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Working Paper no.74

THE COUNTRY BEHIND THE BALLOT BOX: THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL REFORM IN COLOMBIA DURING A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

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December 2005

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This paper examines Colombian electoral behaviour variables from the 2003 mayoral and council elections (specifically voter participation and the effective number of political parties) to try to identify how they have changed since previous periods (1988-2000). The changes are examined within the political context of the last elections and the 2003 political reform,[1] the dynamics of the internal armed conflict, and the nationwide humanitarian crisis. We also qualitatively analyse the relationship between election results, the regional dynamics of the internal armed conflict, and the effects of the political reform, using first hand data from four municipalities: Barranquilla (Atlántico), Pasto (Nariño), Arauca (Arauca) and Barrancabermeja (Santander).[2] The effect of the armed conflict on electoral guarantees is also examined as it directly affects the scope of the political reform.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first deals with some of the conceptual difficulties for democracy in Colombia (the armed conflict and humanitarian crisis). The second analyses the 2003 local elections and examines general electoral tendencies following the changes introduced by the political reform. The third explores the results of the qualitative analysis; and finally we make our conclusions, which we hope will help future analyses of the current state of democracy in Colombia to go beyond just the electoral dimension.

The limitations of electoral democracy in the context of a humanitarian crisis[3]

Free and fair elections are necessary, but they are not enough. If we see elections as evidence that democracy exists, then we don't appreciate the real value of democracy.

(Mark Malloch, UNDP Administrator, 2002)

Although this paper deals with electoral behaviour at a specific time (the 2003 municipal elections), it is necessary to touch on the general challenges democratic regimes face during times of crisis. Any analysis of electoral behaviour in Colombian municipalities requires an approximation of the impact that the internal armed conflict and humanitarian crisis have had on the minimum conditions for democracy. Restrictions on the right to vote, political

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[1] The elections of 26 October 2003 were held using the new framework created by Legislative Act No. 01, 2003, the contents of which will be examined later.

[2] The qualitative information comes from *Descentralización, gobierno local, y violencia. La economía política del municipio colombiano* fieldwork carried out by the *Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento* (CODHES), and financed by the Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Approximately fifty people were interviewed from different social groups and sectors, including public functionaries and local government representatives.

[3] Humanitarian crises are: "Phenomena where different types of human suffering come together that are linked to economic, social, demographic, environmental, military or political factors. These crises tend to arise where there is poverty, a fragile State, where food is scarce and where there has been a natural disaster or armed conflict that has caused a food shortage, illness, forced displacements within and outside the country, and a large scale mobilisation of international aid resources." (Escuela de Cultura de Paz, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, *Alerta 2003. Informe sobre conflictos, derechos humanos y construcción de paz*, Barcelona: Icaria Editorial, 2003, p.43).

competition, the right to opposition, freedom of expression and association, and access to pluralist information, are attacks on civil rights, the right to life, personal integrity and access to justice, amongst others. Furthermore, if someone is threatened and has to flee for his life, he cannot vote, or exercise his right to freedom of expression, without his rights being restricted. Being a citizen implies having one's human rights protected in civil, social and political situations. So to understand the democratic nature of the Colombian regime, one must go further than its electoral definition.

Minimalist analyses have stated that the following conditions are necessary, but not sufficient, for a political regime with democratic rules to exist: elected public authorities; clean, free elections; universal suffrage; the right to compete for political office; freedom of expression, association and access to information; respect for mandates that follow constitutionally established timeframes; a territory with a clearly defined *demos votante*; and a generalised belief that electoral processes and freedoms will be maintained indefinitely.[4]

Critics, however, highlight the danger of evaluating a regime's performance using only these factors, thus ignoring other fundamental aspects such as the State's institutional capacity to protect life and personal integrity, administer justice and impose the rule of law throughout the country, and guarantee that people's basic needs are met.[5] In contrast to minimalist definitions, from a rights point of view a regime is democratic when it generates the conditions necessary for people to live with dignity and freely decide where to live and what to do, as well as having the right to vote for a wide range of political options: "democracy needs a State that ensures the universality of its political, social and civil rights".[6]

Obstacles to democracy in Colombia are not linked to how often elections are held, but they are equally serious. The ongoing internal armed conflict and the effect of institutionalised bipartisan politics on the rise of new political movements are two of the most relevant aspects. Pizarro, for example, has highlighted the political restrictions of the bipartisan, exclusive political monopoly, the state of permanent exception and excessively centralised decision making.[7]

Recent statistical analyses have shown the negative effect of violence and the armed conflict on minimum democratic requirement indicators, such as participation and electoral competition. Hoyos and Ceballos' study of local elections in Colombia between 1988 and 2000 suggests that the armed conflict's regional dynamics and socio-political violence are negatively affecting the right to vote and be elected free from restrictions and external pressures. The study shows that the armed control of local politics frequently leads to direct voter coercion, and that the intensification of the conflict impedes regular participation via formal channels.[8]

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[4] Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989; Robert Dahl, *Poliarquía, participación y oposición*, México: Rey, 1993 [1971]; Guillermo O'Donnell, *Democratic Theory and Comparative Politics*, Notre Dame, Indiana: The Hellen Kellog Institute for International Studies at University of Notre Dame, 1999.

[5] Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), *La democracia en América Latina. Hacía una democracia de ciudadanas y ciudadanos*, 2004, at http://www.pnud.org.

[6] PNUD (2004), p.28.

[7] Eduardo Pizarro, 'Democracia Restringida y desinstitucionalización política', in Pedro Medellín (ed.), *La Reforma del Estado en América Latina*, Bogotá: Fescol, 1989, p.308.

[8] Marcela Ceballos & Diana Hoyos, 'Tendencias del comportamiento electoral y descentralización en los municipios de Colombia, 1988-2000', *Crisis States Working Papers*, 57, London: Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics, 2004, p.29.

Following similar lines, García and Hoskin found a positive relationship between guerrilla actions and voter abstention. These results are associated with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) political control mechanism, which is based on prohibiting voting in municipalities where it has a consolidated presence.[9]

The slow progress of democracy in Colombia is related to all these aspects, the effects of which are reflected in electoral participation, competition and representation, and are indicators of the political regime's legitimacy. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study found that an electoral democracy index can be used to identify how much a state guarantees its citizens' constitutional rights, but indicated that it is insufficient when evaluating the other dimensions of a democratic regime – specifically those related to governmental activities, and civil and social rights.[10] The investigation found serious deficiencies in these areas in Latin American regimes.

As regards civilians, for example, important legislative achievements were registered, but they were accompanied by a low State capacity to guarantee these rights in practice. No increase in human rights abuses was reported, although these are now not committed by the State, but by external forces that the State has been unable to control. Finally, the results indicate that civilians are the principal losers in Latin American democracies, where poverty and inequality have not fallen for a decade.[11]

It can therefore be said that democracy in Colombia is flawed, not just because Colombia has not overcome the problems restricting full citizenship, but also due to the fact that the intensifying armed conflict has generated a humanitarian and human rights crisis that limits electoral guarantees. In many regions people cannot freely exercise their right to vote, and electoral competition is restricted. Although these limitations only affect 20 percent of the population directly, and only have concrete implications at a local-level,[12] the indirect effects of the political crisis had national ramifications in the October 2003 elections, which in turn affect the scope of the political reform.

The political context of the 2003 elections.

By analysing the October 2003 mayoral, council, deputy and governor elections, we were able to identify the factors that directly influenced the results, and also explain, in part, changes in the local political map and political party composition. Three elements characterised the political context of the last local elections:

1. A radicalised political climate since the 2002 presidential elections, in which "a radical proposal won; not because society had become polarised, but because it had moved towards one extreme of the political spectrum on the back of a set of

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[9] Gary Hoskin & Miguel García, 'Participación política y guerra en Colombia. Un análisis de las elecciones de 2002', in Gary Hoskin *et al.* (eds), *Colombia 2002. Elecciones, comportamiento electoral y democracia*, Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2003pp.223-262.

