articulation between the forms of territorial occupation and poorly distributed and defined property rights. As we saw above, when the period started the Colombian state was already a suspect monopolist, but during the two long waves of violence it further deteriorated. In particular, the poor definition and distribution of property rights in the country made the Colombian state vulnerable to exogenous shocks. The first wave operated through radicalisation – as it was the only way of producing a credible conservative modernisation – the other wave through the change in the agro-exporting model (which in turn was a function of the reformist impotence of the political system).

The other side of the coin is that the country, and the state, modernised and grew almost without pause. Though the rural conflict spilled over the cities, the continuous urbanisation of Colombia – with its increasingly modern economy, a growing middle class, bureaucracy, and higher levels of education – coupled with uninterrupted growth, always bounded the waves of violence and their consequences. Naturally, the Colombian conflict is not *only* rural. The obvious analytic correlate of this assertion is the regulatory weakness of its state, which is not territorially based.<sup>101</sup> Regulatory weakness, by the way, also undermines the potential for collective action on the part of the socio-economic elites, because each player is in competition with the other to capture the given agency – which once again diminishes both the probability of a coup and of an agreement to invest in public security. The Colombian conflict, however, is *mainly* rural-territorial. In the last sub-period, this has implied a very severe fracture that depends on endogenous conditions (property structure) and an external shock (the war on drugs), which taken together have completely prevented the state regulation of Colombia's main rural product. As we showed above, the result is that the territorial viability of the state – based on the construction of anti-subversive coalitions that include

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<sup>98</sup> The way in which exit options can weaken organizations was classically analyzed by Hirschman (1971). Please note that this rural behavior is isomorphic to state strategies of pursuing consociational arrangements and at the same time allowing, or fostering, private violence against the opposition.

<sup>99</sup> For a meticulous and clear expression of this point, see Parker (1996).

<sup>100</sup> Which means that theirs was a genuine tragedy.

<sup>101</sup> Although it may be territorially caused.

narco-traffickers and other criminals – is in contradiction with its international recognition as a sovereign, legitimate entity.

## Tables

Table 1: Primary Social Indicators. 1951-1993

	<b>1951</b>	<b>1964</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1993</b>
<b>Total population</b> x1000	11548	17484	22915	30062	35866
<b>Annual growth (%)</b>	2.10	2.23	3.2	2.96	2.21
<b>Fertility rate</b>		6.7	4.7	3.5	3.1
<b>Birth rate</b>		44.2	34.5	29.2	27.4
<b>Life expectancy</b>		57.9	61.6	67.2	68.2
<b>Infant mortality rate</b> / 1000		92.1	73	41.2	39.7
<b>Infant malnutrition</b>				11.9	
<b>Urban population</b> (% of total)	39.5	52	59.5	67.2	74
<b>Population of four largest cities</b> <sup>102</sup> (% of total)	12.9	20	25.4	26.8	30.1
<b>Population of Bogotá</b> (% of total)	5.4	8.3	12.5	13.8	17.6
<b>Primary employment rate</b> (%)	55	48.9	35.2	33.8	
<b>Secondary employment rate</b> (%)	15.8	17.1	22.4	21.4	
<b>Tertiary employment rate</b> (%)	28.7	34.1	42.5	44.8	
<b>Illiteracy</b> (%)	38.5	26.6	17.7	12.5	12
<b>Households with running water</b> (%)	28.8	38.7	62.7	69.7	
<b>Households with electricity</b> (%)	25.8	34.5	57.6	78.2	
<b>Households with sewerage</b> (%)	32.4	40.7	68.1	77	

Source: Palacios, Marco (2001): Entre la Legitimidad y la Violencia, Colombia 1857-1994. Bogotá: Norma, p. 300.

Table 2: Evolution of Electoral Abstention in the NF

<b>Year</b>	<b>Presidency</b>	<b>Upper House</b>	<b>Lower House</b>
1958	42,06	31,08	31,00
1962	51,00	43,00	42,00
1966	60,00	56,00	56,00
1970	47,00	48,00	48,00
1974	41,60	43,00	43,00

Source: Buenahora Febres, Jaime (1995): La democracia en Colombia un proyecto en construcción. Bogotá: s. e., p. 295.

<sup>102</sup> Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla

Table 3: Distribution of Preferences for Political Alternatives in the NF

Category	1958	%	1962	%	1966	%	1970	%
Nacional Front Candidates*	2.480.948	80,130	1.633.873	62,29	1.881.502	69,96	1.606.087	40,59
Nacional Front Disident Candidates**	614.761	19,850	933.677	35,60	...	...	1.546.351	39,08
Candidates out of the Nacional Front***	290	0,0090	55.051	2,09	807.792	30,03	804.360	20,32
Total	3.095.999	100	2.622.601	100	2.689.294	100	3956.798	100

\* This category includes votes of Alberto Lleras Camargo in 1958; Guillermo Valencia in 1962; Carlos Lleras Restrepo in 1966, and Misael Pastrana, in 1970.

\*\* Including votes of Jorge Leyva in 1958; the sum of votes by Jorge Leyva and Alfonso López Michelsen in 1962, and the sum of votes by Betancourt and Sourdís in 1970.

\*\*\* Includes votes by other candidates opposing the front in 1958; the sum of votes by Rojas Pinilla and others in 1962; those of Gabriel Goyeneche and José Jaramillo in 1966 and that of Rojas Pinilla in 1970.

Table 4: Agrarian Reforms 1930-2003

Law	Institutional Reforms	Basic concepts
Law 200 of 1936.	This law created the “Land Judges”, the ocular inspection and the “ <i>launching actions</i> ”, to put an end to the factual occupations.	<p>The economic exploitation of the land is taken as the basic concept in the presumption of private property.</p> <p>The extinction of the dominion right is settled down on lands in which economic operation has not been executed for ten continuous years.</p> <p>The acquisitive prescription of the dominion is established for those who exploit private land economically for five consecutive years.</p>
Law 100 of 1944		<p>The public convenience of “<i>aparcería</i>” contracts has been declared.</p> <p>The term to initiate the prescription of dominion has been extended from ten to fifteen years.</p> <p>The “<i>parcelación</i>” regime is based on the public utility and the land’s social interest.</p>
Law 135	This Law created :	The law was based in the following basic

