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Federal Research Division
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Dennis M. Hanratty
and Sandra W. Meditz
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# Foreword

This volume is one in a continuing series of books now being prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress under the Country Studies—Area Handbook Program. The last page of this book lists the other published studies.

Most books in the series deal with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions, and examining the interrelationships of those systems and the ways they are shaped by cultural factors. Each study is written by a multidisciplinary team of social scientists. The authors seek to provide a basic understanding of the observed society, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal. Particular attention is devoted to the people who make up the society, their origins, dominant beliefs and values, their common interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward their social system and political order.

The books represent the analysis of the authors and should not be construed as an expression of an official United States government position, policy, or decision. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Corrections, additions, and suggestions for changes from readers will be welcomed for use in future editions.

Louis R. Mortimer
Acting Chief
Federal Research Division
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540

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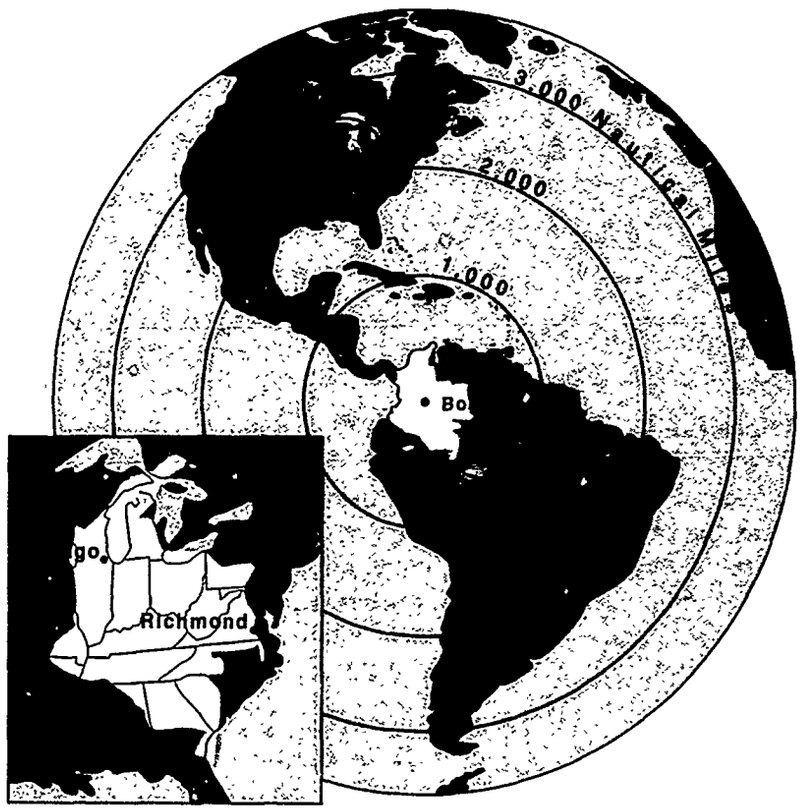
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# Preface

Like its predecessor, this study is an attempt to treat in a compact and objective manner the dominant social, political, economic, and military aspects of contemporary Colombia. Sources of information included scholarly books, journals, and monographs; official reports of governments and international organizations; numerous periodicals; and interviews with individuals having special competence in Colombian and Latin American affairs. Chapter bibliographies appear at the end of the book; brief comments on sources recommended for further reading appear at the end of each chapter. Measurements are given in the metric system; a conversion table is provided to assist readers unfamiliar with metric measurements (see table 1, Appendix). A glossary is also included.

Although there are numerous variations, Spanish surnames generally consist of two parts: the patrilineal name followed by the matrilineal. In the instance of Virgilio Barco Vargas, for example, Barco is his father's name and Vargas is his mother's maiden name. In nonformal use, the matrilineal name is often dropped. Thus, after the first mention, just Barco is used.

# Country Profile




## Country

**Formal Name:** Republic of Colombia.

**Short Form:** Colombia.

**Term for Citizens:** Colombian(s).

**Capital:** Bogotá.

## Geography

**Size:** 1,138,910 square kilometers.

**Topography:** Mainland territory divided into four major geographic regions: Andean highlands (composed of three mountain ranges and intervening valley lowlands); Caribbean lowlands; Pacific lowlands; and llanos and tropical rainforest of eastern

Colombia. Colombia also possesses small islands in both Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean.

**Climate:** Striking variety in temperature resulting principally from differences in elevation; little seasonal variation. Habitable areas consist of hot (below 900 meters in elevation), temperate (between 900 and 1,980 meters), and cold (from 2,000 meters to about 3,500 meters) climatic zones. Precipitation generally moderate to heavy, with highest levels in Pacific lowlands and in parts of eastern Colombia; considerable year-to-year variations recorded.

## Society

**Population:** In 1988 estimated at 28 million; rate of annual growth approximately 2 percent in late 1980s.

**Education and Literacy:** In late 1980s, about 90 percent of children between seven and eleven years of age attended primary school in urban areas; number often fell below 70 percent in many rural areas and below 50 percent in more isolated communities. Approximately 30 percent of twelve-year-old population attended secondary school in 1985; significant urban-rural variations. Estimated 80 percent of all university students attended programs in just five cities. Literacy rate estimated at 88 percent in 1987.

**Health:** Access to and availability of health care and medical services improved substantially in 1970s and 1980s; nonetheless, rural and urban poor continued to suffer from higher mortality and morbidity rates. In 1988 life expectancy at birth estimated at sixty-eight years for females and sixty-four years for males.

**Language:** Spanish.

**Ethnic Groups:** In late 1980s, mestizos constituted approximately 50 percent of population, whites 25 percent, mulattoes and *zambos* (black-Indian mix) 20 percent, blacks 4 percent, and Indians 1 percent.

**Religion:** Over 95 percent of population Roman Catholic in late 1980s; remainder primarily various Protestant groups.

## Economy

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** Approximately US$33.6 billion in 1987; per capita income roughly US$1,330 in 1986. GDP grew at annual rate of more than 5 percent during 1967–80 period, declined to annual rate of approximately 2 percent from 1981 to 1985, and rebounded to annual rate of nearly 5 percent in 1986 and 1987.

**Services:** Nearly 51 percent of GDP in 1987. Sector included trade (nearly 11 percent), transportation (nearly 8 percent), government services (8 percent), and financial services (more than 7 percent).

**Industry:** Over 25 percent of GDP in 1987; primarily composed of manufacturing and construction. Major manufactured goods included food, beverages, textiles, and chemicals.

**Agriculture:** Almost 21 percent of GDP in 1987; also accounted for nearly 68 percent of export earnings in 1986. Main export crops included coffee, bananas, cut flowers, sugarcane, and cotton.

**Mining and Energy:** About 3 percent of GDP in 1987. Major precious metals included gold, platinum, silver, and emeralds. Possessed Latin America's largest coal reserve deposits. Self-sufficient in oil and natural gas.

**Exchange Rate:** Government pursued policy of frequent marginal devaluations of peso against major traded currencies. Exchange rate averaged Col$299.1 = US$1 in 1988.

**Exports:** Officially recorded products totaled approximately US$5.2 billion in 1987. Coffee represented almost 60 percent of all exports in 1986. Other significant exports included petroleum and derivatives, metals, and noncoffee agricultural products. Colombia also Latin America's largest exporter of illegal drugs.

**Imports:** Approximately US$3.9 billion in 1987. Major imports included machinery and equipment, chemicals, and transport equipment.

**Balance of Payments:** Merchandise trade surplus in late 1980s offset by chronic services account deficit. Although manageable, foreign debt more than doubled from 1980 to 1986 to total US$14.6 billion.

**Fiscal Year:** Calendar year.

## Transportation and Communications

**Roads:** About 104,000 kilometers of finished roads in 1987, of which 10,300 considered paved. Three major highways, including Pan American Highway, crossed Andean highlands and Caribbean lowlands and linked to roads servicing major Pacific ports. Few paved roads in eastern Colombia.

**Railroads:** Outdated 3,300-kilometer rail system.

**Ports:** Five major ports—Barranquilla, Cartagena, Santa Marta, Buenaventura, and Tumaco. Inland waterways historically important but carried little cargo in late 1980s.

**Airports:** Five international airports and more than forty regional airports.

**Telecommunications:** Modern telephone system primarily served larger towns and cities. Approximately 500 radio stations and 100 television stations.

## Government and Politics

**Government:** Under 1886 Constitution, executive, legislative, and judicial branches established with separation of powers and with checks and balances; nonetheless, executive retained strong policy-making authority. Chief executive is president of republic, elected by direct popular vote for four-year term and constitutionally probibited from seeking consecutive terms. Legislative authority vested in bicameral Congress consisting of 114-member Senate and 199-member House of Representatives. Congress popularly elected for four-year term. Judiciary consists of twenty-four-member Supreme Court; various district superior, circuit, municipal, and lower courts; and Council of State. In addition to national government, Colombia divided into twenty-three departments, four intendancies, and five commisaryships.

**Politics:** Virgilio Barco Vargas of Liberal Party (Partido Liberal) elected president in May 1986, succeeding Belisario Betancur Cuartas of Social Conservative Party (Partido Social Conservador), until July 1987 known as Conservative Party (Partido Conservador). Political institutions dominated since mid-nineteenth century by Liberals and Conservatives. Both parties characterized by factional rivalries in late 1980s. Minor parties included leftist Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica). Political system challenged in late 1980s by various leftist guerrilla movements and by narcotics traffickers linked to rightist paramilitary groups. Four major guerrilla organizations—Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC), National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN), Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación—EPL), and 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril—M-19)—and several smaller guerrilla groups operated in 1988. Narcotics traffickers sponsored assassinations of numerous government officials and politicians.

**International Relations:** Generally adopted low profile, relying on international law and regional and international security organizations. Good relations with United States. Relations with Venezuela strained over border disputes, presence of undocumented Colombians in Venezuela, and activities of Colombian narcotics traffickers and guerrillas.

**International Agreements and Membership:** Party to Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) and Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America (Tlatelolco Treaty). Also a member of numerous organizations, including Organization of American States, United Nations and its specialized agencies, World Bank, Latin American Integration Association, and Nonaligned Movement.

## National Security

**Armed Forces:** In 1988 total strength estimated at 86,300: army (69,000) navy (10,600), and air force (6,700).

**Military Units:** Army organized into four divisions (consisting of twelve infantry brigades), special forces and logistic support brigades, four specialized battalions, and mechanized cavalry regiment. Navy organized into four fleet commands (including five marine battalions), coast guard, and naval air arm. Air force organized into three combat air commands, tactical air support command, one military air transport command, and one training command.

**Equipment:** Ground forces upgraded equipment in 1980s with purchase of tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) antitank weapons and armored vehicles; other armored equipment mostly of World War II vintage. Major naval vessels included four submarines, four frigates, four large patrol ships, two fast attack craft, three river gunboats, two coastal patrol vessels, and eight river patrol craft. Air force equipment included jet fighters; antiaircraft missiles; and various ground attack aircraft.

**Police:** National Police strength estimated at 55,000 in 1988; approximately 10 percent civilians. Police subordinate to minister of national defense. Police included numerous specialized units, including antinarcotics force and special rural police. In addition to National Police, Administrative Security Department and Customs Service had important law enforcement duties.

## Administrative Units of Colombia

| | |
|---|---|
| Amazonas | 32 |
| Antioquia | 10 |
| Arauca | 13 |
| Atlántico | 2 |
| Bolívar | 7 |
| Boyacá | 12 |
| Caldas | 16 |
| Caquetá | 27 |
| Casanare | 18 |
| Cauca | 25 |
| César | 4 |
| Chocó | 9 |
| Córdoba | 5 |
| Cundinamarca | 17 |
| Distrito Especial | 22 |
| Guainía | 29 |
| Guaviare | 28 |
| Huila | 26 |
| La Guajira | 1 |
| Magdalena | 3 |
| Meta | 23 |
| Nariño | 24 |
| Norte de Santander | 8 |
| Putumayo | 31 |
| Quindío | 20 |
| Risaralda | 15 |
| Santander | 11 |
| Sucre | 6 |
| Tolima | 21 |
| Valle del Cauca | 14 |
| Vaupés | 30 |
| Vichada | 19 |

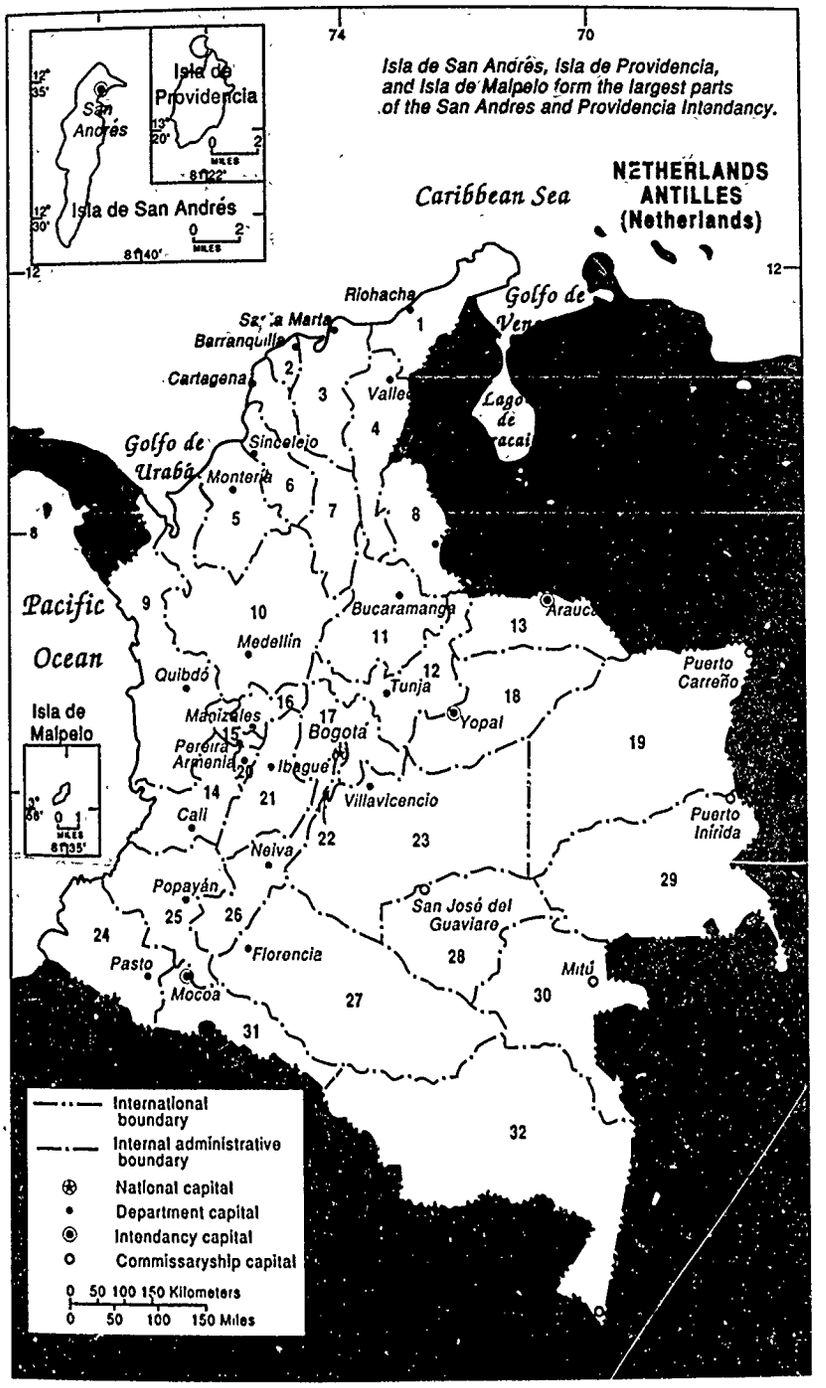



*Figure 1. Administrative Divisions of Colombia, 1988*

# Introduction

IN THE LATE 1980s, Colombia remained a nation of paradoxes. The bearer of one of the strongest democratic traditions in Latin America, it was also subject to recurrent bouts of political violence and terrorism. A highly urbanized and industrialized country, its social structure continued to be influenced by an elite that traced its lineage to an earlier, more agrarian period. Despite a dynamic economy, the country suffered from a skewed distribution of income and delivery of essential services.

In contrast to the usual pattern found in Latin America, Colombia has had a long history of civilian rule and control over the armed forces. Since gaining independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century, Colombia has experienced only three intervals of military government. In 1830 General Rafael Urdaneta led a military dictatorship for eight months. In 1854 General José María Melo staged a successful coup against an elected government controlled by the Liberal Party (Partido Liberal—PC) but was himself replaced within a year by an alliance of Liberals and members of the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador—PL). In 1953 General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla overthrew a Conservative government that had proved incapable of addressing widespread rural violence. Although the coup initially had extensive popular support, civilians soon became disenchanted with the regime and sought a restoration of democracy. In 1957 elements of the armed forces forced Rojas Pinilla into exile and turned the reins of government over to civilians. In the thirty years since the return of democratic rule, five Colombian presidents have dismissed key military leaders whose public statements appeared to challenge government policies. The armed forces accepted each of these dismissals.

However, civilian control over the military has not spared Colombia from a long history of violent political conflict. Instead of civilian-military conflict, Colombia has experienced conflict between dominant political parties, the Liberals and Conservatives. Both parties emerged around 1850 during the presidency of General José Hilario López; for the remainder of the century, Liberals and Conservatives clashed frequently over the government of the respective departments, the division of authority between the president and the legislature, and the position in society of the Roman Catholic Church. The López administration drafted a Liberal constitution that granted substantial autonomy to the provinces, reduced the power of the executive, and established a strict separation of

church and state. The PL initially consisted of a heterogeneous coalition of *golgotas* (merchants supporting free trade), *draconianos* (artisans and manufacturers supporting protectionism), and smaller landowners. Conservatives, in turn, drew their support from large landowners and the Catholic clergy. Peasants tended to support the parties of their *patrones,* a pattern that continued well into the twentieth century and helped to explain the intensity of rural political conflict.

Liberals emerged victorious from a civil war in the early 1860s and held power until 1884. Under the leadership of Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera, the Liberals expropriated church lands. Because the beneficiaries of this action were merchants and landowners rather than peasants, the policy served mainly to intensify land concentration in a few hands. Meeting in Rionegro in 1863, the government enacted a constitution that reserved for the states all powers not expressly granted to the federal government. In spite of these reforms, a radical faction overthrew Mosquera in 1867 and instituted still stronger curbs in central government authority. Over the next twenty years, Liberal and Conservative factions engaged in an estimated forty violent local conflicts.

The election in 1884 of the Conservative Rafael Núñez as president resulted in a dramatic reversal of government policies. Reacting to the excesses of the radical Liberal faction, legislators supported Núñez in adopting the Constitution of 1886, still in force in 1989. The Constitution established a strong president who appointed department governors and who had broad powers to shape central government policies. Although the Constitution of 1886 finally settled the contentious issue of the scope of presidential power, its promulgation also set the stage for one of the most violent periods in Colombian history. Liberals split into Peace and War factions, with the latter supporting armed rebellion against the government. After staging unsuccessful revolts in 1893 and 1895, the War faction rebelled a third time in what came to be known as the War of a Thousand Days. Conservatives eventually prevailed in 1902, but at a cost of an estimated 100,000 deaths.

The war's devastation discredited extremists in both parties. Conservative and Liberal moderates recognized that the rebuilding of the country's economy required the cooperation of both parties. Although Conservatives retained national power until 1930, a succession of presidents appointed bipartisan cabinets. Cooperation helped generate extensive economic growth and industrialization, which produced new urban groups that supported social reform. Liberal reformists led by Alfonso López Pumarejo swept to power in 1930 and instituted the "Revolution on the March," a series

of measures that included agrarian reform, support for labor unions, and the enactment of public assistance. López Pumarejo's ambitious social agenda threatened Conservative landowners; in addition, the loss of the presidency stripped the Conservatives of control of extensive local patronage. As a result, relations between the two parties became increasingly polarized during the 1930s and early 1940s.

Violence soon overwhelmed the political system. In April 1948, populist Liberal politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán—a leader of many of Colombia's urban poor and a likely presidential candidate in 1950—was assassinated in Bogotá. Gaitán's murder sparked a riot, known as the Bogotazo, that destroyed much of the capital and left 2,000 dead. Although the government soon contained the situation in the capital, it could not handle the violence that spread through much of the countryside. Rural violence became the norm as some 20,000 armed combatants claiming to be operating in the name of the Liberals and Conservatives settled old political scores; over the next eighteen years, *la violencia* (1948–66) claimed the lives of over 200,000 Colombians. Although Mariano Ospina Pérez, who was elected president in 1946, came from the moderate wing of the PC, his administration became increasingly repressive and relied extensively on the military. His successor, Laureano Gómez Castro, was a Conservative extremist who curtailed civil liberties and used the rural police as his party's agents; these actions merely served to polarize the nation, to escalate the level of violence, and to spawn the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship. It took five years for democracy to be restored.

As was the case following the War of a Thousand Days, Liberal and Conservative leaders recognized that the survival of the political system required political cooperation rather than polarization. This recognition led to an innovative power-sharing arrangement known as the National Front. From 1958 to 1974, the two parties agreed to rotate the presidency every four years, to establish parity in all elective and appointive government positions, and to require a two-thirds vote in Congress for all legislation. The National Front proved invaluable in allowing the return of civilian rule and an end to party-related violence. Analysts also contended, however, that the noncompetitive nature of National Front elections weakened party identification among the population, especially urban Colombians, and generated notably higher levels of voter absenteeism.

Reconciliation between the two parties did not produce social peace, however. In the 1960s, three major left-wing guerrilla organizations—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC), the

National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN), and the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación—EPL)—and several smaller groups established bases in the Colombian countryside. In the 1970s, a fourth major organization—the 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril—M-19)—began urban operations. Guerrillas sought to undermine public order through kidnappings, murders, robberies, assaults on military and police facilities, and destruction of key economic installations.

Successive administrations employed a variety of tactics to deal with the guerrilla threat. Although military counterinsurgency operations placed the guerrillas on the defensive during the late 1960s and early 1970s, they regained much of their strength in the late 1970s. In response, President Julio César Turbay Ayala employed his state of siege powers in 1978 to decree the National Security Statute. The statute gave expanded arrest powers to the armed forces, granted military tribunals jurisdiction over numerous crimes, and subjected the media to censorship. Although critics charged that the statute legalized numerous human rights violations, it did not succeed in reducing the scope or intensity of guerrilla operations. Turbay's successor, Belisario Betancur Cuartas, proposed a political rather than military solution to the guerrilla problem. Under the terms of the 1984 National Dialogue, the FARC, EPL, and M-19 signed cease-fires that were designed to allow their reincorporation into national life. As part of the peace process, the FARC established a political front, the Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica—UP), which participated in national elections. But the guerrillas, who were allowed to keep their weapons, soon violated the cease-fires. The National Dialogue collapsed in November 1985 when M-19 commandos stormed the Palace of Justice, the Supreme Court building, in Bogotá. In the ensuing battle between the military and guerrillas, over 100 died, including 11 Supreme Court justices.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Colombian democracy also came under attack from major narcotics trafficking syndicates based in Medellín and Cali. Initially, drug traffickers concentrated their efforts on furnishing marijuana to the United States market; increasingly, however, they shifted their attention to the vastly more lucrative cocaine trade. The Medellín and Cali cartels became vast international networks that coordinated the production of coca in Peru and Bolivia, its conversion into cocaine in Colombian laboratories, and transportation to and distribution in the United States. By the early 1980s, Colombian traffickers had firm control over the United States cocaine market. The cocaine trade generated huge

profits and created a boom in the real estate and construction industries because of the traffickers' need to launder money. Overall, however, the cartels' presence had a highly corrosive effect on the Colombian economy, exacerbating inflation, skewing income distribution, and undercutting national economic planning. The cartels had an even more disastrous impact on the political system. Traffickers employed hired assassins known as *sicarios* to intimidate judges and politicians and corrupted other public officials with huge payoffs. Traffickers also had ties with various right-wing "paramilitary" groups that systematically killed leftist politicians and their supporters; during the 1980s, these groups allegedly murdered several hundred UP members.

As was the case with the guerrillas, Colombian administrations varied in their response to the cartels. Turbay sent the military into the Guajira Peninsula in an effort to root out marijuana production and also approved a treaty allowing for the extradition to the United States of Colombian narcotics traffickers accused of crimes in the United States. Although Betancur initially opposed extradition on grounds of national sovereignty, he changed his position after the April 1984 assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. Declaring a "war without quarter" against the cartels, Betancur authorized the extradition of thirteen narcotics traffickers. In two rulings in 1987, however, the Colombian Supreme Court invalidated the 1979 extradition treaty, thereby depriving the new president, Virgilio Barco Vargas, of the weapon most feared by traffickers. Following the January 1988 assassination of Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos Jiménez, Barco beefed up interdiction efforts by the military.

The paradoxical character of Colombia was apparent not only in its political system but also in its social structure. This structure was a legacy of the Spanish colonial and postindependence periods. Spanish authorities established a highly stratified social system in New Granada, as Colombia was known during the colonial era as well as for much of the nineteenth century. *Peninsulares,* persons of Spanish descent born in Spain, controlled the key colonial institutions. Immediately below them were the criollos, those of Spanish descent born in New Granada. Mestizos constituted the lower stratum of society. Mulattoes, *zambos* (black-Indian mix), and blacks remained at the margin of colonial society, and Indians were virtually outside of it. Change and continuity occurred in New Granada's social structure as a result of independence. Criollos replaced *peninsulares* at the pinnacle of the social pyramid, and mixed-race citizens gained a modicum of social mobility. Such mobility, however, was granted to individuals only and

not to entire groups and required adherence to traditional Spanish values and culture.

The stable political environment that Liberals and Conservatives fashioned in the wake of the War of a Thousand Days allowed for sustained economic growth, which subsequently generated dramatic social changes. The emergence of the industrial centers of Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, and Barranquilla spurred massive migration from the countryside. By the early 1980s, approximately 70 percent of all Colombians lived in urban areas, one of the highest rates in Latin America. Urbanization also weakened kinship ties and the extended family structure.

Yet despite these changes, a relatively small upper class continued to dominate the nation's economic and political institutions. The upper class, which constituted about 5 percent of the population in the mid-1980s, consisted of both traditional large landowners with distinguished family lineages and major entrepreneurs. With the notable exception of Antioquia Department, the elite was largely white. Regarding itself as the keeper of the nation's cultural heritage, the elite was the only class to exhibit a strong sense of collective consciousness. Although about 20 percent of Colombians were middle class, the sector's heterogeneous nature inhibited a shared identity; instead, many members of the middle class sought to emulate the culture and life-style of the elite. Even lower levels of common identity were found among the 50 percent of the population considered to be members of the lower class or the remaining 25 percent engaged in peripheral, subsistence occupations.

Paradoxes were also evident in Colombia's economy. Colombia was one of the first Latin American countries to recognize that protectionist trade policies generated inefficiencies in domestic manufacturing and penalized the more dynamic, export-oriented industries. As a result, entrepreneurs and government officials joined forces in the mid-1960s to support a strategy of export promotion and gradual economic liberalization. The export program emphasized nontraditional goods such as textiles, coal, oil, and noncoffee agricultural products and was designed to complement Colombia's strong coffee export business. This export promotion campaign led to sustained growth in the nation's gross domestic product throughout the 1970s, although the global recession of the early 1980s revealed that Colombia remained too dependent on the international coffee market. Colombia actively sought foreign investment, especially in potentially lucrative export industries. The government relied heavily on private capital to sustain economic growth, and it generally limited its role to designing an appropriate fiscal and monetary policy, providing vital infrastructure, and

ensuring a political climate conducive to economic growth. The government did take an active role in the management of coal and oil production, however. Although the nation's total external debt more than doubled during the 1980s, analysts considered that it remained manageable.

Yet economic growth did not produce a more equitable distribution of income. Analysts estimated that the top 20 percent of the population held roughly 70 percent of total national income. A national agricultural census in the early 1970s revealed that 10 percent of Colombia's farmers and ranchers held 80 percent of all farmland. These inequities were also evident in the delivery of essential services. In contrast to the rest of the population, the rural and urban poor experienced notably higher mortality and morbidity rates. Only about 60 percent of Colombians were served by a sanitary water supply and only about half by a sewerage system. Finally, the upper and middle classes continued to provide a disproportionate share of secondary and university students.

Colombian democracy thus faced varied challenges in the late 1980s. The most immediate challenge confronting government leaders was the serious threat to public order from forces on both the left and the right. Over the longer term, however, the government's ability to address the needs of Colombia's lower classes may prove to be the more important key to political stability.

February 15, 1989

* * *

In the months following completion of research and writing of this book, significant developments occurred on both the guerrilla and the narcotics trafficking fronts. The Barco administration and the M-19 signed a series of agreements to allow the latter's incorporation into the political system. Other guerrilla organizations, with the notable exception of the ELN, expressed interest in the peace process. This progress was counterbalanced, however, by a dramatic escalation of terrorism by "paramilitary" groups and drug traffickers.

In a major address in September 1988, Barco had offered guerrillas a three-phase peace plan. The initial pacification phase was designed to create a climate of understanding between the government and interested guerrilla groups and consisted of several major elements. First, guerrilla organizations were required both to state their willingness to reach a peace accord and to suspend all terrorist activities. Second, government and guerrilla representatives

were to meet to establish procedures for the guerrillas' return to normal life. Third, the guerrillas' representatives were to be allowed to propose constitutional reforms to Congress. Finally, the president was to present a bill to Congress pardoning guerrillas for their crimes; this bill was to take effect only after the completion of the entire peace plan. During the second, transitional, phase, the government was to temporarily relocate the guerrillas to a neutral site and provide them with medical services, food, and lodging. The armed forces were to suspend all patrol activities at that site and offer maximum protection to the guerrillas. The final phase was to involve the complete incorporation of the guerrillas into the democratic process. The government pledged to protect the lives of the demobilized guerrillas, to provide them with economic assistance for a reasonable period, and to allow their full participation in elections.