[10] PNUD (2004). The UNDP electoral democracy index has three components: participation, competition and representation. These are measured by four sub-components: the right to vote, clean elections, fair elections and elected public officials. The civilian index is composed of equality and protection against discrimination; the right to life, physical integrity and security; the administration of justice; press freedom; and access to information. It also includes basic needs and social integration.

[11] PNUD (2004), p.24.

[12] According to Colombian Federation of Municipalities data on electoral competition restrictions, the right to vote, and the exercise of government in 200 of Colombia's 1,300 municipalities.

heterogeneous hopes and expectations".[13] In other words, the country as a whole had moved to the political right.

This radicalisation later spread to other elections. One was the 2003 referendum, which was designed to ratify president Uribe's proposals. The referendum began as a consultation on political reform, but became a plebiscite on the presidency; and many of the proposals included in the referendum had, in fact, already been approved by congress.[14] This initiative affected the local elections – the referendum was held the day before the mayoral, council and departmental governor elections – and imposed a new set of electoral dynamics. Supporting the referendum became the cornerstone of some campaigns, which played on the possibility of winning more votes in areas where the electorate had also supported the referendum. This, in turn, meant that the local elections focussed on central government proposals.

Nevertheless, just six million people voted in the referendum – half the number who voted in the local elections. This was probably due to electoral saturation; numerous points were needed in the referendum to include all the essential political reforms. In the end there was minority support for the referendum and only a minimal number of the reforms were approved.[15] The open opposition of some political parties and movements, as well as the central government's intolerant reactions, generated a climate of political polarisation that was transferred to the regions.[16] In summary, amidst uncertainty about the results of the referendum, the local electorate experienced the same climate of radicalisation that characterised the presidential elections.

2. The second element that affected guarantees and influenced the election results was the closing of political spaces and the consequent restriction of citizens' political rights. In regions and municipalities that were being disputed by guerrilla and paramilitary forces, or army and guerrilla forces, the closing of political spaces was the result of social control strategies applied by groups at the margin of the law, who use different forms of violence to achieve their ends. Threats and warnings directed at certain sectors of the population, or the inhabitants of certain regions, are a reflection of the polarised logic of war and a manifestation of the dispute for control, in which the right to neutrality in the midst of an armed conflict is ever more difficult to guarantee.[17]

The most recent phase of the armed conflict has been characterised by an expansion into new municipalities, and an intensification in regions with a historic guerrilla or paramilitary presence following the incursion of a second group hoping to win a military advantage. Armed groups in these regions recur to offensives during which they attack their adversaries, or the civilian regulations related to controlling resources, people and territories. Thus, disputed areas register armed attacks and other actions, such as guerrilla and paramilitary-led

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[13] Francisco Gutiérrez, 'La radicalización del voto en Colombia', in Hoskin *et al.* (2003), p.107.

[14] Marco Romero, 'Elecciones, reforma política y garantías electorales', *Actualidad Colombiana*, 2004, at http://www.actualidadcolombiana.org.

[15] According to the constitution, the minimum number of voters needed for a referendum to be validated is 25% of the total number of voters in the presidential elections. However, this figure was necessary for each of the referendum's fifteen points. Just one of the points, in ten of Colombia's 32 departments as well as the capital, was validated.

[16] The president called the result "unpatriotic". See 'Uribe perdió el referendo', *Diario El Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 30 October 2003.

[17] This is due to the logic of the war in Colombia: rural zones are occupied by guerrilla forces and urban areas by paramilitary forces and the army. The civilian population is considered to be the adversary's social support base, and becomes a military objective.

blockades, and restrictions on free movement, the entry and exit of foodstuffs, medicine, information and humanitarian aid,[18] in addition to armed strikes, illegal roadblocks, and the charging of protection money.[19]

In essence, the way in which the armed groups intervene in social, political and economic activities has created adverse conditions for political participation. In a context of restricted fundamental human rights, individual rights are also restricted, which, in turn, has an effect on politics. In addition to the difficulties associated with voting in regions where the armed conflict is most intense, or where people's rights are affected by different forms of confinement, voters and candidates received direct threats in 2003.

Following Alvaro Uribe's campaign, in which he ratified his intention to confront the guerrilla via an armed struggle, the FARC stated that mayors, councillors, governors and public functionaries in general were now military objectives – the idea being to destabilise democratic security and public order. In the 2003 elections this included the express order not to vote in areas where the FARC had a historic presence. During the pre-election period the group prevented candidates from campaigning in certain areas and candidates were also threatened and intimidated.

The paramilitary *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), on the other hand, were not openly opposed to the elections, although certain candidates were vetoed and threatened in areas where the group had a consolidated presence. In various regions there were reports of paramilitary groups pressuring voters to ensure that certain candidates or parties received support, or to prevent anyone being elected whose campaign was considered to be in opposition to the AUC's political aims.

Some indicators reveal the closure of political spaces, an absence of local electoral guarantees and a radicalisation of the vote. Areas with just one candidate and where candidates resigned are an indication of conditions under which electoral competition is impossible and where the minimum conditions for democracy are being threatened. The Colombian Federation of Municipalities reported 22 instances where there was just one candidate (see Table 1), and 9 cases where there was no candidate – mostly in regions with a historic guerrilla presence.[20] In regions where the government and the AUC were involved in peace negotiations, such as the Department of Córdoba, 22 rural polling stations had to be transferred to urban areas due to public order problems (Tierra Alta, Montelíbano, Buenavista and Puerto Libertador).

Between 1998 and 2003, 64 mayors were assassinated, 181 candidates for governor, departmental assemblies, mayor and municipal council resigned,[21] and campaigns were restricted in 200 municipalities (about 20 percent of the total). This represents political pressure on governmental institutions and voters, and had a negative effect on politics and influenced election results. Additionally, 160 mayors were forced to govern in exile in 2003 following death threats, which limited the State's ability to guarantee municipal governments.

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[18] According to CODHES, 72 municipalities are affected by a total blockade. However almost all Colombian departments report some type of blockade. Regions such as Medio and Bajo Putumayo, the border between Caquetá and Putumayo, Norte de Santander, Arauca, Atrato and Bajo San Juan in Chocó are disputed zones.

[19] These include caps on the amount of foodstuffs or resources.

[20] Socotá, Boyacá – mayor and council; Cartagena del Chairá, Caquetá – council; La Salina and Sácama, Casanare – council and mayor; Santa Rosa, Cauca – mayor and council; Algeciras, Huila – council; Calamar and Miraflores, Guaviare – council; Carurú, Vaupés – mayor.

[21] Not including the 22 candidates who resigned in Acarí, Norte de Santander, but whose resignation was not officially accepted.

Many departments where just one candidate ran for election have a consolidated paramilitary presence (Antioquia, Córdoba, Sucre, Meta, Guajira and parts of Cundinamarca), and others are in the midst of a dispute between paramilitaries and guerrillas (Chocó and Norte de Santander). In these regions, the group has tried to co-opt institutional representation and participation mechanisms to control local politics.