of 1961	<p>The Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform (Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria).</p> <p>The Agrarian Social Council (Consejo Social Agrario)</p> <p>The Agrarian Solicitors (Procuradores Agrarios)</p> <p>The Agrarian National Fund (Fondo Nacional Agrario)</p> <p>The Regional Development Corporations (Las Corporaciones Regionales de Desarrollo)</p> <p>The Institute Sectional Councils (Consejos Seccionales del Instituto –Departamentales y Municipales)</p> <p>The Family Agrarian Units (Unidades Agrícolas Familiares)</p>	<p>concepts:</p> <p>Eliminating and preventing the inequitative land concentration or its fragmentation, and giving land to those who need it.</p> <p>Fomenting the adequate economic exploitation of non-cultivated land or deficiently used land.</p> <p>Increase the global volume of agrarian and farming production in harmony with the development of other economic sectors; increase the productivity of the exploitation with the application of appropriated techniques.</p> <p>Create the appropriate conditions under which small renters will enjoy better conditions.</p> <p>Elevate the standard of life of the farming population with the promotion of technical attendance, agricultural credit, housing and health, among others.</p> <p>Assure the conservation and suitable use of natural resources.</p>
Law 1 of 1968		<p>This law included as new agrarian reform's objective the promotion and support of organisations that aim to foster the economic social and cultural improvement of the farmer population.</p> <p>It developed the idea of social interest and public utility as foundations for the acquisition of private lands.</p> <p>It stimulated the “aparcería” contracts.</p>
Ley 4 of 1973	<p>This Law created :</p> <p>The Agrarian Section in the State Council (Sala Agraria del Consejo de Estado)</p> <p>Comunitary Entreprises (Empresas Comunitarias )</p> <p>National Fund of Acquisitions and</p>	<p>It was based on the concept of “small rural property” as: <i>a property that does not exceed fifteen hectares</i> and it was constituted as the non divisible agricultural minimum unit.</p> <p>It defined the concept of suitably exploited lands and related it to the accomplishment of social functions.</p>

	<p>Social Farmer Welfare (Fondo Nacional de Adquisiciones y Bienestar Social Campesino)</p> <p>Paths Welfare Fund (Fondo de Bienestar Veredal)</p> <p>Advisor Council for Agrarian Policy (Consejo Asesor de la Política Agropecuaria)</p>	<p>It created the “presunción de renta líquida agropecuaria” for effects of the tax rent.</p>
Ley 5 of 1973	<p>This Law ruled:</p> <p>Agrarian Foment Tittles (Los Títulos de Fomento Agropecuario)</p> <p>Agrarian Financial Fund (El Fondo Financiero Agropecuario)</p> <p>Cattle Funds (Los Fondos Ganaderos)</p> <p>Cattle Bank (El Banco Ganadero)</p>	<p>This law developed with the following objectives: to capitalise on the farming sector, to orient the farming policy to guarantee a suitable earth advantage and to promote the rational use of the human potential of the rural sector.</p>
Law 6 of 1975		<p>This law’s objective was to define and regulate the “aparcería” contracts.</p>
Law 35 of 1982		<p>It regulated the earth dowry and rural house to benefit the people sheltered by the Law of Amnesty.</p>
Law 30 of 1988		<p>It included as Agrarian Reform objectives:</p> <p>To elevate the standard of life of the farmer population, to generate productive use in the field and to assure the collaboration and institutional cooperation of the diverse organisations of the state for the integral and coordinated development of the programs of agrarian reform</p> <p>To promote and support the organisations that have as objectives the economic, social and cultural improvement of the rural population and to stimulate the participation of farmers organisations in the integral processes of agrarian reform</p> <p>It has been established as a main idea that all the rural buildings are susceptible to acquisition or expropriation on the part of the state, with the purpose of fulfilling the</p>

		aims of the agrarian reform.
Ley 160 of 1994	<p>This Law created:</p> <p>The National System for the Agrarian Reformation and Rural Development.</p> <p>The organisms that integrate the National System of Agrarian Reform will group into six subsystems in the following way:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The acquisition and awarding of the lands</li> <li>Organisation and qualification of the farmers and native population</li> <li>Basic social services, physical infrastructure, rural housing, land adjustment and social security</li> <li>Investigation, technical attendance, transference of technology and diversification of trade cultures</li> <li>Storing, packing, processing and agro-industrial promotion</li> <li>Finance</li> </ol> <p>The Fund of Cofinanciación for Rural Investment</p> <p>The zones of farmer reserve</p> <p>The departmental committees of Rural Development and the Agrarian Reformation</p> <p>The municipal committees of Rural Development and the Agrarian Reformation</p> <p>The Agrarian Public Ministry</p> <p>The Cooperatives of beneficiaries of Agrarian Reform</p>	<p>The law was based on the constitutional principle of the promotion of access to the land of the agrarian workers.</p> <p>The objectives were:</p> <p>To promote peace, through mechanisms directed at obtaining social justice and the well-being of the farming population.</p> <p>To reform the agrarian social structure by means of procedures directed at eliminating the inequitable concentration of rustic property or its uneconomical fragmentation, and to equip men and women farmers of limited resources with land.</p> <p>To support to the peasants – men and women of limited resources – in the processes of land acquisition.</p> <p>To elevate the standard of life of the farming population, to generate jobs in the field and to ensure the cooperation of diverse organisations of the state in the development of the rural programs</p> <p>To foment the suitable operation and social use of water and rural land.</p> <p>To increase the global volume of agricultural production</p> <p>To promote, support and coordinate the economic, social and cultural improvement of the rural population, and to stimulate the participation of farmers organisations in the integral processes of the Agrarian Reformation .</p> <p>To guarantee to indigenous female farmers the conditions of equitable participation in the plans of farming development.</p> <p>To regulate the occupation and exploitation of uncultivated territories of</p>

		<p>the nation, giving preference to farmers of limited resources and to establishing zones of reserve for the promotion of the small rural property.</p> <p>In addition the law established the existence of regular and stable economic operations.</p> <p>The law legislated on the indigenous defenses establishing the capacity of the INCORA to equip indigenous communities with land and facilitate their establishment and development. In addition it studied the titles of the “reserves” with the purpose of extending them or adjusting them. Finally, it decided to reconstruct and extend the “reservas” of colonial origin, with previous clarification on the legal use of its titles.</p>
Decree 1300 of 2003	Created the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural: INCODER)	<p>The INCODER will have as objectives:</p> <p>To identify and consolidate agrarian and rural development areas in order to use them in the implementation of rural and agrarian development programs.</p> <p>To fortify the integration of the institutional actions in rural parts of the country.</p> <p>To fortify the participatory processes of institutional, regional and local planning for the definition of farming and rural development programs.</p> <p>To consolidate the decentralisation of departmental administration and support the producers’ organisations.</p> <p>To stimulate the consolidation of regional scenes for rural development.</p> <p>To help the small and medium-sized rural producers in the process of acceding land.</p> <p>To manage resources to support the execution of farming development programs.</p>

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Source: Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 200 de 1936. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional.