The Barco peace plan was greeted with widespread scepticism. Nonetheless, by January 1989 the Barco administration and the M-19 had agreed to negotiate terms of peace. The specifics of the transition phase were reached in March when the government granted the M-19 a neutral zone in Santo Domingo, Cauca Department, and barred military and police operations in the area. The government and the M-19 signed a final peace accord in September 1989. The guerrilla movement announced its intention to demobilize, although this had not occurred by November 1989, and to reestablish itself as a political party.

Apparently impressed with the positive nature of the negotiations between the government and the M-19, several other guerrilla organizations—including the FARC and the EPL—sought a dialogue with the Barco administration. After several false starts, government representatives traveled to eastern Colombia in October 1989 to begin discussion with the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board (Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar), ostensibly the umbrella group for all leftist guerrilla organizations operating in the country.

It was clear, however, that the board lacked the authority to negotiate on behalf of the ELN. In an effort to force the government to nationalize the petroleum industry and terminate all exploration contracts with multinational firms, the ELN had carried out over 100 attacks between January 1988 and June 1989 on the nation's largest oil pipeline. Analysts estimated that government losses from pipeline attacks in 1988 exceeded US$400 million. In June 1989, ELN commandos destroyed the pipeline terminal in Coveñas, Sucre Department, resulting in a temporary suspension

of oil exports from that facility. Finally, in October 1989 the ELN assassinated the Catholic bishop of Arauca.

The most shocking acts of terrorism, however, were committed by "paramilitary" squads and narcotics traffickers. In 1988 "paramilitary" units staged several massacres of individuals residing in areas considered sympathetic to leftist political interests; in the three most violent incidents, approximately 100 persons were killed in all. Drug traffickers also stepped up their terrorist campaign. During July and August 1989, *sicarios* assassinated the governor of Antioquia Department, a district superior court judge, the chief of police of Medellín, and the head of the New Liberalism Movement (Movimiento Liberalismo Nuevo), Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento, who was a leading contender for the PL presidential nomination in 1990.

Galán's murder shocked the nation and spurred the Barco administration to issue a sweeping series of decrees under the state of siege provision of the Constitution. The most significant decrees allowed officials to seize the personal property of narcotics traffickers, to detain suspected traffickers for seven days, and to extradite, through adminstrative procedures, those accused of crimes in the United States. Over the next month, the military arrested over 10,000 persons and confiscated traffickers' airplanes, helicopters, processing laboratories, and residences. In addition, the Colombian government extradited five traffickers to the United States. The most sought-after traffickers—including Pablo Escobar Gaviria, José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, and the members of the Fabio Ochoa Restrepo clan—eluded capture, however. To support the Colombian effort, the United States provided a US$65 million package of military equipment.

Clearly hurt by the government's offensive, the Medellín Cartel offered to end its trafficking activities and to repatriate its capital in exchange for a pardon—an offer immediately rejected by President Barco. Meanwhile, the cartel continued to engage in terrorism. Between August and October, traffickers bombed dozens of buildings in Bogotá and Medellín and murdered several persons. Following the October killing of a district superior court judge in Medellín, the Colombian judiciary staged a seventy-two-hour strike to demand increased security. The nation recognized that it faced a long and difficult struggle ahead.

November 1, 1989

* * *

As work on this manuscript neared completion, Colombians witnessed several acts of narcotics-related terrorism and the death of a prominent leader of the Medellín Cartel; they also elected a new president. In late 1989, traffickers dramatically escalated their campaign of terror designed to reverse the government's extradition policy. On November 27, a bomb exploded on an Avianca jet within minutes after takeoff from Bogotá, killing all 107 persons aboard. On December 6, sixty-two persons died when a driver on a suicide mission detonated an estimated 500 kilograms of dynamite outside the Bogotá headquarters of the Administrative Security Department (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad—DAS).

The Medellín Cartel suffered an important setback, however, on December 15, when an elite Colombian police unit tracked down Rodríquez Gacha on one of his estates near Covenas, Sucre Department; in the ensuing gun battle, Rodríguez Gacha, his son, and fifteen bodyguards were killed. In an attempt to sway public opinion, the cartel responded the following month with a communique asserting the government's victory over it and offering to suspend all violent and narcotics activities in exchange for undefined "constitutional and legal guarantees." Consistent with his previous responses to similar cartel statements, Barco immediately rejected the offer.

After a brief hiatus, traffickers resumed their campaign of terror on March 22, 1990, when they assassinated Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, the presidential candidate of the UP, at the airport in Bogotá. Traffickers followed this operation with the daring assassination on April 26, 1990, of M-19 presidential candidate Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez during a domestic Avianca flight. Although Jaramillo and Pizarro were terrorist targets because of their leftist politics, each had also opposed extradition of narcotics traffickers as a violation of national sovereignty. Thus, many analysts interpreted their murders as evidence that traffickers were engaged in an effort to destabilize Colombian democracy.

With the assassinations of Jaramillo and Pizarro serving as tragic reminders of the dangers of public service, Colombians went to the polls on May 27, and elected PL candidate César Gaviria Trujillo as the nation's new president. Although Gaviria captured only 48 percent of the votes, he easily outdistanced his nearest competitor in a crowded field that included two Social Conservative Party (Partido Social Conservador—PSC) candidates—Alvaro Gómez Hurtado and Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo—and Pizarro's successor as M-19 standardbearer, Antonio Navarro Wolf. Gaviria benefited not only from the PSC split but also from having inherited Galán's

movement following the latter's assassination in August 1989. A PL insider who had served as finance and interior ministers during the Barco administration, Gaviria had taken a bold move when he agreed to serve as Galán's campaign manager. As the nation followed Galán's funeral on radio and television, Galán's son turned to Gaviria and asked him to seek the presidency. Gaviria's nomination as PL candidate was assured on May 11, when he defeated two others in the party's first-ever primary. Galán had long fought for the institution of the primary as a means of reducing the role of party bosses.

Following his victory, the president-elect pledged institutional renovation and expressed strong support for a future constituent assembly that voters had also approved. Gaviria also committed himself to addressing the problem of poverty and the need for greater decentralization of authority. Analysts also expected that Gaviria would offer a prominent post to the M-19 in the wake of Navarro's having received 13 percent of the vote, an unexpectedly strong showing. Finally, Gaviria promised to continue the battle against narcotics trafficking by supporting both extradition and more resources for judges and penal officials.

June 30, 1990 Dennis M. Hanratty

# Chapter 1. Historical Setting



*One of several hundred stone monuments located near San Agustín, Huila Department. The monuments are distinguished by their part-man, part-jaguar features.*

THE HISTORY OF COLOMBIA is characterized by the interaction of rival civilian elites. The political elite, which overlaps with social and economic elites, has shown a marked ability to retain the reins of power, effectively excluding other groups and social institutions, such as the masses and the military, from significant participation in or control over the political process. Members of the lower classes have found it difficult, although not impossible, to challenge or join the established elite in the political and economic spheres. Their subordination dates to the rigid colonial social hierarchy that placed the Spanish-born above the native-born. Elite control of the military is the result of the "civilian mystique" that developed along with Colombian independence. That mystique has successfully restricted the military to nonpolitical functions, with three exceptions—1830, 1854, and 1953. Thus Colombia has a history rare for Latin America in that the country has been dominated more by civilian than by military rule. Because military forces have been denied political power, the civilian elites have had only themselves, divided into rival groups, to contend with in the political arena.

Some analysts have divided the political elite along economic lines between the landed and the nonlanded. The agricultural export sector, the backbone of the Colombian economy, has supplied the two main economic groups that also have been the most powerful in the political sphere: the landed aristocracy, who are devoted to the large-scale production of agricultural crops, and the merchants, who are engaged in the trade of these export goods and imported consumer goods. Lesser economic groups, such as the emerging manufacturing sector, have allied themselves with one of the two dominant groups, most often the merchants. Differences within the allied groups on issues such as trade created factions within the alliances even before they officially became established political parties. In addition, the nation's economic development opened up new economic opportunities, and new forces increasingly expressed their views through the political factions.

Elite members of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party alternately competed and cooperated with each other throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Often the nature of relations between the two parties depended on whether moderates or extremists dominated the ruling party. During the periods when moderate factions of both parties were in power, the parties were

able to work together in coalitions; when extremist factions prevailed, however, conflict often resulted. During the competitive periods, one party usually sought to limit or eliminate the rival party's participation in the political process, attempts that often resulted in political violence. The most notorious of these periods were the War of a Thousand Days (1899–1902) and *la violencia* (1948–66). At the end of these civil wars, the elite inaugurated the cooperative governments of the Period of Reconciliation (1903–30) and the National Front (1958–74), respectively, the former catalyzed by the Rafael Reyes presidency (1904–09) and the latter by the Gustavo Rojas Pinilla dictatorship (1953–57). The replacement of the discredited extremist factions by the more conciliatory moderate factions in each case made it possible for the two parties to share power and to achieve a consensus on what policies were appropriate for Colombian society at the time.

Although the elite dominated the masses, the different classes were bound to each other through personalistic patron-client relationships, especially in rural areas where peasants relied on the propertied upper class for access to the land they farmed. These patron-client relationships also tied the masses into the political system as the numerical votes or bodies mobilized and controlled by local political bosses. The affiliation adopted by the members of the lower classes was determined largely by the affiliation of their patrons and their families; these affiliations, as much for a party as against the opposing party, became what Robert H. Dix termed "inherited hatreds," elements of one's identity handed down from generation to generation. The emotional bond to the party carried individual members not only to the polls but also into violent conflict with adherents of the opposing party during those times when political conflict could not be controlled. In this way, the peasants and urban masses were recruited by the party elite to participate in the civil wars that riddled the nation's history.

Colombia's economic life has been based consistently on exports of primary goods, especially coffee. In the sixteenth century, the conquistadors and early colonialists, who often exploited Indian and slave labor, mined precious metals and gems for export to Spain under a mercantile system that inhibited the development of domestic industries. Throughout the preindependence and postindependence periods, agriculture on large landholdings, known as *latifundios,* became the predominant mode of production for export crops such as sugar and tobacco. By the 1860s, coffee had emerged as the key export crop. At the turn of the century, tariffs on coffee exports were the main source of government revenues, and profits from the coffee trade were the major source of investment in the

newly emerging industrial sector that was beginning to produce basic consumer goods. Although the industrial sector grew sufficiently to induce urbanization and economic modernization in the first half of the twentieth century, industrial exports remained relatively minor compared with coffee, which in the late 1980s still accounted for almost 60 percent of all export earnings.

Economic modernization, supported by the coffee industry, became significant at the turn of the century. Modernization brought social changes and growing demands that produced various challenges to the dominant position of the traditional elite: the populist movements of the 1940s and 1970s, the military dictatorship of the 1950s, the rise of guerrilla activity in the 1960s through the 1980s, and the emergence of drug traffickers as a major economic and social element in the 1970s and 1980s. The increase in industrialization and the migration of peasants to the cities accelerated the rate of urbanization and the formation of urban working and lower classes. The heightened need for infrastructure, both within a given city and among urban areas, spurred the growing involvement of the state in the economy, especially during the reformist period in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1980s, the state had become an important investor in and manager of strategic sectors of the economy, such as energy resources, transportation, and communications.

The emergence of the National Front marked a significant break in the traditional political and economic patterns in Colombian society. Interparty conflict receded and was replaced in the 1960s by leftist subversion, which continued through the 1980s. The illicit narcotics industry emerged in the 1970s as a dominant economic force, altering the structure of the national economy and disrupting existing social and political relations. The leadership in both parties proved unable to address inflation, unemployment, and a skewed distribution of income. The post-National Front Liberal tenure bequeathed a triple legacy to the incoming Conservative government in 1982: guerrilla activity, the corruptive drug trade, and an inequitable economy.

## The Spanish Conquest

### The Pre-Columbian Era

Perhaps as early as 20,000 B.C., Indian groups had settled in the area of present-day Colombia. The Mesoamericans (Indians originally inhabiting Central America), who arrived in approximately 1200 B.C., introduced the cultivation of corn. They were

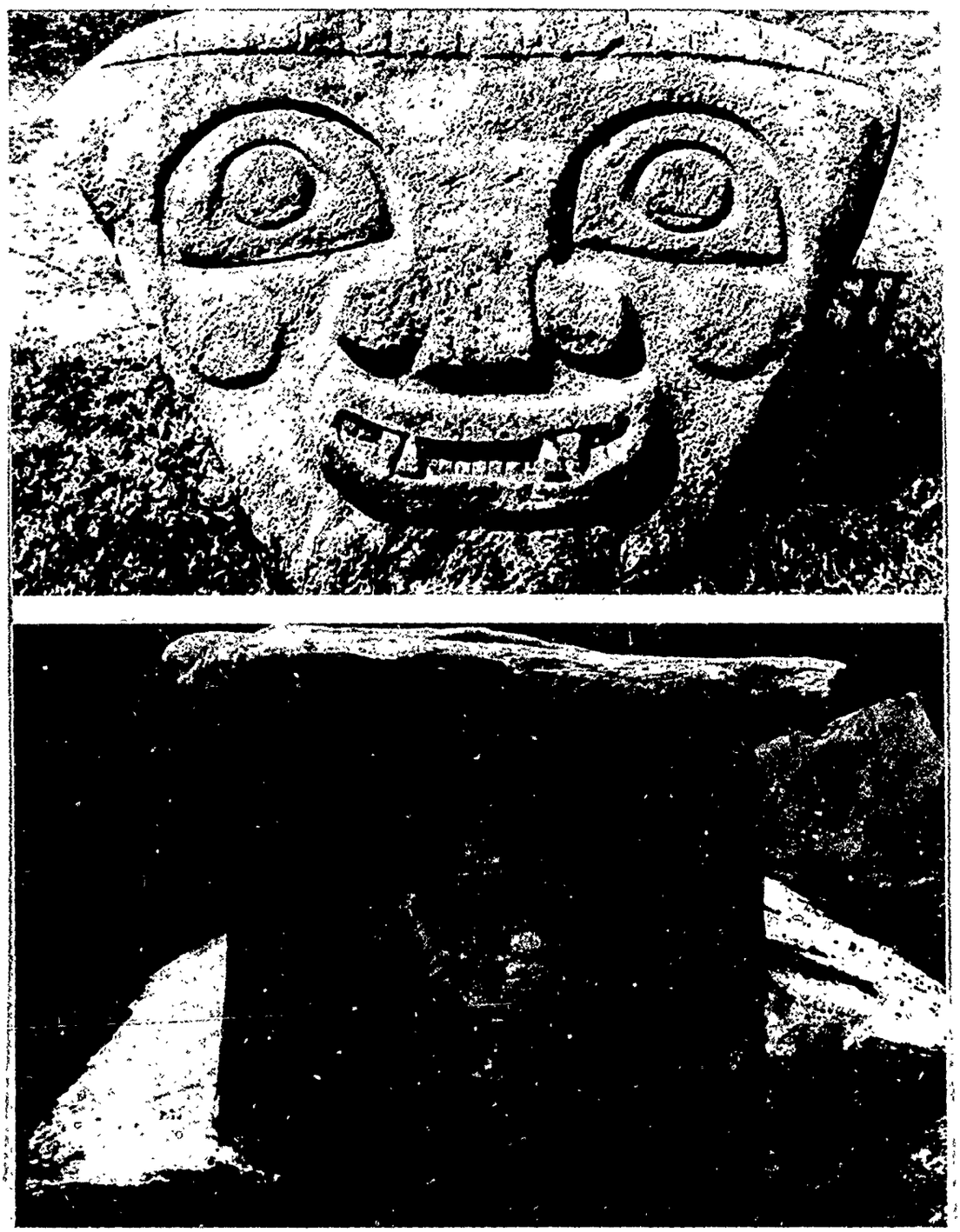
followed by a second wave of Mesoamericans in 500 B.C. Artifacts from a number of distinct cultures, such as those in the areas around San Agustín (in present-day Huila Department), Tierra Dentro (Cauca Department), and Tumaco (Nariño Department), are believed to date from this period. Between 400 and 300 B.C., the Chibchas traveled from Nicaragua and Honduras and reached Colombia, shortly before the Arawaks began their migration from coastal South America to the Caribbean. Near the end of the first millennium A.D., the Caribs migrated to the Caribbean islands. These warlike people raided the Chibchas in the lowlands and forced them to move to higher elevations.

By the 1500s, the two most advanced cultures of indigenous peoples were the Chibchas, or Muisca, located in the plateaus of Cundinamarca and Boyacá, and the Tairona, who settled along the northern spur of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (in present-day La Guajira Department). The Muisca were the more prominent of the two groups and based their economy on agriculture, especially the cultivation of corn and potatoes. The Muisca centered their social organization on the *cacicazgo,* a hereditary form of leadership following matrilineal succession. Two large Muisca confederations existed at the time of the Spanish conquest: Bacatá/Bogotá and Hunsa/Tunja. A chieftain known as a *zipa* headed Bacatá/Bogotá, whereas a *zaque* governed Hunsa/Tunja.

The Tairona formed two groups, one in the Caribbean lowlands and the other in the highlands of the Nevada de Santa Marta. The lowlands Tairona fished and produced salt, which they traded for cotton cloth and blankets with their counterparts in the highlands. The Tairona of both groups lived in numerous, well-organized towns connected by stone roads.

## Exploration and Conquest

The group of Spaniards that first came to the New World consisted of conquistadors, administrators, and Roman Catholic clergy. The adventurous conquistadors were risk-taking entrepreneurs, financing their own expeditions in the expectation of being able to get rich quick. The administrators were appointed by and represented the crown in the colonies and sought to maintain the New World colonies as a source of wealth and prestige for the Spanish Empire. The clergy sought to save the souls of the native Indians, and in the process they acquired land and wealth for the church. The conquistadors, who felt they owed nothing to the crown, often came into conflict with the latter's attempts to centralize and strengthen its authority over the colonies.



*Stone divinities in San Agustín, Huila Department*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

In what became present-day Colombia, the conquistadors explored and began to settle the coastal areas. The first explorers to round the coast of the Guajira Peninsula and enter Colombian territory were Alonso de Ojeda in 1499 and Rodrigo de Bastidas in 1500. In 1510 Ojeda founded Santa María la Antigua de Darién (present-day Acandí) on the western side of the Golfo de Urabá. Bastidas established Santa Marta in 1525 (see fig. 1). In 1533 another explorer, Pedro de Heredia, organized Cartagena after pacifying the Indians in the area. These coastal cities served as havens from Indian attacks and as bases for exploratory expeditions into the interior. In addition, Cartagena linked the colonies with the motherland and became a focal point of intercontinental travel.

Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, Nikolaus Federmann, and Sebastián de Belalcázar figured prominently in the exploration of the interior. In 1536 Jiménez de Quesada set out in search of a path to Peru. During the course of his journey, he encountered the Muisca in the Sabana de Bogotá and in 1538 founded the city of Santa Fe de Bogotá (present-day Bogotá)—the eventual power center for the colony of New Granada. Federmann explored the eastern plains, crossed the Cordillera Oriental, and arrived at Bogotá in 1539. Traveling northward from Peru, Belalcázar established the cities of Popayán and Santiago de Cali (present-day Cali). Other members of his group traveled northward and founded Cartago and Anserma. In 1539 Belalcázar arrived in Bogotá, where the three conquistadors negotiated the division of the newly explored territory.

The expeditions that these men led provided the basis for the settlement of the highlands interior that played a significant role in the future life of the colony. To an even greater extent than in Peru and New Spain (present-day Mexico), many of the population centers established during the conquest were located in remote intermontane valleys and plateaus. This contributed to New Granada's becoming one of the most isolated of all the colonies of the Spanish Empire in the New World.

## Colonial Society, 1550–1810

Colonial society relied on "purity of blood" as a basis for stratification. The elites at the top of the social pyramid were *peninsulares,* persons of Spanish descent born in Spain. *Peninsulares* held political power and social prestige in the society. Below them were the criollos, those of Spanish descent born in the colonies. This group had limited access to the higher circles of power and status. For generations the criollos accepted a position of inferiority to the

*peninsulares,* but in the late eighteenth century their acquiescence was transformed into a resentment that ultimately led to their fight for independence. Next in importance and the most numerous were the mestizos, persons of mixed Spanish and Indian descent who were free but relegated to positions of low prestige. Most Indians gradually became absorbed linguistically or lost their identity through mixture with other peoples; by the late 1980s, Indians constituted only 1 percent of the Colombian population (see Contemporary Trends, ch. 2). Black African slaves and *zambos,* persons of mixed African and Indian descent, were at the bottom of the social scale and were important only as a source of labor.

## Colonial Administration

The administrative structure paralleled the social pyramid in that *peninsulares* appointed by the crown generally controlled the higher jurisdictional levels, and criollos could compete only for the lower posts. Two councils in Spain presided over the colonies. The House of Trade (Casa de Contratación) controlled all overseas trade. The Supreme Council of the Indies (Consejo Supremo de las Indias) centralized the administration of the colonies and had legislative, executive, and judicial functions. As the king delegated increasingly more authority to this council, it effectively became the ruler of the colonies.

The viceroyalty, headed by a viceroy, was the highest authority in the colonies. The next level of jurisdiction was the *audiencia,* a regional court consisting of various judges and a president. The Real Audiencia de Santa Fe, which presided over present-day Colombia, was instituted in 1550. The *audiencia* had jurisdiction over the governorships, which in turn controlled the cities. Governors, appointed by the crown, had administrative and judicial functions and, in areas considered dangerous, military duties. Cities, the lowest jurisdictional level, were run by city councils, or *cabildos. Cabildos* initially were elected by popular vote, but later seats were sold by the crown, and positions on the council thus lost their democratic character. Despite their low position on the administrative pyramid, *cabildos* had the greatest impact on the day-to-day lives of citizens in the local municipalities.

The *cabildos* became the first effective agency of civil government, regularizing the processes of government and tempering the authority of the governor, even though their membership was composed of his subordinates. They included a varying number of magistrates or aldermen, depending on the size of the community, and two mayors. The mayors on the *cabildo* were elected annually and initially acted as judges in courts of first instance with criminal and

civil jurisdiction. Appeals from their decisions could be taken to the local governor or to a person functioning as his deputy and finally to the royal court of jurisdiction. During times of crisis, the town citizens of importance might be invited to sit with the *cabildo* in what was called the open council. By increasing criollo participation in government, the open council contributed to the movement leading to the war for independence.

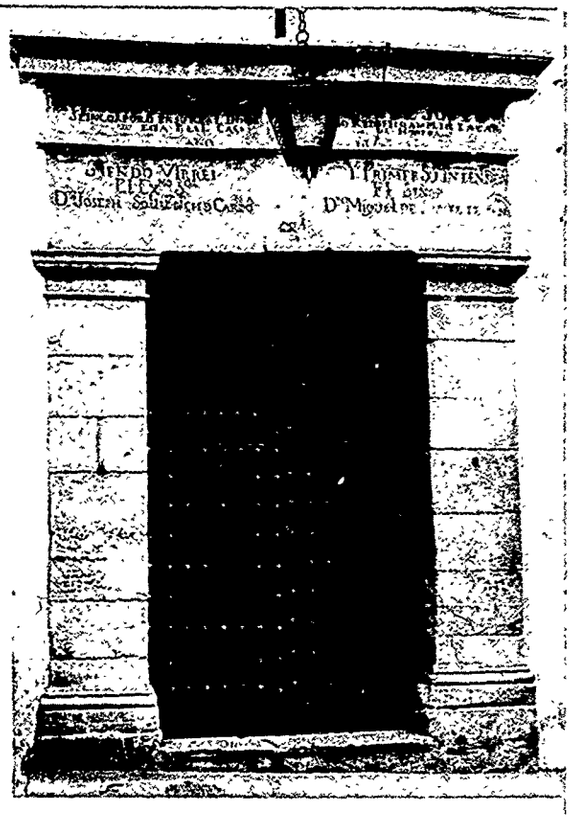
The royal courts in the colonies, unlike their counterparts in Spain, performed administrative and political as well as judicial functions. The courts were empowered to limit the arbitrary use of power by the viceroy or any subordinate official in the New World. Major courts existed in the higher jurisdictions, such as the viceroyalty; subordinate courts existed at lesser administrative levels. Under the Supreme Council of the Indies, the viceroys, as the direct representatives of the sovereign, exercised royal authority in all civil and military affairs, in the secular aspects of church affairs, and in the supervision of the administration of justice. Subject to the overall supervision of peninsular authorities, the executive officers also exercised a degree of legislative power.

Two additional governmental practices designed to oversee the colonial authorities were the *residencia* (public judicial inquiry) and the *visita* (secret investigation). The *residencia* was performed at the end of an official's term of office by a judge who went to the chief seat of the jurisdiction of the official in question to hear anyone who wished to make charges or to offer testimony concerning the official's performance in office. The *visita* could take place at any time without warning during an official's tenure and was performed by an inspector who might, in the performance of his task, sit with a court in public hearings.

## The Colonial Economy

The Spanish system encompassing the *audiencia* was extractive and exploitative, relying heavily on cheap native labor. Domestic industry was constrained during the colonial period because the *audiencia* was bound to Spain as part of a mercantile system. Under this arrangement, the colony functioned as the source of primary materials and the consumer of manufactured goods, a trade pattern that tended to enrich the metropolitan power at the expense of the colony.

Because Spaniards came to the New World in search of quick riches in the form of precious metals and jewels, mining for these items became the pillar of the economy for much of the colonial period. Indeed, the extraction of precious metals—such as gold and



*Colonial entryway, Bogotá*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

copper—in the American colonies formed the basis of the crown's economy.

Spain monopolized trade with the colonies. The crown limited authorization for intercontinental trade to Veracruz (in present-day Mexico), Nombre de Dios (in present-day Panama), and Cartagena. Direct trade with other colonies was prohibited; as a result, items from one colony had to be sent to Spain for reshipment to another colony. The crown also established the routes of transport and the number of ships allowed to trade in the colonies. Merchants involved in intercontinental trade had to be Spanish nationals. Finally, the crown circumscribed the type of merchandise that could be traded. The colony could export to Spain only precious metals, gold in particular, and some agricultural products. In return, Spain exported to the colonies most of the agricultural and manufactured goods that the colonies needed for survival. Domestic products supplemented these items only to a minor degree.

Agriculture, which was limited in the 1500s to providing subsistence for colonial settlements and immediate consumption for workers in the mines, became a dynamic enterprise in the 1600s and replaced mining as the core of the Colombian economy by the 1700s. By the end of the 1700s, sugar and tobacco had become important export commodities. The growth in agriculture resulted in part from the increasing exhaustion of mineral and metal resources in the seventeenth century, which caused the crown to

reorient its economic policy to stimulate the agricultural sector.

As commercial agriculture became the foundation of the Colombian economy, two dominant forms of agricultural landholdings emerged—the *encomienda* and the hacienda. These landholdings were distinguishable by the manner in which the landholders obtained labor. The *encomienda* was a grant of the right to receive the tribute of Indians within a certain boundary. In contrast, the hacienda functioned through a contract arrangement involving the owner—the hacendado—and Indian laborers. Under a typical arrangement, Indians tilled the land a specified number of days per week or per year in exchange for small plots of land.

The *encomendero,* or recipient of the *encomienda,* extended privileges to de facto control of the land designated in his grant. In effect, the *encomendero* was a deputy charged by the crown with responsibility for the support of the Indians and their moral and religious welfare. Assuming that the land and its inhabitants were entirely at its disposal, the monarchy envisioned the *encomiendas* as a means of administering humane and constructive policies of the government of Spain and protecting the welfare of the Indians. The *encomenderos,* however, sought to employ the Indians for their own purposes and to maintain their land as hereditary property to be held in perpetuity. Most *encomenderos* were private adventurers rather than agents of the empire. The remoteness of the *encomiendas* from the center of government made it possible for the *encomenderos* to do as they pleased.

Under the influence of church figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas, the crown promulgated the New Laws in 1542 for the administration of the Spanish Empire in America. Designed to remove the abuses connected with *encomiendas* and to improve the general treatment of Indians, the laws called for strict enforcement of the existing regulations and freedom for the enslaved Indians, who were placed in the category of free subjects of the crown. They further provided that *encomiendas* would be forfeited if the Indians concerned were mistreated; that the tribute paid by Indians being instructed in religion should be fixed and in no case required in the form of personal service; and that public officials, congregations, hospitals, and monasteries could not hold *encomiendas.* Additional provisions—especially resented by the *encomenderos*—prohibited the employment of Indians in the mines, prevented *encomenderos* from requiring Indians to carry heavy loads, forbade the granting of any future *encomiendas,* ordered a reduction in size of existing *encomiendas,* and terminated the rights of wives and children to inherit *encomiendas.*

*Encomenderos* opposed the royal government's attempts to enforce these regulations. A formula was adopted according to which the laws would be "obeyed but not executed." The *encomenderos* also had the opportunity to send representatives to Spain to seek modifications of the laws—modifications that the crown eventually granted. The tensions between the royal authority and the colonists in the new empire were never entirely removed.

The institution of the hacienda with its associated *mita* (ancient tribute) system of labor began in the late sixteenth century. After 1590 the crown started to grant titles of landownership to colonists who paid the crown for the land and reserved the right to use Indian labor on their haciendas. Under an agrarian reform in 1592, the crown established *resguardos,* or reservations, for the Indians to provide for their subsistence; the resulting concentration of Indians freed up land to be sold to hacendados. The purchase of land as private real estate from the crown led to the development of *latifundios.*

The new hacendados soon came into conflict with the *encomenderos* because of the ability of the latter to monopolize Indian labor. The Spanish authorities instituted the *mita* to resolve this conflict. After 1595 the crown obliged *resguardo* Indians to contract themselves to neighboring hacendados for a maximum of fifteen days per year. The *mitayos* (Indians contracted to work) also were contracted for labor as miners in Antioquia, as navigational aides on the Río Magdalena, and as industrial workers in a few rare cases. Although the *mitayos* were considered free because they were paid a nominal salary, the landowners and other employers overworked them to such an extent that many became seriously ill or died.

Because the *mitayos* could not survive their working conditions, the crown sought an alternate source of cheap labor through the African slave trade. The crown sold licenses to individuals allowing them to import slaves, primarily through the port at Cartagena. Although the crown initially restricted licenses to Spanish merchants, it eventually opened up the slave trade to foreigners as demand outstripped supply. The mining industry was the first to rely on black slaves, who by the seventeenth century had replaced *mitayos* in the mines. The mining industry continued to depend on slave labor into the eighteenth century. Despite the decline of the mining industry, slavery remained the key form of labor; from the second half of the seventeenth century through the eighteenth century, plantation-style agriculture rose in prominence and raised the demand for slave labor on sugar plantations and ranches. Minor segments of the economy also supported slavery and used slaves as artisans, domestic servants, and navigational aides.