Table 1: Municipalities with single candidates in 2003 local elections

Department	Municipality	Electoral Participation	Party
Antioquia	Cocorna	30.8%	Equipo Colombia
	Tarso	49.6%	Partido Liberal Colombiano
Arauca	Fortul	17.3%	Partido Liberal Colombiano
Boyaca	Almeida	65.6%	Polo Democrático Independiente
	Guacamayas	66.7%	Movimiento Nacional
	Maripi	53.5%	Partido Colombia Siempre
	Paipa	65.4%	Paritido Liberal Colombiano
Cauca	Jambalo	60.9%	Alianza Social Indigena
	San Sebastián	36.4%	Alianza Social Indigena
Choco	Certegui	70.1%	Partido Liberal Colombiano
	Sipi	61.5%	Partido Liberal Colombiano
Córdoba	San Andrés de Sotavento	69.5%	Partido Liberal Colombiano
	Valencia	61.1%	Movimiento Colombia Viva
Cundimarca	Quebradanegra	62.8%	Movimiento Unionista
	San Bernardo	51.1%	Partido Conservador
	Yacopi	63.1%	Partido Nuevo Liberalismo
Guajira	Manaure	39.5%	Partido Conservador
Meta	Mapiripa	22.8%	Partido Cambio Radical
Norte de Santander	Chitaga	62.2%	Partido Liberal Colombiano
	Labateca	54.9%	Movimiento Apertura Liberal
Santander	Ocamonte	76.2%	Partido Liberal Colombiano
Sucre	San Onofre	48.2%	Partido Conservador

Source: National Registrar

In regions with a guerrilla presence, mayors and public functionaries were selectively threatened and assassinated, and in Caquetá and Arauca there were large-scale resignations of all local representatives.[22] In consequence, these regions are experiencing political difficulties related to civil rights and electoral participation.

In addition to these dynamics of the armed conflict, some of president Uribe's democratic security strategies have also limited political representation in as much as they do not recognise the right to neutrality (especially strategies that encourage the civilian population to provide information about members of illegal groups, such as the informant network, the cooperation network, and other initiatives that involve direct contact with the internal conflict, such as the 's*oldados campesinos*' programme). Finally, the round-ups that are part of the

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[22] In 2002, all the municipal councillors in Puerto Rondón and Cravo Norte (Arauca) resigned following threats and public order problems. In 2003, all Arauca's mayors did the same. The government did not accept their resignations and militarised the department, without strengthening the State's civilian presence. The government even appointed a military mayor in Arauquita (Colonel (r) Hugo Manuel Benítez), a town where the guerrilla have been active for more than 20 years, and where death threats forced him to resign. In 2003, all Caqueta's mayors were threatened and, according to the Colombian Federation of Municipalities, none have been able to return from internal exile, where they governed between 2001-2004.

fight against terrorism do not recognise due process and affect social leaders', candidates' and representatives' personal security: they have to go back home and deal with the stigma of having been suspected, even if all charges against them have been dropped.

The arbitrary detention of social leaders, union members and political candidates in some municipalities during the 2003 elections led to a worsened climate of radicalisation. In October 2003, in Arauca, for example, some of the principal candidates were detained just five days before the elections (Julián Reyes, *liberalismo*; Benjamín Sacadagui, ex-departmental assembly deputy and candidate; and the current mayor of Saravena who was in the middle of campaigning). They were later freed after proving their innocence.[23]

The closure of political spaces due to the climate of radicalisation and other dynamics of the internal armed conflict restricted local political participation and affected 20 percent of all Colombian municipalities in the October 2003 elections.[24] Elections have become a stage from which the irregular armed groups consolidate their political control. According to Marco Romero:

> If the crisis affects the regional authorities like this, it is even worse for the general population whose democratic rights have been limited by violence. In general, humanitarian crisis indicators are correlated with electoral and political guarantees. People being displaced by violence and social leaders being threatened, displaced or assassinated constitute structural faults in the State's responsibility to defend civil rights and, in this case, political rights as well.[25]

3. The political reform approved by congress in Legislative Act 01, 2003, is the third factor that led to important changes in the political system. The modified electoral system and the 'law of parties' had been under debate in congress since 1998, but no agreement was reached by the non-traditional parties leading the debate. Finally, in 2003 a much wider set of reforms was approved.

The most important electoral reform was the new threshold for being elected to a public corporation. The political reform included new lists with an optional preferential vote, the formation of parliamentary benches organised by party or movement and the prohibition of double or multiple candidatures in public corporations. The reform established a threshold of 2 percent of total votes for the senate (close to 240,000 votes at 2000 levels),[26] and 50 percent of the current quotient system for the other public corporations.[27] These requirements were

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[23] CODHES interview, President of the Commission for Human Rights, Arauca, 21 & 26 August 2004. The number of arrests within the framework of the government's flagship democratic security policy are alarming: "The Minister of Defence reported that during the first year of the democratic security policy 125,778 people were arrested (334 per day)" (Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo- Fundación Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos, '¿Cacería de brujas? Detenciones masivas y seguridad democrática', in *Reelección el embrujo continúa. Segundo año de gobierno de Álvaro Uribe Vélez*, Bogotá: Plataforma Colombiana - Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo, 2004, pp.199-206). However, by November 2003, just 43% of those detained had been charged and the majority had been freed. Testimonies collected during fieldwork mention cases of people having been detained and freed up to six times in four months – a clear indication of irregularities in the way the security forces are applying the strategy.

[24] Elections were not held in approximately eleven municipalities where, due to violence, there were no candidates.

[25] Romero (2004), p.23.

[26] This element will come into force in the 2006 parliamentary elections.

[27] The electoral quotient is the result of dividing the total number of valid votes for each public corporation by the total number of seats. This figure is still used to calculate the threshold, but not for assigning seats. This

designed to reduce the importance of small numbers of votes and eliminate electoral micro-businesses.

The reform included using the D'Hondt method to assign seats. In the past almost all seats in the corporations were won by residuals or fractions of the quotient. The new threshold means that lists that do not win at least one quotient will almost never win seats. The mechanism was designed to award seats to lists winning high numbers of votes, and to ensure that relatively new political movements, with significant support at mayoral level, could also win an equally significant proportion of seats.

The optional preferential vote allows parties to publish open or closed lists. The former require voters to choose the candidate who should be at the head of the list. Although this may encourage personality-based campaigns, when combined with the proportional figure, the preferential vote ensures some degree of institutionalisation and structure in the way political movements choose their candidates.

Critics of the reform highlight the fact that the 2 percent threshold for the senate favours national-level political parties with support in the big cities, whilst restricting new, local-level parties in smaller municipalities. Others point to the preferential vote's perverse effect of becoming an incentive for personality-based electoral micro-businesses, and of taking importance away from other means of institutionalising parties via formal procedures.

However, the preferential vote benefits the parties more than the candidates: the threshold and number of seats are linked to the total number of votes the list wins. In Bogotá, for example, the city council has 45 seats and the threshold is 19,300 votes. In the 2003 elections, María Margarita Zuleta won 17,253 votes, but her party (*Nuevo Partido*) did not reach the threshold and won no seats. Luis Eduardo Díaz's party, however, won a total of 49,597 votes and, thanks to the preferential vote, he won a seat on the city council with just 1,343 votes.[28]

The proportional figure, the threshold and the preferential vote were meant to stimulate political alliances and eliminate electoral micro-businesses. Furthermore, these mechanisms increased the probability that political movements would be more equally represented in the public corporations. As the number of movements falls, seats are distributed between fewer, larger parties. In essence, the reform encourages advances towards the democratisation and institutionalisation of political parties and guarantees more orderly political competition. However, some elements of the reform put local political movements at a disadvantage (due to the threshold for reaching the senate).

Critics of the reform have stated that the new formulae will encourage political alliances but not the institutionalisation of the system, thereby negatively affecting pluralism. The reform, however, does not refer to alliances, but to a total number of votes won by a "determined number of senators or representatives" that, if the threshold is reached, mean that "the new group can enjoy the constitutionally guaranteed benefits for parties and movements". This refers to financing for campaigns, which has been increased by 300 percent for 2006. This is a comparative advantage for the old political class that currently hold seats in the senate and house of representatives, clearly evidenced by the number of lists standing for municipal councils that did not reach the threshold.