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 200 de 1936. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 100 de 1944. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 135 de 1961. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 1 de 1968. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 4 de 1973. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 5 de 1973. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 6 de 1976. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 35 de 1982. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 30 de 1988. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Presidencia de la República de Colombia. Decreto 1300 de 2003. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional

Table 5: Security taxes (1991-2002)

Law	Description	Collection Prices from 2006. Mill. \$ (PESOS)	Collection as a percentage of PIB
Decree No. 416 of 1991	This was the 1990s first decree concerning tributes of security. It established the norm by means of which measures were dictated to preserve and to restore the public order. It set down some special contributions of extraordinary and temporary character: (1). Special contributions for the re-establishment of Public Order consisting of 5% of the Complementary Income tax. " <i>Personas naturales</i> " were excluded. (2). Over-charging international phone calls (equivalent to an additional 2% to the tariff of 12% of the IVA for international phone calls service). (3). Special contribution for the re-establishment of Public Order in relation to the operation or exportation of crude petroleum, gas or coal.	244061	0.10%
Decree No. 1071 of 1991	Decreed during state of siege; an advance payment (5%) of the contribution of burdenable year 1991 was established based on the Income Tax of burdenable year 1990	285982	0,10%

Law 6 of 1992	It established in Art. 16 the authorisation to emit Bonds of Social Development and Internal Security BDSI by \$270,000 millions. They are forced to subscribe them: Income Tax contributors, except the “ <i>personas naturales</i> ” with inferior income to \$7 millions, or gross patrimony inferior to \$30 millions.	1048349	0.30%
Law 6 of 1992	It established in Art. 12 the monthly contribution over the production or export of crude petroleum, free gas, coal or ferroniquel. They are forced to pay it to the producers and exporters of these products.	2366600	0.80%
Law 345 of 1996	Granted government authority to emit Security Bonds. All “ <i>personas juridicas</i> ” were required to subscribe to these bonds, excepting contributors to the “ <i>régimen especial</i> ” tax group (foreign companies investing in Colombia), public entities and mixed partnerships between domestic public services and mass transport; official liquor producers, state lotteries and public entities. “ <i>Personas Naturales</i> ” were required to subscribe to these bonds whenever their liquid assets did not exceed \$150 million (pesos).	804582	0.30%
Law 418 of 1997	It established in Art. 120 the Special Contribution of 5% in public works contracts.	120536	0.10%
Law 418 of 1997	With Art.122 it established the creation of the National Fund of Security and Citizen Coexistence.	159641	0.00%
Law 487 of 1998	It established the authorisation to emit Bonds of Internal Security by \$2 billion, with term of seven (7) years. All “ <i>personas juridicas</i> ” were required to subscribe to these bonds, excepting contributors to the “ <i>régimen especial</i> ” tax group (foreign companies investing in Colombia), public entities and mixed partnerships between domestic public services and mass transport; official liquor producers, state lotteries and public entities. “ <i>Personas Naturales</i> ” were required to subscribe to these bonds whenever their liquid assets did not exceed \$210 million (pesos).	1762389	0.60%

Decrees 1838 and 1885 of 2002	Decree No.1837 of August 11 <sup>th</sup> , 2002, declared the State of Inner Commotion in all the national territories for the term of ninety (90) days. Based on this norm, the Decree 1838 of 2002 created the "Tax to preserve the Democratic Security". It falls on the contributors of the complementary Income Tax. The tariff is 1.2%, and the non Contributors, organisations in liquidation or those with agreements of reconstruction of debts are excluded. Decree 1885 makes precisely specifies the application of the tax.	3014053	1.00%
Total		9806193	3.30%

Source: Rico Torres Cecilia (2006): Recursos Fiscales para el Restablecimiento del Orden Público en Colombia: 1991-2006. Bogotá: DIAN, p. 6.

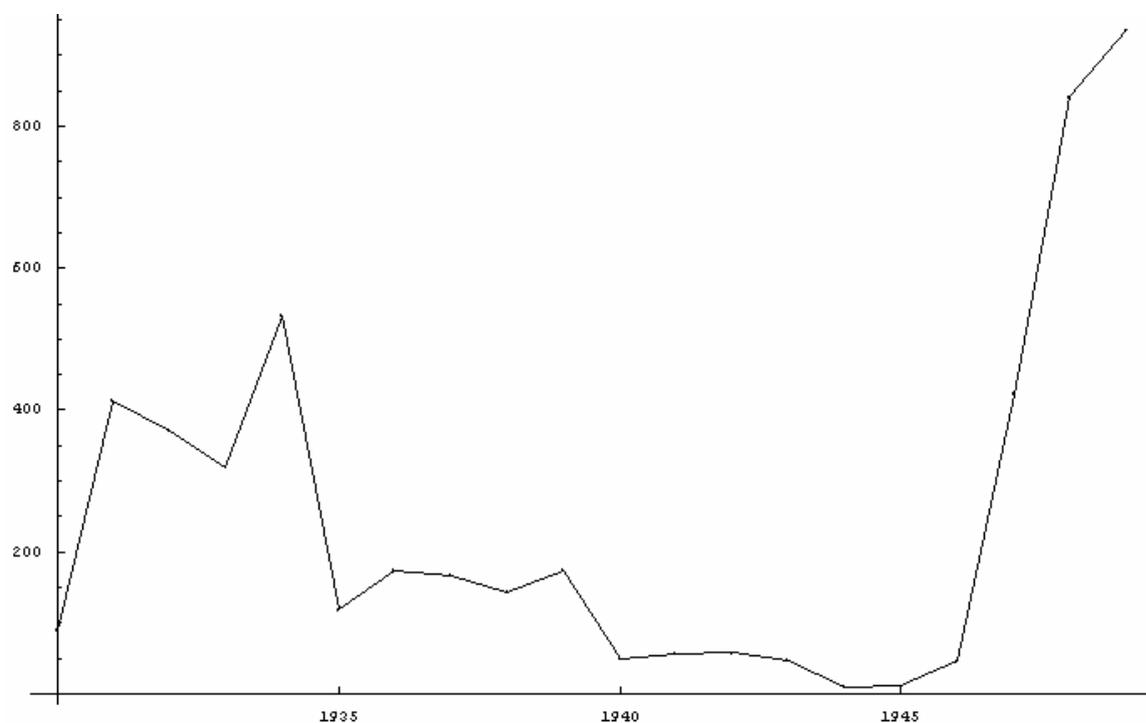
Table 6: Land distribution and production (1970)

Size (Hectares)	Coffee farms		Surface	Production
	Number	%	%	%
Less than 3.9	234,351	77.35	29.7	26.5
4.0 - 39.9	66,686	22.01	57.8	58.1
More than 40	1,908	0.62	12.5	15.4

Source: Coffee Census, 1970 (In: Ruíz and Low Murtra 1980:164)