Slaves had no legal rights in the colonial system. The crown enacted laws to separate the slaves from the Indians so that the two groups would not join against the Spanish and criollo ruling classes. Slaves, however, often revolted against their subhuman living conditions, and many escaped to form *palenques* (towns) high in the mountains where they could maintain their African customs. These *palenques* separated themselves from colonial society and thus were among the first towns in Spanish America to be free of Spanish authority. The *palenque* movement was strongest in the eighteenth century. At this time, there was a crisis in the institution of slavery as it existed in the Spanish colonies. By the end of the 1700s, the high price of slaves along with increasing antislavery sentiment in the colony caused many to view the system as anachronistic; nonetheless, it was not abolished until after independence was achieved.

## The Colonial Church

The Roman Catholic Church served as both agent and opponent of the colonial government. The church desired a system, supported by the state, within which it might proselytize; at the same time, it opposed many of the secular aims of government that appeared to be in conflict with Christian morality. The church acted to restrain secular excesses and despotism, particularly those of the early conquistadors.

From the outset, the clergy became a vital element of colonial life. Missionaries and conquistadors arrived simultaneously in the New World during the late 1400s. From 1520 to 1550, the church began methodical evangelization among the Indians. The Franciscans, Dominicans, Capuchins (members of the Order of Mercy), and later the Jesuits and Augustinians were all important in the country's colonial history. The first two orders arrived in Bogotá with the first judges: the Franciscans established monasteries in Vélez and Cartagena, and the Dominicans established them in Bogotá, Pamplona, and Popayán. In 1534 the church established the dioceses of Santa Marta and Cartagena, and in 1546 it established the diocese of Popayán—the first such dioceses in the New World. The church organized further between 1550 and 1620, creating the diocese of Bogotá in 1562. The Tribunal of the Inquisition, installed in Cartagena in 1611, sought to ensure that African culture did not contaminate Spanish culture in the colonies as a result of the importation of African slaves. The Jesuits, who formally were allowed to enter the colonies in 1604, sought to improve the economic standing of the Indians with whom they worked



*Inquisitor's desk and rack, Cartagena*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*

and established self-sufficient villages for Indians in the eastern plains.

In addition to bringing the Christian religion to the Indians, the church spread the ideas and institutions of Western civilization and had responsibility for establishing and maintaining almost all of the schools of the colonial period. In 1580 a monastery founded the University of General Studies, the first in the territory. The Jesuits established two additional universities in 1622 and 1653.

In its role as the patron of education, the church made an unintended but significant contribution to developing a local spirit of independence among the colonists. Church and state attempted to control the intellectual life of the New World. Throughout the eighteenth century, the church engaged in controversy with the country's leading intellectuals, who were influenced by the political ideas of the Enlightenment in Europe and by the concepts of positivism and empirical scientific investigation. The education system also fostered opposition to Spain's sovereignty over its American empire and provided the groundwork for the intellectuals whose activities the church opposed.

Although the Roman Catholic Church influenced educational and intellectual development in the colonies, the crown ensured its own influence over the colonial church. Several papal bulls in the 1490s and in the first decade of the 1500s strengthened the ability of the Spanish kings to influence church affairs in the New World.

In addition, the Holy See granted to the Spanish state the papal rights governing the administration and the personnel of the church and of bishoprics being created in the New World. In addition to common economic interests, this closely bound the church to the state during the colonial period.

## Developments Leading to Independence

Throughout the colonial period, events in Spain affected the political, economic, and intellectual state of the colonies. One such event was the ascension of the Bourbons to the Spanish throne in 1700. Upon the death of Charles II—the last in the line of the Spanish Hapsburgs—the Austrian Hapsburgs and Charles's nephew Philip of Anjou, a Bourbon and the grandson of French king Louis XIV as well the designated heir to the Spanish throne, contended for the Spanish throne. The War of the Spanish Succession (1702–14) ended in the triumph of the Bourbons over the Austrians, and the Treaty of Utrecht recognized the Bourbon succession in Spain on the condition that Spain and France would never be united under one crown.

Beginning with Philip of Anjou, now known as King Philip V (reigned 1700–46), the Bourbon kings placed themselves in more direct control of their colonies, reducing the power of the Supreme Council of the Indies and abolishing the House of Trade. In 1717 Philip V established the Viceroyalty of New Granada (present-day Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador), and in 1739 Bogotá became its capital. Other Bourbon kings, particularly Charles III (reigned 1759–88), tried to improve the profitability of the American colonies by removing restrictions that had hindered Spain's economic development in the 1500s and 1600s. Such measures included the liberalization of commerce with the colonies and the establishment of additional authorized ports. In 1774 the crown allowed free exchange among the colonies of Peru, New Spain, New Granada, and Guatemala. These reforms allowed the crown control over the de facto trade among the colonies that previously had been illicit. When Charles III declared war on Britain in 1778, he levied taxes on the colonies to fund the war. These fiscal decrees affected imports and exports, the sale of general items—especially tobacco and alcohol—and the production of silver and gold. The crown demanded tribute from Indians and the church and expected the general population to fund the naval fleet that patrolled the Spanish American coast. Excessive and increasing taxation in the late 1700s contributed to the discontent of the criollos with the Spanish administration, which manifested itself in the Comunero Revolt of 1781, the most serious revolt against Spanish authority before

the war for independence. The rebellion was a spontaneous but diffuse movement involving many towns. The most important uprising began among artisans and peasants in Socorro (in present-day Santander Department). The imposition of new taxes by the viceroy stimulated the revolt further.

Almost without exception, the rebels expressed their loyalty to the king and the church while calling for a repeal of new taxes and a modification of government monopolies. The rebels succeeded in getting government representatives to abolish the war tax, taxes for the maintenance of the fleet, customhouse permits, and tobacco and playing-card monopolies; to reduce the tribute paid by the Indians and the taxes on liquor, commercial transactions, and salt; and to give preference to those born in the New World for appointments to certain posts. Later, however, government negotiators declared that they had acted under duress and that the viceroy would not honor the agreements. The leaders of the rebellion were subjected to severe punishments, including death for the more prominent among them. The rebels had not sought independence from Spain, but their revolt against the king's administration and administrators, despite protestations of loyalty to the king himself, was not far removed from a fight for independence. In this light, the rebellion was a prelude to the struggle for freedom.

In the late 1700s, the Enlightenment served as a second major influence in the struggle for independence. After the Comunero Revolt, the outlook of the local upper-class and middle-class criollos changed as the ideas of the Enlightenment strengthened their desire to control their own destiny. This movement criticized the traditional patterns of political, economic, and religious institutions and as such was a threat to both the central state and the religious authorities. The North American and French revolutions also contributed intellectual foundations for a new society, as well as examples of the possibilities for change.

A third major event of the late colonial period that may have led to the struggle for independence was the Napoleonic invasion of the early 1800s. In 1807 Napoleon Bonaparte made his brother Joseph the king of Spain, forcing Charles IV to abdicate and his son Ferdinand VII to renounce the throne. In exile, Ferdinand VII organized royalist supporters under the Central Council (Junta Central) of Seville, later called the Council of the Regency (Consejo de Regencia). This council constituted a provisional government for Spain and the colonies.

Both Napoleon and the royalists competed for support of Spain's colonists in the New World. Napoleon wrote a liberal constitution for Spain in which he recognized the colonies as having rights equal

to those of Spain. In competition for the colonies' loyalties, the Central Council offered them certain privileges, such as participation in Spanish courts. Colonists, however, were not satisfied with the council's measure because of the larger representation accorded the representatives from Spain. Despite conflict with the *peninsulares* holding colonial authority in the viceroyalty, additional concessions to criollos to win their support resulted in the creation of a criollo governing council in Bogotá on July 20, 1810. The new local government passed reforms favoring power-sharing by the criollos and *peninsulares* and loosened the economic restrictions previously placed on the colony. Most of the old Spanish laws remained in effect, however. The establishment of other criollo governing councils laid the basis for the first attempts at independence from Spain.

## The Founding of the Nation, 1810–1903

Even with the initial steps to unify against Spanish authority, the colonial elites argued among themselves. Both before and after the granting of independence, elites disagreed as to whether the national structure should be federalist or centralist. This crucial disagreement, exacerbated by Colombia's extreme regional differences, was the first to separate the political elites into rival groups. The differing opinions of these groups concerning the appropriate relationship between the church and state further emphasized the disagreement. The separate groups followed leaders representing their views and identified with the individuals as much as with the ideologies. By the time of the new nation's foundation, these two groups had become clearly divided and dominated the political scene, excluding others from their competition for control of the country. The force of their ideals carried the nation back and forth between political extremes—absolute liberty and repression.

### The Independence Movement

Leaders in the various localities that had formed criollo councils sought to unite the colony of New Granada. From the beginning of their attempts, however, conflict emerged over the form the new government should take. The provincial councils did not want the centralist, authoritarian type of government advocated by the Bogotá council, preferring a federal type of government more in keeping with the liberal principles of the Enlightenment and the example of the North American revolution. This represented the first ideological split between groups of leading criollos. Federalists rallied behind Camilo Torres; Centralists rallied behind Antonio Nariño. To avoid a civil war between the two factions, the provincial

councils sent representatives to Bogotá in 1811 to draft a constitution for the territory. In November 1811, a congress was installed, and the provinces formed the United Provinces of New Granada. The federal union consisted of autonomous provinces joined only in common interest; the national army was subordinate to Bogotá.

Starting in 1812, individual provinces began declaring absolute independence from Spain. That year, Simón Bolívar Palacios, considered the liberator of South America, tried for the first time to gain independence for New Granada. The absence of united support from the various provinces, however, frustrated him. Bolívar left New Granada in 1815 and went to Jamaica. The continuing tension between federalist and centralist forces led to a conflict that left New Granada weak and vulnerable to Spain's attempts to reconquer the provinces.

At the time of Bolívar's departure, the independence cause in New Granada was desperate. Ferdinand VII had been restored to the Spanish throne, and Napoleon's forces had withdrawn from Spain. A pacification expedition led by Pablo Morillo on behalf of the king proceeded from present-day Venezuela to Bogotá, and those who laid down their arms and reaffirmed their loyalty to the Spanish crown were pardoned. Morillo also granted freedom to slaves who helped in the reconquest of the colonies. Because of dissension between the upper class and the masses and inept military leadership, Cartagena fell to the royalists by the end of 1815.

In early 1816, Morillo moved to reconquer New Granada and changed his tactics from pardons to terror; Bogotá fell within a few months. Morillo repressed antiroyalists (including executing leaders such as Torres) and installed the Tribunal of Purification, responsible for exiles and prisoners, and the Board of Confiscations. The Ecclesiastical Tribunal, in charge of government relations with the church, imposed military law on priests who were implicated in the subversion. The Spanish reconquest installed a military regime that ruled with violent repression. Rising discontent contributed to a greater radicalization of the independence movement, spreading to sectors of the society, such as the lower classes and slaves, that had not supported the previous attempt at independence. Thus the ground was laid for Bolívar's return and ultimate triumph.

At the end of 1816, Bolívar returned to New Granada, convinced that the war for independence was winnable only with the support of the masses. In the earlier attempt at independence, large segments of the population had been lured to the royalist side by promises such as repartition of land and abolition of slavery. When the masses saw that the promises were unfulfilled, however, they changed their allegiance from Spain to the independence movement.

Two significant military encounters led to the movement's success. After having won a number of victories in a drive from the present-day Venezuelan coast to present-day eastern Colombia via the Río Orinoco, Bolívar gave Francisco de Paula Santander the mission of liberating the Casanare region, where he defeated royalist forces in April 1819. After the decisive defeat of royalist forces at the Battle of Boyacá in August 1819, independence forces entered Bogotá without resistance.

The merchants and landowners who fought against Spain now held political, economic, and social control over the new country that encompassed present-day Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama. The first economic reforms that they passed consolidated their position by liberalizing trade, thereby allowing merchandise from Britain (New Granada's major trading partner after Spain) freer entry into the area. As a result, the artisan class and the emerging manufacturing sector, who previously had held only slight economic and political power, now lost stature.

## Gran Colombia

As victory over Spain became increasingly apparent, leaders from present-day Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama convened a congress in February 1819 in Angostura (present-day Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela) and agreed to unite in a republic to be known as Gran Colombia. After Bolívar was ratified as president in August 1819, he left Santander, his vice president, in charge of Gran Colombia and traveled south to liberate present-day Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. When present-day Ecuador was liberated in 1822, it also joined Gran Colombia. In 1821 the Cúcuta Congress wrote a constitution for the new republic. The Cúcuta political arrangement was highly centralized and provided for a government based on popular representation with a bicameral Congress, a president, and a Supreme Court consisting of five magistrates. The constitution also guaranteed freedom for the children of slaves; freedom of the press; the inviolability of homes, persons, and correspondence; the codification of taxes; protectionist policies toward industry and agriculture; and the abolition of the *mita* system of labor.

Nonetheless, political rivalries and regional jealousies progressively weakened the authority of the new central state. Venezuelan leaders especially were resentful of being ruled by Santander, a native of present-day Colombia, in the absence of their president and fellow Venezuelan, Bolívar. In 1826 General José Antonio Páez led a Venezuelan revolt against Gran Colombia. Outbreaks and disturbances also occurred elsewhere.

On his return from Peru in 1827, Bolívar was barely able to maintain his personal authority. In April 1828, a general convention was convened in Ocaña to reform the constitution of Cúcuta, but the convention broke up as a result of conflicting positions taken by the followers of Santander and Bolívar. Those backing Santander believed in a liberal, federalist form of government. Bolívar's followers supported a more authoritarian and centralized government, and many, especially those in Bogotá, called on Bolívar to assume national authority until he deemed it wise to convoke a new legislative body to replace Congress.

In August 1828, Bolívar assumed dictatorial powers and attempted to install a constitution that he had developed for Bolivia and Peru. Unpopular with a large portion of the New Grenadine populace, this constitution called for increased central authority and a president-for-life who could also name his own successor. During a constitutional convention held in January 1830, Bolívar resigned as president, naming José Domingo Caicedo as his successor. That same year, the divisive forces at work within the republic achieved a major triumph as the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian portions of the republic seceded.

## New Granada

New Granada lay in a depressed state after the dissolution of Gran Colombia. None of the country's three principal economic bases—agriculture, ranching, and mining—was healthy. The import trade was limited to a small group, the banking industry was inadequate, and craftsmen and small manufacturers could supply only enough for local consumption. Despite the desire and need for change, New Granada retained slavery, the sales tax, and a state monopoly on the production and trade of tobacco and alcohol. The problems facing the country, the discontent of liberal groups who saw the constitution as being monarchical, and the military's desire for power culminated in the fall of the constitutional order and the installation in 1830 of the eight-month dictatorship of General Rafael Urdaneta. After Bolívar's death in December 1830, however, civilian and military leaders called for the restoration of legitimate authority. Urdaneta was forced to cede power to Caicedo as the legitimate president.

In October 1831, Caicedo convened a commission to write a new constitution for New Granada. Finished in 1832, the new constitution restricted the power of the presidency and expanded the autonomy of the regional administrative subdivisions known as departments (*departamentos*). Santander assumed the presidency in 1832 and was succeeded in 1837 by his vice president, José Ignacio

de Márquez. Personalism and regionalism remained key elements in national politics in a country with small cities, a weak state, and a semifeudal population that was bound to the large landowners in patron-client relationships.

During the Márquez administration, the political divisions in the country reached a breaking point. In 1840 the political ambitions of some department governors, the constitutional weakness of the president, and the suppression of some Roman Catholic monasteries in Pasto combined to ignite a civil war that ended with the victory of the government forces led by General Pedro Alcántara Herrán. This triumph brought Herrán to the presidency with the next election in 1841. In 1843 his administration instituted a new constitution, which stipulated a greater centralization of power.

In 1845 Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera succeeded Herrán. Personalism as an important element in politics abated during his administration. The Mosquera government also saw the economic and political ascendancy of merchants, artisans, and small property owners. Mosquera liberalized trade and set New Granada on the path of exporting primary goods.

The election of General José Hilario López as president in 1849 marked a turning point for Colombia both economically and politically. Capitalism began to replace the old colonial structure, and the ideological differences between the established political parties overshadowed the previous emphasis on personalism. In 1850 the López administration instituted a so-called agrarian reform program and abolished slavery. In order to allow landowners access to more land, the agrarian reform program lifted the restrictions on the sale of *resguardo* lands; as a result, Indians became displaced from the countryside and moved to the cities, where they provided excess labor. In 1851 the government ended the state monopoly on tobacco cultivation and trade and declared an official separation of church and state. In addition, López took the education system from the hands of the church and subjected parish priests to popular elections.

## Consolidation of Political Divisions

The ideological split dividing the political elite began in 1810 and became solidified by 1850 after the official establishment of the Liberal Party (Partido Liberal—PL) and the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador—PC), the two parties that continued to dominate Colombian politics in the 1980s. The Liberals were anticolonial and wanted to transform New Granada into a modern nation. Those joining the PL primarily came from the more recently created and ascending classes and included merchants advocating

free trade, manufacturers and artisans anxious to increase demand for their products, some small landowners and agriculturists endorsing a liberalization of state monopolies on crops such as tobacco, and slaves seeking their freedom. The Liberals also sought lessened executive power; separation of church and state; freedom of press, education, religion, and business; and elimination of the death penalty.

The Conservatives wanted to preserve the Spanish colonial legacy of Roman Catholicism and authoritarianism. They favored prolonging colonial structures and institutions, upholding the alliance between church and state, continuing slavery, and defending the authoritarian form of government that would eliminate what they saw as excesses of freedom. The PC grouped together slave owners, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and large landholders. Campesinos were divided between the two parties, their loyalties following those of their employers or patrons—often the PC.

In contrast to the unity demonstrated by the PC, the PL developed factions from the start. Although they had most interests in common, the merchants differed from the artisans and manufacturers on the question of trade. Merchants favored free trade of imports and were called *golgotas,* whereas artisans and manufacturers demanded protectionism to support domestic industry and were known as *draconianos.*

### *The Federalists*

Although divided, the PL soon achieved electoral victories. In the election of 1853, General José María Obando, who had led the revolutionary forces in the 1840 civil war and who was supported by the *draconianos* and the army, was elected and inaugurated as president. Congress remained in the hands of the *golgotas.* In May of the same year, Congress adopted the constitution of 1853, which had been written under López. A liberal document, it had significant provisions defining the separation of church and state and freedom of worship and establishing male suffrage. The new constitution also mandated the direct election of the president, members of Congress, magistrates, and governors, and it granted extensive autonomy to the departments.

Despite the victory that the constitution represented for the Liberals, tensions grew between *golgota* and *draconiano* forces. When the *draconianos* found Obando to be compromising with the *golgotas,* General José María Melo led a coup d'état in April 1854, declared himself dictator, and dissolved Congress. Melo's rule, the only military dictatorship in the nineteenth century, lasted only eight months because he proved unable to consolidate the interests of

the *draconianos;* he was deposed by an alliance of *golgotas* and Conservatives.

In 1857 PC candidate Mariano Ospina Rodríguez was elected president. The next year, his administration adopted a new constitution, which renamed the country the Grenadine Confederation, replaced the vice president with three designates elected by Congress, and set the presidential term at four years. With the *draconiano* faction disappearing as a political force, the *golgotas* took over the PL in opposition to the Conservative Ospina. General Mosquera, the former president and the governor of the department of Cauca, emerged as the most important Liberal figure. A strong advocate of federalism, Mosquera threatened the secession of Cauca in the face of the centralization undertaken by the Conservatives. Mosquera, the *golgotas,* and their supporters declared a civil war in 1860, resulting in an almost complete obstruction of government.

Because civil disorder prevented elections from being held as scheduled in 1861, Bartolomé Calvo, a Conservative in line for the presidency, assumed the office. In July 1861, Mosquera captured Bogotá, deposed Calvo, and took the title of provisional president of the United States of New Granada and supreme commander of war. A congress of plenipotentiaries chosen by the civil and military leaders of each department met in the capital in September 1861 in response to a call by the provisional government. Meanwhile, the war continued until Mosquera defeated the Conservatives and finally subdued the opposition in Antioquia in October 1862.

Shortly after taking power, Mosquera put the church under secular control and expropriated church lands. The property was not redistributed to the landless, however, but was sold to merchants and landholders in an effort to improve the national fiscal situation, which had been ruined by the war. As a result, the amount of land held under *latifundios* increased.

In February 1863, a Liberal-only government convention met in Rionegro and enacted the constitution of 1863, which was to last until 1886. The Rionegro constitution renamed the nation the United States of Colombia. All powers not given to the central government were reserved for the states, including the right to engage in the commerce of arms and ammunition. The constitution contained fully defined individual liberties and guarantees as nearly absolute as possible, leaving the federal authority with little room to regulate society. The constitution also guaranteed Colombians the right to profess any religion.

The Rionegro constitution brought little peace to the country. After its enactment and before the next constitutional change, Liberals and Conservatives engaged in some forty local conflicts and several major military struggles. Contention persisted, moreover, between the moderate Liberals in the executive branch and the radical Liberals in the legislature; the latter went so far as to enact a measure prohibiting the central authority from suppressing a revolt against the government of any state or in any way interfering in state affairs. In 1867 the radical Liberals also executed a coup against Mosquera, leading to his imprisonment, trial before the Senate, and exile from the country.

With the fall of Mosquera and the entrenchment of radical Liberals in power, Conservatives found it increasingly difficult to accept the Rionegro constitution. Eventually Conservatives in Tolima and Antioquia took up arms, initiating another civil conflict in 1876. The Liberal national government put down the rebellion, but only with difficulty.

*Golgotas* controlled the presidency until 1884 and defended the Rionegro constitution's provisions for federalism, absolute liberties, separation of church and state, and the nonintervention of the state in the economy. Their economic policies emphasized the construction of lines of communication, especially railroads and improved roads. These projects did not unify the country and increase internal trade but instead linked the interior with export centers, connecting important cities with river and maritime ports. By allowing easier access to imports, the projects thus favored the merchant class over the national industrialists.

Under the *golgota* policy of completely free trade, exports became a major element of the country's economy. Three main agricultural exports—tobacco, quinine, and coffee—developed, especially after 1850 when international markets were more favorable and accessible. Nonetheless, all three crops suffered from cyclical periods of high and low demand. By the 1880s, it was clear that tobacco and quinine would not be reliable exports in the long term because of stiff international competition. Coffee also faced competition but nevertheless succeeded in dominating the economy after the 1870s. The coffee merchants used their profits as middlemen to invest in domestic industries, producing goods such as textiles for domestic consumption, particularly in the Medellín area. The emergence of coffee as an important export crop and the investment of profits from the coffee trade into domestic industry were significant steps in the economic development of the country.

### The Nationalists

It became obvious to many Liberals and Conservatives that the lack of governmental authority stipulated in the Rionegro constitution was allowing the country to run a chaotic course and that the situation needed to be corrected. The Regeneration movement sought a basic shift in Colombia's direction. A key leader of the movement was Rafael Núñez, who was elected president in 1879 and held the office until 1882. Liberals and Conservatives who were disenchanted with the *golgota* governments joined to form the National Party, a coalition that in February 1884 brought Núñez to the presidency for a second term. The Nationalists authorized Núñez to take steps urgently required to improve economic conditions. As leader of the Regeneration movement, he attempted to reform the constitution with the agreement of all groups. The *golgotas,* however, were afraid that constitutional change would favor the Conservatives and dissident Liberals at their expense. In 1884 the *golgotas* in Santander started an armed rebellion, which spread throughout the country. Nationalist forces suppressed the revolution by August 1885, at which time Núñez also declared that the Rionegro constitution had expired.

The most important result of the conflict was the adoption of the Constitution of 1886 by a national council made up of two delegates from each state. The Nationalist leaders believed that ultraliberalism as practiced under the Rionegro constitution was not appropriate to the needs of the country and that a balance was needed between individual liberties and national order. Based on this philosophy, the Constitution of 1886 reversed the federalist trend and brought the country under strong centralist control. The Constitution renamed the country the Republic of Colombia and, with amendments, remained in effect in the late 1980s. The Constitution provides for a national rather than confederate system of government in which the president has more power than the governors, who head departments or two types of national territories known as intendencies (*intendencias*) and commissaryships (*comisarias*) (see The Governmental System, ch. 4).

In 1887 Núñez consolidated the position of the church in the country by signing the Concordat of 1887 with the Holy See. Through the concordat, the church regained its autonomy and its previous preferential relationship with the republic. The agreement stipulated the obligatory teaching of Roman Catholicism as part of a child's education and recognized Roman Catholic marriages as the only valid marriages in the country. It also acknowledged Colombia's debt to the Holy See brought on by the

uncompensated confiscation of church assets under Mosquera in the 1860s.

Political disorder did not cease with the adoption of the Constitution of 1886. The Nationalists, who had become an extremist branch of the PC after Núñez was elected, were opposed by the Historical Conservatives, the moderate faction of the PC that did not agree with the extent of antiliberalism taken by the new government. The bipartisan opposition of Liberals and Historical Conservatives sought to reform Nationalist economic and political policies through peaceful means. The Nationalists, however, denied the civil rights and political representation of the Liberals because differences of opinion concerning trade policy and the role of the state in society created a gulf between the Nationalists and their opponents. The PL split into Peace and War factions, the former seeking peaceful reform of economic policies and the latter advocating revolution as the only way to win political rights. The Peace faction controlled the party in the capital, whereas the War faction dominated the party in the departments—a response to the violent political exclusion that was characteristic of rural areas and small towns. The War faction staged unsuccessful revolts in 1893 and 1895.

In 1898 Nationalist candidate Manuel Antonio Sanclemente was elected president. In ill health, Sanclemente left much of the governing to his vice president, José Manuel Marroquín. The Sanclemente/Marroquín presidency faced increasing problems as the world price of coffee fell, which, because of reduced customs revenues, left the government bankrupt. The fiscal policy of issuing nonredeemable paper money, which had replaced the gold standard under Núñez, added to the increasing lack of confidence in the government.

In July 1899, in Santander, Liberals again attempted a revolution, known as the War of a Thousand Days. Historical Conservatives eventually cast their allegiance with the Nationalists, whereas the Peace and War factions of the PL remained split, thereby weakening the rebellion. Despite an initial victory in December 1899, the Liberal forces were outnumbered at Palonegro five months later. The defeat left the Liberal army decimated and demoralized and with little chance to succeed. The Liberal army changed its strategy from conventional tactics to guerrilla warfare, thus transforming the war into a desperate struggle that lasted for two more years.

In July 1900, Historical Conservatives, seeking a political solution to the war, supported Marroquín in a coup against Sanclemente. Contrary to what his supporters had expected, Marroquín

adopted a hard line against the rebels and refused to negotiate a settlement. In November 1902, the defeated Liberal army negotiated a peace agreement with the government. The war took more than 100,000 lives and left the country devastated.

The War of a Thousand Days left the country too weak to prevent Panama's secession from the republic in 1903. The events leading up to Panama's secession were as much international as domestic. At the turn of the century, the United States recognized the strategic need to have access to a naval route connecting the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, such as a canal in the isthmus. The Hay-Herrán Treaty of January 1903, which was to have been the basis for allowing the United States canal project to proceed, was rejected by the Colombian Congress. Because the proposed Panamanian route was preferred over the Nicaraguan alternative, the United States encouraged the Panamanian separatist movement, militarily assisted Panama in its movement for independence, and immediately recognized the independent Republic of Panama (see Relations with the United States, ch. 4).

## The Period of Reconciliation, 1903–30

### The Reyes Presidency

The devastation that resulted from the War of a Thousand Days discredited the factions of each party that had instigated the conflict. The moderates who assumed power in each party had similar economic interests; they recognized the need for the two parties to reconcile their differences and rule together in peaceful coexistence to ensure the survival of the country and the economy. For the first time in Colombian history, the Liberals and the Conservatives sought to share power rather than exclude the opposition party from it. Although Conservatives were nominally in control during this period, they formed coalition governments incorporating minority Liberals into the cabinet and other important political bodies. Rejecting the practice of excluding the Liberals from political participation, as had been done by the Nationalists, the moderate Conservatives removed the key element that had prompted so much political violence in the past and laid the foundation for economic progress in the country.

At the end of the civil war, the country needed a leader who was strong enough to rebuild the nation after the loss of Panama and the ravages of civil strife. General Rafael Reyes, elected president in 1904 with the support of moderate Conservatives, showed a determination to unify the republic, renew the nation's economy, and prevent any obstacle—constitutional or otherwise—from



*Villa de Leyva, Boyacá Department*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

standing in his way. Reyes's policies were a contradictory combination of political reconciliation and authoritarianism, which forced minority Liberal representation in government on the elected Conservative majority in Congress. His economic programs included a protectionist trade policy, which represented a major intervention of the state into economic activity. This trade policy encouraged domestic industrial growth, which in turn led to the growth of cities and the need to develop an urban infrastructure.

To ensure the passage of his economic reforms, Reyes greatly strengthened the executive and thereby centralized power. He abolished Congress and replaced it with a National Assembly composed of three representatives from each department, selected by department officials appointed by Reyes. This action ensured the adequate representation of the Liberal support he needed in the legislative branch. This extraconstitutional body was designed to approve his decrees and to pass constitutional amendments. The National Assembly allowed Reyes to implement policies that sometimes were at odds with orthodox economic theory and therefore would not have been tolerated by a Conservative Congress. Through these measures, Reyes established a sound fiscal administration, stabilized the monetary system, initiated a return to the gold standard, restored Colombian credit abroad, attracted foreign capital, improved transportation, encouraged export agriculture,

and aided domestic industry. At the same time, however, he aroused a great deal of political opposition.

Reyes realized that the soundest path to economic development—based on trade and foreign investment—required normalized relations with the United States, an unpopular idea at that time. In 1909 Reyes unsuccessfully tried to force legislative approval of the Thompson-Urrutia Treaty with the United States, which was to reestablish relations with that country and recognize the independence of Panama. The issue of the treaty's ratification, however, provided a focal point for opposition against Reyes, even though the treaty was ratified under a subsequent administration. In June 1909, the Republican Union, a bipartisan group of Liberals and Historical Conservatives who opposed Reyes, won a majority in the congressional elections held to reestablish the Colombian Congress. In acknowledgment of the political current against him, Reyes secretly resigned later that month and left the country.