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decision is more historical than theoretical – it was taken following a majority vote by members of the public corporations (Romero, 2004, p.3).

[28] Angélica Bernal, *Elecciones de 2003: El Referendo y Autoridades Locales*, Bogotá: Red Mujer y Participación Política, 2004, at http://www.fescol.org.co/política-formas-genero-ompp-b-5.htm.

Electoral variables, 2003

Electoral participation and the effective number of parties (ENP) were examined using the three factors described above. The effects of the political reform can be seen in the size and composition of the party system (measured using ENP) that should, in the medium-term, be restructured to favour larger political movements.

Although the reform was not designed to increase electoral participation, this variable is linked to changes in the party system, and has a tight relationship with the electoral ground rules in terms of the incentives or disincentives that make voters go to the polls or not. Electoral participation is an indicator of how the modifications introduced by the reform were perceived by the electorate. If voters are sceptical about the effect their votes will have on local politics, their perception may change following the reform's implementation (especially in terms of the reconfigured party system and its effect on the political classes). It is also important to mention that the reform's impact will be more clear in the 2006 Senate and House of Representatives elections – especially if new parties are restricted by the threshold.

Participation in mayoral and council elections did not vary significantly during the 1990s (see Figure 1).[29] In a large part of the country less than half of the eligible voters went to the polls. In 13 percent of all municipalities in 2003, participation was less than 50 percent. The same was true in 11 percent of all municipalities in 2000, and in the 1990s the figure was more than 25 percent – in more than a quarter of Colombia less than half those eligible to vote actually participated.
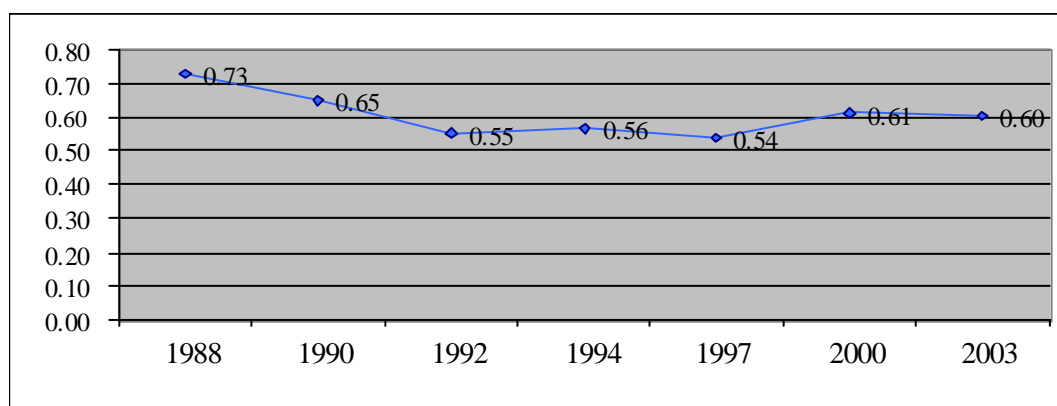

Figure 1: Average national participation in mayoral elections, 1988-2003
Source: National Registrar, author's calculations

The slight increase in participation in 2000, when almost 60 percent voted, is still within historical parameters. A long-term examination is needed of the effect of single candidates and lists in concentrating voting, and whether these represent an incentive to voters. It is probable that sceptical voters will go to the polls if these regulations stimulate programme-based campaigning.

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[29] Electoral participation is calculated here by dividing the number of people eligible to vote by the number of valid votes cast.

In spite of the slight improvement in 2000, it is important to remember that in many rural zones that suffered guerrilla pressure, councillors were elected with 8 votes (Cartagena del Chairá, Caquetá). Although the total number of voters in 2003 did not fall,[30] any inability to vote due to external pressure is, *per se*, an indicator of vulnerable political rights.

Lastly, we looked for variations in the effective number of political parties in municipal councils, and the number of non-Conservative and Liberal mayors compared with previous years.[31] In other words, whether the unique lists, the preferential vote, the threshold and the participation figure produced changes in political party representation in the public corporations – a smaller number of parties is expected, in terms of seats being distributed in accordance with the participation figure rather than residuals, that make it harder to win seats. We also examined whether unique candidates by party had an *al reducri* impact on the number of mayoral candidates and lists for municipal councils, thus evaluating whether the expected political alliance effect was produced.

Figure 2 shows that the average ENP before 2000 was typical of a bipartisan system, and that one party was dominant in most electoral periods between 1988 and 1997. This variable's rising tendency since 1994 reached its peak in 2003, when the national average reflected a multi-party system with more than three parties for the first time in a decade; although in 1992 the variable had also shown a tendency very close to a multi-party system.[32] This change is very important in terms of opening up the Colombian political system. Until now the two traditional parties (Liberal and Conservative) have had a monopoly on representation that has generated a negative effect on political renovation in municipal councils.

Interestingly, in spite of the 2003 political reform, there was an increase in the effective number of parties. This indicates that the new method for assigning seats and the new electoral competition rules led to diversification within councils and favoured more political parties than in previous years. This can be explained by various factors: generalised disenchantment with the old political classes, who had extended their influence to small municipalities, actually favoured independent candidates and relatively new parties. This was evidenced by voter opinion polls during the 2004 presidential election campaign, as well as the interviews carried out for this study, in which the emergence of new political forces was registered alongside a number of moves from the Liberal Party towards independent candidates who were part of what was then a strong independent current: Uribism. This was how, in the midst of voter radicalisation, new parties such as *Movimiento Equipo Colombia*, *Cambio Radical* and *Convergencia Ciudadana* appeared, and became the principal non-

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[30] This is explained by the fact that the rural population (under guerrilla pressure) is lower than the urban population. If information was available on the number of rural areas where it was impossible to vote, the geographical impact would probably be greater.

[31] According to Laakso and Taagepera: "In a bipartisan system with two equally strong parties, the effective number of parties is exactly 2.00. If one party is considerable stronger than the other, with a percentage of votes or seats equivalent to, for example, 70% / 30%, the effective number of parties is 1.72, a figure that corresponds with our intuition that we are moving from a bipartisan to a one-party system. If there are three equally strong parties then the effective number is 3.00. If one of the parties is weaker than the other two then the effective number of parties is between 2.00 and 3.00, depending on the third party's relative force" (Arendt Lijphart, *Sistemas electorales y sistemas de Partidos. Un estudio de veintisiete democracias 1945-1990*, Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1994, pp.114-118). The formula is:

$$NEP \ \frac{1}{\Sigma \, e_i^2}$$

where e is the proportion of seats of party i.

[32] This can be explained by the impact of the party system reforms, contained in the 1991 constitution, that promoted electoral competition and facilitated the formation of political groups.

traditional forces in terms of mayors and seats on municipal councils. The political spectrum was, therefore, widened in terms of new parties (related to Uribism) rather than an aggregation of forces.