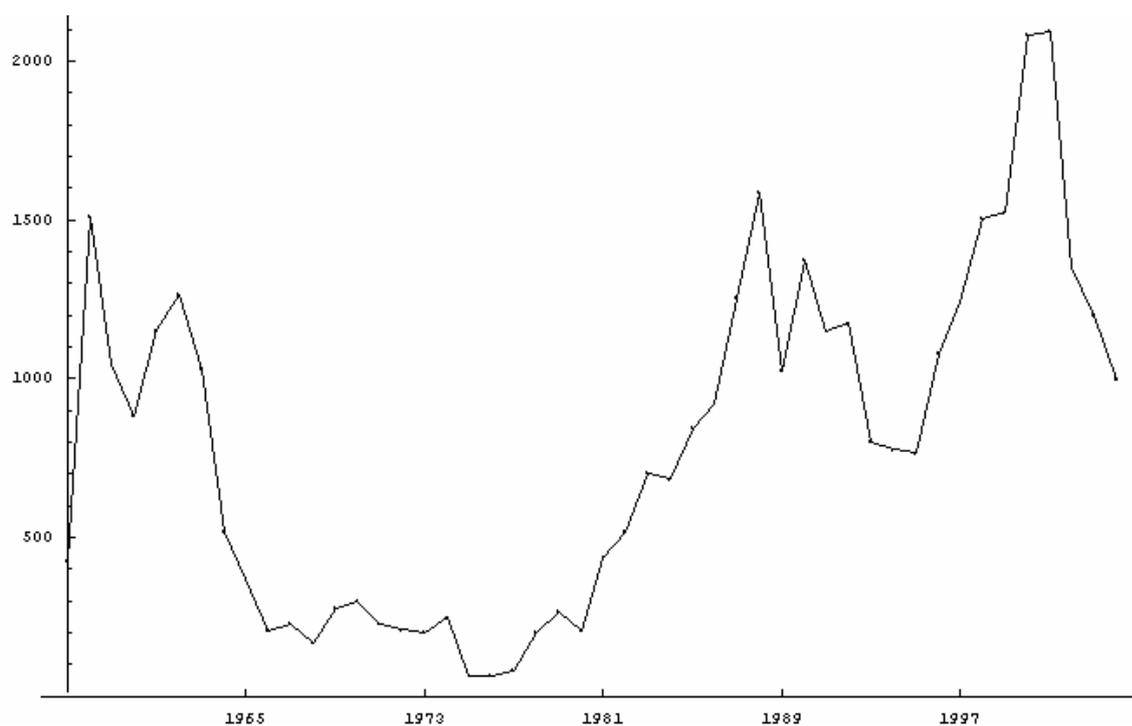
## Figures

Figure 1 A: Political homicides – first period (1930-1949)



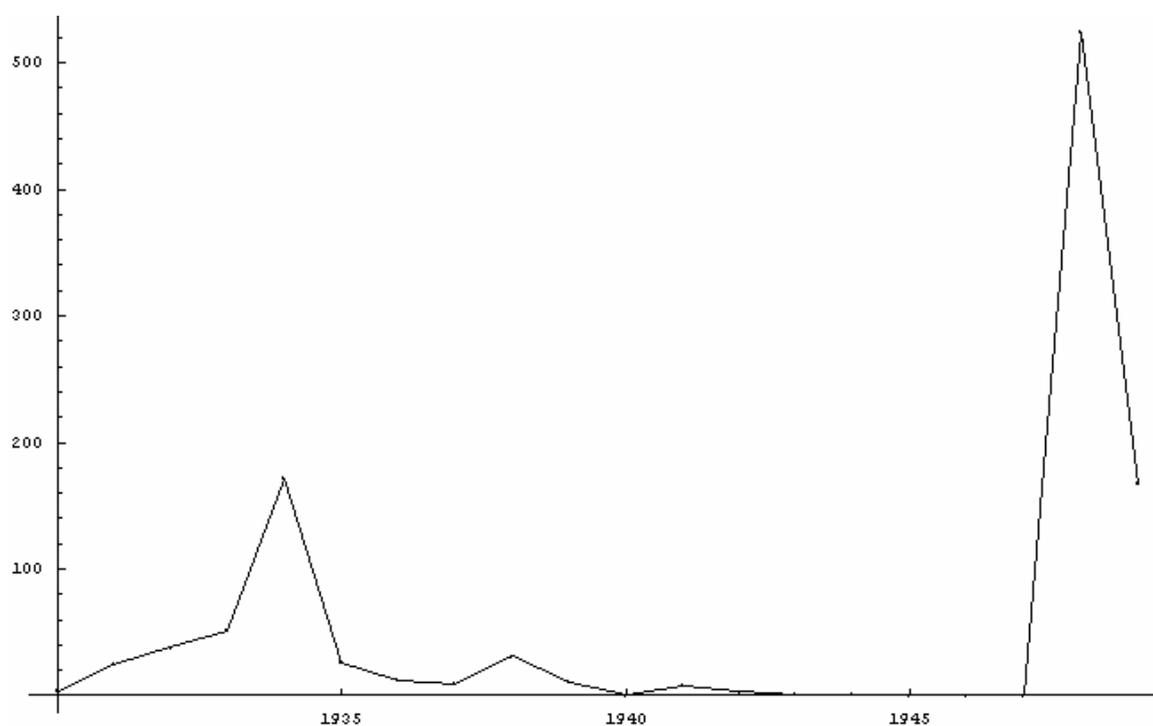
Source: Database of Political Homicide in Colombia 1930-2005. Constructed by Francisco Gutiérrez and William Mancera.

Figure 1 B: Political homicides – second period (1957-2006)



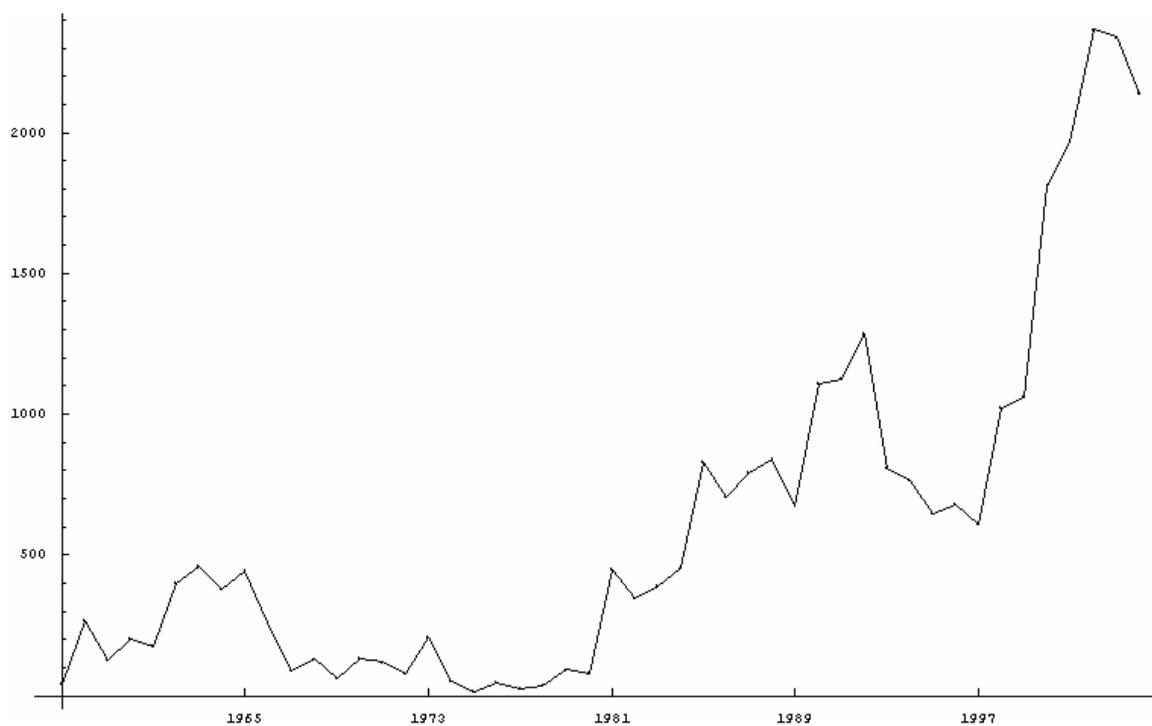
Source: Database of Political Homicide in Colombia 1930-2005. Constructed by Francisco Gutiérrez and William Mancera.