Carlos E. Restrepo, a Conservative who had been instrumental in founding the Republican Union, assumed the presidency after Reyes. The Republican Union represented a transformation in Colombian politics. The Liberal merchants and Conservative agriculturists found a common interest in coffee exports, which were quickly beginning to dominate the Colombian economy. Their mutual economic interest allowed the moderate factions of each party to join in a bipartisan coalition that gained political control at the end of the civil war. Although Conservatives retained nominal control of political institutions until 1930, they accepted and applied the principle of Liberal representation and participation in government. Conservative presidents appointed Liberals to their bipartisan cabinets and thus included them in political decision making. Although party conflict and rural unrest remained, the coalitions that the two parties formed provided a basis for political stability.

## Economic and Social Change

As a result of domestic policies and the international situation, the Colombian economy diversified and developed at the turn of the century. In the early 1900s, the industrial sector became an increasingly important part of the economy. Between 1900 and 1910, textile industries developed in Bello and Medellín, pottery plants in Caldas, and breweries in Itagüí and Bogotá. New economic groups emerged with the development of import-substitution industrialization (see Glossary) and of a larger financial sector.

During the 1910s and 1920s, the Colombian economy became more integrated into the global financial and commercial markets. Renewed relations with the United States during the administration of Marco Fidel Suárez (1918–21) opened the door for foreign exchange and investment. The United States replaced Britain as Colombia's key financial and commercial partner. Most of the foreign exchange came from the coffee trade, which at this time represented nearly 80 percent of exports. Foreign exchange also came in the form of loans and an indemnity paid by the United States for Colombia's loss of Panama. Money coming into the country was invested in industry, consumption goods, and public works and enterprises. Public works, such as building communication networks, accelerated under the Conservative Pedro Nel Ospina administration (1922–26). Investment in industry came primarily from the private sector, including foreign interests. By 1929 private foreign investment totaled US$400 million, with some US$45 million having been invested by oil companies. The Nel Ospina administration also oversaw the reorganization of the banking and financial sectors, creating the Bank of the Republic (Banco de la República).

The growth in industry and construction, supported by both public and private funds, led to the emergence of a genuine working class that soon learned to unionize. In 1918 Colombia experienced its first major strikes. The union movement also came to be influenced by European syndicalism and socialism; in 1919 the first workers' conference, which was fostered by socialist ideas, was held. These activities were a backdrop to the launching of the Colombian Socialist Party. During the 1920s, the union movement expanded and stimulated the growth of socialist-oriented groups. In 1928 a strike against the United Fruit Company was put down violently by armed forces. In the following year, Congressman Jorge Eliécer Gaitán criticized the rough handling of the strike and became a prominent speaker for the working class (see The Labor Movement, ch. 3).

Growing popular discontent with the Conservative governments and divisions within Conservative ranks eventually resulted in the rise of the PL to power. The growth in the industrial and construction sectors that fueled the union movement also drained the countryside of agricultural workers, encouraging rural workers to petition for higher wages. In 1928 the government began importing food and as a result drew protests from agriculturists. Workers and artisans protested the rise in inflation that resulted from the influx of foreign loans and protectionist trade policies. Social tensions increased throughout the Conservative administration of Miguel Abadía

Méndez (1926–30) and ultimately led to the fall of the PC after its forty-five years in power. The Liberals gained the upper hand in the political arena and retained it during the fifteen years (1930–45) of global crisis.

## The Reformist Period, 1930–45

The economic modernization of the early 1900s unleashed social forces that resulted in the emergence of new urban classes. As the traditional elites failed to address the demands made by the new groups, tension was generated. The growing urban electorate tended to favor those politicians who advocated social reforms. The Liberals were better able than the Conservatives to benefit from this development, especially during the first administration of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934–38). The populist movement of the 1940s, represented by the progressive faction of the PL, attracted the most support, however, and represented a threat to the more conservative traditional elites. For the first time, nonelites had a voice with which to express their interests.

Although a split in the PC over candidates for the 1930 presidential election aided in the ascension of the PL to power, both parties were divided into factions. The PC consisted of moderates (led by Mariano Ospina Pérez and known as *ospinistas*) who wanted to maintain the status quo and reactionary conservatives (led by Laureano Gómez Castro and known as *laureanistas*) who favored a restructuring of the state along corporatist (see Glossary) lines. The PL also had its moderates who supported the status quo. The second faction of the PL consisted of reformists, who favored controlled social change. These factions represented different socioeconomic groups. In general, reformists included the new financial and capitalist groups. Reactionaries primarily were traditional *latifundistas* (owners of *latifundios*). Moderates of both parties tended to have interests that incorporated several economic activities and included groups such as export-oriented *latifundistas*.

As a result of the Liberal victory, many of the privileges that had been afforded to Conservatives through patronage politics were now denied. Because the president appointed the governors, who in turn appointed the municipal mayors, the transfer of power from the PC to the PL at the presidential level was felt at the municipal level. Because of the change in the political affiliation of the police force, the stricter application of the law was transferred to members of the opposition party. Clashes resulted between partisan groups among the lower classes, who sought either to gain or to maintain their privileges. One such clash involved the peasants,

who, amidst the confusion, tried to attain greater control over small plots of land at the expense of members of the opposing party.

The first Liberal president of the twentieth century, Enrique Olaya Herrera (1930–34), was elected at a time when the price of coffee had dropped to about one-third of the 1928 price, loans from United States banks had stopped, and the country was gripped by an economic depression. Olaya endeavored to hold together the moderate Liberals and the moderate Conservatives, some of whom had worked for his election. Although Conservative control of the legislature and concern over the economy constrained Olaya's ability to enact a comprehensive Liberal agenda, he succeeded in carrying out some reforms, notably in education. Nonetheless, some Liberals, disappointed by their party's failure to carry out a "revolution," in 1932 organized a movement called the Revolutionary Leftist National Union (Unión Nacional Izquierdista Revolucionaria—UNIR). The movement came to an end after Gaitán, its leader, returned to the PL in 1935 when the party adopted many of his proposed reforms and offered him a congressional seat.

International disputes also confronted the Olaya administration, one of the most prominent being a boundary conflict with Peru. In 1932 Peruvians occupied Leticia, a Colombian outpost on the Amazon, and hand-to-hand combat ensued between small Colombian and Peruvian forces. The dispute was settled by direct negotiation in 1934, when Peru recognized Colombian sovereignty over the port (see The Development of the Modern Armed Forces, ch. 5).

The most important president in the reformist period was Olaya's successor, López Pumarejo. Believing that the reformist faction of the PL had become strong enough to carry out its program, the López Pumarejo administration implemented extensive reforms, principally in agriculture, education, and the tax system. Known as the "Revolution on the March," these reforms included constitutional amendments that guaranteed the state's role in developing the economy of the country and diversifying its exports, authorized the national government to expropriate property for the common good, provided special state protection for labor and the right for labor unions to strike, and stipulated that public assistance was a function of the state. Additional reforms included the strict enforcement of progressive income and inheritance taxes, the guarantee of rights granted to squatters on public and private lands, the reinforcement of credit institutions, and the renewed separation of church and state.

The reforms put in place by the López Pumarejo administration, combined with import-substitution policies, helped to

accelerate the capitalist development of Colombia. During the López Pumarejo administration, coffee prices and the volume of exports increased. Protectionist measures helped to increase domestic production and enlarge the domestic market. A surge in industrialization began in the 1930s, aided by various external and internal factors. The key external factor was the world economic crisis of the 1930s, which limited the availability of goods to be imported and limited markets for exports. Internal factors included domestic capital accumulation via the tobacco, gold, and coffee trade; the increased buying power of large groups, especially coffee growers; the construction of transportation and communication facilities that unified the internal market; and a continuation of protectionist policies begun by President Reyes in 1904. The increasing emphasis on growing and exporting coffee fostered industrial development and allowed a more equitable distribution of income because more skilled laborers were employed and received higher wages. As a result, the demand for domestically produced consumer goods increased further.

Reforms instituted under López Pumarejo reflected a variety of influences: the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which had set forth provisions relating to social welfare, labor, and government responsibility in education and economics; ideas of change favored by the Peruvian *apristas*—members of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana—APRA); and the New Deal policies of United States president Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933–45). Some Colombian intellectuals had become interested in socialist thought, and the establishment of a liberal republic in Spain during the early 1930s inspired Colombian Liberals.

The Liberals, recognizing the social changes that were under way, identified themselves with the growing demands of the masses. In contrast, the Conservatives favored a minimum of concessions, the greatest possible influence of the church, and continued control of the country by a small upper class; they saw López Pumarejo's policies as communistic. Meanwhile, disagreement over the extent to which Liberal ideology should be applied led to a split between the pro-reform supporters of López Pumarejo and the pro-status quo followers of fellow Liberal Eduardo Santos, owner of the national daily *El Tiempo*.

In 1938 Santos became president with the support of moderate Liberals and of Conservatives opposed to López Pumarejo's Revolution on the March. Santos retained some of his predecessor's policies, such as protectionism, and oriented his policies toward capitalist industrial and agricultural development. The Santos

administration improved the economic capabilities of the country to invest in industry. It also stimulated capital-intensive agriculture to convert traditional *latifundios,* which relied on cheap labor, into capitalist haciendas, which used advanced technology. The reduced demand for manual labor in the countryside caused many campesinos to migrate to the cities. This urban growth increased both the supply of labor and the demand for consumer goods, further contributing to industrial expansion. Santos also reduced taxes on machinery imports that were needed for industry.

In the later years of his administration, Santos turned his attention to relations with the church and the United States. In 1942 Santos reformed education by removing it from the control of the church. In the same year, he concluded a new agreement with the Vatican, requiring that bishops be Colombian citizens. During World War II, he cooperated with the United States in the defense of the Panama Canal, ousted German nationals from control of Colombia's national airline, and broke diplomatic relations with the Axis governments. His administration also strengthened economic, commercial, and cultural relations with the United States (see Relations with the United States, ch. 4).

Despite opposition from Conservatives, moderate Liberals, and a more progressive Liberal group led by Gaitán, López Pumarejo was elected president for a second term in 1942. He was not as successful in the second term in implementing reform, however, because of strong Conservative opposition and a split in the Liberal organization in Congress. Laureano Gómez exploited the Liberal division by attacking López Pumarejo's foreign policy, including the declaration of war on the Axis Powers in 1943. Other effects of World War II were being felt at this time, including an unbalanced budget, unstable foreign trade, a decline in coffee prices, and an increase in import prices.

Discontent with López Pumarejo increased. Gómez made personal attacks on López Pumarejo and his family that were so inflammatory that Gómez was imprisoned in 1944. This triggered demonstrations and street fighting in Bogotá. In July 1944, during army maneuvers, López Pumarejo and some of his cabinet members were held prisoner for a few days by officers staging an abortive military coup in Pasto. Although most of the military supported the constitutional order, López Pumarejo lost prestige and power. In July 1945, he resigned in favor of his first presidential designate, Alberto Lleras Camargo, a Liberal who had distinguished himself as a writer and government official.

López Pumarejo's resignation resulted in part from pressure by the political and economic forces that he had helped to strengthen

through the reforms of his first term. By 1942 a new group of industrialists wished to perpetuate their gains and believed that reform should cease. During López Pumarejo's first term, the interests of industrialists and those of other urban elements frequently coincided—for example, in reducing the power of the church and large landowners and in stimulating economic growth. In his second term, however, critics contended that the social reforms and development policies of the first term no longer were appropriate. Thus, the industrialists, looking for favorable tax policies and protection against the demands of labor, joined with the landowners in resisting reforms. Both groups helped block important portions of López Pumarejo's legislative program, and the reformist trend of the PL was negated by more moderate elements within the party.

Lleras Camargo, who served as provisional president until August 1946, appointed representatives of all parties to his cabinet in an effort to establish a "national union." Nonetheless, his coalition policy was attacked by Gaitán, who had gained considerable support among the masses and among some intellectuals and industrialists. When Gabriel Turbay, a moderate Liberal, won the party's nomination for the 1946 presidential election, Gaitán decided to run independently, and his forces shifted to a more militant stance. This serious split among Liberals resulted in the election of the Conservative candidate, Mariano Ospina Pérez, by a plurality of 42 percent of the electorate.

## Collapse of the Democratic System, 1946–58

The transfer of power in 1946 ignited tensions between the two parties, resulting in violent political conflict, particularly in rural areas. The loss of peace foreboded the return to competitive and exclusionary politics, similar to the situation preceding the War of a Thousand Days. In the 1940s and 1950s, however, violence and exclusion more than threatened the political system; they ruptured it. A democratically elected administration became repressive and dictatorial, which led to its overthrow by the sole military coup in the twentieth century. Only by having the reins of power taken from both of their hands did the traditional elites recognize that the most effective way to avoid interparty civil wars and possible military dictatorships was to join forces and restrain their competitive tendencies.

In 1946 Ospina assumed office and was faced with the difficult task of ruling from a minority position, as Liberals had received the majority of all presidential votes and continued to control Congress. Ospina tried to confront this situation by incorporating Liberals into a coalition government. Meanwhile, the level of political

rivalry intensified in the countryside, where Conservatives pursued a course of violence in an attempt to consolidate power after sixteen years out of office. Liberals retaliated and, under Gaitán's leadership, became highly mobilized in their demands that the Ospina government confront the social needs of the modernizing and urbanizing nation.

Gaitanism, the populist social movement led by Gaitán as a faction of the PL, increased dramatically between 1946 and 1948. Gaitán supported the democratic rather than the revolutionary path to reforms. By advocating the passage of more socially liberal policies, he appealed to the masses and he united urban workers and campesinos. As the movement grew, observers believed that Gaitán would be elected president, which may have happened had he lived to see the next election.

Liberal victories in the 1947 congressional elections demonstrated the party's strength among the electorate. Ospina became increasingly concerned with retaining Conservative control and provoked Liberals further by resorting frequently to police enforcement of Conservative privileges in the rural areas. The Liberal appointees in his government resigned in protest in March 1948.

## La Violencia

The following month, the inevitable explosion occurred in the form of the most violent and destructive riot in the country's long history of conflict. On April 9, Gaitán was assassinated at midday in the heart of Bogotá. An angry mob immediately seized and killed the assassin. In the ensuing riot, some 2,000 people were killed, and a large portion of downtown Bogotá was destroyed. The Bogotazo, as the episode came to be called, was an expression of mass social frustration and grief by a people who had lost the man who represented their only potential link to the decision-making process.

Although order was restored in Bogotá and Ospina remained in control, the tempo of rural violence quickened to a state of undeclared civil war known as *la violencia. La violencia* claimed over 200,000 lives during the next eighteen years, with the bloodiest period occurring between 1948 and 1958. *La violencia* spread throughout the country, especially in the Andes and the llanos (plains), sparing only the southernmost portion of Nariño and parts of the Caribbean coastal area. An extremely complex phenomenon, *la violencia* was characterized by both partisan political rivalry and sheer rural banditry. The basic cause of this protracted period of internal disorder, however, was the refusal of successive

governments to accede to the people's demands for socioeconomic change.

After the Bogotazo, the Ospina government became more repressive. Ospina banned public meetings in March 1949 and fired all Liberal governors in May. In November of that year, Ospina ordered the army to forcibly close Congress. Rural police forces heightened the effort against belligerents and Liberals, and eventually all Liberals, from the ministerial to the local level, resigned their posts in protest.

In the 1949 presidential election, the Liberals refused to present a candidate; as a result, Gómez, the only Conservative candidate, took office in 1950. Gómez, who had opposed the Ospina administration for its initial complicity with the Liberals, was firmly in control of the party. As leader of the reactionary faction, he preferred authority, hierarchy, and order and was contemptuous of universal suffrage and majority rule. Gómez offered a program that combined traditional Conservative republicanism with the European corporatism of the time. A neofascist constitution drafted under his guidance in 1953 would have enhanced the autonomy of the presidency, expanded the powers of departmental governors, and strengthened the official role of the church in the political system.

Gómez acquired broad powers and curtailed civil liberties in an attempt to confront the mounting violence and the possibility that the Liberals might regain power. Pro-labor laws passed in the 1930s were canceled by executive decree, independent labor unions were struck down, congressional elections were held without opposition, the press was censored, courts were controlled by the executive, and freedom of worship was challenged as mobs attacked Protestant chapels. Gómez directed his repression in particular against the Liberal opposition, which he branded as communist. At the height of the violence, the number of deaths reportedly reached 1,000 per month.

Despite the relative prosperity of the economy—owing largely to expansion of the country's export markets and increased levels of foreign investment—Gómez lost support because of protracted violence and his attacks on moderate Conservatives and on the military establishment. Because of illness, in November 1951 Gómez allowed his first presidential designate, Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez, to become acting president until Gómez could reassume the presidency. Although Urdaneta followed Gómez's policies, he refused to dismiss General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, whom Gómez suspected of conspiring against the government. When Gómez tried to return to office in June 1953, a coalition consisting of moderate Conservatives who supported Ospina, the PL, and the armed forces



*Cathedral at Pasto*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

deposed him and installed a military government. They viewed such action as the only way to end the violence. Rojas Pinilla, who had led the coup d'état, assumed the presidency.

## The Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship

Initial response to the coup was enthusiastic and widespread; only the elements at the two extremes of the political spectrum protested the action. Rojas Pinilla's first goal was to end the violence, and to that end he offered amnesty and government aid to those belligerents who would lay down their arms. Thousands complied with the offer, and there was relative calm for several months after the coup. Other immediate steps taken by Rojas Pinilla included the transfer of the National Police to the armed forces in an effort to depoliticize the police, relaxation of press censorship, and release of political prisoners.

The government also started an extensive series of public works projects to construct transportation networks and hospitals and improved the system of credit for small farmers. Rojas Pinilla attempted to respond to demands for social reform through populist measures patterned after the policies of General Juan Domingo Perón (1946–55) in Argentina. The National Social Welfare Service, under the direction of his daughter María Eugenia Rojas de Moreno Díaz, was created to meet the most pressing needs of the

poor, and the public works projects began to provide jobs for the masses of urban unemployed. The tax system was restructured to place more of the burden on the elite. Poorly administered, however, these reform programs met with little success. Rojas Pinilla was unable to restructure Colombian society.

Rojas Pinilla attempted to recruit political support from nontraditional sources. He courted the military by raising salaries and constructing lavish officers' clubs, and he courted the church by espousing a "Christian" doctrine as the foundation of his government. Through the creation of a "third force," Rojas Pinilla attempted to fuse the masses of peasants and urban workers into a movement that would counter the elite's traditional domination of the country's politics; however, this served more to anger the elite than to create a populist political base.

Support for the Rojas Pinilla regime faded within the first year. Toward the end of 1953, rural violence was renewed, and Rojas Pinilla undertook strict measures to counter it. Following a substantial increase in police and military budgets, the government assumed a dictatorial and demagogic character. The government reversed its initial social reform measures and relied instead on repression. It tightened press censorship and closed a number of the country's leading newspapers, both Liberal and Conservative. Under a new law, anyone who spoke disrespectfully of the president could be jailed or fined. Many were killed or wounded at the so-called Bull Ring Massacre in February 1956 for failing to cheer Rojas Pinilla sufficiently. The administration became increasingly corrupt, and graft in government circles was rampant. In addition, economic deterioration, triggered by a drop in coffee prices and exacerbated by inflationary government policies, seriously threatened the gains made since World War II. Efforts of government troops to suppress the widespread violence degenerated into an enforcement of the president's tenuous hold on power, and their methods became more brutal. Scorched-earth policies were introduced to confront the 20,000 belligerents estimated to be active in rural areas.

Rojas Pinilla tried to provide a legal facade for his dictatorship. A new constitution (the Constitution of 1886 was abolished in 1954) created a Legislative Assembly composed of fifty-nine Conservatives and thirty-three Liberals, twenty of whom were nominated by the president. The assembly elected Rojas Pinilla to the presidency in 1954 for four years; in 1957 it confirmed him as president until 1962, an action that consolidated mounting opposition to Rojas Pinilla and precipitated his subsequent fall from power

By early 1957, most organized groups opposed Rojas Pinilla. Liberal and Conservative elites, to whom the populist and demagogic Rojas Pinilla had become a greater threat than their traditional party adversaries, decided to stop feuding and to join forces against the president under the banner of the National Front. Conservative and Liberal leaders had been negotiating an alliance since early 1956. In July 1956, Gómez—in exile in Spain—and Lleras Camargo signed the Declaration of Benidorm, a document that laid the foundation for the future institutionalization of a coalition government. The moderate Conservatives, supporting Rojas Pinilla until 1957, did not join in negotiations with the Liberals until that time.

Although factionalism between moderates and reactionaries slowed the process, all concerned parties signed a final agreement in San Carlos in 1957. Based on the Sitges Agreement signed between the reactionaries and the Liberals in Sitges, Spain, in 1957, the San Carlos Agreement stipulated that a Conservative, either moderate or reactionary, would be the first president under a National Front and that he would be elected by a National Congress previously elected by popular vote. The Sitges and San Carlos agreements, which sought to reduce interparty tensions and provide a basis for power-sharing between the parties, also called for the following: restoration of the Constitution of 1886, which had been abolished by Rojas Pinilla; the alternation of the presidency between the two parties every four years; parity between parties in all legislative bodies; a required two-thirds majority vote for the passage of legislation; the establishment of an administrative career service of neutral parties not subject to partisan appointment; women's suffrage and equal political rights for women; and the devotion of at least 10 percent of the national budget to education.

As the party leaders laid the basis for a coalition government, the tides of discontent turned against Rojas Pinilla. When Rojas Pinilla ordered the arrest of Guillermo León Valencia, a Conservative leader involved in the formation of the National Front, Rojas Pinilla was confronted with student demonstrations, massive strikes, riots, and finally the declared opposition of the church and the defection of top-ranking military officers. In May 1957, faced with a multitude of protesters and top military leaders requesting his resignation, Rojas Pinilla resigned and went into temporary exile in Spain. Power reverted to a five-man junta led by General Gabriel París, who promised the free election of a civilian president in August 1958.

In December 1957, Colombians voted overwhelmingly in a national plebiscite to approve the Sitges and San Carlos agreements

as amendments to the Constitution of 1886. Congressional elections were held soon thereafter, with the result that the reactionary Conservatives emerged as the largest faction of the Conservative half of Congress. Gómez vetoed the proposed presidential candidacy of Valencia, who until then had been the strongest Conservative candidate. As a result of this division within the PC, faction leaders agreed to allow a Liberal to be the first president under the National Front and to extend the provision of the coalition government from twelve to sixteen years. These agreements were ratified by Congress as constitutional amendments in 1958. In August of that year, Lleras Camargo, a Liberal, was elected as the first president under the National Front.

## The National Front, 1958–74

The National Front agreement to share power between Liberals and Conservatives was a constructive effort to assuage the interparty strife and distrust that had contributed to both the violence and the collapse of the democratic system. Its inauguration marked the beginning of a gradual decline in the level of confrontation. Nevertheless, the necessity of securing bipartisan support for any policy or action produced several difficulties—most notably, stalemate and inaction in the governmental process, voter apathy, and the exacerbation of factionalism within the two parties—that were to plague National Front administrations.

### Instituting the Coalition Government

When Lleras Camargo took office in August 1958, he faced not only the problems of rivalry between Liberals and Conservatives but also factional controversies within the two parties. He succeeded, however, in demonstrating that the National Front program could point the way to a restoration of constitutional government. His administration adopted vigorous measures to reduce banditry and rural violence.

Lleras Camargo introduced an austerity program to improve economic conditions, with the result that in 1958 Colombia recorded its most favorable balance of trade in twenty years. The government cut imports, stabilized the peso (for value of the peso—see Glossary), and established the National Planning Department. It handled labor troubles with firmness. The Lleras Camargo government also instituted a series of programs to improve the living conditions of the masses, including expansion of the water supply, sewers, housing, and education. An agrarian reform law passed in 1961 provided for a new agency, the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria—

Incora). Lleras Camargo's government made only limited progress in land reform, however, in the face of opposition from Liberals, who denounced the plan as inadequate, and from Conservatives, who called it communistic and revolutionary (see Agriculture, ch. 3). Nevertheless, at the end of his term in 1962, despite a difficult political situation, Lleras Camargo had done much to stabilize the economy, stimulate increased output of industrial and agricultural products, and bring the people a renewed confidence in the future.

Although he was strongly opposed by Gómez and his supporters among the reactionary Conservatives, Valencia became the next official Conservative candidate of the National Front and was elected for the 1962–66 presidential term. Only half the eligible citizens voted, but Valencia received more than 62 percent of the votes, which perhaps confirmed the voters' belief in the principle of alternating the presidency between the two leading parties. Valencia took only modest steps to continue the programs initiated by his predecessor. He ignored, for example, the National Planning Department and failed to fill vacancies as they occurred. Incora's land reform program also ran into opposition from large landholders. In addition, Valencia's finance minister, Carlos Sanz, devalued the peso and proposed new taxes, thereby arousing the hostility of Congress.

Declining economic conditions contributed to growing social unrest. Increasing prices, the printing of growing quantities of paper money, and a drop in the price of coffee affected the economy adversely and contributed to increased inflation. Drains on the economy were generated by contraband trade with neighboring countries. The equivalent of some US$64 million in foreign loans promised in 1964 had been withheld, and the government was faced with a serious deficit. Rumors of plots against the government circulated, students protesting high prices rioted in Bogotá, and kidnappings occurred frequently. Valencia declared a state of siege in May 1965 and, having lost additional congressional support, was forced to rule by decree. The war minister, General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, succeeded in reducing civil disorders; Ruiz was dismissed in January 1965, however, after he openly criticized the president and made it known that he considered himself a leader who might bring order out of the confusion that plagued the nation.

In mid-1965 the state of siege enabled Valencia and his new finance minister, Joaquín Vallejo, to enact reforms by decree. They raised taxes, collected delinquent taxes, limited imports, and applied other austerity measures. The United States and international lending agencies then agreed to make loans to Colombia with the understanding that the government would take vigorous action to

improve its financial situation. Inflation leveled off, and rumors of plots to remove the president died down.

## Opposition to the National Front

Despite the constitutional amendment stipulating that only the PL and PC were authorized to participate in elections, dissident groups opposing the National Front arrangement formed "movements" to challenge the establishment by presenting candidates under the Liberal and Conservative labels. In 1959 Liberal dissidents formed the Liberal Recovery Movement (Movimiento de Recuperación Liberal)—subsequently renamed the Liberal Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal—MRL)—under the leadership of Alfonso López Michelsen, son of ex-President López Pumarejo. The more serious challenge to the National Front arrangement came from the populist National Popular Alliance (Alianza Nacional Popular—Anapo), which was founded in 1961 by Rojas Pinilla after his return from exile. The potential popular support for these dissident movements was manifest in the congressional elections of 1964, when 70 percent of the voters failed to cast ballots and 10 percent voted against Valencia's candidates. Congressional victories by Anapo and MRL reduced Valencia's support in the legislature to a narrow majority.

During the mid-1960s, the embers of *la violencia* were dying out, but guerrilla activity was increasing. In 1964 the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN) was formed by students who were disenchanted with the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Colombia (Partido Comunista de Colombia—PCC) and inspired by the Cuban Revolution. The ELN gained its greatest notoriety when Father Camilo Torres Restrepo, a Roman Catholic priest, joined the guerrilla group in 1966 and was killed in an armed conflict with government forces shortly thereafter. In 1966 another guerrilla movement—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC)—began operating and was officially designated as a branch of the PCC (see Guerrilla and Terrorist Groups, ch. 5).

Carlos Lleras Restrepo, the third president under the National Front, proved to be an effective leader. He was opposed in the 1966 election by the Liberal Anapo candidate, who won almost 30 percent of the vote. Aided by an especially competent group of cabinet members, Lleras Restrepo enacted a number of reforms during his tenure in office. He swiftly announced the creation of a series of presidential task forces to draw up national development plans, which included the establishment of exchange controls to combat the mounting foreign exchange difficulties; an increased state role

in economic development; and funding for new housing, infrastructure, and industrial development projects. These proposals drew support from international lending agencies, which helped ease the fiscal problems that had beset the Valencia administration.

The effectiveness of the government was increased by the sweeping constitutional reforms of December 1968, which abolished the requirement of a two-thirds majority for Congress to pass major bills and gave greater authority to the executive in economic decision making. In addition, the reforms provided for the gradual phasing out of the National Front arrangement during the coming decade. Having discarded major obstacles that had stalemated previous National Front administrations, Lleras Restrepo built on the efforts of Lleras Camargo in economic and social reform. The government revised tax laws and rationalized tax collection through more rigid enforcement. Wage and price controls helped stabilize the currency, and inflation was held to a moderate 7 percent per year. The Lleras Restrepo administration improved the balance of payments situation through a program of export diversification, through which exports other than coffee more than doubled between 1966 and 1970. The government reorganized the Ministry of Agriculture and gave it increased resources to finance investments in the agricultural sector. Incora intensified agrarian reform efforts and issued more than 60,000 land titles to tenants and sharecroppers in 1968 and 1969 alone. The creation of the Andean Common Market in 1969 further stimulated economic expansion through the integration of the economies of Colombia and its neighbors (see Foreign Economic Relations, ch. 3).

The policies of the Lleras Restrepo administration resulted in an increased rate of economic growth. Nevertheless, an explosive population increase continued to add some 200,000 young Colombians to the labor force each year, and the problems of poverty and unemployment persisted. A system of family planning was launched, in spite of considerable church opposition, in an attempt to slow the population growth that was largely nullifying the economic gains.

Unrest in the late 1960s assumed a more urban and more nearly class-oriented base as rural and interparty violence receded. Rural disorders declined markedly as a consequence of optimism on the economic front and the capture of some of the most prominent guerrilla leaders. In 1968, however, a new guerrilla group—the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación—EPL)—was formed as the armed branch of the Communist Party of Colombia—Marxist-Leninist (Partido Comunista de Colombia—Marxista-Leninista—PCC-ML), a pro-Chinese group.