Left-wing movements became stronger in the principal cities but gained little ground in other municipalities, especially the smallest. This was the case of the *Polo Democrático Independiente* (PDI), the M-19, the *Movimiento Ciudadano* and the *Movimiento Verde Oxígeno* – the most significant left-wing parties that triumphed in Cali, Bogotá and Barranquilla, but which lagged behind at national-level.
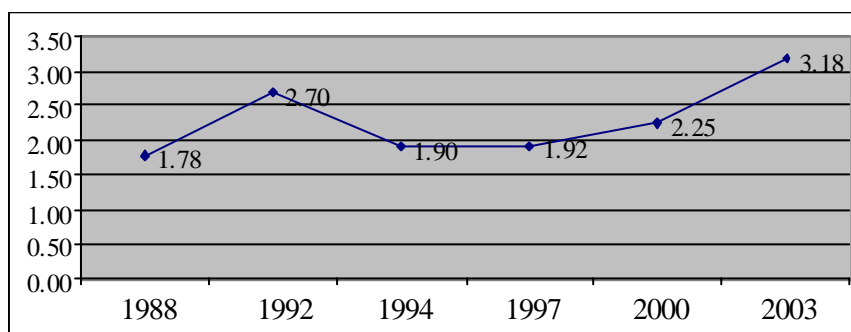

Figure 2: National average of Effective Number of Parties in municipal councils, 1988-2003
Source: National Registrar, author's calculations

When the number of municipalities with more than 2.5 effective parties is examined (see Table 2), it is clear that since 1994 the bipartisan to multi-partisan tendency has extended to ever more municipalities. In 1994, 15 percent of all municipalities reported more than 2.5 parties, in 1997 the figure was 16 percent, in 2000 it was a third, and in 2003 it was over 66 percent. In summary, the opening up of the political spectrum continues and, in spite of the violence that affected 20 percent of the Colombian electorate in 2003, it took a qualitative leap that was an indirect effect of the radicalised climate described above.

Table 2: Municipal Distribution (%) by Interval in the Effective Number of Parties

Interval	1988	1992	1994	1997	2000	2003
1 – 1.48	28.10%	13.49%	27.82%	29.02%	20.61%	2.22%
1.48 – 1.97	30.50%	18.48%	29.85%	26.16%	21.63%	9.33%
1.97 – 2.46	26.34%	20.52%	23.57%	22.18%	23.84%	18.76%
> 2.46	8.32%	41.31%	15.06%	16.08%	31.61%	66.82%

Source: National Registrar, author's calculations

This table shows that the high number of multi-partisan municipalities in 1992 was atypical. In following years this number fell and only became generalised once again in 2003. The anomaly can be explained by the immediate effect of the 1991 constitutional reforms, which facilitated political party formation and stimulated electoral competition.

If we look at the proportion of mayoral elections won by the traditional parties (Liberal and Conservative) compared with those won by non-traditional political movements, a similar tendency is observed to the opening up of the formal political system at the local level (see Figure 3). Since 1994, ever more municipalities have elected non-traditional parties. At the start of the 1990s, traditional parties were dominant in 80 percent of Colombian municipalities, but in 2003, they controlled less than half. Over the same period more than a

third of mayors were from non-traditional parties, and in various municipalities indigenous parties have shown a strong capacity to strengthen themselves as political alternatives.[33] 2003 was, therefore, an important year for the opening up of the political system, probably associated with the rise of new parties that supported Uribism at the local level (e.g. *Cambio Radical*) and that achieved an important level of support following the 2002 presidential elections.
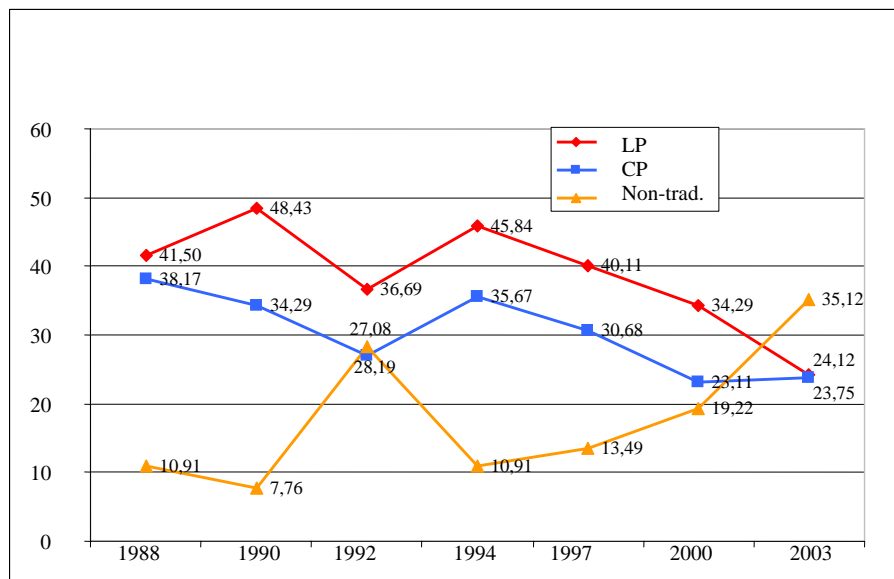

Figure 3: Mayoral Elections won by Party, 1988-2003 (%)
Source: National Registrar, author's calculations

Opposition parties' victories in mayoral elections in the principal cities reflected a strengthened opinion vote (the PDI in Bogotá). In many Colombian cities, non-traditional movements won mayoral and governor elections. In Valle del Cauca, Angelino Garzón (*Partido Convergencia Popular Cívica*) beat the Liberal candidate; in Medellín, Sergio Fajardo (*Alianza Social Indígena*) beat the Liberal and Conservative Parties for the first time since 1988; in Cali, the ex-councillor Apolinar Salcedo (*Movimiento Sí Colombia*) became mayor; in Bucaramanga, Honorio Galvis (ANAPO) won; and Pereira was won by Juan Manuel Arango (*Nuevo Partido*). Indigenous movements have important levels of participation in departments such as Nariño and Cauca, where social mobilisation and political participation have been led by this sector of society.

These tendencies show that multi-party politics are not exclusive to the principal cities as other studies have stated,[34] but that it has extended to more than half of all Colombian municipalities. It is also worth mentioning that the system of seat assignation explains a large part of the 'effective number of parties' variable.

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[33] This distinction between the Liberal and Conservative Parties and non-traditional parties was made by looking not just at the parties' names, but also by verifying which parties were just a faction of the Liberal or Conservative Party.

[34] Ceballos & Hoyos (2004). Lariza Pizzano speaks of "conurbated" municipalities and cities when referring to the spatial element's importance in explaining electoral behaviour, especially in rural areas that are influenced by large urban centres ('Ciudad, territorio y elecciones: Un aporte conceptual al análisis de los resultados electorales en las áreas metropolitanas de Colombia', in Hoskin *et al.* (2003), pp.193-222).

However, it is important to note that the fragmentation of liberalism and conservatism has led to the rise of multiple political factions that have become small electoral micro-businesses representing the old political classes. In this context it is difficult to identify when an increased number of parties reflects a broader political spectrum (i.e. if the 'other' classification includes alternative political forces, or if it reflects the factionalism typical of Colombian parties, who frequently use this strategy to win more votes). In other words, an increase in the effective number of parties in municipal councils and a higher proportion of non-traditional mayors do not necessarily mean that new political forces are consolidating themselves at the local level.

As regards electoral competition, the figures show that the political reforms did not significantly reduce the number of lists for councils, although they did slightly reduce the number of mayoral candidates in 2003, compared with 2000. This means that the strategy designed to stimulate political alliances did not work, at least at the local level. In 2003, there were 3,256 candidates for mayor versus 3,379 in 2000, whilst the number of lists presented for municipal councils in 2003 was significantly higher than in 2000 (56,459 and 30,060 respectively). This means that the political alliance formula could have a greater impact on the 2006 Senate and House of Representatives elections.

Lastly, the election results showed that the preferential vote scheme tends to weaken personality-based candidatures, and benefits lists of candidates with significant electoral support. The vast majority of parties (more than 90 percent) opted to use open lists for municipal councils, thus adopting the preferential vote as a means of structuring their candidates. This is related to the level of deinstitutionalisation in the Colombian political party system and the need to promote processes that allow political strategies to be decided on within the movements themselves.