Figure 1 C: Casualties in combat – first period (1930-1949)



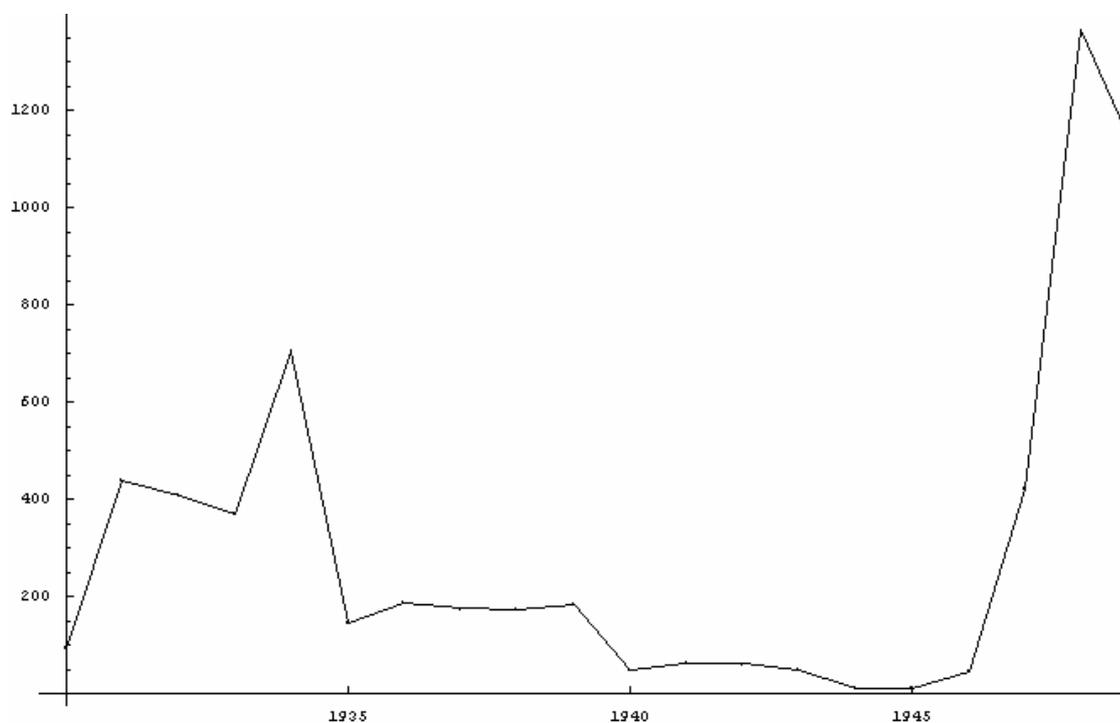
Source: Database of Political Homicide in Colombia 1930-2005. Constructed by Francisco Gutiérrez and William Mancera.

Figure 1 D: Casualties in combat – second period (1957-2006)



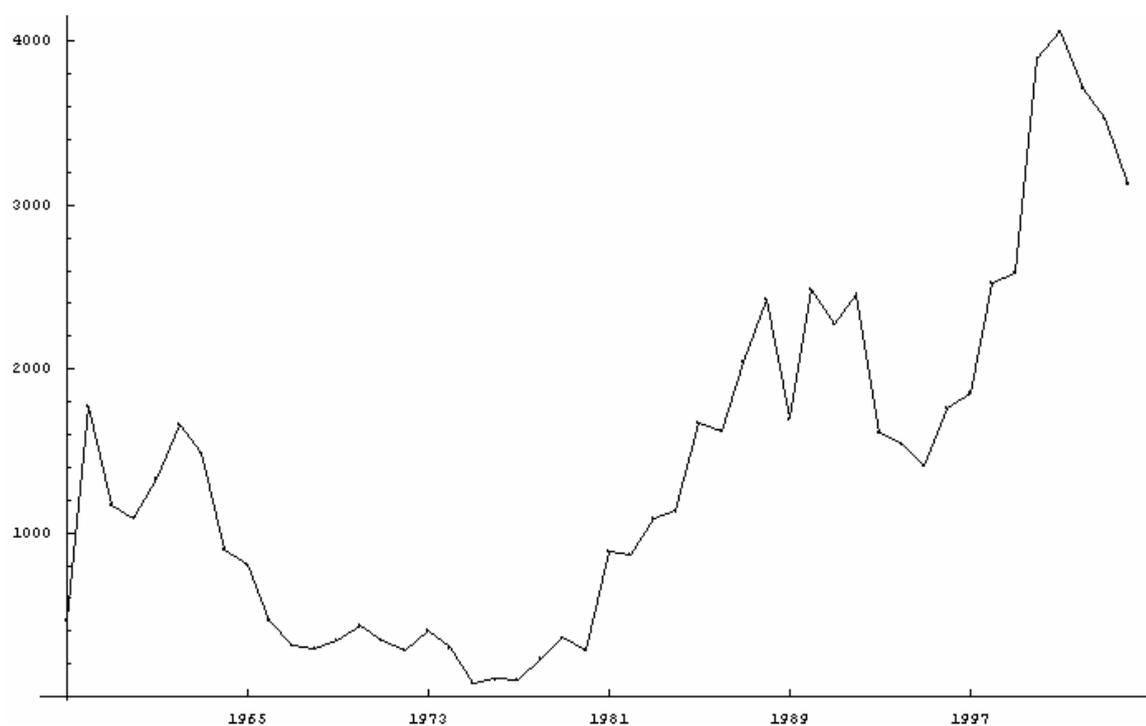
Source: Database of Political Homicide in Colombia 1930-2005. Constructed by Francisco Gutiérrez and William Mancera.

Figure 1 E: First period – aggregated politically motivated lethal violence



Source: Database of Political Homicide in Colombia 1930-2005. Constructed by Francisco Gutiérrez and William Mancera.

Figure 1 F: Second period – aggregated politically motivated lethal violence



Source: Database of Political Homicide in Colombia 1930-2005. Constructed by Francisco Gutiérrez and William Mancera.