In December 1968 Lleras Restrepo lifted the state of siege that had been imposed under Valencia in 1965. Sporadic incidents of violence occurred, however, especially among dissident students and labor union members, and the government reinstated its emergency powers on several occasions.

Dissidence within the PL was lessened through the reintegration of the MRL and its leader, López Michelsen, who came to play a valuable role in the Lleras Restrepo government. In the 1968 congressional elections, those elements of both the PL and PC that supported the National Front arrangement gained a strong majority in the legislature. Voter apathy persisted, however, and less than 40 percent of eligible voters participated.

Under the banner of Anapo, Rojas Pinilla continued his appeal to the urban masses and the peasantry, promising solutions to the problems of unemployment and inflation and advocating free education and health care for the poor. Anapo challenged the National Front by presenting Rojas Pinilla as a Conservative candidate for the presidency in 1970. The election took place in an atmosphere of escalating violence, and the public received with widespread skepticism the official announcement that the Conservative candidate of the National Front, Misael Pastrana Borrero, had won by a narrow margin of 65,000 votes. The outpouring of support for Rojas Pinilla indicated significant voter dissatisfaction with the National Front's response to Colombia's persistent social and economic problems.

## Dismantling the Coalition Apparatus

Pastrana was the last president to be elected under the provisions of the National Front. In 1970 the government began to dismantle the structure of the National Front in accordance with the 1968 constitutional amendments. The parity provision for elective legislative bodies and the exclusion of nontraditional parties from participation in elections no longer applied on the local level. These changes also went into effect on the national level in 1974, in time for the election of Pastrana's successor.

The liberalization of the political system in effect undercut support for the bipartisan movements that had challenged the traditional parties during the National Front. Although Anapo declared itself an official party in 1971, it declined in popularity and electoral strength. María Eugenia Rojas—the Anapo candidate in the 1974 presidential election—received less than 10 percent of the vote. After General Rojas Pinilla's death in 1975, the party continued to lose strength, eventually allying itself with other marginal

movements that, by themselves, drew insignificant results at the polls (see Minor Third Parties, ch. 4).

Pastrana termed his administration the "Social Front" and followed most of the policies of his predecessor. In two areas of economic policy, however, he differed: land reform and the status of the construction sector. Pastrana's proposals for land reform included promises of redistribution; however, the large landowners objected to the government's proposal to base taxation on potential rather than actual income from the land. In the course of negotiations between the agricultural interests and the different party factions, productivity replaced redistribution as a priority. The government granted major concessions to the large agriculturists concerning the bases for assessing income and real estate taxes. It also guaranteed that new sources of credit be made available for modernizing the agricultural sector along capital-intensive lines.

In industrial policy, Pastrana selected construction as the "leading sector." The administration advocated public investment in construction projects as the engine of growth for the economy because it created employment and increased income and, by extension, increased demand for domestically produced items. Pastrana also encouraged private investment in the leading sector through the establishment of the Units of Constant Purchasing Power (Unidades de Poder Adquisitivo Constante—UPAC), a system by which an investment not only accrued interest but also was adjusted for inflation. The UPAC system of adjusting for inflation extended to many elements of the economy, including life insurance, wages, and prices. The combination of the UPAC system and the huge investment in construction overstimulated the economy and fueled inflation, which reached 27 percent by 1974.

Guerrilla activity continued during the Pastrana administration. In 1972 another guerrilla group—the 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril—M-19)—emerged. The M-19 took its name from the date on which Rojas Pinilla was narrowly and, in their minds, fraudulently, defeated by Pastrana. Although the M-19 claimed to be the armed branch of Anapo, the Rojas Pinilla organization disavowed any connection to the guerrilla group.

## The Post-National Front Period, 1974–82

### The Erosion of Partisan Affiliations

The PL and PC were weak, divided into factions, and inadequately organized at the end of the existence of the National Front. Because the political parties were not eager to engage in intense competition, Colombia achieved a peaceful transition to an open

system. The principle of power-sharing was retained, although a president was allowed to select appointees from whatever sources he chose if the opposition refused to participate in his government.

The experience of the National Front, the lack of organizational efforts by the parties, and the massive migrations from rural to urban areas weakened party affiliations, which also decreased the likelihood of interparty violence. This weakening of party identification emerged as an unforeseen consequence of the nonpartisan structure of the National Front, in which party loyalty was less important than support for a particular faction. In addition, rapid urbanization and industrialization eroded the traditional bases of partisan support because Liberal supporters were transplanted to Conservative communities. The period after the National Front also reflected a growing gap between the issues and agendas of the political elite and the demands, concerns, and expectations of the populace.

The erosion of the bond between the elites and the masses also was manifested in the high rates of electoral abstentionism, rising levels of mass political apathy and cynicism, the emergence of an urban swing vote, and widespread distrust of the nation's political institutions and leadership. The image the masses held of the elite was tarnished by the failure of the elite as a whole to institute promised reforms and by suspected links between some leaders and the drug trade. The traditional mechanisms of political control, such as inherited party affiliation, patrimonialism, and clientelism, lost their effectiveness, especially in the growing urban areas.

The government's failure to accommodate the new social groups and classes that had emerged during Colombia's modernization generated the increasing alienation of the masses from the political leadership and caused some elements among the masses to resort to militancy. Thus, Colombia experienced a radicalization of peasant movements, an increase in urban protests, a growing restlessness within the urban labor movement, and a surge in rural and urban guerrilla activity.

Popular discontent with the government's management of the economy continued despite steady economic growth and high primary export revenues in the mid-1970s. The post-National Front period began in the midst of inflation and unemployment that fueled social unrest and prompted the government to institute unpopular anti-inflationary austerity measures. Subsequent moves to increase employment by raising public spending on construction and infrastructure projects did more to augment the national debt than to alleviate the unemployment problem. As the coffee boom receded, growth rates declined steadily through the 1978–82 period.

The massive underground economy, fueled by drug trafficking and marijuana cultivation, undermined the government's efforts to control inflation and contributed to the rise of a parallel financial market, placing a large part of the national economy beyond the control of legitimate authority (see Crops, ch. 3).

## The Liberal Tenure

The first president elected in the post-National Front period, López Michelsen (1974–78), faced difficult situations in three areas: the economy, the guerrilla movement, and the drug trade. Subsequent governments inherited these same problems. The influx of foreign exchange from the coffee boom and the illicit drug trade created a glut of money in the financial sector that increased the rate of inflation. To counteract this, López Michelsen immediately instituted a stabilization program that included austere measures, such as cutting back on public investment and social welfare programs and tightening credit and raising the interest rate. By declaring a state of economic emergency, López Michelsen was able to pass unpopular yet necessary economic measures without legislative action.

Another key component of López Michelsen's economic policy was designed to improve income distribution. The cornerstone of this effort was the "To Close the Gap" program. This program addressed the rural sector by proposing to increase productivity and employment in the countryside and integrate the rural sector into the monetary market with the support of the Integrated Rural Development program.

The "To Close the Gap" plan had its greatest impact, however temporary, in the tax reform of 1974. The tax reform, instituted two months after López Michelsen took office, made changes in the sales tax, export taxes and incentives, import surcharges, the tax treatment of government agencies, and personal and corporate income taxes. The reform had four general goals: to make the tax system more progressive, to reduce the distorting effects of the tax system on resource allocation, to promote economic stability by increasing revenues on a one-time basis and by enhancing the built-in response of the tax system to growth in the national income, and to simplify tax administration and compliance and thereby reduce evasion and increase yields. The government recorded a short-term fiscal improvement; nevertheless, inflation and a failure to improve administrative procedures allowed for continued large-scale tax evasion and an ultimate drop in revenues.

The austerity that the López Michelsen administration forced on the country had unpopular consequences. Inflation outstripped

wage increases, nontraditional exports faced unfavorable trade conditions, and the industrial sector entered into a slump. Students and labor groups engaged in periodic protests and strikes. In October 1976, López Michelsen imposed a state of siege following two months of strikes by social security employees. The continuing discontent with the government erupted again in September 1977 when the four major labor unions joined in a strike to protest the high cost of living. Under the state of siege measures still in effect, the administration declared the strike illegal. Riots following the government's attempt to suppress the strike resulted in twenty deaths. Several cabinet ministers resigned in protest over the way the strike had been handled.

Guerrilla activity resurged during the López Michelsen administration, although some groups actually became less active. The FARC was the most active, operating in rural areas in the departments of Antioquia, Tolima, Magdalena, Boyacá, Caquetá, and Meta. The M-19 kidnapped and held more than 400 people for ransom. The ELN, especially active in southern Bolívar Department, kidnapped several prominent people and ambushed army patrols. The EPL, however, declined in importance after the death of its founder, Pedro León Arboleda, in 1975.

Although López Michelsen did not view drug trafficking as a serious threat at the beginning of his administration, by 1978 he recognized the ruinous impact that the drug industry was having on the political and economic structure of Colombian society (see Narcotics Control and Interdiction, ch. 5). Corruption financed by the drug rings permeated all levels of the political system. Those in office or campaigning for office who spoke out against the major drug traffickers rightfully feared for their lives. In some areas, prominent drug traffickers were so powerful that they were able to get themselves elected to local or state offices.

Although the narcotics industry contributed to a foreign exchange surplus and generated employment, its overall impact was detrimental to the national economy. The influx of dollars contributed to the increase in the money supply and the creation of a parallel economy that competed with the official economy for financial resources (see Foreign Trade, ch. 3). The industry created "boom towns" in rural Colombia that rose and fell within short periods of time. The income provided by the drug industry was used primarily for conspicuous consumption rather than for productive investment. The slash-and-burn method of cultivating marijuana destroyed fertile land that could have been used for legal food production, resulting in both a damaged environment and a national need to import food. The parallel economy contaminated the official economy

through the laundering of narcodollars, often through the "side windows" of government banks and the real estate industry. Drug traffickers also purchased legitimate businesses, such as banks, textile mills, and sports teams. The drug traffickers' control over a large portion of the illicit economy and a significant amount of the official economy undercut government efforts at national economic planning. In addition, government efforts to combat drug trafficking drained funds that could have been used more productively elsewhere.

In late 1977, observers mistakenly predicted that the Conservative Belisario Betancur Cuartas would win the 1978 presidential election because of the division of the PL into rival factions that supported Lleras Restrepo and Julio César Turbay Ayala. Turbay became the nominee of the PL after his faction won the most seats in the February 1978 congressional elections. The presidential campaign was largely personalistic in that neither candidate took specific positions on major issues. The candidates differed, however, in their reliance on partisan machinery. Turbay stressed the party connection, whereas Betancur, representing the minority party, claimed to be a candidate of its National Movement (Movimiento Nacional), which joined together Conservatives, dissident Liberals, remnants of Anapo, and members of the Christian Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrático Cristiano—PSDC) (see Minor Third Parties, ch. 4). Turbay won the presidential election by a narrow margin; approximately 60 percent of all voters abstained.

The Turbay administration (1978–82) inherited a slightly improved financial situation because the austerity measures instituted under López Michelsen and declining coffee revenues had produced a lower rate of inflation by 1978. Turbay focused his economic policy on reducing unemployment and avoiding an impending recession. A main goal was the decentralization of fiscal resources and the promotion of regional autonomy, which made public investment in infrastructure a priority. His National Integration Plan (Plan de Integración Nacional—PIN) of 1979–82 foresaw growth in public investment to reach 19 percent in real terms. Because government revenues from coffee exports were declining at this time, Turbay had to finance the growth in public spending by turning to foreign loans. The increased public spending thus contributed both to a renewed rise in inflation and to a massive increase in foreign debt. Attempting to avoid a recession, Turbay also encouraged foreign investment in Colombia and promoted domestic investment in labor-intensive industries to reduce high urban unemployment. In spite of increased government spending, Colombia

experienced a recession caused by tight credit and high interest rates, a reduction in protectionist tariffs, grants of import licenses for industrial goods, smuggled imports, and a decreased world demand for industrial goods produced in Colombia (see Foreign Trade, ch. 3).

Shortly after taking office, Turbay gave top priority to combating guerrilla activity and narcotics trafficking. Although designed ostensibly to counteract drug trafficking, the institution of a state of siege and the National Security Statute of 1978 substantially enhanced the government's ability to act against guerrillas (see Internal Security Problems, ch. 5).

Critics charged that the military and police forces used the security statute to detain indiscriminately "cultural subversives"—including prominent journalists, artists, and scholars—who were suspected of being associated with left-wing elements. Threats to invoke the security statute in nonpolitical cases, such as protests for a better water supply, suppressed popular unrest. Persons arrested on political charges alleged that the armed forces had resorted to torture during interrogation. Although the government claimed that tough measures were needed to counter leftist subversion, critics asserted that repression resulted from the worsening economic situation. The deteriorating human rights situation drew criticism from leaders of both parties and from international organizations such as Amnesty International. Turbay lifted the state of siege and nullified the security statute in June 1982, shortly before leaving office.

Despite the severe measures taken against leftist subversion, guerrilla activity increased and reached a peak during the Turbay administration. Although the ELN was less active than during the López Michelsen administration, the FARC expanded its operations, especially in Cauca and Caldas departments.

The M-19 emerged as the most active guerrilla group during this period. In January 1979, members of the M-19 tunneled into a military arsenal in Bogotá and took 5,000 guns. Within a few weeks, however, most of the weapons were recovered, and many of the participants were arrested. In October 1979, more than 200 accused M-19 members were brought to trial in Bogotá. The delay of other military trials of M-19 members probably led to the movement's takeover of the embassy of the Dominican Republic in February 1980, in which fourteen diplomats, including the ambassador of the United States, were held hostage. The seizure ended peacefully when the kidnappers received safe conduct out of the city and a promise that the Inter-American Human Rights Commission would be permitted to investigate allegations of human

rights abuses. By the end of 1981, the M-19 had shifted from purely urban to mostly rural operations and had formed a tenuous union with the other three guerrilla groups. In March of that year, Turbay proposed—and the Senate approved—a limited four-month amnesty for those guerrillas already detained if a sufficient number in the field were to lay down their arms. A second limited amnesty for those guerrillas who surrendered peacefully was approved for the period from February to June 1982.

Turbay also took a strong stance against drug traffickers. In 1978 the president gave the army a key role in the main operation to control drug trafficking and marijuana cultivation in the department of La Guajira, including allowing a military occupation of the region. Two years later, the government transferred responsibility for the antidrug campaign in La Guajira to units of the National Police. Combined efforts with the United States produced some success; for example, the joint Operation Tiburón, which began in December 1980, resulted in the seizure of more than 2,700 tons of marijuana. Despite some impressive victories, however, the drug traffickers continued to wield increasing economic and political power in the country.

In the early 1980s, evidence came to the fore linking some Colombian drug traffickers with both Cuba and the M-19. In 1982 a federal grand jury in Miami indicted four close aides of Cuban president Fidel Castro Ruz on charges of smuggling narcotics into the United States. According to the indictment, the aides assisted the operations of Colombia drug trafficker Jaime Guillot Lara, who, in turn, funneled arms and money on Cuba's behalf to the M-19.

A contradictory episode in the relationship between the guerrillas and the drug trade was the December 1981 founding of the right-wing "paramilitary" group Death to Kidnappers (Muerte a Secuestradores—MAS) by prominent drug lords Carlos Ledher Rivas and Jorge Luis Ochoa Vásquez. MAS apparently was established to intimidate and punish those guerrilla groups, especially the M-19, that had engaged in the ransom of key members of the drug community in order to finance their operations. MAS subsequently became a death squad, targeting left-wing politicians, students, and party members.

The post-National Front Liberal presidencies proved unable to stem the growth in guerrilla activity and narcotics trafficking. A divided PL thus lost support and the presidency to the PC, effecting a peaceful alternation of power between the two parties. In 1982 the PL presented López Michelsen for reelection, supported by the Turbay faction of the party. Opposing him from the PL was Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento, a member of the Lleras Restrepo faction.

In 1979 Galán had formed the New Liberalism Movement (Movimiento Nuevo Liberalismo—MNL) and accused the Turbay-López Michelsen forces of opportunism, clientelism, and corruption. The PC coalesced again behind Betancur and his National Movement. López Michelsen employed the partisan campaign style that Turbay had used in the previous election, counting on the Liberal majority to remain loyal to the party. Betancur retained his minority strategy of stressing coalition over party affiliation and received endorsements from Gloria Eliécer Gaitán, daughter of Jorge Gaitán, and from María Eugenia Rojas. With the voter abstention rate reduced to 54 percent, Betancur won a decisive victory, receiving support from some traditionally Liberal areas. The election represented the first peaceful exchange of power between the two parties since the end of the National Front (see Post-National Front Political Developments, ch. 4).

Upon taking office, Betancur confronted the economic and social conditions bequeathed by his predecessors: economic recession, fiscal deficit, foreign debt, inflation, and unemployment. The parallel economy remained a major concern, as did the growing strength of drug traffickers. On the social front, Betancur sought to negotiate a peace with the guerrillas, offering them unconditional amnesty and legitimate participation in the political system.

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A variety of sources covering Colombian history are available in both English and Spanish. Harvey F. Kline's *Colombia: Portrait of Unity and Diversity* and Pat M. Holt's *Colombia Today—And Tomorrow* provide excellent overviews of Colombia. *Historia de Colombia,* by Carlos A. Mora, Margarita Peña, and Patricia Pinilla, and *Colombia Hoy,* edited by Mario Arrubla, also offer a comprehensive examination of Colombian history. Extensive data on political history, especially the periods prior to and including the National Front, can be found in *Colombia: A Contemporary Political Survey* by John D. Martz; *Politics of Compromise,* edited by R. Albert Berry, Ronald G. Hellman, and Mauricio Solaún; *The Politics of Colombia* by Robert H. Dix; and Kline's "Colombia: Modified Two-Party and Elitist Politics." The relationship between politics and economic development is treated comprehensively by Charles W. Bergquist in *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886–1910.* William Paul McGreevey deals with economic history in Colombia in *An Economic History of Colombia, 1845–1930* and "The Transition to Economic Growth in Colombia." A comparable work in Spanish is *Colombia y la Economía Mundial, 1830–1910* by José Antonio Ocampo.

More recent economic and social trends are addressed in *State and Society in Contemporary Colombia,* edited by Bruce Michael Bagley, Francisco E. Thoumi, and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian. Jonathan Hartlyn's "Colombia: Old Problems, New Opportunities" and Bagley's "Colombian Politics: Crisis or Continuity" offer important perspectives on contemporary Colombia. Two useful examinations of Colombia's drug problem are Thoumi's "Some Implications of the Growth of the Underground Economy in Colombia" and Richard B. Craig's "Illicit Drug Traffic: Implications for South American Source Countries." (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

# Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment



*The varied people of Colombia*

COLOMBIA IS THE FIFTH LARGEST country in Latin America and has the third largest population (28 million) in the region. Unlike most of its Andean neighbors, Colombia is a nation of cities; almost 70 percent of the people lived in urban areas in the late 1980s. In addition to Bogotá, the capital, which had an estimated population of 5 million in 1988, three other cities had populations of 1 million or more: Cali, Medellín, and Barranquilla. Fourteen other urban centers had populations of between 100,000 and 500,000. More than 100 cities had 10,000 or more inhabitants.

Three-fifths of the country was sparsely populated tropical lowlands and jungle. Ninety-eight percent of the population was concentrated in the interior two-fifths of the national territory—mainly in the narrow valleys and intermontane basins formed by the three ranges of the Andes Mountains that divide the country from north to south. The dominant language was Spanish, and the vast majority of the people were (at least nominally) Roman Catholic. Seventy percent of the population was of mixed blood; Caucasians, Indians, and blacks accounted for the rest. The country's economic and political elite remained predominantly white, however.

Over the past nearly 500 years, Colombian society has been highly stratified, with a castelike elite, correlation between skin color and class membership, and limited vertical mobility. Modern social structure was the offspring of a colonial society that was rigidly segregated into two groups: the white elite of educated, cultured, rich, and politically powerful persons and the mass of proletarians and peasants. A small middle group, composed of merchants and minor officials, actually belonged with the lower class in terms of powerlessness.

Independence did little to change this configuration, and prestige continued to be determined by birth and landownership. The postindependence period did not encourage a revolutionary change in the stratification system but instead reinforced the status quo. The continuing political anarchy, the difficulty of economic development because of ineffective use of capital and resources, and the lack of an urban labor movement inhibited change throughout the nineteenth century and discouraged the growth of an independent, viable middle class.

The rugged terrain and inadequate transportation system reinforced social and geographic distance, keeping the numerically

superior but disunited masses fragmented and powerless. The nascent middle sector lacked a collective consciousness, preferring to identify individually with the upper class. The elite was the only social group with sufficient cohesion to articulate goals and make them known to the rest of the society.

In the twentieth century, the society began to experience change—not so much in values or orientation but in broadening of the economic bases and an expansion of the social classes. Improvements in transportation, communication, and education—coupled with industrialization and rapid urban growth—opened the society somewhat by expanding economic opportunities. Individuals moved up from the masses into the lower, the middle, and infrequently the upper classes. Nevertheless, the traditional upper class continued to dominate the country by maintaining strict control over forces that encouraged change and by absorbing or co-opting other social sectors into the economic and political system. Generally, however, the upper class did not admit these upwardly mobile groups to the inner circle of power cliques and informal social contacts.

## Physical Setting

Located in the northwest corner of the South American continent, Colombia encompasses an area of more than 1.1 million square kilometers. It is the only country in South America with both Caribbean (1,760 kilometers) and Pacific coastlines (1,448 kilometers). Colombia also has international borders with five Latin American nations: Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador (see fig. 2). There were no major outstanding international boundary problems between Colombia and its neighbors in the late 1980s. All of the borders had long been delineated, and most had been demarcated by surveys and the placement of markers, although tropical jungle terrain and hostile Indians had impeded survey operations in some areas along the borders with Venezuela and Brazil. Colombia and Venezuela did, however, dispute sovereignty over the seabed in the Golfo de Venezuela, an area of potential petroleum wealth (see Relations with Latin America, ch. 4).

In addition to its mainland territory, Colombia possesses a number of small islands in both the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The combined areas of all these islands do not exceed sixty-five square kilometers.

In the Caribbean, off the coast of Nicaragua and 640 kilometers from the Colombian coast, Colombian territory includes an archipelago of thirteen small cays grouped around the Isla de San Andrés and the Isla de Providencia. Other small islands, cays, and banks

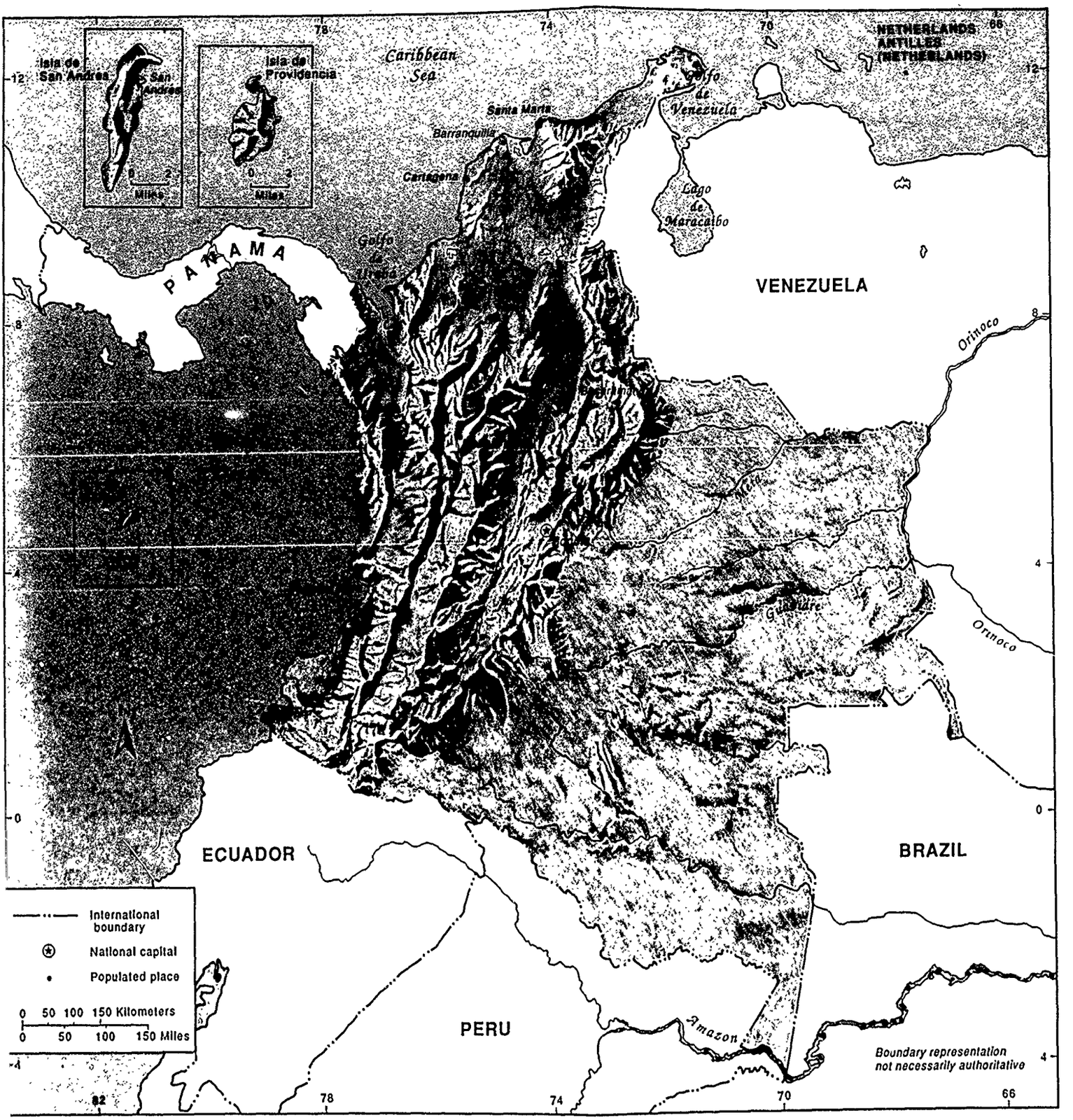



*Figure 2. Topography and Drainage*

in the same area—which belong to Colombia but also are claimed by Nicaragua—are Isla de Santa Catalina, Cayos de Roncador, Banco de Quita Sueño, Banco de Serrana, and Banco de Serranilla. Several small islands also lie off Colombia's Caribbean coast south of Cartagena. These include the Isla del Rosario, Islas de San Bernardo, and Isla Fuerte.

In the Pacific, Colombian territory encompasses Isla de Malpelo, which lies about 430 kilometers west of Buenaventura. Nearer the coast, a prison colony is located on Isla Gorgona. Isla Gorgonilla lies off the southern shore of Isla Gorgona.

## Geographic Regions

Geographers have devised different ways to divide Colombia into regions. It is most appropriate to divide the country into four geographic regions: the Andean highlands, consisting of the three Andean ranges and intervening valley lowlands; the Caribbean lowlands coastal region; the Pacific lowlands coastal region, separated from the Caribbean lowlands by swamps at the base of the Isthmus of Panama; and eastern Colombia, the great plain that lies to the east of the Andes Mountains.

### *Andean Highlands*

Near the Ecuadoran frontier, the Andes Mountains divide into three distinct, roughly parallel chains, called cordilleras, that extend northeastward almost to the Caribbean Sea. Altitudes reach more than 5,700 meters, and mountain peaks are permanently covered with snow. The elevated basins and plateaus of these ranges have a moderate climate that provides pleasant living conditions and in many places enables farmers to harvest twice a year. Torrential rivers on the slopes of the mountains produce a large hydroelectric power potential and add their volume to the navigable rivers in the valleys. In the late 1980s, approximately 78 percent of the country's population lived in the Andean highlands.

The Cordillera Occidental in the west, the Cordillera Central in the center, and the Cordillera Oriental in the east have different characteristics. Geologically, the Cordillera Occidental and the Cordillera Central form the western and eastern sides of a massive crystalline arch that extends from the Caribbean lowlands to the southern border of Ecuador. The Cordillera Oriental, however, is composed of folded stratified rocks overlying a crystalline core.

The Cordillera Occidental is relatively low and is the least populated of the three cordilleras. Summits are only about 3,000 meters above sea level and do not have permanent snows. Few passes exist, although one that is about 1,520 meters above sea level provides

the major city of Cali with an outlet to the Pacific Ocean. The relatively low elevation of the cordillera permits dense vegetation, which on the western slopes is truly tropical.

The Cordillera Occidental is separated from the Cordillera Central by the deep rift of the Cauca Valley. The Río Cauca rises within 200 kilometers of the border with Ecuador and flows through some of the best farmland in the country. After the two cordilleras converge, the Cauca Valley becomes a deep gorge all the way to the Caribbean lowlands.

The Cordillera Central is the loftiest of the mountain systems. Its crystalline rocks form an 800-kilometer-long towering wall dotted with snow-covered volcanoes. There are no plateaus in this range and no passes under 3,300 meters. The highest peak in this range, the Nevado del Huila, reaches 5,439 meters above sea level. The second highest peak is a volcano, Nevado del Ruiz, which erupted violently on November 13, 1985. Toward its northern end, this cordillera separates into several branches that descend toward the Caribbean coast.

Between the Cordillera Central and the Cordillera Oriental flows the Río Magdalena. This 1,600-kilometer-long river rises near a point some 180 kilometers north of the border with Ecuador, where the Cordillera Oriental and the Cordillera Central diverge. Its spacious drainage area is fed by numerous mountain torrents originating high in the snowfields. The Río Magdalena is generally navigable from the Caribbean Sea as far as the town of Neiva, deep in the interior, but is interrupted midway by rapids. The valley floor is very deep; nearly 800 kilometers from the river's mouth the elevation is no more than about 300 meters.

In the Cordillera Oriental at elevations between 2,500 and 2,700 meters, three large fertile basins and a number of small ones provide suitable areas for settlement and intensive economic production. In the basin of Cundinamarca, where the Spanish found the Chibcha Indians, the European invaders established the town of Santa Fe de Bogotá (present-day Bogotá) at an elevation of 2,650 meters above sea level.