Case Studies

Interviews with local government officials and diverse social sectors in four municipalities allow us to contrast statistical information with first hand data experiences of the relationship between local democracy, political reform and the internal armed conflict. In general, a minimum of eight interviews were conducted in each municipality, and documents were consulted that contained data on the aspects mentioned. More than being about the elections, the interviews were designed to explore the following factors: a) the impact of violence on the October 2003 mayoral and council elections; b) local governability, or the capacity of municipal governments to respond to their citizens' demands; c) the perceived legitimacy of the elections (were they clean, fair, free and competitive?); d) State democracy or the capacity of institutions to ensure respect and compliance with norms in their jurisdictions; e) characteristics of, and changes to, the formal political system (the party system, and local participation and representation). There follows an examination of the aspects related to the elections and changes in the formal political system.

This section is an extract of a wider qualitative analysis in terms of themes and number of municipalities. Four municipalities were chosen to include different geographical zones, the dynamics of the armed conflict and the principal electoral behaviour tendencies registered in the decade.

The municipalities used were:

- Pasto (Nariño) – one of the principal Colombian cities. Pasto has a tradition of strong social organisation and motivation, mostly due to the importance of indigenous groups in the region's politics. In 2005, there was a dispute in Nariño between the FARC and ELN and the army, which has led to an intensification of the armed conflict. Pasto, however, is an example of political renovation: the M-19 triumphed in the mayoral elections.

- Barranquilla (Atlántico) – one of the principal Colombian cities. Barranquilla has been undergoing political renovation in municipal administration since 1992, when the *Movimiento Ciudadano* won the mayoral elections and ended the Liberal Party's dominance. There is a relatively strong paramilitary presence in the city, although the zone is generally peaceful and there is no open armed conflict.

- Barrancabermeja (Santander) – an intermediate city and the country's principal oil producer. There is a guerrilla presence in rural areas, but paramilitary forces control the urban areas. In spite of this, a left-wing PDI candidate was elected mayor in 2003.

- Arauca (Arauca). The municipality has a consolidated ELN presence, but there have been violent incursions by paramilitary groups since 1997, and the FARC since 2000. It is the centre of the government's democratic security policy and has become a 'war laboratory' where all the different security strategies are being used: the informer and collaborator network, continuous massive detentions, military rule with restrictions on free movement and absolute control of radio communications, a concentration of North American advisers (part of the Plan Colombia package), aerial spraying of illicit crops,[35] and the recent use of the counter insurgency strategy known as '*Operación Escudo*' (Operation Shield).

Table 3: Electoral Participation – Mayors
Source: National Registrar, author's calculations

Municipality	1988	1990	1992	1994	1997	2000	2003
Barranquilla	0.65	0.56	0.41	0.42	0.46	0.49	0.42
Pasto	0.64	0.54	0.42	0.52	0.51	0.57	0.50
Arauca	0.82	0.60	0.57	0.60	0.59	0.53	0.49
Barrancabermeja	0.54	0.46	0.42	0.45	0.45	0.62	0.54

Table 4: Effective Number of Parties (1988-2003)
Source: National Registrar, author's calculations

Municipality	1988	1992	1994	1997	2000	2003
Barranquilla	1.54	5.23	2.71	2.26	3.97	4.64
Pasto	2.47	4.35	2.67	6.12	4.95	8.02
Arauca	1.61	3.07	1.34	1.32	1.14	4.25
Barrancabermeja	2.31	6.15	2.17	2.51	2.56	5.45

Table 3 shows a fall in electoral participation in all municipalities compared with 2000, although the levels are generally the same as they were in the 1990s. Table 4 shows that all municipalities reported increases in the effective number of parties, the most significant being in Barrancabermeja (from a bipartisan system in 2000 to more than five parties in 2003),

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[35] Better known as '*Plan Patriota*', this is a military campaign that receives US support and financing. The initial phase included deploying 17,000 operatives in hot-spots.

Pasto (from five to eight parties on the municipal council), and Arauca (from one party in 2000 to more than four in the last elections).

These increases indicate that in spite of the dynamics of the armed conflict, violence has no effect on the number of political movements standing for local election. The political reform, therefore, has not had the desired effect on the number of parties. However, the qualitative information also shows that in some municipalities interference in local politics by irregular groups does lead to increased pressure on voters, candidates and governors.

Table 5 contains specific information on candidates and lists in 2003. Contrary to national tendencies, the number of mayoral candidates in these municipalities increased compared to the previous period, but the number of lists for councils fell to roughly half the number in 2000 (nationwide the figures were 56,459 in 2003, 26,000 more than in 2000). A reduced number of lists standing for council elections is an indicator of the political alliances the reform hoped for, which were designed to ensure an increased probability of reaching the threshold. However, the results show that just half the lists actually achieved the threshold in 2003, and the others, therefore, found it difficult to aspire to national-level representation (Congress).

Table 5: Number of mayoral candidates and council lists. Lists that achieved the threshold and lists with preferential vote
Source: National Registrar, author's calculations

Municipality	Mayoral candidates		Council lists		Lists not reaching threshold		With preferential vote
	2000	2003	2000	2003	No.	% del total	
Barranquilla	6	15	121	27	16	59.26%	22
Arauca	5	7	81	12	5	41.67%	11
Pasto	8	7	84	22	12	54.55%	15
Barrancabermeja	8	17	18	24	13	54.17%	21
TOTAL	27	46	304	85	46	54%	69

As regards the preferential vote, 80 percent of all parties in the four municipalities presented open lists that allowed voters to select the candidate who should lead the proposal. This indicates that the parties still do not have structured candidatures for the public corporations, and through chance or popularity some public figures still have a wide margin in the lists' definition.

The election results indicate that although there was a reduction of 50 percent in the number municipal council lists in 2003, this was not due to political alliances. In addition, the effective number of parties (the distribution of seats in 2003) increased compared with 2000; in these four municipalities, and nationwide, the party system grew by at least one political force.

An examination of the qualitative information regarding the impact of violence on the 2003 elections, and their legitimacy, shows that electoral guarantees were affected in municipalities where political spaces had been closed by the radicalised climate. In Arauca and Barrancabermeja, the results reflect the difficulty for rural populations of travelling to urban polling stations. Furthermore, candidates denounced having been pressured by one of the armed groups active in the region.

In Arauca, the guerrilla used intimidation to prevent the rural population from voting, thus putting political pressure on the national government and challenging the democratic security strategies in the department. Other factors also influenced the reduced levels of participation:

> Abstention triumphed; the electoral census was 100,000, but less than 40,000 people voted for the following reasons: a lack of credibility amongst the candidates, threats from armed actors and the arrest of the most popular candidates for mayor and governor on October 21.[36]

In addition, the armed forces' influence on local politics in this municipality has led to security measures being implemented with minimal civilian control. In 2002, the region was declared a special war area (rehabilitation zone), which led, according to some social leaders, to "civilian life [becoming] militarised". In this context political polarisation is a reality, and the right to free association, meetings, expression and opposition is restricted by the armed groups' multiple pressures on civil society. When responding to the question "Who's in charge here?" one of the most common responses was: "Fear and intimidation".[37]

The targeting of specific sectors of society, specifically unions, human rights defenders and political leaders, is a constant indicator of Arauca's limited political spectrum:

> Relations with the church are good, but with the army they are extremely delicate. There is no possibility of dialogue because [the army] accuse us of being guerrilla collaborators, or fighters. And the police have adopted a stance of silence.[38]

These dynamics are even affecting traditional party leaders:

> In the past one couldn't execute political control or announce one's candidature without obtaining the permission of the armed groups with a historic presence in the department. But we're still at risk because now members of the Liberal Party in the department are called guerrillas and members of Cambio Radical are accused of being paramilitaries. But if we don't seek the guerrilla's permission they threaten us, and the State stigmatises us… Two deputies were arrested after being accused of being guerrillas by an informant. The mayor of Saravena took office whilst under arrest and our own candidate was also accused.[39]

In Barrancabermeja, the dynamics of the armed conflict have had a similar effect, although characterised by less visible control mechanisms. There is a relatively high level of paramilitary infiltration in municipal institutions, and the AUC veto campaigns and candidates opposed to paramilitarism in the city. The Communist Party candidate, for example, says:

> I was not elected mayor because the [paramilitaries] prohibited people from voting for me. I could not go into Barrancabermeja's [poor neighbourhoods] because I was being threatened. They took down my posters and put up Edgar

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[36] CODHES interview with Martín Sandoval, Representative to the Permanent Human Rights Assembly in Arauca, 25 August 2004.