Figure 2: Evolution of the Colombian GNP 1925-2006



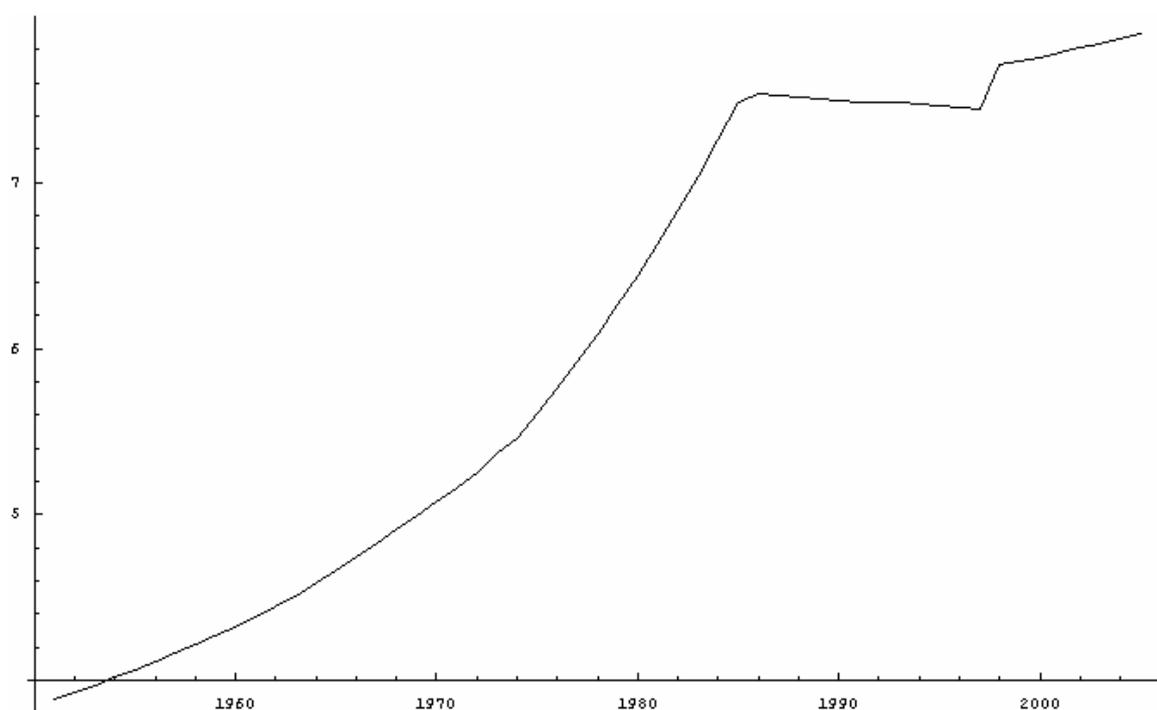
*In constant 1975 pesos*

Source 1925-1997 (Calculation based on 1975 = 100): Departamento Nacional de Planeación. Estadísticas históricas de Colombia. Chapter 1 - Sector real. Online Document. Consulted on: Departamento Nacional de Planeación - [http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas\\_detalle.aspx?idp=42](http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas_detalle.aspx?idp=42)

Source 1998-2004 (Calculation based on 1994 = 100): Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. Cuentas Nacionales Anuales. Cuentas consolidadas y resultados generales. PIB total y a precios corrientes y constantes de 1994. Online Document. Consulted on: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. [http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/pib/anuales/cuadros\\_publicacion/Ctas\\_Consolidadas-y-Resultados\\_Grles\\_1994-2004/ctas\\_nles\\_PIB\\_total\\_corrientes\\_constantes\\_1994\\_1990-04.xls](http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/pib/anuales/cuadros_publicacion/Ctas_Consolidadas-y-Resultados_Grles_1994-2004/ctas_nles_PIB_total_corrientes_constantes_1994_1990-04.xls)

Source 2005-2006 (Calculation based on 1975 = 100): The data was calculated from the information provided by Banco de Crédito. Colombian Macroeconomic Indicators. Online Document. Consulted on: Banco de Crédito. [http://www.bancodecredito.com.co/home/inf\\_financiero/macroeconomico.pdf](http://www.bancodecredito.com.co/home/inf_financiero/macroeconomico.pdf)

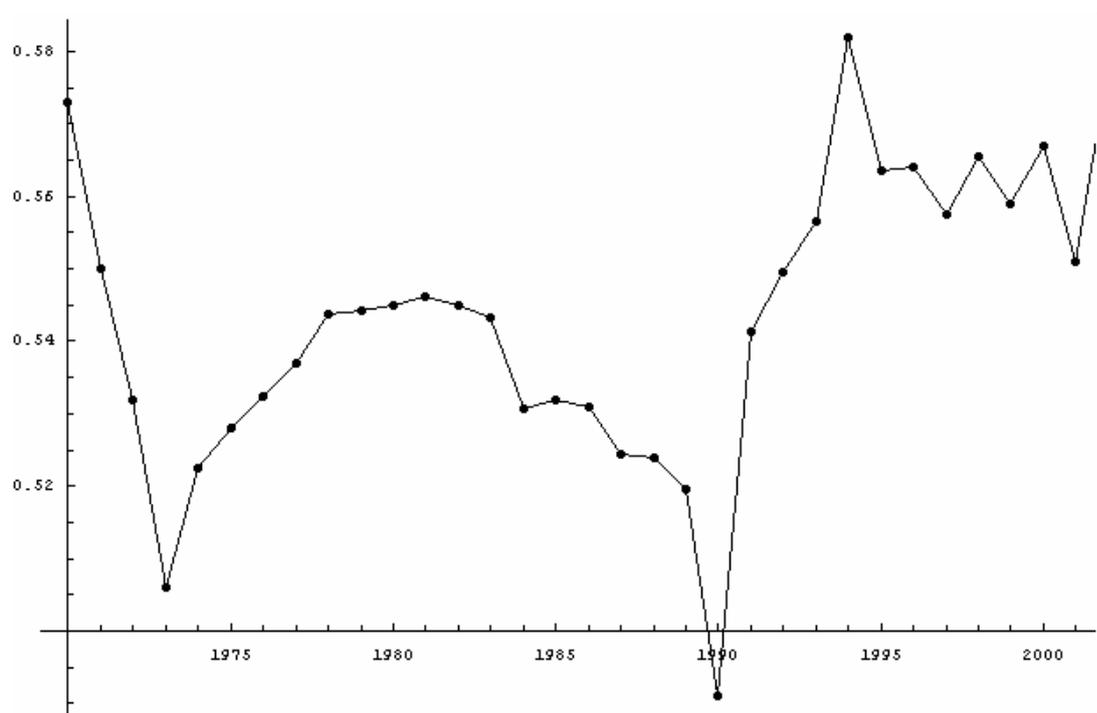
Figure 3: Evolution of the population of the “Territorios Nacionales”<sup>103</sup> 1951-2005



Source: Departamento Nacional de Planeación. Estadísticas históricas de Colombia. Chapter 7 - Población e indicadores sociales. Online Document. Consulted on: Departamento Nacional de Planeación - [http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas\\_detalle.aspx?idp=42](http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas_detalle.aspx?idp=42)

<sup>103</sup> The 'Territorios Nacionales' are the sum of the population: Caquetá, Chocó, Guajira, Meta, Arauca, Casanare, Putumayo, San Andrés, Amazonas, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaúpes, Vichada.