To the north of Bogotá, in the densely populated basins of Chiquinquirá and Boyacá, are fertile fields, rich mines, and large industrial establishments that produce much of the national wealth. Still farther north, where the Cordillera Oriental makes an abrupt turn to the northwest near the border with Venezuela, the highest point of this range, the Sierra Nevada de Cocuy, rises to 5,493 meters above sea level. In the department of Santander, the valleys on the western slopes are more spacious, and agriculture is intensive in the area around Bucaramanga. The northernmost

region of the range around Cúcuta is so rugged that historically it has been easier to maintain communications and transportation with Venezuela than with the adjacent parts of Colombia.

### *Caribbean Lowlands*

The Caribbean lowlands consist of all of Colombia north of an imaginary line extending northeastward from the Golfo de Urabá to the Venezuelan frontier at the northern extremity of the Cordillera Oriental. The semiarid Guajira Peninsula, in the extreme north, bears little resemblance to the rest of the region. In the southern part rises the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, an isolated mountain system with peaks reaching heights over 5,700 meters and slopes generally too steep for cultivation.

The Caribbean lowlands region is in roughly the shape of a triangle, the longest side of which is the coastline. Most of the country's commerce moves through Cartagena, Barranquilla, Santa Marta, and the other ports located along this important coast. Inland from these cities are swamps, hidden streams, and shallow lakes that support banana and cotton plantations, countless small farms, and, in higher places, cattle ranches.

The Caribbean region merges into and is connected with the Andean highlands through the two great river valleys. After the Andean highlands, it is the second most important region in economic activity. Approximately 17 percent of the country's population lived in this region in the late 1980s.

### *Pacific Lowlands*

In the 1980s, only 3 percent of all Colombians resided in the Pacific lowlands, a region of jungle and swamp with considerable but little-exploited potential in minerals and other resources. Buenaventura is the only port of any size on the coast. On the east, the Pacific lowlands are bounded by the Cordillera Occidental, from which numerous streams run. Most of the streams flow westward to the Pacific, but the largest, the navigable Río Atrato, flows northward to the Golfo de Urabá, making the river settlements accessible to the major Atlantic ports and commercially related primarily to the Caribbean lowlands hinterland. To the west of the Río Atrato rises the Serranía de Baudo, an isolated chain of low mountains that occupies a large part of the region. Its highest elevation is less than 1,800 meters, and its vegetation resembles that of the surrounding tropical forest.

The Atrato Swamp—in Chocó Department adjoining the border with Panama—is a deep muck sixty-five kilometers in width that for years has challenged engineers seeking to complete the Pan

American Highway. This stretch, near Turbo, where the highway is interrupted is known as the Tapón del Chocó (Chocon Plug). A second major transportation project involving Chocó Department has been proposed. A second interoceanic canal would be constructed by dredging the Río Atrato and other streams and digging short access canals. Completion of either of these projects would do much to transform this somnolent region.

### *Eastern Colombia*

The area east of the Andes includes about 699,300 square kilometers, or three-fifths of the country's total area, but Colombians view it almost as an alien land. The entire area, known as the eastern plains, was home to only 2 percent of the country's population in the late 1980s (see fig. 3). The Spanish term for plains (llanos) can be applied only to the open plains in the northern part, particularly the piedmont areas near the Cordillera Oriental, where cattle raising is practiced.

The region is unbroken by highlands except in Meta Department, where the Macarena Sierra, an outlier of the Andes, is of interest to scientists because its vegetation and wildlife are believed to be reminiscent of those that once existed throughout the Andes. Many of the numerous large rivers of eastern Colombia are navigable. The Río Guaviare and the streams to its north flow eastward and drain into the basin of the Río Orinoco, the largest river in Venezuela. Those south of the Río Guaviare flow into the basin of the Amazon. The Río Guaviare divides eastern Colombia into the llanos subregion in the north and the tropical rainforest, or *selva,* subregion in the south.

## Climate

The striking variety in temperature and precipitation results principally from differences in elevation. Temperatures range from very hot at sea level to relatively cold at higher elevations but vary little with the season. At Bogotá, for example, the average annual temperature is 15°C, and the difference between the average of the coldest and the warmest months is less than 1°C. More significant, however, is the daily variation in temperature, from 5°C at night to 17°C during the day.

Colombians customarily describe their country in terms of the climatic zones: the area under 900 meters in elevation is called the hot zone (*tierra caliente*), elevations between 900 and 2,000 meters are the temperate zone (*tierra templada*), and elevations from 2,000 meters to about 3,500 meters constitute the cold zone (*tierra fría*). The upper limit of the cold zone marks the tree line and the

approximate limit of human habitation. The treeless regions adjacent to the cold zone and extending to approximately 4,500 meters are high, bleak areas (usually referred to as the *páramos*), above which begins the area of permanent snow (*nevado*).

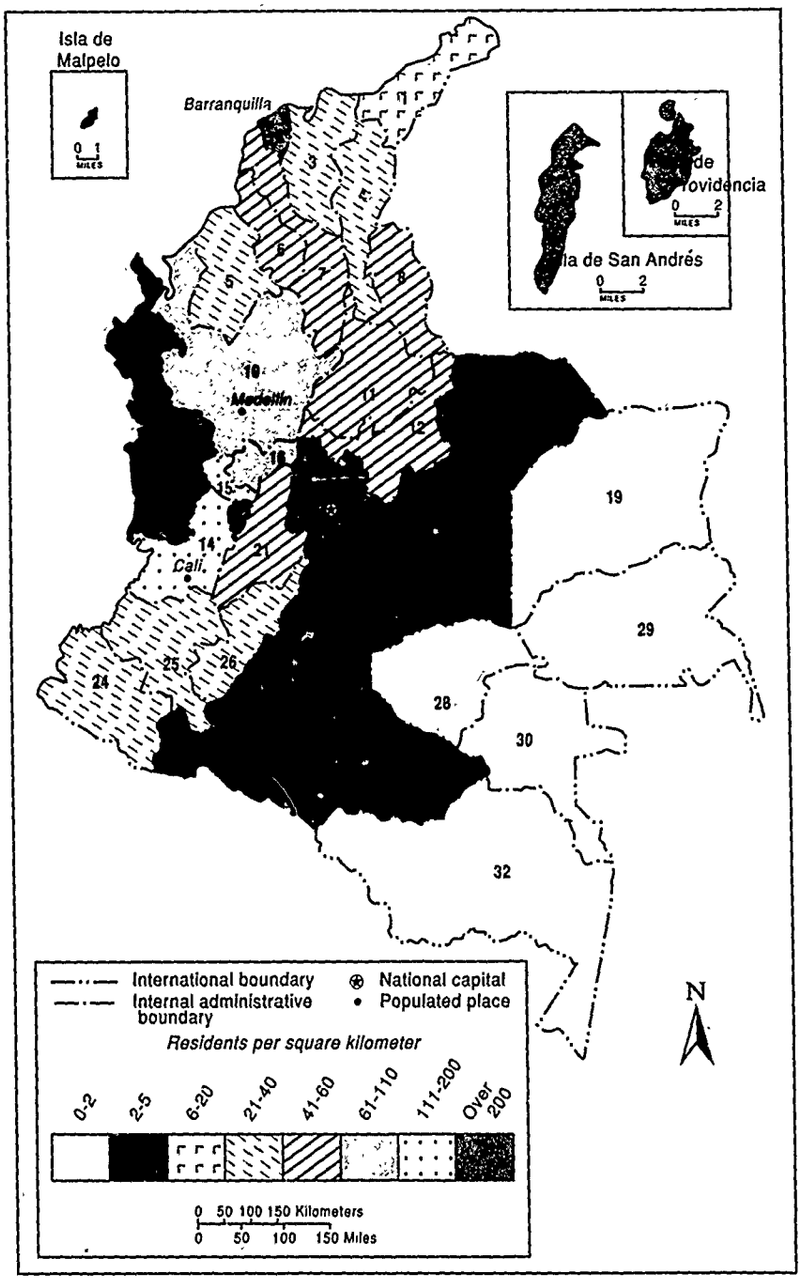
About 86 percent of the country's total area lies in the hot zone. Included in the hot zone and interrupting the temperate area of the Andean highlands are the long and narrow extension of the Magdalena Valley and a small extension in the Cauca Valley. Temperatures, depending on elevation, vary between 24°C and 38°C, and there are alternating dry and wet seasons corresponding to summer and winter, respectively. Breezes on the Caribbean coast, however, reduce both heat and precipitation.

Rainfall in the hot zone is heaviest in the Pacific lowlands and in parts of eastern Colombia, where rain is almost a daily occurrence and rain forests predominate. Precipitation exceeds 760 centimeters annually in most of the Pacific lowlands, making this one of the wettest regions in the world; in eastern Colombia, it decreases from 635 centimeters in portions of the Andean piedmont to 254 centimeters eastward. Extensive areas of the Caribbean interior are permanently flooded, more because of poor drainage than because of the moderately heavy precipitation during the rainy season from May through October.

The temperate zone covers about 8 percent of the country. This zone includes the lower slopes of the Cordillera Oriental and the Cordillera Central and most of the intermontane valleys. The important cities of Medellín (1,487 meters) and Cali (1,030 meters) are located in this zone, where rainfall is moderate and the mean annual temperature varies between 19°C and 24°C, depending on the elevation. In the higher elevations of this zone, farmers benefit from two wet and two dry seasons each year; January through March and July through September are the dry seasons.

The cold or cool zone constitutes about 6 percent of the total area, including some of the most densely populated plateaus and terraces of the Colombian Andes; this zone supports about one-fourth of the country's total population. The mean temperature ranges between 10°C and 19°C, and the wet seasons occur in April and May and from September to December, as in the high elevations of the temperate zone.

Precipitation is moderate to heavy in most parts of the country; the heavier rainfall occurs in the low-lying hot zone. Considerable variations occur because of local conditions that affect wind currents, however, and areas on the leeward side of the Guajira Peninsula receive generally light rainfall; the annual rainfall of thirty-five centimeters recorded at the Uribia station there is the lowest in




Source: Based on information from Colombia. Gobernación de Antioquia, División de Estadísticas Básicas, *Anuario Estadístico de Antioquia, 1985,* Medellín, 1986, 60.

*Figure 3. Population Density, 1985*

## Administrative Units of Colombia

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amazonas | 32 | Guaviare | 28 |
| Antioquia | 10 | Huila | 26 |
| Arauca | 13 | La Guajira | 1 |
| Atlántico | 2 | Magdalena | 3 |
| Bolívar | 7 | Meta | 23 |
| Boyacá | 12 | Nariño | 24 |
| Caldas | 16 | Norte de Santander | 8 |
| Caquetá | 27 | Putumayo | 31 |
| Casanare | 18 | Quindío | 20 |
| Cauca | 25 | Risaralda | 15 |
| César | 4 | Santander | 11 |
| Chocó | 9 | Sucre | 6 |
| Córdoba | 5 | Tolima | 21 |
| Cundinamarca | 17 | Valle del Cauca | 14 |
| Distrito Especial | 22 | Vaupés | 30 |
| Guainía | 29 | Vichada | 19 |

Colombia. Considerable year-to-year variations have been recorded, and Colombia sometimes experiences droughts.

Colombia's geographic and climatic variations have combined to produce relatively well-defined "ethnocultural" groups among different regions of the country: the Costeño from the Caribbean coast; the Caucano in the Cauca region and the Pacific coast; the Antioqueño in Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, and Valle del Cauca departments; the Tolimense in Tolima and Huila departments; the Cundiboyacense in the interior departments of Cundinamarca and Boyacá in the Cordillera Oriental; the Santandereano in Norte de Santander and Santander departments; and the Llanero in the eastern plains. Each group has distinctive characteristics, accents, customs, social patterns, and forms of cultural adaptation to climate and topography that differentiate it from other groups. Even with rapid urbanization and modernization, regionalism and regional identification continued to be important reference points, although they were somewhat less prominent in the 1980s than in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## Population and Urbanization

### Population Trends

At the outset of the twentieth century, Colombia's population was approximately 4 million. By 1951 it had grown to more than

12 million. In mid-1988 it had reached an estimated 28 million. Population growth rose from 2 percent annually in the 1940s to a peak of 3.4 percent in the 1950s. It then slowed to the 2 percent rate by the mid-1970s and appeared to have stabilized at that level through the 1980s (see fig. 4). Even at this lower rate of growth, however, the population was projected to reach 38 million by the year 2000.

When modern methods of disease control were adopted by an expanding public health system and average income growth began to rise in the late 1940s, the death rate fell rapidly. The birth rate remained at high levels until the early 1970s (see table 2, Appendix).

Life expectancy at birth was estimated to have grown steadily from forty-five years in 1951 to fifty-eight years in 1970, whereas the fertility rate remained nearly seven children per woman until the mid-1960s. The resulting rate of natural population increase between the late 1950s and the late 1960s was more than 3 percent annually, one of the highest rates in the world. Despite a net emigration during the 1960s, total population growth remained close to 3 percent through the end of the decade. Fertility began declining sharply in the mid-1960s to about four children per woman in the mid-1970s. The corresponding drop in the birth rate over the same period was among the most dramatic declines experienced in any country. Taking into account net emigration, the World Bank (see Glossary) calculated the actual population growth rate at about 2 percent annually in the mid-1970s.

Since 1966 total fertility had fallen by about 45 percent. At the same time, life expectancy at birth had been extended by about 9 percent, whereas the infant mortality rate had dipped by 27 percent. A sharp decline in the dependency ratio also occurred over the same period, primarily the result of the steep decline in the birth rate (see table 3, Appendix).

The Colombian experience is remarkable in the abruptness and magnitude of the declines in mortality and fertility, particularly given the absence of radical changes in the social, political, or economic order. Similar declines have taken place in Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), but only under conditions of drastic regime change.

A variety of factors combined to produce the fertility decline in Colombia. As in most countries, fertility patterns varied widely among Colombian socioeconomic groups. In the late 1960s, for example, Colombian women living in rural areas who had not completed primary education had a total fertility rate of 8 children, compared with 3.4 children for urban women with at least a full primary education. Since the beginning of the steep fertility decline

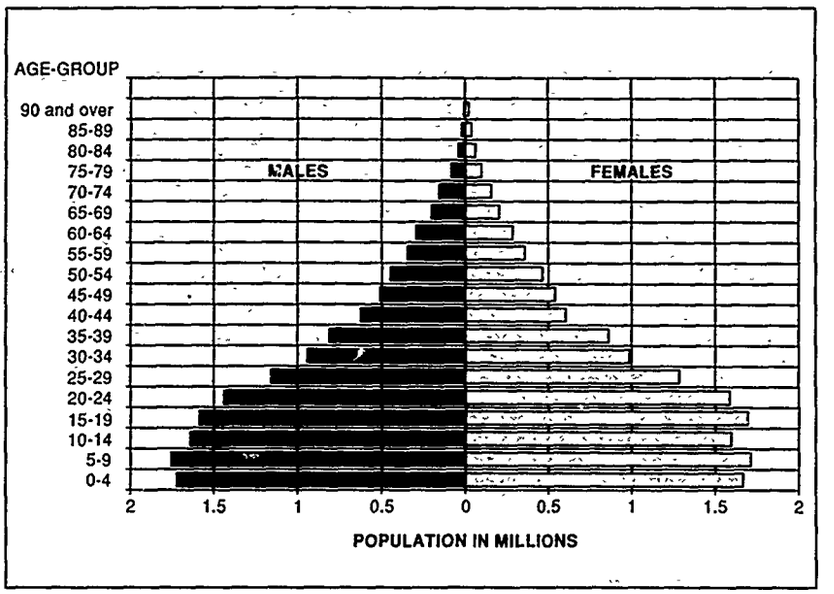
in the early 1960s, substantial shifts have occurred in the socioeconomic composition of Colombia's population. Typically, low-fertility groups, such as better-educated urban women, have increased their share of the population at the expense of high-fertility groups. Thus, even if reproductive patterns within different socioeconomic groups had not changed, the average fertility rate would have declined.

Family planning programs did not initiate the fertility decline because such programs did not begin until after the onset of the rapid fertility decline. Nevertheless, Colombia's well-organized family planning programs helped to keep the growth rate down. Information about and use of contraceptives increased rapidly after 1969, when the government began its support of family planning. In that year, the Liberal Party (Partido Liberal—PL) administration of President Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966–70) began providing subsidized family planning services in local health centers through the maternal and child health program of the Ministry of Public Health. In 1972 and 1973, the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador—PC) government of Misael Pastrana Borrero (1970–74) extended services to postpartum cases in about ninety hospitals throughout the country. Family planning services were substantially more accessible in urban than rural areas and more widely available through the private sector in urban areas; as much as 50 percent of the services were probably obtained from private entities. The government also subsidized consumers of contraceptives. Between 1969 and 1976, the proportion of women with knowledge of contraceptives rose from 51 percent to 72 percent. By 1976 about 95 percent of married women had this knowledge; 59 percent of married women had put this knowledge to use in 1976—a large jump from 34 percent in 1969.

Despite the dramatic fertility decline, the World Bank emphasized that a considerable gap remained in the 1980s between existing fertility levels and those prevailing in modern industrial societies. Thus, the demographic transition in Colombia was far from complete. The experience of more industrialized countries suggested that eventually fertility would decline to the two-children level. Whether this occurred quickly (by 2000) or slowly (by 2020) would greatly affect the eventual size of the country's population, the expansion rate of the labor force in the 1990s and beyond, and thus the social overhead investment and fiscal burden that the society would have to underwrite.

## Urbanization, Migration, and Immigration

Colombia had one of the highest urbanization rates of any Latin American nation. The proportion of the population living in urban




Source: Based on information from Colombia, Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, *XV Censo Nacional de Población y IV de Vivienda,* Bogotá, July 1986, 88-90.

*Figure 4. Population by Age and Sex, 1985*

areas increased from 31 percent to nearly 60 percent from 1938 to 1973. Over the 1951 to 1964 period, the rate of urbanization averaged 5.5 percent per year. In the 1980s, however, the rates of both population growth and urbanization fell.

Massive rural-urban migration since the late 1930s was the main factor in increasing the urban share of the population from less than one-third to almost two-thirds in 1982 (see table 4, Appendix). Urban growth between 1951 and 1973 was dominated by the growth of the four largest cities: Barranquilla, Cali, Medellín, and Bogotá —all of which were already large metropolitan areas of more than 500,000 people in 1951. The share of total population in these four cities nearly quintupled from 5 percent in 1951 to 25 percent in 1973—compared with an increase in the total urban share of less than 50 percent during the same period.

Observers disagreed about whether the growth of these cities, which averaged 5.2 percent a year between 1964 and 1973, persisted into the late 1980s. Since city size determined the allocation of federal funds for various public programs, the controversy was charged with heightened political and economic interest. Preliminary results from a survey of households indicated that the growth

rate of Bogotá declined from nearly 6 percent during the 1964–73 period to less than 4 percent between 1973 and 1981.

The decline in the urban growth rate was mainly the result of lower fertility in the more recent period and a higher base size of the cities, rather than a dramatic reduction in the pace of migration. Indeed, it appears that throughout the 1970s the absolute number of persons migrating to urban areas continued to increase. However, after 1979 the slowdown in economic activity, particularly in manufacturing and trade, probably lowered the pace of rural-urban migration somewhat as job opportunities in the cities declined.

Colombia has experienced little foreign influence or immigration. During the colonial period, Spain discouraged the admission of non-Spaniards into the colonies. After independence there were few economic attractions for immigrants. Civil wars were another deterrent. The country generally lacked a clear policy on immigration but never favored it on a large scale. Those who entered from abroad came as individuals or in small family units.

Immigration laws provided for the admission of persons who did not jeopardize the social order for personal, ethnic, or racial reasons. In 1953 the Institute of Land Settlement and Immigration was set up to direct the colonization of the underdeveloped regions of the country and was given the power to organize immigration for this purpose. After World War II, Colombia encouraged the immigration of skilled technicians, and in 1958 procedures were specified for the admission of refugees. Little was done, however, to implement these measures.

There were several identifiable ethnic groups of foreign origin in Colombia, all of them small. The Jewish population was estimated at 25,000, although in the 1980s many of them emigrated because of widespread kidnapping for ransom. There was a constant trickle of Spanish immigrants, many of them members of the clergy. Residents from the United States were mainly in business or missionary work. Germans, Italians, and Lebanese—usually referred to as Turks (*turcos*) or Syrians because they came from the Christian Lebanese part of Syria that formerly belonged to Turkey—were active in commerce, particularly in the port cities of Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Buenaventura.

Germans, as well as other foreigners, found acceptance in the upper class and frequently married into the white group. Some Lebanese married into the Guajira Indian tribe, but immigrants generally were most closely associated with the white upper class, which was generally receptive to ties with foreigners.

## Race and Ethnicity

The population is descended from three racial groups—Indians, blacks, and whites—that have mingled throughout the nearly 500 years of the country's history. No official figures were available, but according to rough estimates in the late 1980s, mestizos (white-Indian mix) constituted approximately 50 percent of the population, whites 25 percent, mulattoes (black-white mix) and *zambos* (black-Indian mix) 20 percent, blacks 4 percent, and Indians 1 percent.

Recognizing the impossibility of objective racial classification and not wishing to emphasize ethnic or racial differences, the national census dropped references to race after 1918. Nevertheless, most Colombians continued to identify themselves and others according to ancestry, physical appearance, and sociocultural status. Social relations reflected the importance attached to certain characteristics associated with a given racial group. Although these characteristics no longer accurately demarcated distinct social categories, they still helped determine rank in the social hierarchy.

The various groups were found in differing concentrations throughout the nation, largely reflecting the colonial social system. The whites tended to live mainly in the urban centers, particularly in Bogotá and the burgeoning highland cities. The large mestizo population was predominantly a peasant group, concentrated in the highlands where the Spanish conquerors had mixed with the women of Indian chiefdoms. After the 1940s, however, mestizos began moving to the cities, where they became part of the urban working class or urban poor. The black and mulatto populations were also part of this trend but lived mainly along the coasts and in the lowlands.

Descendants of Indians who survived the Spanish conquest were found in scattered groups in remote areas largely outside the national society, such as the higher elevations of the southern highlands, the forests north and west of the cordilleras, the arid Guajira Peninsula, and the vast eastern plains and Amazonian jungles, which had only begun to be penetrated by other groups in the twentieth century. The Indian groups differed from the rest of the nation in major cultural aspects. Although some continued to speak indigenous languages, Spanish, introduced by missionaries, was the predominant language among all but the most isolated groups.

### Historical Development

In the first fifty years after the discovery of the Americas, the Spanish began to settle in present-day Colombia, introducing their culture and social system and imposing their values on the African



*Harbor at Santa Marta*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

slaves they imported and the indigenous population they conquered. Spanish colonists settled in the Caribbean coastal zones, the highland plateaus, and the areas along the major rivers but were initially unsuccessful in settling Chocó, the eastern plains, and the Amazon Basin. Patterns of colonial settlement were reinforced throughout later periods, leaving frontier areas—usually less hospitable land—open for settlement by nonwhites—especially blacks, mulattoes, and retreating Indian tribes.

The Spanish created a hierarchical society in which they occupied the top stratum in terms of prestige, wealth, and power; slaves and Indians occupied the bottom (see Colonial Society, 1550–1810, ch. 1). White skin became synonymous with being Spanish and therefore of high status. Offspring of mixed unions fell somewhere in between, adopting the dominant culture if recognized by their Spanish fathers, remaining on the social periphery if not. As the character and value system of the nation were formed, notions of color, class, and culture merged to elevate whites, subjugate blacks and Indians, and allow upward mobility for mulattoes and mestizos who dissociated themselves from the heritage of their nonwhite ancestors in favor of becoming "Spanish."

Probably more than any other Latin American people, Colombians remained conscious of their Spanish heritage. The persistent supremacy and relative purity of the Spanish heritage was

brought about by a combination of factors. The indigenous population was sparse, heterogeneous, and thus relatively easily subdued, driven into less accessible and less desirable areas or absorbed by the Spanish population during the colonial era. Blacks, viewed as slaves until the mid-nineteenth century and as manual laborers thereafter, remained segregated economically, geographically, and socially. Although Indians and blacks outnumbered whites and people of mixed blood in certain regions, they remained minorities without shared identity or cohesion on the national level. The lack of immigrants from other European nations and the emphasis on traditional Spanish institutions—particularly Roman Catholicism—helped white Colombians retain their Hispanic identification. Finally, a diverse geography and resultant regionalism exacerbated the lack of communal feelings among the masses and provided little basis for national cohesion within any group except the tightly knit white elite.

As Colombian society developed, there was little change in its rigid stratification. Various intellectuals, clergy, and politicians unsuccessfully attempted to debate the status of Indians and blacks and to prevent discrimination against them. Being a recognized member of the national society and thereby eligible for its benefits and a chance at upward mobility required allegiance to a culture and a behavioral pattern based almost entirely on traditional Spanish values. Anything outside this pattern was anomalous and was considered un-Colombian.

Independence did little to alter the colonial framework of the society. In the struggle for independence, the *peninsulares* (those born in Spain) were backed by Spanish troops, and the criollos (those born in the New World of Spanish descent) were backed by mestizo and mulatto troops; nonetheless, the values and outlooks of the two factions were similar. Many of the *peninsulares* left after independence, allowing the criollos and some persons of mixed blood to take over their positions in the society. To this extent, the system was opened up to qualified mestizos and mulattoes, but those who moved up did so as individuals whose mobility was based on education, wealth, and culture rather than on a change in the status of their group. No attempt was made to upgrade the status of blacks, who remained on the periphery of the national society, or Indians, who remained almost completely outside it.

Both Indians and blacks continued to reside on the outskirts of national life, as much because of their class and culture as their color. As a group, however, blacks were more integrated into the national society and left a greater mark on it for several reasons. First, they had been a part of Spanish society since the Middle Ages,

whereas Indians were relative newcomers. The Spanish had long possessed Africans as personal servants and did not find them as alien as the Indians they encountered in the New World. Moreover, it was more difficult for the blacks to maintain their original culture because, unlike the Indians, they could not remain within their own communities and did not initially have the option of retreating into isolated areas. They did not arrive in and were not grouped into organized social units, and, coming from different areas of Africa, they often did not share the same language or culture. Although slave revolts sometimes occurred, no large community of escaped slaves survived in isolation to preserve its African heritage, as did the Maroons in Jamaica. Finally, despite their position on the bottom rung of the social ladder, black slaves often had close relations—as domestic servants—with Spaniards and were therefore exposed to Spanish culture much more than were the Indians.

Blacks thus became a part, although a peripheral one, of Colombian society from the beginning, learning Spanish and adopting the ways of the Spanish that were permitted them. They thought of themselves as Colombians by the end of the colonial period and felt superior to the Indians, who officially occupied higher status, were nominally free, and were closer in skin color, facial features, and hair texture to the emerging mestizo mix.

The proportion of white ancestry has been an important measure of status for the mixed groups since the colonial era, when each degree of mixture was recognized as a distinct category. The plethora of terms for color still being used in the 1980s reflected the persistence of this colonial pattern and a continuing desire among Colombians to classify each other according to color and social group. A complex racial terminology led to persons of the same class using different terms to define themselves racially. These terms also cut across class lines so that persons at one level defined themselves as being racially similar to those at other levels.

The confusion over classification affected most Colombians because most of them did not define themselves as being white, black, or Indian, which are distinct and mutually exclusive groups, but as belonging to one of the mixed categories. Factors that helped Colombians order their perceptions of color were, in addition to the interplay of biological and social data, geographic residence and membership in a social class. Residence in a region often automatically categorized an individual. For example, blacks and mulattoes were so prevalent in Chocó that the word *Chocoano* (resident of Chocó) was virtually synonymous with the word *black* throughout much of Colombia. Whites and mestizos in Chocó were

commonly migrants from neighboring Antioquia, so that any light-skinned person might be called an Antioqueño regardless of his or her origin.

Migration and rural or urban residence could also determine a person's status. A dark-skinned mulatto who because of wealth and prestige would be a member of the local elite in a rural area along the coast would not be so considered outside his or her region. Conversely, movement from a larger to a smaller town might enhance an individual's status. Usually the only Colombians whose status was invariable were the national elite, Indians, and blacks.

Perceptions of one's own color and that of others also varied with class membership. A lower-class person in either an urban or a rural area was likely to be more concerned with the daily struggle for survival than with skin color, especially if the person's peers were of a similar racial background. Members of the upper class were equally secure in their status as white Colombians, whether or not they appeared Caucasian to the casual observer, because their status automatically defined them as such. The racial segregation of the polar extremes of the class structure—with virtually no blacks or Indians in the elite and equally few whites in the lower class—reinforced cultural and class distinctions.

It was among the self-conscious, racially mixed members of the middle sectors that color and ethnic designations were critical and likely to contribute to status. All other factors being equal, light-skinned mestizos with straight hair found mobility easier than darker-skinned counterparts. A man, especially a black or mulatto, might improve his social position or that of his children by marrying a lighter-skinned or wealthier woman. Mestizos might place more emphasis on acquiring other accoutrements of whiteness, such as an education, a cultured life-style, or a genteel occupation.

## Contemporary Trends

In the late 1980s, whites continued to occupy the highest positions in the government, economy, and society. Most of them resided in the large urban centers, and even those who did not considered themselves urban in orientation. Membership in the white group was usually concomitant with upper- or middle-class values and behavior patterns and adherence to Roman Catholicism and its teachings—in name if not in practice (see Religion, this ch.). Whites modeled their life-styles, family patterns, and human relations largely on European and North American norms and in turn dictated them to the rest of society.

The white group usually emphasized racial and cultural purity and wealth derived from property. This emphasis was particularly

true in the capital and in the seats of colonial aristocracy, such as Popayán. The exception was in Antioquia Department, where a great deal of miscegenation took place and where social distinctions rested largely on economic achievement rather than ethnic considerations.

Non-Antioqueño whites continued to stress colonial notions of the superiority of mental over manual labor, encouraging genteel remunerative activities derived from owning land or a career in law, medicine, or architecture. Creative or journalistic writing, literary criticism, and university professorship were also considered appropriate careers or sidelines for whites who were financially secure. For those less well off, business, commerce, and industry provided more lucrative, if less traditional, positions.

Although North American cultural influence has grown substantially since the 1950s, whites remained culturally tied to Europe—particularly to France and Spain. Children continued to be sent to Europe and the United States for schooling, to learn languages, and to become cosmopolitan. Only in the twentieth century did white Colombians begin to seriously study nonwhite facets of their country's social system and incorporate them into their scholarly and creative works.