[37] CODHES interview with Martín Sandoval, Representative to the Permanent Human Rights Assembly in Arauca, 25 August 2004.

[38] CODHES interview with Oscar García, President of the Unión Sindical Obrera (USO) in Arauca, 25 August 2004.

[39] CODHES interview with Germán Naber Cruz, President of the Arauca municipal council, 25 August 2004.

> Cote's, their own candidate. He's the mayor now. 15 percent of the count in the mayoral elections took 19 days to complete, on the last day they changed the votes and took out the ones for the Communist Party. This is part of State policy. We lost 30 votes.[40]

Some people mention the pressure put on voters:

> There was pressure from paramilitary groups during the last elections. In northeast Barrancabermeja some women said that they voted for x candidate because they were being pressured. They censused each household and then told them to vote for a specific candidate. They watched them. People were scared. They made the juries count the vote four times when Uribe's proposals weren't approved in the referendum.[41]

Electoral participation is explained by multiple factors, not just violence:

> There's a sustained 45 percent abstention rate because the lists are fragmented, there are no truly cohesive, articulated parties. When the guerrilla were here, human rights abuses shot up during the elections. In these elections there weren't as many problems and actions as we'd expected. Scepticism, there are constraints, impositions, coactions, public and private protests that show how candidatures were influenced. Low level of opinion votes.

In this municipality the general perception is that there has been a high level of paramilitary infiltration in local government, private businesses and municipal political life via the creation of movements and presentation of AUC candidates in elections. This has limited local electoral legitimacy and has led to a relatively high level of abstention:

> There are no guarantees for civil and political rights here. The United Self Defence Forces of Colombia are entering civilian, political and economic life in the municipality. They control pawnshops, betting, the lottery… There's no pressure from the illegal forces because they have their own councillors on the inside.[42]

> The last administration had links with the paramilitaries. A communicator was assassinated and there were massacres. Three of the mayor's secretaries have been in the hands of the paramilitaries.[43]

The dynamics of the irregular groups' institutional penetration are linked to their appropriation of lucrative business income in the municipality, financial support given to campaigns and political activities, and permanent relationships with public sector employees, amongst others. In Barrancabermeja some functionaries expressed that:

> There is pressure here. Call the paramilitary commandant and tell him what needs doing and where… Fear means that there is no community participation here, and anyone who makes a complaint is killed.[44]

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[40] CODHES interview with David Ravelo in Barrancabermeja, May 2004. Member of the Communist Party leadership and *Unión Patriótica* councillor in 2001. Mayoral candidate for the Communist Party in 2003.
[41] CODHES interview with USO leaders in Barrancabermeja, May 2004.
[42] CODHES interview with Jorge Ferreira, Liberal Party councillor, Barrancabermeja, May 2004.
[43] CODHES interview with the CREDHOS director, Barrancabermeja, May 2004.
[44] CODHES interview with Jorge Ferreira, Liberal Party councillor, Barrancabermeja, May, 2004.

The closure of political spaces in Arauca, and paramilitary penetration of different local spheres in Barrancabermeja are associated with the electoral reform's real impact on the widened party system. In spite of the significant increase in the effective number of parties in these municipalities (in Arauca the number rose from 1.14 in 2000 to 4.25 in 2003, and in Barrancabermeja from 2.56 to 5.45), new political movements' access to elected posts is seen as a 'fictitious' political renovation. The mayor of Barrancabermeja said: "I am not part of the Polo, they gave me their support, but they've never seen my face".[45] At the time of the interview the mayor was being investigated by the PDI following accusations of links with paramilitary groups.

The best option for small movements and independent leaders is to form alliances with larger parties that allow them to officially launch their candidatures and campaign for local public office. In Arauca, the increased number of political movements could well be reduced by the high level of local control exercised by the armed and guerrilla forces: "The mayor is controlled by the governor and the armed forces".[46]

The composition of municipal councils shows that after the 2003 elections there was indeed a more equal distribution of seats between the different parties, and that the new political forces forming Uribism won an important level of representation (specifically *Cambio Radical* and *Convergencia Ciudadana*) (see Tables 6 and 7). The Conservative Party, and left-wing movements that had at least one seat in 2000, lost ground in these municipalities in 2003. The Liberal Party also lost seats. The transformed council structure is associated with the radicalised voting patterns of the 2002 presidential elections, in which officialism triumphed in these municipalities.

Table 6: Council Composition, Arauca (seats per party)

2000		2003	
	Seats		**Seats**
Liberal Party	14	Liberal Party	6
Community Political Movement	1	Cambio Radical	3
		Colombia Democrática	2
		Colombia Siempre	1
		Nuevo Partido	1
		Movimiento Convergencia Colombiana	1
		Community Political Movement	1
TOTAL	**15**	**TOTAL**	**15**

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[45] CODHES interview, Barrancabermeja, May 2004.

[46] The mayor is part of the Convergencia Ciudadana movement. CODHES interview with Martín Sandoval, representative to the Permanent Human Rights Assembly in Arauca, 25 August 2004.

Table 7: Council Composition, Barrancabermeja (seats per party)

2000		2003	
	Seats		**Seats**
Liberal Party	10	Liberal Party	4
Conservative Party	3	Conservative Party	1
UI	1	Mto Convergencia Ciudadana	5
Independiente Frente de Esperanza	1	Mto Nuevo Liberalismo	2
Mto de Integración Popular	1	Mto Político Comunal y Comunitario	2
Mto Cívico Independiente	1	Mto Ciudadano	1
		C4	1
		Mto Político por la Seguridad Social	1
TOTAL	**17**	**TOTAL**	**17**

Pasto and Barranquilla experienced different dynamics. These municipalities had been consolidating processes prior to the political reform, and left-wing movements had achieved an important level of participation in mayoral and council elections (the M-19 in Pasto and the Movimiento Ciudadano in Barranquilla). Furthermore, the 2003 elections took place in relatively calm conditions, and the majority of those interviewed agreed that they were clean: "Yes, the elections were clean, there were no claims of fraud, the day was peaceful, and we saw a higher level of participation amongst young people".[47] The interviews also reinforced the importance of the opinion vote in the political renovation process: "The mayor was elected by opinion vote. The same wasn't true of the council, where clientelism still operates".[48]

Although the dynamics of the armed conflict did not affect the election results in these municipalities, there are some aspects that could destabilise public order in the 2006 elections. Territorial disputes in Nariño and a growing paramilitary presence in Barranquilla are the principal risk factors:

> In the past it was clear that the guerrilla had a strong presence, but now the paramilitaries have consolidated their presence on Nariño's Pacific coast.[49]

> Certain groups have co-opted businesses, such as the lottery in the Department of Bolívar, and they want to do the same in the Department of Atlántico. This person is involved with the political class on the coast and has links with paramilitarism.[50]

The election of a PDI mayor in Barranquilla and a Movimiento Convergencia Popular Cívica representative in Pasto are a reflection of the continuity of changes to the party system. The different social sectors interviewed ratify this tendency, although it does not include the public corporations:

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[47] CODHES interview with the mayor of Pasto, Victor Raúl Delgado, August 2004.
[48] CODHES interview with the People's Defender, Barranquilla, October 2004.
[49] CODHES interview with the People's Defender, Pasto, August 2004.
[50] CODHES interview with the person from the People's Defender's Office in charge of attending the displaced population, Barranquilla, October 2004.