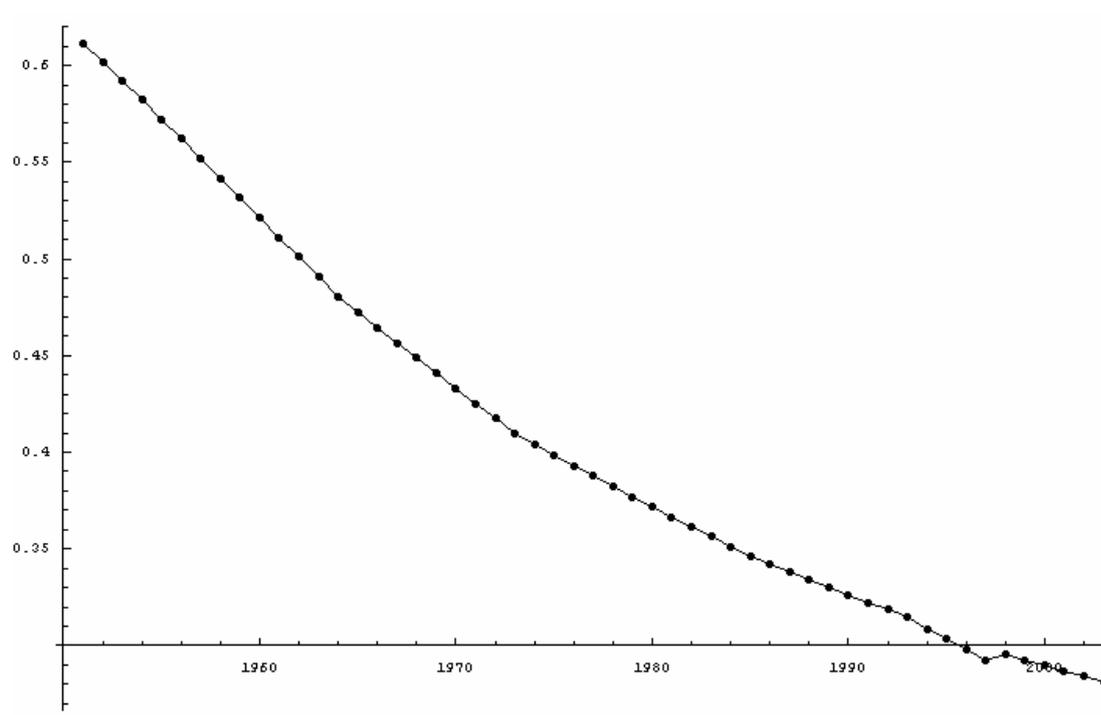
Figure 4: Evolution of the Gini – 1975 – 2003



Source: Montenegro Armando y Rivas Rafael. *Las Piezas del Rompecabezas. Desigualdad, Pobreza y Crecimiento*. Bogotá: Taurus, 2005. pp. 39-40<sup>104</sup>

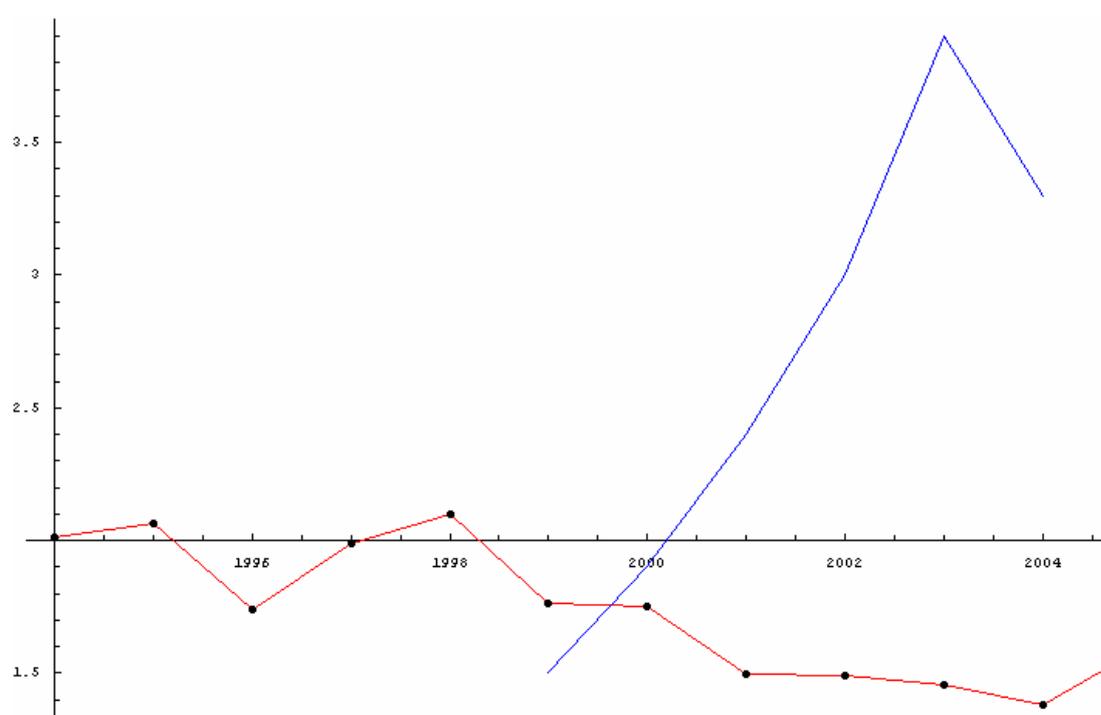
<sup>104</sup> Montenegro and Rivas average the different estimation of the Gini index by different sources: 1991-2003 (DNP 2004); 1984-1990 (DNP 1996); 1991-1999 (Székely); 1974-1989 (Nuñez and Sánchez); 1978-1988 (Ocampo, Pérez and Tovar); 1978-1988 (World Bank); 1970-1993 (Londoño and Székely).

Figure 5: Percentage of the definitely rural population in Colombia – 1951-2005



Source: Departamento Nacional de Planeación. Estadísticas históricas de Colombia. Chapter 7 - Población e indicadores sociales. Online Document. Consulted on: Departamento Nacional de Planeación - [http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas\\_detalle.aspx?idp=42](http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas_detalle.aspx?idp=42)

Figure 6: Weight of coffee production and remittances with respect of the Colombian GNP



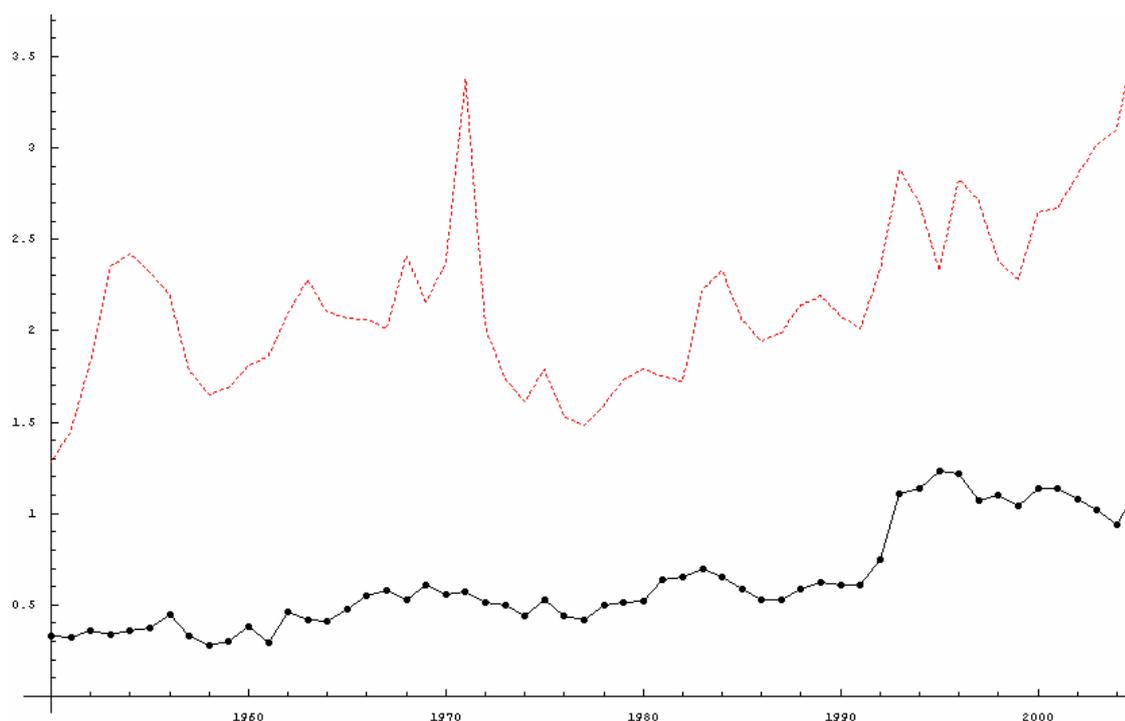
Source:

For remittances: Fuente: Banco de la República. Reportes del Emisor. Investigación e Información Económica. Cuadro 3. Colombia: Ingresos de Divisas por Remesas. No. 61. Junio de 2004. Online Document Consulted on: Banco de la República. <http://www.banrep.gov.co/documentos/publicaciones/pdf/Repor-emi-61-junio04.pdf>

The data of 2004 was founded in the intervention of Jose Darío Uribe, General Manager of the Banco de la República, at Colombian upper house. Bogotá May 31 of 2005. Online Document. Consulted on: Banco de la Republica. <http://www.banrep.gov.co/documentos/sala-prensa/pdf/Congreso-Remesas-mayo-05.pdf>

For coffee: Source: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. Cuentas Nacionales Trimestrales. PIB por rama de actividad. Online Document. Consulted on: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. [http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/pib/trimestrales/PIB\\_IIItrim06/Pib\\_Oferta\\_corrientes\\_1994-I\\_2006-III\\_\(desestacionalizadas\).xls](http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/pib/trimestrales/PIB_IIItrim06/Pib_Oferta_corrientes_1994-I_2006-III_(desestacionalizadas).xls)

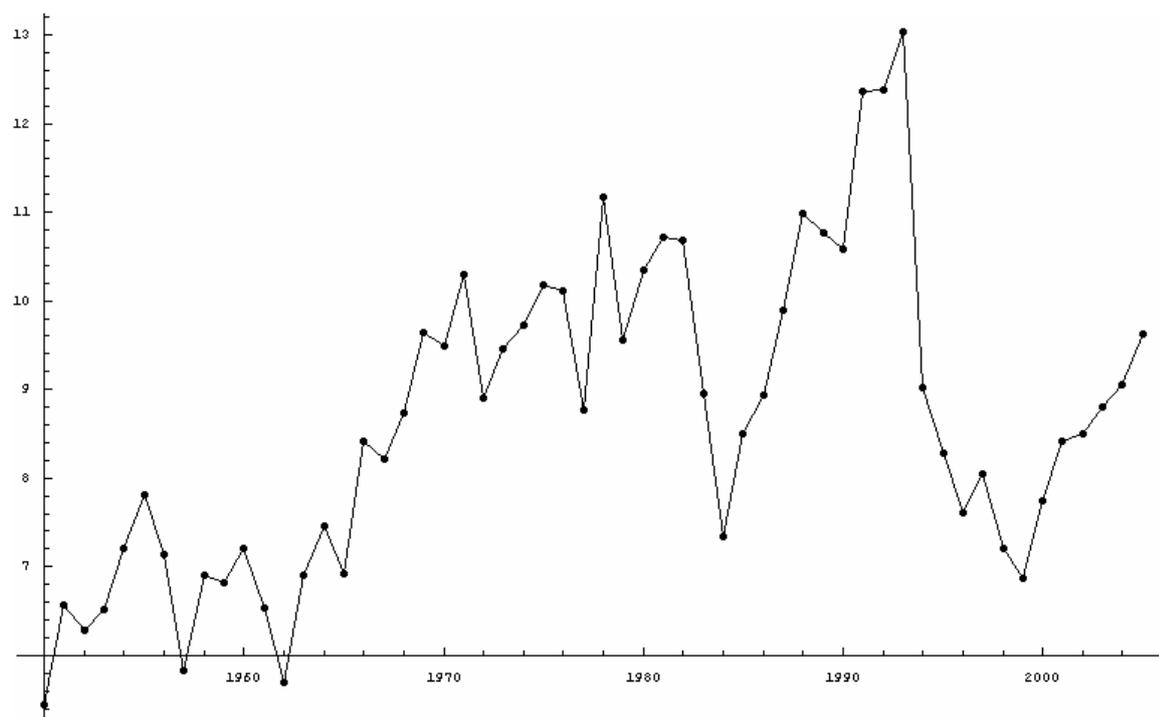
Figure 7: Weight of the investment in justice (black dotted line) and in defense (red line) from 1950 until 2005



Source 1950-1994: Numpaque Cielo, María, Rodríguez Cuestas, Ligia (1996): Evolución y comportamiento del gasto publico en Colombia 1950-1991. In: Archivos de Macroeconomía. Departamento Nacional de Planeación. Documento No. 45. May 1996.

Source 1995-2005: Departamento Nacional de Planeación. Indicadores de Coyuntura Económica. 2.7 Finanzas públicas. Bogotá: Dirección de Estudios Económicos. December 2005. Online Document. Consulted On: [http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas\\_detalle.aspx?idp=882](http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas_detalle.aspx?idp=882)

Figure 8: Weight of the taxes from 1950 until 2005



Source 1950-1993: Departamento Nacional de Planeación. Estadísticas históricas de Colombia. Chapter 1 – Sector Real. Online Document. Consulted on: Departamento Nacional de Planeación - [http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas\\_detalle.aspx?idp=42](http://www.dnp.gov.co/paginas_detalle.aspx?idp=42)

Source 1994-2004: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. Cuentas Nacionales Trimestrales. PIB por rama de actividad. Online Document. Consulted on: Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. [http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/pib/trimestrales/PIB\\_IIItrim06/Pib\\_Oferta\\_corrientes\\_1994-I\\_2006-III\\_\(desestacionalizadas\).xls](http://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/pib/trimestrales/PIB_IIItrim06/Pib_Oferta_corrientes_1994-I_2006-III_(desestacionalizadas).xls)

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A.B.C (Quibdo)

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El Colombiano

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Revista Cambio

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## **Crisis States Research Centre**

Development Studies Institute (DESTIN)  
LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7849 4631 Fax: +44 (0)20 7955 6844  
Email: [csp@lse.ac.uk](mailto:csp@lse.ac.uk) Web: [www.crisisstates.com](http://www.crisisstates.com)