Insistence on racial purity within the white group varied among regions and sometimes was not as important as light skin and an old, respected Spanish surname. In fact, many people who came from families that had been considered white for generations were actually descendants of people of mixed ancestry who purchased certificates of white ancestry from the Spanish crown. Whites did not usually marry dark-skinned individuals, however, unless economic hardship necessitated bringing a wealthy mulatto or mestizo into the family.

From the earliest years of the colonial period, miscegenation among whites, Indians, and blacks occurred so much that people of mixed origin soon came to outnumber all other groups combined. In fact, racial mixing was so great that Colombians usually referred to themselves as a mestizo nation—in this case meaning simply "mixed"—despite the absence of a significant cultural synthesis.

In the mid-1980s, people of mixed origin were found throughout the society—in all classes, occupations, and geographic regions. The status of individuals of mixed blood varied, from those who bordered on being white to those who had recently moved out of marginal status as black or Indian. Probably the only factors that tied the mixed group together were a general recognition that status

as a mestizo or mulatto was better than that as an Indian or a black and some feeling of belonging to the national society.

Colombians perceived considerable differences between mestizos and mulattoes. Mestizos found upward mobility easier than mulattoes in most areas, probably because mestizo physical characteristics were more like those of the idealized Colombian: light brown to white skin, straight or wavy hair, and caucasoid facial features. Moreover, once a person was considered mestizo, his cultural identity automatically became that of the dominant white group, whereas mulattos often exhibited black cultural and social traits that made upward social mobility more difficult.

Many blacks left slave status early in Colombian history, becoming part of the free population. Some were awarded freedom by their owners, and some purchased their liberty, but probably the greatest number achieved freedom by escape. There were numerous revolts, particularly in the Cauca Valley and along the Caribbean coast, that liberated many slaves. Those who achieved freedom sometimes moved into Indian communities, and their *zambo* offspring became part of the indigenous group. Others founded their own settlements. A number of towns, such as Palenque in northern Antioquia Department and Ure in southern Córdoba Department, kept the history of revolt alive in their oral traditions. In the Chocó area, along the Pacific, many of the black communities remained relatively unmixed, probably because there were few whites in the area and the Indians became increasingly resistant to assimilation. In other regions, such as the Magdalena Valley, black communities had considerable white and Indian admixtures.

The distribution of blacks in the 1980s continued to reflect that of the colonial period. The greatest number lived in the lowland areas on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts and along the Río Cauca and Río Magdalena. In the Chocó region, they had largely replaced the Indians and, along with mulattoes, constituted 80 percent of the population. On the Caribbean islands of San Andrés and Providencia, which Colombia acquired from Britain at the end of the colonial period, there were several thousand blacks. Despite the length of time during which Colombia had jurisdiction over them, most blacks on these islands retained their Protestant religion, continued to speak English, and regarded themselves as a group distinct from mainland residents.

Descendants of slaves preserved relatively little of their African heritage or identification. Some place-names were derived from African languages, and some traditional musical instruments brought into the country by slaves were used throughout the



*Guajira Indians*
*Courtesy Embassy*
*of Colombia, Washington*

country. Religion in the black communities remained the most durable link with the African past.

In the 1980s, wholly black communities were disappearing, not only because their residents were moving to the cities but also because the surrounding mestizo and white populations had begun moving into black communities. Eventual absorption into the mixed milieu appeared inevitable in the 1980s. Moreover, as blacks moved into the mainstream of society from its peripheries, they perceived the advantages of better education and jobs. Rather than forming organizations to promote their advancement as a group, blacks concentrated on achieving mobility through individual merit and adaptation to the prevailing system.

When the Spanish arrived in 1499, they found a heterogeneous Indian population that numbered between 1.5 and 2 million, belonged to several hundred tribes, and spoke mutually unintelligible dialects. The complexity of their social organization and technology varied tremendously, from stratified agricultural chiefdoms to tropical farm villages and nomadic hunting and food-gathering groups. Throughout the colonial years, the indigenous population constituted an estimated 50 percent of the total population, but by 1988 it had dropped to roughly 1 percent. About sixty tribes were scattered throughout the departments and national territories.

In the agricultural chiefdoms of the highlands, the Spaniards successfully imposed institutions designed to ensure their control of

the Indians and thereby the use of their labor. By the end of the sixteenth century, political and religious administration was organized, and efforts to convert the Indians were well under way. The most important institution that regulated the lives and welfare of the highland Indians was the *resguardo* (reservation) system of communal landholdings. Under this system, Indians were allowed to use the land but could not sell it.

Similar in some respects to the Indian reservation system of the United States, the *resguardo* system lasted with some changes into the late twentieth century and was an enduring link between the government and the remaining highland tribes. As land pressures increased, however, encroachment of white settlers onto *resguardo* lands accelerated, often without opposition from the government. The struggle of the Indians on these lands to protect their holdings from neighboring landlords continued into the late 1980s. Nevertheless, the Virgilio Barco Vargas administration (1986– ) created new *resguardos,* including one in Guainía Commissaryship, and reconstituted others.

The highland Indian communities have been the subject of most Indian legislation since the 1940s. The National Indian Institute was originally founded in 1943 as a private body. It was later attached to the National University of Colombia (Universidad Nacional de Colombia—UNC) and eventually became an advisory body to the Directorate of Indian Reservations within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. The institute was reorganized in 1958 to include representatives of several ministries concerned with Indians, as well as members of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology. Division of the *resguardos* was immediately suspended, as far as possible, and a new program of community development directed at the incorporation of the Indians into the national society was begun.

In 1960 the Directorate of Indian Reservations was reorganized and became the Division of Indian Affairs; together with the National Indian Institute it was transferred to the Ministry of Government. The Division of Indian Affairs carried out its programs and policies through eight regional commissions for Indian welfare and protection. The location of the commissions corresponded to the *resguardo* zones and in general to areas inhabited by Indians who were already somewhat integrated into the national system.

In contrast to the highlands, the lowlands were less densely populated at the time of the conquest, and the natives possessed a simpler culture than the highland tribes. The tropical forest areas were inhabited by farmers whose slash-and-burn agriculture limited the size of settlements to 100 or 200 persons. Most of these tribes lived

along rivers and depended partially on fishing for subsistence. Indians of the eastern savannas and the Amazon Basin were nomadic, traveling in small hunting and gathering bands and frequently living along rivers. When the Spanish arrived, many lowland groups retreated to areas that were less accessible or attractive to the Spanish. These nomadic tribes and forest dwellers fared better than their highland counterparts in maintaining independence from the Spanish because of their simpler, more mobile, and more self-sufficient life-style. Their contacts with outsiders were generally limited to missionaries.

In the past, the government generally had not attempted to legislate in matters affecting the forest Indians. During the colonial period, Roman Catholic missions were granted jurisdiction over the lowland tribes. With the financial support of the government, a series of agreements with the Holy See from 1887 to 1953 entrusted the evangelization and education of these Indians to the missions. The missions were coordinated with the government's Division of Indian Affairs through a representative in the National Indian Institute. In 1960 the secretary of the institute became the chief of the Section of Indian Protection in the Ministry of Government and was responsible for the Indians of the nation's peripheral regions. Barco's *resguardo* initiative affected forest tribes as well as highland tribes.

Although all tribes in Colombia had had some contact with outsiders, the degree and effect varied considerably. Some tribes, such as the Maku, Chiricoa, Tunebo, and others from Amazonas Commissaryship, remained very primitive nomadic hunting and fishing groups. Others had begun to cultivate such crops as cacao, sugarcane, corn, and bananas. Some of the most successful tribes developed effective methods of raising cattle. Nonetheless, it was difficult for Indians to retain land that they traditionally held, especially in the highlands, where the competition for cultivable land was keenest.

In the 1980s, there was considerable disagreement in Colombia over the number of remaining Indians, their concentrations, and their relationship to the national society. Some Colombian scholars argued against integrating Indians, contending that the indigenous peoples had as much right as any other element of the society to survive intact under government protection. However, this protection was only partial. The government lacked a comprehensive policy, and what legislation did exist seemed oriented toward assimilating the Indians. Other factors pointing toward gradual absorption of the Indians were expansion of colonization into Indian territories, government plans for the development of

natural resources in Indian areas, and the Indians' increased contact with and integration into the national system through economic inducement.

## Social Class

The structure of Colombian society in the 1980s—strongly influenced by traditions inherited from sixteenth-century Spain—was highly stratified, having well-defined class membership, pronounced status differences, and limited vertical social mobility. The urban sector was characterized by a more flexible social system, a growing middle class, and greater participation of the population in national politics. Rural society in all but a few regions was organized in rigidly hierarchical structures in which change of status was very difficult. Only in the coffee-growing departments of Caldas and Antioquia were there sizable segments of the population exhibiting the traits of a rural middle class.

In the 1980s, social scientists continued to disagree about the definition of class in Colombia, the composition and relative importance of the middle class, the role of the upper class in the larger society, and the degree to which the society was evolving into a more open system. It was difficult to speak of social class per se because class implied feelings of cohesion and exclusiveness vis-à-vis other classes—characteristics that did not uniformly apply to status groups in Colombia. This class consciousness among persons with similar economic, occupational, and sociological interests was found only at the highest stratum of society in Colombia.

Four classes and their relative proportions could be distinguished in the mid-1980s: upper class, 5 percent; middle class, 20 percent; lower class, 50 percent; and the masses, 25 percent. There were also two important transitional subdivisions: the new rich, who constituted perhaps 3 percent of the total and were tenuously members of the upper class; and the upper lower class, organized blue-collar workers, and poorer white-collar workers, who made up about 15 percent of the total.

Classes were distinguished by occupation, life-style, income, family background, education, and power. Within each of the classes, there were numerous subtle gradations in status. Colombians tended to be extremely status-conscious, and class membership was an important aspect of social life because it regulated the interaction of groups and individuals. Social class boundaries were far more flexible in the city than in the countryside, but consciousness of status and class distinctions continued to permeate social life in both sectors.

## Upper Class

The upper class comprised two interrelated groups, the traditional landed elite and the new rich, who owed their status primarily to successful entrepreneurship. The former continued to base its elite status on distinguished lineage and a respected family name, together known as *abolengo,* and on the ownership of large tracts of land. It frequently provided personnel for the highest offices in the government, the church, and the military. *Abolengo* remained virtually the sole determinant of upper-class membership in rural communities and in some traditionally oriented cities, such as Popayán. In larger cities and in areas accessible to its influence, however, wealth was probably equally or more important in determining elite status. In urban areas, a person's family history was frequently not as significant as the financial ability to maintain the life-style that had come to be associated with the social elite.

The traditional elite continually lost individual members to the middle class, either through the gradual loss of inherited wealth or through the division of estates among many heirs. In the past, however, and even in the 1980s, displacement of families was kept to a minimum because of the custom of mutual aid among relatives. If one branch of an elite family suffered financial difficulties, friends and relatives rallied to its support, helping children to obtain the customary good education and enabling the family to maintain a facade of well-being.

In the modern urban industrial communities, however, the financial climate had become more demanding as ever-increasing emphasis was placed on wealth and its display as a criterion of high status. The decline in extended-family cohesion and the dispersal of relatives that accompanied urbanization made it even less likely that an elite family would feel obligated to sustain all of its members at the accustomed level. Thus, many of these persons were forced to accept middle-class employment and living standards and might even fall into the lower class.

The newer members of the upper class were generally thought to be in a transitional state from the middle to the upper class. They had acquired economic and social success through entrepreneurial skills in banking, commerce, and industry. Some of the representatives of this group were self-made men, often mestizos, who had worked their way up the social ladder from the middle class. Others were European immigrants or their descendants who had been successful in the business community.

Some observers believed that the new rich constituted a lower sector of the upper class because they lacked the lineage, cultivation, and landowning tradition of the old elite. Although the new rich often regarded themselves as equal to the elite, they were not so considered by the rest of society. The barriers between these two groups were dissolving, however, at least in the major urban centers, where changing social standards, intermarriage, and shared political interests tended to overrule tradition.

Further linkages between the traditional elite and the new rich were provided by the many persons who had roots in both groups. Although the entrepreneurial upper class was sometimes regarded as entirely of recent origin, many of its members had aristocratic forebears and had long been recognized as part of the traditional elite. Because of the declining productivity of traditional agriculture and the increased opportunity for investment in industry, business, and commercial farming, the sons of large landowners had been among the first to enter these new areas of economic endeavor during the 1920s.

Education was traditionally correlated with upper-class membership. Upper-class children received the best education in the most prestigious schools, beginning at one of the exclusive private schools and ending with a degree from one of the country's well-known universities. Intellectual and professional careers, particularly in law, medicine, and journalism, were preferred by sons of the elite. It was not unusual for a member of this class to obtain an advanced degree and take a position as a university professor for several years before entering high government office or assuming a managerial position in a family enterprise.

The upper class was very successful in maintaining exclusiveness and controlling change through a system of informal decision-making groups called *roscas*—the name of a twisted pastry. These informal groups existed at different levels and across different spheres and were linked hierarchically by personal relationships. Their composition varied according to level—municipal, departmental, or national—but each group tried to include at least one powerful person from every sphere. A *rosca* was a vitally important system in both the social and the political context because it was at this level of interaction that most political decisions were made and careers determined. Only when a man was a member of such a group could he consider himself a member of the upper-middle or upper class.

*Roscas* linked influential individuals and institutions in such a way that an important university, a commercial bank, an investment bank, an association of industries, and agricultural interests

might all be coordinated and controlled by a few persons. Several competing groups in an area often bargained and traded favors among themselves. A casual observer might not recognize the linkages within such groups until he began to do business in the area or needed something done in an official capacity. Colombians moving up the social ladder became increasingly aware of the importance of such groups.

## Middle Class

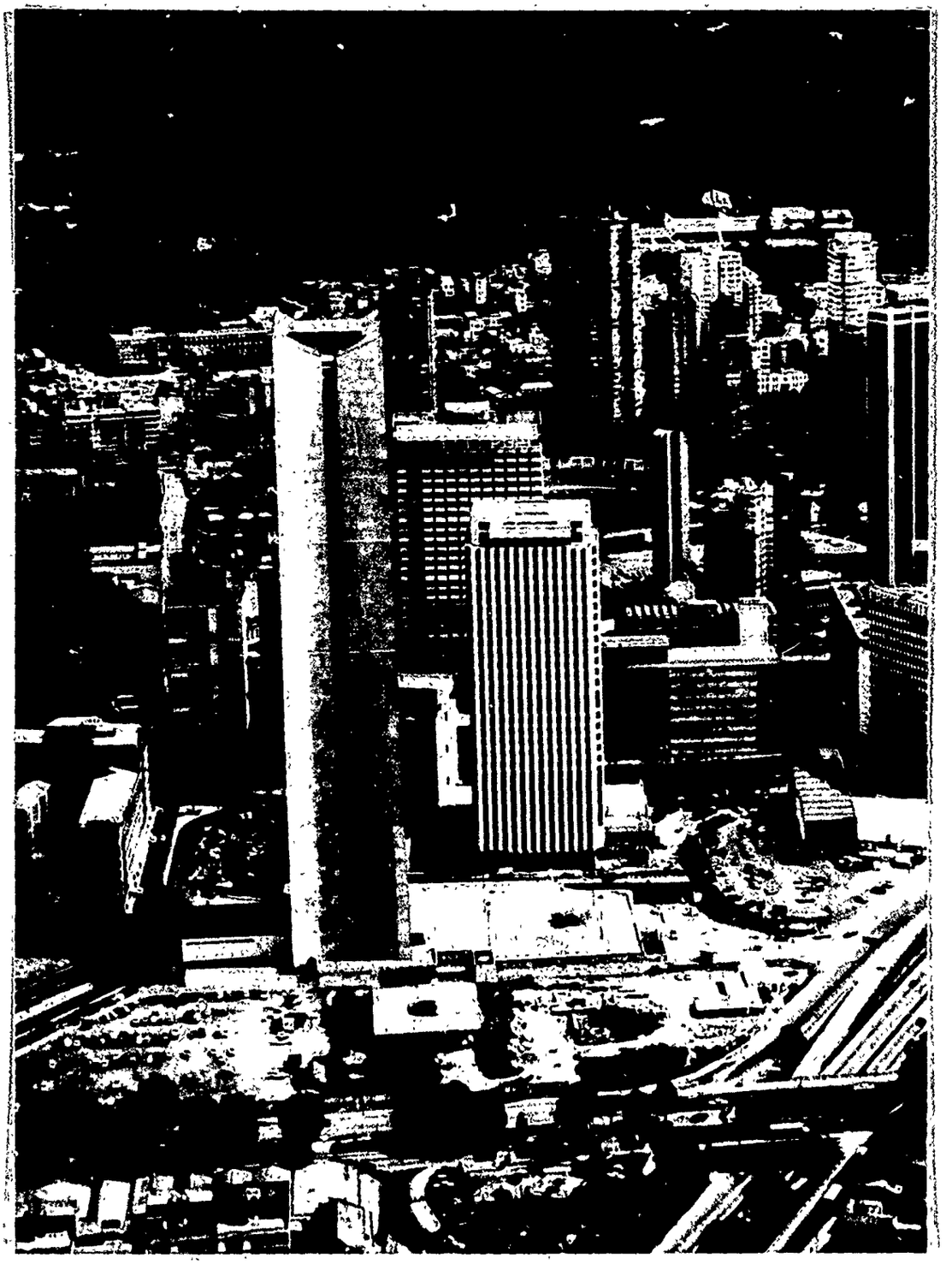
The emergence in the twentieth century of a fairly large middle class paralleled the development of urban society and of the modern institutions of government, education, and social services. Although Colombia had always had a small element of self-employed shopkeepers, clerks, and overseers, they had been limited in number and had no sense of shared identity.

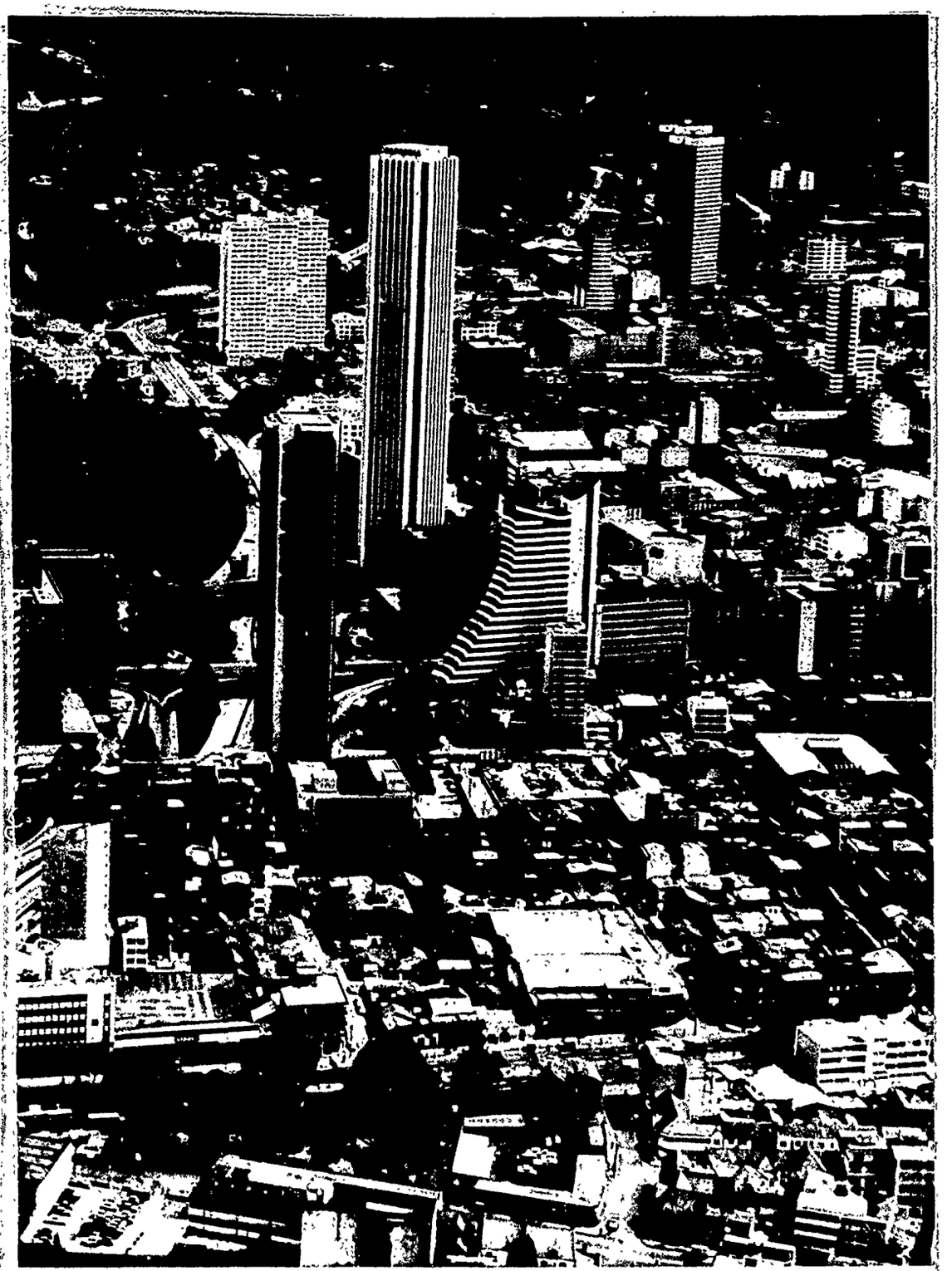
Most of the modern middle class had developed since the 1920s. As a class, the various middle groups distinguished themselves from other members of society by regular employment in occupations that generally did not qualify them for membership in the elite.

The nucleus of the middle class was in the most highly industrialized urbanized areas—the departments of Antioquia, Caldas, and Cundinamarca—where institutional changes had been most pronounced. These areas had the highest percentage of people employed in professions, government, business, and trade—all predominantly middle-class occupations.

The middle class owed its heterogeneity to its late development and continued expansion. It consisted of self-employed small businessmen, professionals, salaried employees (including office workers), other white-collar personnel, and some members of organized labor. The expansion of the government bureaucracy provided a number of positions for the middle class. Teachers were usually included in the middle class, as were most military officers, most of the clergy, and some intellectuals, artists, journalists, and musicians.

Owners of medium-sized farms, primarily in the agricultural departments of Caldas and Antioquia, made up most of the rural middle class. They derived the greatest benefits from governmental efforts at agricultural credit, technical training, community development, and expanded primary education. In addition, they possessed a relatively modern outlook in contrast to other farmers in more remote areas who had accumulated enough wealth to be placed at the top of the middle class but preferred a modified peasant existence and traditional outlook.





*Bogotá skyline*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

The diversity of the middle class, which placed some of its members scarcely above the lower class in life-style and income and others on the lower edge of the upper class, was striking. Infinite status gradations characterized the internal structure of this class. However, by linking several of the most important status or prestige factors, the middle sector can be divided into two main parts: an upper middle class and a lower segment in transition from the lower class. The sectors were differentiated primarily on the basis of the attitudes and values they held and on their origin in the social system.

The upper middle class gradually merged into the elite class and was composed primarily of professionals, medium-sized landowners, entrepreneurs, managerial personnel, and some government bureaucrats. Some of these were descendants of the traditional elite who had fallen on the social scale and clung to the illusion of their families' former status. They often did not consider themselves members of the middle group and continually attempted to regain a place in the upper class by modeling their manners, behavior, and attitudes on those of the elite.

The members of the upper middle class tended to share a concern for culture and outward appearance, exhibited by conspicuous consumption. Standards of social behavior were stringently observed, and active support was given, particularly by women, to the Roman Catholic Church and numerous religious associations. The completion of academic secondary school was considered essential for the child of upper-middle-class parents, and a university degree was becoming increasingly necessary. Whereas membership in the elite was still determined primarily by family background and values, upper-middle-class status was largely determined by a good secondary education.

The lower middle class, constituting the bulk of the middle class, came primarily from upwardly mobile members of the lower class. A large number were clerks or small shopkeepers. Many had only a precarious hold on middle-class status and tended to be less concerned with imitating upper-class culture and behavior than with making enough money to sustain a middle-class life-style. Families at this level tended to be just as concerned as those at higher social levels with giving their children an education. Many hoped to send at least one of their children through a university, regardless of the financial burden.

### The Lower Class and the Masses

The lower class and the masses together constituted the largest sector of rural and urban society—about 75 percent. The line

between the lower class and the masses was fine; it was based more on an increased awareness of the social, economic, and political systems among members of the lower class than on any other criterion. Those at the upper levels of the lower class—organized labor, small farmers, merchants, and some white-collar workers—were in a transitional stage and possessed some attributes of middle-class status.

The lower class was more politically aware than the masses, although the levels of participation were uniformly low. Feelings of common identity were generally lacking among groups in the lower class, although class consciousness existed within such groups as organized labor and landowning campesinos. Generally, members of the lower class were regularly employed with some degree of security, although they were frequently unskilled and unorganized. Included in this category were domestic servants, construction workers, taxi drivers, barbers, repairmen, and small shopkeepers. The rural lower class included small independent landholders, called *minifundistas,* and even some day workers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers, who provided some security for their families.

In contrast, the masses were composed of the illiterate and the impoverished who lived on the margin of subsistence and possessed little or no security, skill, or stable employment. They included Indians and blacks as well as many other dark-skinned persons. They resided on the sociopolitical periphery of the society and maintained their traditional way of life; most of their energies were consumed in the struggle for survival. Although the masses possessed some political potential and some awareness of the political system, they lacked an effective, evaluative understanding of it as well as sufficient class cohesion to articulate their desires.

At the top of the lower-class hierarchy and merging into the middle class were the regularly employed industrial workers. Often distinguished from white-collar employees only by their blue-collar occupations, unionized factory workers received relatively high wages and were protected by labor legislation (see The Labor Movement, ch. 3). They were better organized than other employed members of the lower class and were sometimes able to exert a degree of pressure on employers and political parties to obtain their demands. In general, they were conservative politically and opposed government initiatives to change the status quo. This conservatism existed because, despite their stability relative to other members of the lower class, their status in the society was fairly tenuous, resting solely on maintenance of their occupation. Loss

of job would seriously impair a factory worker's ability to maintain his status.

Social life in the lower class was less structured and more informal than in the middle and upper classes. There was less restraint and concern with the rigid standards of behavior that regulated the social activities of those higher on the social scale. Participation in religious activities, particularly celebrations of saints' days and festivals, was an important part of social life, as were spontaneous neighborhood and family gatherings.

The rapid growth of the urban sector since the 1940s resulted primarily from the influx of migrants from the countryside. Agricultural workers continued to leave the rural areas and come to the towns and cities, hoping to improve their way of life. Most were uneducated—at best barely literate—and unskilled, two attributes that considerably limited their prospects for employment and their ability to adjust to urban life. Consequently, there was a high rate of unemployment and underemployment in this migrant population, particularly among the men (see Inflation and Unemployment, ch. 3). Women often found jobs as domestic servants or cooks, but the continued flood of unskilled labor into the cities made it increasingly difficult for men to find even the most menial jobs.

Movement to the city did little to change the relative social status or way of life of most migrants, who merely exchanged rural unemployment and poverty for the same conditions in an urban environment. Many became residents of the shantytowns that surrounded the larger cities. Housing in a lower-class barrio was frequently no more than a shack without running water and often without electricity, not too different from what the migrant had left behind.

Despite the apparent hopelessness of the migrant's condition, there was the expectation of some future improvement, if not in his own life at least in that of his children. One survey taken in a lower-class community in a larger city found that parents believed that the future would be better for their children. Usually this belief was tied to the greater availability of education and the other institutions of urban life. Migrants perceived themselves as closer to the mainstream of national life with a greater chance of becoming economically, socially, and politically a part of it than those who remained in the countryside.

In the mid-1980s, the rural lower class was outnumbered by the urban lower class. Migration had rapidly reversed the traditional balance; the proportion of the rural population continued to decline steadily as it had since the 1920s. In the past, the lower class was primarily an agricultural sector, its position in society dictated by

dependence on the land. Whether *minifundista,* semipermanent squatter, sharecropper, tenant farmer, or day laborer, the campesino's small parcel of land or lack of land kept him at a near-subsistence level of existence for generations. There were slight distinctions among the various groups making up the rural lower class: generally, the living standard of the *minifundista,* squatter, and tenant farmer was somewhat higher than that of the sharecropper, who in turn lived a little better than the landless day laborer.

## Family Life

In the 1980s, there were continued signs of change in the traditional norms and patterns of family life, resulting from the high rate of rural-to-urban migration, the growth of urban industrial centers, and accompanying socioeconomic developments. The decline of the patriarchal extended-family structure was apparent in urban society, as increased geographic and social mobility weakened kinship ties and extended greater independence to young people. Families at the bottom of the social ladder were adversely affected by geographic dislocation and were increasingly less cohesive. They continued to be characterized by a large number of consensual unions and mother-centered households.

Traditional elements of trust and mutual dependence among relatives, no matter how distant the relationship, were still strong. The already large circle of kin relationships was extended through the institution of *compadrazgo* (see Glossary), a complex form of ritual kinship. Ties with relatives and *compadres* (godparents) continued to be important in political and business activities and provided the low-status person with a wide circle of mutual assistance.

The nuclear family unit continued to be authoritarian, patriarchal, and patrilineal. Legal reforms had extended equal civil and property rights to women, but tradition dominated male-female relations, and roles and responsibilities in marriage were still relatively clear-cut. In the lower class, in which the father was frequently not a permanent member of the household, the mother often assumed the role of chief authority and family head, but in all other cases the father unquestionably occupied this position. Within the household, the wife was considered the father's deputy and the chief administrator of domestic activities. Her first duty was to bear and raise children. She was also expected to keep the household running smoothly and efficiently. In her relations with her husband, she traditionally was supposed to be deferential, thinking of his wishes and needs before considering her own.

Men of the upper and middle class had always been paternal and protective toward their dependents and tried to shelter their

wives and children from undesirable outside influences. The activities of women were severely circumscribed because of the male concern with protecting the honor and virtue of the wife and unmarried daughters. Women in the upper and middle classes traditionally were not permitted to do work outside the home except for volunteer work. The social life of women in the upper and middle classes, particularly of unmarried girls, was limited to the home, the school, the church, and well-chaperoned parties and dances.