> There has been a partial political renovation in terms of mayors and departmental governors, but the old power structures remain in the council and the assembly, which has led to alliances between the new sectors and the traditional political powers.[51]

> Over the past decade new political groups have emerged, but they follow old practices in terms of corruption. For example, in the previous municipal council (2000-2003) there was almost no renovation, just 7 of the 21 councillors were from new movements.[52]

Thus, the electoral reform is seen as a stimulus for the non-traditional forces that have won mayoral elections in these municipalities over the past decade and, furthermore, as having allowed these movements to achieve a higher level of representation in municipal councils in 2003.

Changes in council composition in Barranquilla (Table 8) do not show a reduced number of Liberal Party seats, nor a greater representation of the *Movimiento Ciudadano*, which confirms the fact that reforming the political system has, in this case, been a slow process compared to other municipalities. In the words of the Community Action Committee president:

> It is a complex situation. Here in Barranquilla the budget is controlled by councillors who are nothing more than a bunch of bandits, and the previous mayors ended up negotiating with them. This meant that certain sectors were favoured. We hope this will change under the current administration.[53]

The old way of conducting politics has continued in Barranquilla, where electoral barons traditionally create local-level clientelism by using their party's national-level representation as a political resource to win votes and ensure they are elected to municipal office.

Table 8: Council Composition, Barranquilla (seats per party)

2000		2003	
	Seats		**Seats**
Liberal Party	5	Liberal Party	6
Conservative Party	8	Mvto Nacional Progresista	7
Mvto Voluntad Popular	4	Movimiento Ciudadano	2
Mvto Nacional Progresista	1	Partido Verde Oxígeno	1
Mvto Verde Oxígeno	1	Mvto Nueva Fuerza Democrática	1
Mvto Ciudadano	2	Movimiento Nacional	1
		Mvto Conservatismo Independiente	1
		Mvto Apertura Liberal	1
		Mvto Político Voluntad Popular	1
TOTAL	**21**	**TOTAL**	**21**

In Pasto (see Table 9) the electoral reform's impact can be observed in the more equal distribution of seats amongst new, left-wing political movements, such as the PDI, the *Frente*

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[51] CODHES interview with a member of the Fundación Foro Costa Atlántica, Barranquilla, October 2004.
[52] CODHES interview with the municipal representative, Barranquilla, October 2004.
[53] CODHES interview with the Communal Action Committee president, Pasto, August 2004.

Social y Político, and the *Nuevo Partido* (each with three seats), and the fact that traditional parties lost seats. In these two municipalities, as opposed to Arauca and Barrancabermeja, the broadened party system benefited movements who opposed the referendum, and in Pasto allowed new opposition movements to win the same number of seats as the traditional parties on the municipal council.

Table 9: Council Composition, Pasto (seats per party)

2000		2003	
	Seats		**Seats**
Liberal Party	7	Liberal Party	3
Conservative Party	3	Conservative Party	1
Mvto Alternativa Democrática	3	Nuevo Partido	3
Mvto Convergencia Popular Cívica	1	PDI	3
Mvto Integración Regional	1	Mvto Integración Regional	3
Mvto C4	1	ANAPO	2
Mvto Político Comunal y Comunitario	1	Mvto Frente Social y Político	1
Partido del Socialismo Democrático	1	Moral	1
Proyecto por Pasto	1	C4	1
		Mvto Político por la Seguridad Social	1
TOTAL	**19**	**TOTAL**	**19**

The above shows that the political reform's impact on the party system's size and composition (measured by the NEP) depends to a large degree on the political system's context and structure which, in turn, determines relationships between political leaders at all levels (national, regional or departmental, and local or municipal).

Conclusions

This analysis of the 2003 local elections shows that the closure of political spaces negatively affected electoral guarantees. In 20 percent of Colombian municipalities it was impossible to vote and be elected. There was a mayoral election with just one candidate, candidates and political leaders were threatened, and elections could not be held in eleven municipalities where no candidate stood due to the public order situation. Elections in these regions have become a strategic scenario for the irregular armed groups, and local democracy is facing grave difficulties.

In spite of the reform's measures that were designed to reduce the number of candidates (lists for council elections and mayoral candidates), there was an increase in 2003. This is evidenced not only by the higher effective number of parties, but also by the number of mayors representing non-traditional parties. For the first time since mayors have been elected by popular vote, relatively new political forces triumphed in more than a third of Colombia's local administrations.

In contrast, the Liberal Party lost regional representation (just a quarter of municipalities elected a Liberal candidate). This was due to the radicalised political climate that favoured the emergence of new political forces supporting Uribism.

In spite of the intensified, expanding armed conflict in some regions, the changes introduced by the political reform have led to an increased number of parties (in 2000, the national

average number of parties was 2.25; in 2003, it was 3.18). In 2003, more than 60 percent of municipalities had near multi-party systems (more than 2.5 parties), compared with 30 percent in 2000. Municipal council composition, in the cases examined here, suggests that the changes (specifically the participation figure for assigning seats) have generated higher levels of representation for new political forces, and local-level political renovation. However, in municipalities such as Barranquilla where politics is characterised by clientelism, and electoral barons still have a certain degree of influence, political renovation has been slower. In addition, the radicalisation of voting in the 2002 presidential elections shifted to the 2003 local elections following the referendum, and gave them a different set of dynamics. Differences between parties and movements were to a certain degree based on supporting or opposing Uribism.

These factors allow us to state that the political reform's impact on the party system's size and composition (measured by the NEP) depends in a large part on the political context, and the political system's structure *per se*. In the Colombian case, national party elites' influence on local-level elites and leaders must be highlighted. The significant increase in the effective number of parties in more than half of Colombia's municipalities means that a multi-party system is not exclusive to large urban areas, and that the spatial variable, or geographic dimension, is a determining factor in electoral-behaviour tendencies.

We found that in 2003, the non-traditional political movements that won the highest number of mayoral and council elections supported Uribism (*Movimiento Equipo Colombia* – 7.15% of mayors; *Cambio Radical* – 2.75%; and *Convergencia Ciudadana* – 2.31%). The left-wing movements that won mayoral elections in the principal cities (PDI) only won 1.76% of the local administrations. This ratifies the hypothesis of voter radicalisation, in which the country as a whole moved to the right.

Although the electoral reform established a threshold for winning seats, and unique lists and candidates by party, as mechanisms for stimulating political alliances and promoting institutionalisation within the system, this did not happen and there was no reduction in the number of lists standing for municipal councils. In contrast, the open list option used by almost all parties reflected the importance of personality-based leadership in winning votes. In this sense, the municipal council election results showed that the preferential vote combined with the threshold formula and unique candidatures by party principally benefited political movements rather than candidates. In synthesis, the political reform stimulated processes within parties that are oriented towards presenting more structured candidatures and processes.

The political reform encouraged the democratisation of political parties and established mechanisms to promote more organised electoral competition, and encourage debate of programme content. However, other factors – local political practices and the armed conflict – also affect electoral behaviour, the way parties are formed, the regional political map, and voter guarantees. In other words, the political regime needs to strengthen its institutions if is to guarantee the rule of law in Colombia. This will allow advances to be made in political participation processes that democratise access to power, by strengthening means other than violence, corruption and clientelism. The regime must strengthen institutionalisation processes within the party system and continue supporting transparent politics if it is to strengthen democracy via electoral reforms.

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Research Objectives

- We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.

- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.

- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.

- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.

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