The lower-class or lower-middle-class woman was under far fewer restrictions than her upper-class counterpart. Formal chaperonage had always been impossible to maintain because of family instability, economic need, and the frequent absence of the husband and father and because moral standards differed somewhat from those of the upper social levels. The lower-class woman usually had to be employed and contribute her salary to the family's subsistence or work in the fields beside her male relatives. Her economic contribution gave her a degree of equality and, combined with the matrilocality of lower-class life, i.e., the fact that a husband tended to live with his wife's family, limited the husband's and father's control over her.

There were increasing exceptions in urban society to the traditional concept of a woman's role. Many women in the upper social levels were well educated, and some pursued careers in such fields as the arts, social welfare, and education. Colombian women were also considered among the most politically active in Latin America. Many of them held high elective or appointive offices. At the same time, women who engaged in these activities were considered exceptional. Most upper-class and upper-middle-class women did not work after marriage but devoted themselves to their homes, families, and church groups.

The Roman Catholic Church was the single most important force affecting marriage and family life. Nearly all formal marriages took place within the church, and most other turning points in the life of the individual family member were marked by religious rites. The Concordat of 1887 with the Holy See was replaced in 1973 by a new agreement, which opened the way for increased acceptance of civil marriages. After decades of debate, a divorce law permitting the dissolution of civil marriages was passed in the mid-1970s. In the late 1980s, however, the debate over divorce for Catholic marriages continued unresolved.

Moreover, regardless of the increasing acceptability of civil weddings, most middle-class and upper-class families still tried to provide their children with the most elaborate church wedding they could afford. In the lower class, consensual union, in which both

the religious and the civil marriage ceremonies are foregone, was common. In rural communities with traditional lower-class standards, formal marriage was regarded as neither important nor essential. Despite the efforts of the church to encourage legal marriage within the lower class, people in this group generally regarded Catholic marriage as a heavy social and economic burden. At the same time, however, Catholic marriage was recognized as the ideal and the preferred legal, social, and sexual basis of the family. Although other kinds of union were more prevalent within the lower class, Catholic marriage often connoted superior social status and prestige. In contemplating religious marriage, both men and women might consider carefully the heavy costs involved against the prestige that would be gained.

Some Colombians, especially those in the middle class, regarded marriage as one of the best means of facilitating upward social mobility. At the same time, however, members of the upper class were generally reluctant to marry persons of lower social position. With the increasing independence of young people and the declining authority of the family, marriages between relatives had become less common, but intermarriage between families of similar aristocratic background was a custom that few young people chose to disregard.

## Income Distribution

The question of who has benefited from economic growth has been the subject of considerable controversy in Colombia. In the opinion of some observers, growth during the 1970s worsened the skewed distribution of income. The World Bank, in contrast, has concluded that the real incomes of the poorest workers improved significantly during the 1970s.

Data from a variety of sources suggest that there was a redistribution of income toward the two extremes of the population during the 1970s. Income growth was faster for those groups at both the top and the bottom of the income distribution ladder. By contrast, all the evidence suggests that the middle class, which did well in the 1960s, lost ground in the 1970s. For the poor, increased employment of females and other secondary workers at higher wage rates explained most of the improvements; for the rich, the higher income of the head of the household accounted for the betterment.

Agricultural workers and small landholders made up the majority of the poor in Colombia in the late 1980s, although this proportion was decreasing. The urban poor consisted mainly of persons without primary education, who with their numerous children were grouped in large households where few of the members worked.

The poorest households were often headed by a single parent—typically a woman. Those who worked were concentrated in domestic service, construction, manufacturing, and retail trade. The wages of the rural and urban poor stagnated until the mid-1970s, improved significantly in the latter half of the decade, but then deteriorated somewhat in the mid-1980s. Real earnings, however, improved more than the wage rates in view of greatly increased employment among household members, which was more significant in urban locations that had greater opportunities for female employment. The income per member of poor urban families also was likely to have benefited from the decline in fertility in urban areas.

Relative wages in low-paid occupations tended to converge over the 1970s. Those paid the least at the beginning of the decade gained, the better-paid semiskilled workers faced stagnant or falling wages, and higher-paid workers suffered substantial setbacks. Important factors contributing to the improvement in the lot of the poor included rapidly expanding educational opportunities since the early 1950s, reinforced by population, nutrition, and related social policies since the late 1960s. Strongly complementary was the employment boom of the 1970s that enabled increasing numbers of women and other "secondary" workers in the poorer households to find jobs, significantly increasing household incomes.

The economic positions of the higher-income group apparently also improved substantially during the 1970s. Rapid economic growth in this period provided ample opportunities for raising entrepreneurial profits, and substantial real interest rates were available to owners of capital. The decade also witnessed booming markets in coffee, emeralds, urban residential housing, and illegal trade.

By contrast, persons in the intermediate range of the income distribution fared poorly. This situation was caused in part by the surging supply of educated workers during the 1970s.

## Rural Wages

Agricultural wages remained stagnant in real terms during the 1935–64 period, and in 1964 they were only 90 percent of the wages of unskilled construction workers and about 33 percent of those of blue-collar industrial workers (see table 5, Appendix). Except for a small increase in the early 1960s, real wages in agriculture changed little until the mid-1970s, when they increased substantially until 1980.

In contrast to the dampening effect of a labor surplus in the 1960s, the employment boom of the 1970s began to raise agricultural wages. The introduction of the *caturra* variety of coffee during the

1970s led to large-scale replanting and land preparation for new plantations, which, combined with the boom in marijuana production and cocaine processing, greatly increased labor demand in rural areas. Rapidly growing urban employment in this period also pulled agricultural workers into the urban economy, thus creating increasing labor scarcity in rural areas. Agricultural labor productivity over the 1974–79 period was estimated to have grown at roughly 3.7 percent per year, providing much of the basis for rising real wages. The booming terms of trade for coffee producers were also captured to some extent by workers in agriculture. In addition, the rise in the real minimum wage beginning in 1973 may also have been a contributing factor. The stagnation in the agricultural real wage after 1978 reflected the substantially slower growth in the sector and the economy during this period.

## Urban Wages

In spite of some modest and erratic improvements in the mid-1960s, and again during the early 1970s, real wages for unskilled construction workers in Bogotá increased by less than 10 percent during the 1960–77 period as a whole. From 1977 to 1979, however, they increased appreciably, although other data suggest that these gains may have been lost between 1978 and 1981.

The wages of blue-collar workers in manufacturing jumped abruptly between 1960 and 1963, accompanied by a smaller increase for white-collar workers. During the remainder of the 1960s, wages for both types of workers showed modest gains, followed by a loss of these gains during the 1970–76 period and then an upturn until the end of the decade. Relative to their real wages at the beginning of the 1970s, both blue- and white-collar workers were earning at a lower rate in 1981. If fringe benefits are taken into account, their situation appears to have improved during 1964–70 more than at other times and deteriorated less during 1970–76. Over the long term, the pattern showed cyclical fluctuations around a flat trend.

Data confirm the sluggish growth of wages and total earnings of manufacturing workers since the late 1970s. The resulting view that the working class suffered, however, fails to distinguish among groups within the working class. Even in manufacturing, the poorer, unskilled worker did better than white-collar or skilled workers. Moreover, wages and total earnings increased faster in smaller enterprises. Despite the rapid per capita income growth during the 1970s, the income of persons with jobs did not increase much, and those who were better off at the beginning of the decade fared even

worse; conversely, those who had minimal remuneration at the beginning of the decade significantly improved their situation.

In summary, according to the evidence from occupational data, during the 1970s poor agricultural workers and small farmers increased their shares of national income. Among urban workers, the poor and the unskilled did better than those employed in skilled or formal-sector occupations. Consumption of luxuries indicated substantial improvements in the position of the rich relative to the middle class. But the share of income going to the middle class fell.

## Health and Welfare

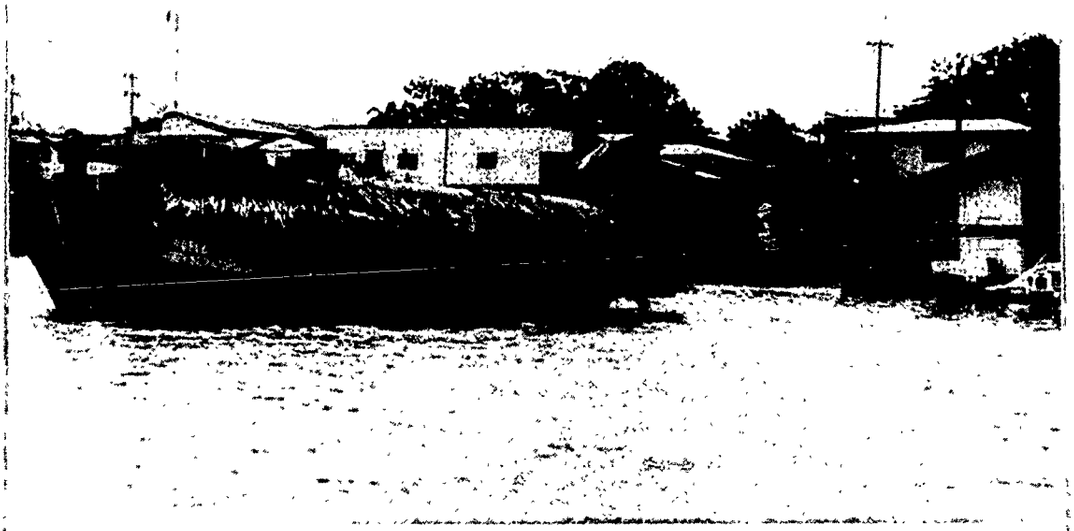
In 1988 most Colombians enjoyed significantly better health care and nutrition than previous generations. The country had risen from the ranks of the poorest nations in Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s to an intermediate status in the 1980s, according to health indicators. These improvements were the result of rapid socioeconomic modernization, which was accompanied by improvements in education and working conditions; greater access to urban health care facilities, running water, and sewerage systems; and more modern attitudes toward sexuality, medicine, disease prevention, nutrition, and exercise. There were also explicit state policies designed to improve access to and availability of health care and medical services. In the 1970s and 1980s, Colombia developed a public and private infrastructure of hospitals and other health care facilities, a widespread network of medical schools, and a specialized set of institutions responsible for formulating and handling public policy in the health sector.

Despite general improvement, the benefits of better health care in 1988 were not evenly distributed among the different strata and regions of Colombian society. Urban areas, the upper and middle classes, blue-collar workers, and the central Andean region enjoyed above-average health conditions. In contrast, the rural and urban poor suffered from higher mortality and morbidity rates because of inadequate or inaccessible medical services, housing, and food. In the late 1980s, Colombian health policy makers were faced with the task of improving services to the least-favored segments of society, while improving the quality and overall performance of the national health care system.

### General Indicators of Health

Colombia's leading health indicators indicated consistent improvement over the long term. During the 1950s, life expectancy at birth was under fifty years for the average citizen. In 1988 this indicator had reached approximately sixty-eight years for females





*Top: Street scene in Leticia*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*
*Bottom: Houseboat on the Amazon*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*

and sixty-four years for males. The estimated life expectancy range for the rural population was 10 percent to 30 percent below the national average, varying regionally. In the eastern plains, the Amazon Basin, the southern rural Caribbean coastal region, and especially in the southern and northern Pacific coast, the rate of improvement in life expectancy was substantially lower than the national average; in some of the poorest areas, no perceptible change had occurred between the 1950s and the 1980s.

Higher life expectancies were closely correlated with the "spatial" distribution of the population. The higher the level of urbanization, the greater the average life expectancy. The five major cities—with nearly 30 percent of the population—in the early 1980s reported average life expectancies nearly 10 percent above the national average. Analysts anticipated that projected increases in urbanization in the 1990s would have a positive impact on the life expectancy of the nation as a whole.

In 1984 analysts estimated Colombia's infant mortality rate at 52 per 1,000 live births (see table 6, Appendix). The annual rate of decrease fluctuated between 2.4 percent and 2.9 percent during the 1950–84 period, peaking during the second half of the 1970s. Some observers suggested that this pattern was closely associated with greater public expenditures for nutrition and basic care for pregnant women and newborns in rural areas.

Despite these improvements, Colombia's infant mortality indicators were among the poorest of the major Latin American countries. Colombia's figure stood substantially above these countries' norm of 42.8 per 1,000 live births and was more than 200 percent greater than the lowest level recorded for national infant mortality in the region (19.5 per 1,000 live births) during the first half of the 1980s.

Moreover, complementary data suggested that infants and children were the least protected segment of the population. Although Colombia's death rate declined 51 percent from 1970 to 1985, infant mortality diminished only 19.8 percent over the same period. Indeed, despite the gradual improvement of infant health indicators, the benefits of better medical care and living conditions were strongly concentrated in the upper levels of the age pyramid. Infant death rates also were higher in rural areas. Moreover, maternal mortality was high by Latin American standards. Between 20 and 30 percent of maternal deaths were related to complications arising from induced abortion, the vast majority of them performed outside the formal medical system because of legal, cultural, and religious sanctions.

Nutrition in Colombian society improved significantly after the 1950s. The average nutrient and caloric intake improved in quality and quantity, as did the performance of the main indicators of nutritional status, such as height, weight, and malnutrition-related mortality and morbidity. The improvements resulted from increased agricultural productivity in the early 1970s, modernization of eating habits, higher levels of nutritional awareness, and explicit public policies supporting nutritional programs aimed at the poorest segments of society (see The Politics of Health: Priorities, Institutions, and Public Policy, this ch.).

In the 1980s, the health and hazard causes for death were, to a significant degree, considered preventable, treatable, or curable. Most infant and child deaths were linked to diarrheal diseases, digestive tract infections, nutritional disorders, and complications related to immunizable viruses. Many adult deaths resulted from "social pathologies," including homicide and accidents. In addition, as their society aged, Colombians were exhibiting a surge in diseases common to the industrialized world, such as coronary and heart disorders, hypertension-related illnesses, and cancer.

One-fifth of all infant and child deaths (zero to four years of age) resulted from diarrheal and infectious digestive disorders accompanied by the inevitable dehydration complications. These diseases were associated with poor sanitation and living conditions, malnutrition, and lack of parental nutritional awareness. Another fifth of infant mortality originated in complications associated with delivery and birth. This mortality reflected the low level of basic health care for rural pregnant women, which was also associated with high levels of maternal mortality. Respiratory diseases caused another fifth of the deaths in children under four.

Violent criminal attacks and homicide—referred to in Colombia as "blood deaths"—accounted for 45 percent of deaths in persons between fifteen and forty-four years of age. The high rate of homicide and violent deaths was associated with the structural problems of poor law enforcement, high levels of social and political violence, and criminal activities related to narcotics production and distribution (see Post-National Front Political Developments, ch. 4; Internal Security Problems, ch. 5). The impact of violence was exacerbated by a health care system that was designed to handle "normal" or "formal" health disorders and not well suited for emergency medical care. Colombians considered the poor quality of emergency treatment as one of the major flaws of their nation's health care system.

The major causes of death for those over forty-four years of age were coronary and heart degenerative disorders, cancer, and

cerebrovascular diseases. Diet—composed of sugars, starches, salted food, and fats high in cholesterol—along with the prevalence of smoking and alcohol consumption contributed to the unusually high incidence of these maladies.

In the early 1980s, the most prevalent illnesses striking Colombians were respiratory infections, ophthalmological and vision problems, digestive tract parasitic diseases, acute upper respiratory tract infections, peripheral vascular problems such as varicose veins, and malnutrition disorders. Over 14.2 million cases of individual illness were attributed to these diseases.

In the 1980s, the duality of the Colombian health profile was also present in the social and regional distribution of morbidity. The poorest segments and regions suffered the most from preventable and curable causes, such as gastrointestinal disorders and certain types of respiratory ailments, whereas the incidence of the degenerative and chronic diseases—typical of urban dwellers and higher-income earners—was relatively low in comparison. Tropical diseases continued to be endemic to certain areas of the country. Because of the acceleration of migratory flows to the unexplored tropical hinterland, diseases such as malaria, dengue, and yellow fever were increasing. Malaria affected approximately 15 percent of the population—equivalent to roughly one-half of all rural inhabitants.

In the late 1980s, geriatric issues increasingly challenged the country's health care system. The combination of increasing life expectancy, reduction of fertility rates, and diminishing mortality rates produced an older society. Those persons over forty-five increased from 13.5 percent of the population in the mid-1960s to 17 percent in the late 1980s. In absolute terms, this trend meant that more than 4.6 million people in 1990 would enter a period of life characterized by major health concerns related to chronic, catastrophic, and degenerative diseases. The proportional increase in these types of ailments demanded a specific framework for health care, medical technology, and professional specialization that was not widely available in the public health system.

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) was another major health challenge in the late 1980s. Like many other less-developed countries, Colombia was sluggish in tackling the issue of AIDS within its borders and recognizing it as a potentially disastrous health threat. The cultural environment—strongly influenced by traditional values toward sexuality, virility, and homosexuality—slowed public debate, distorted factual information about the incidence and spread of the virus, and inhibited the formulation of policy and preventive guidelines. In the first quarter

of 1988, the official number of confirmed cases of AIDS was fifty-nine. By April that figure had to be revised upward to 153 confirmed cases.

Some sources contended, however, that this dramatic increase showed only a fraction of the total cases. New projections in 1988 suggested that there were 7,650 AIDS carriers. Of that total, 2 percent suffered the terminal stages of the disease, 25 percent were experiencing related opportunistic illnesses, and the remaining 73 percent were in the asymptomatic stage. A doubling of the total number of positive carriers was expected to occur within six months to one year because of the high levels of underreporting, the weakness of preventive measures, and the high incidence of carriers among female prostitutes.

The high cost of health care for AIDS victims would seriously strain the already scarce resources available to treat other diseases. Analysts believed that major funding and resources would not be channeled into the fight against AIDS. As of 1988, the Colombian government had taken few steps beyond attempting to protect the national blood supply.

## The Politics of Health: Priorities, Institutions, and Public Policy

During colonial times and the first century following independence, health care in Colombia consisted of services provided by traditional healers and private physicians trained first in Europe and later in national medical schools. The physicians served the elite and practiced curative medicine exclusively. Health care of the indigent, orphans, and the mentally ill was at first the domain of charity institutions, largely run by the Roman Catholic Church. As the population increased, orphanages, shelters, and municipal and community hospitals, usually staffed by religious orders, emerged throughout the country. Political pressures and local initiative, rather than assessment of regional needs, determined the size and kind of health facilities built and operated. Therefore, the distribution of hospital beds and services in the country was haphazard. With the advent of modern high-cost technology, this approach led to wasteful duplication of services and a major escalation in investment and operating costs.

The government initiated official action in the health field in 1913. The Ministry of Public Health, largely as it exists today, was established in 1953. Government programs were initially small, geared exclusively to the control of communicable diseases by reducing environmental hazards, providing water and sewerage facilities, and controlling garbage disposal. Vaccination campaigns were attempted, as was the isolation of patients with contagious diseases.

At first, there was no relationship between these government activities and hospital care. Rural health care was virtually nonexistent, and reliance on traditional practitioners was almost universal until the 1950s.

In 1945 the National Provident Fund (Caja Nacional de Provisión—Cajanal) was created to provide prepaid health services and other benefits to government employees. In 1946 the Institute for Social Insurance (Instituto para Seguros Sociales—ISS) was organized under the Ministry of Labor to provide life and disability insurance, a pension plan, and a health program for employees in the modern private subsector. The ISS health system grew rapidly and independently of both municipal hospitals and the Ministry of Public Health. Subsequently, many smaller prepaid health programs were organized for railroad and telecommunications workers, the police, the armed forces, and other employees either not protected by the ISS or Cajanal or dissatisfied with the services. In the late 1980s, about 200 of these social security and family welfare funds existed.

The health sector was divided into three main subsectors: the government—consisting of the Ministry of Public Health, its five autonomous specialized agencies, and the Department of Health Services (Servicio Seccional de Salud—SSS); the social security subsector—comprising the ISS for private employees, Cajanal for public employees, and the smaller funds for specific population groups; and the private sector. Lacking coordination, these subsectors evolved along divergent paths.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the ministry's programs focused on extending coverage to persons not protected by organized health services. Priority was given to rural areas, poor marginal urban populations, and maternal and child health care. Primary health care, largely provided by paramedical personnel, was the principal instrument for achieving this objective.

A major review of the health sector by the government in 1974 led to the development of the National Health System, designed to provide adequate health care to all Colombians. Health was also viewed as a major component in integrated development efforts in the 1970s and early 1980s. These efforts, which received substantial support from the World Bank and other international agencies operating in Colombia, attempted to enhance productivity, income, and living standards of "viable" and "stable" peasant communities with small- and medium-sized farms. Good results and continued multilateral financing guaranteed its survival for more than a decade.

The 1979–82 National Integration Plan (Plan de Integración Nacional—PIN), as the national government's development plan was called, continued to emphasize expanding health coverage to the most vulnerable groups (mothers and children under five) and areas (rural and urban squatter settlements), recognizing the disparities in health status among regions and population subgroups. The National Health System was viewed as the major instrument to achieve the goal, and increased coordination among the Ministry of Public Health, the ISS, the social security funds, and family welfare funds was emphasized. Specific coverage targets were identified, including immunization of 80 percent of infants and 100 percent of children under five years; piped water and sewerage to 78 percent of the urban population and 79 percent of the nondispersed rural population; and a 15 percent increase in prenatal care. The ultimate goals were to reduce infant mortality by 15 percent, child mortality by 25 percent, and various kinds of morbidity by given percentages.

In 1981 the government established the Plan to Accelerate Health Development, based on grouping the SSS into six nuclei led by the six most developed departments. These departments would help their less-well-favored neighboring departments and national territories with technical assistance, coordination, data processing and monitoring services, supervision, and evaluation of programs. The central nucleus in Bogotá was to oversee and to develop the norms of the system.

In the late 1980s, the Barco administration implemented two other major social programs with both a direct and an indirect impact on health care for the poorest groups in society. The programs were the National Rehabilitation Plan, actually initiated by the Belisario Betancur Cuartas administration (1982–86) to shift public expenditures to the most remote and least-developed rural zones of the country, where guerrilla groups maintained strongholds, and the National Plan for the Eradication of Extreme Poverty, which focused on reducing urban poverty by 80 percent among those persons below the level of extreme poverty. Like the programs of the 1970s and early 1980s, these two new programs consisted of food subsidies, primary health care, communal education, and locally constructed small public works projects for transportation, schools, and health care centers. In contrast with the earlier effort, however, Barco hoped for improved delivery of services through better coordination of different government agencies.

The private sector also acquired some paragovernmental functions in relation to health care. The Family Compensation Funds, or Cajas, were governmentally mandated, private sector institutions

that held a percentage of the total salary paid by a firm to its workers and used it to provide cash subsidies and different types of services to affiliated workers. Some of the largest Cajas developed hospitals, pharmacies, dental units, general medical consultation services, and outpatient health care centers for children and nonworking spouses. Cajas were legally barred from duplicating the work of other governmental institutions, such as the ISS. This unorthodox model could be considered a private component of the urban social security system, managed jointly by unions or workers, firm owners, and the government.

Another key paragovernmental private health care provider was the National Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers (Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia—Fedecafe) (see Interest Groups, ch. 4). Fedecafe collected and managed the taxes originating from coffee exports, using the money both to stabilize and protect the coffee industry and to improve living conditions in the coffee regions of the country. In the central Andean region—the core of the coffee economy—Fedecafe was a major provider of basic health care, sanitation, access to clean water, nutritional education, immunization, and dental services.

Except for extensive support by the international system, the provision of health care was a relatively low priority for the Colombian political establishment in the 1970s and 1980s. In political electoral terms, there was no clear constituency for national health care. Those sectors lacking health care and risk protection were usually the poorest groups in society, the least organized, and the weakest in political influence. In addition, other groups, including public employees, transportation workers, oil workers, private employees, and middle-class professionals, struggled independently and autonomously to develop some form of health care and risk protection.

The health sector was perceived implicitly by politicians as a legitimate part of the "spoils" of office (*botín burocrático*) because of its relatively high employment capacity for political appointees. Traditionally, with some significant exceptions, the Ministry of Public Health and its regional division were "assigned" to politicians; that is, they were effectively outside the control of national planning officials and programs. Indeed, the financial sources that supported departmental health services—the lottery and state taxes on alcoholic beverages—were periodically shaken by revelations of political corruption and reckless management.

Compared with other ministries and given the magnitude of its task, the Ministry of Public Health was woefully underfunded. The ministry's expenditures as a share of the national product had

decreased since the late 1960s, and by the mid-1980s they were at approximately 0.6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary). Since the late 1960s, with the exception of the period of the Alfonso López Michelsen administration (1974–78), the share of the health sector in total central government expenditures had declined. In fact, the fiscal adjustments in late 1984 and 1985—necessitated by the global recession and Colombia's ensuing trade and national account deficits—cut heavily into social expenditures, especially health and education (see Balance of Payments, ch. 3). Between 10 percent and 20 percent of public health care beds were not operating in 1985 because of inadequate funding. Another symptom of the low priority given to health care services was its relative share of foreign earnings. Total foreign currency commitments for the health sector in Colombia in the 1973–82 period amounted only to US$402 million.

Considerable institutional overlap and bureaucratic inefficiency and uncertainty characterized the ministry's specialized institutions. Both the National Institute of Health and the National Institute of Municipal Development supported local investments in water and sewerage systems in small- and medium-sized towns. In 1988 the latter institute was being dismantled and its functions transferred to the Central Mortgage Bank, the Malaria Eradication Service, and the Cancer Institute. In addition, ministry units were autonomous. Although some coordination at the operational level occurred, each institution generally developed its own policies and programs.

## National Health Care System

In the late 1980s, the national public health care infrastructure was built around a network of approximately 640 hospitals classified as local (73 percent), regional (17 percent), specialized (8 percent), and university (2 percent) hospitals. There were 35,000 beds in the public sector of the system, excluding those available at health care centers and basic care units.

The other three major components of the health care infrastructure were the ISS, the paragovernmental social security institutions, and the private sector. The ISS and related organizations managed approximately 6,500 beds (13 percent); paragovernmental social security institutions handled around 2,300 (4 percent); and the private sector—one of the most dynamic components of the system—had reached 8,000 beds (15 percent). The total availability of hospital beds amounted to only approximately 51,800—a figure that was equivalent to a ratio of 1.9 beds per 1,000 citizens. This ratio was less than half of the capacity for the health sectors

of Costa Rica, Chile, Argentina, or even Brazil and not far from the performance of the most underdeveloped countries in the region.

Nevertheless, approximately 80 percent of the population had access to some form of medical and health care services. The national public health system offered coverage to 46 percent of the population, the private sector to 16 percent, the ISS system to 12 percent, and other social security organizations to 6 percent. The remaining 20 percent lacked formal health care coverage and had access only sporadically to professional medical consultation. Furthermore, a considerable proportion of the 12.7 million people served by the national public health system did not have real access to modern forms of diagnosis and treatment.

Urban and rural residents experienced significant differences in access to health care. The coverage in the three largest cities—Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali—was almost 95 percent. At the rural level, the best services were delivered by the departments in the coffee-growing areas. At the bottom of the scale—in terms of quality and coverage—were the rural areas in the non-Andean regions as well as the marginal neighborhoods in medium-sized and small cities.

In 1985 the country had an estimated 20,500 physicians. Thus, Colombia had almost one physician for every 1,300 inhabitants, a good ratio by international standards. The data were misleading, however, in terms of the real availability of medical care for the population. Almost 70 percent of physicians were located in the twenty-five major cities, which together contained only 45 percent of the population. The problem with professional nursing care was even worse. There was an even greater urban concentration of nurse professionals than of physicians.

The medical doctor was a very important social actor in Colombian history. The doctor's status in the community usually gave him or her responsibilities that went far beyond health and healing, such as acting as mediator of disputes and electoral power broker. The social reputation and political power of physicians normally was accompanied by above-average economic rewards, thus creating a very attractive professional path for social mobility. Socially, the title of "doctor" was highly desirable and was a goal for the youth of middle-class families that could afford the high cost of this type of education.

Despite a doubling in the number of medical schools between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, university facilities were not able to cope with the huge demand for medical education. In addition, although many medical graduates had not been absorbed by the health system, they were generally not willing to move into



*Mothers receive instruction in dental hygiene.*
*Courtesy United States Agency for International Development*

the nonurban areas where they were most desperately needed. The high cost of medical education—considered as an investment with unusually high expectations for return—discouraged physicians from considering voluntary moves to areas in need that offered considerably less profitability.

## Social Security

Social security in Colombia, as in most of Latin America, developed in response to various pressure groups. Like most economic benefits in Colombia, social security came first to those groups that had political and economic strength. The military formed the first health security program in 1843, followed by other privileged public sector employee groups, notably members of Congress and the judiciary. Industrial laborers and other private sector workers attained basic coverage in 1946, but many others were still without any type of health or income security benefit in the late 1980s.

The social security system in the late 1980s was divided into three types of programs. The private sector, including both blue-collar workers and management, was covered in part by the ISS, which included 70 percent of insured workers. The public sector program covered 7 percent of insured employees nationwide and was administered by Cajanal. The remaining 23 percent of covered

private workers belonged to one of 300 small insurance funds operating at the national, departmental, or municipal levels.

The social security program comprised three types of coverage: health insurance provided for medical and hospital coverage; the pension system made disability, old age, and death payments; and the family allowance program granted income maintenance for families earning substandard salaries. The family allowance program was the only standardized insurance scheme in the social security system. Health coverage and pensions, by contrast, varied significantly among public sector employees, workers covered by the ISS, and employees belonging to smaller funds.

Public employee benefits far exceeded those of private sector workers. Government workers could retire ten years earlier than private workers, and their pensions averaged 66 percent higher than those paid to members of the ISS. The military was an extreme example of this inequity; their pensions surpassed private worker retirement annuities by 150 percent. Government workers also enjoyed superior health facilities and benefits, as compared with workers in the private sector.

Insurance premium payments, although similar in form among the various providers, were as inequitable as the benefits received. In all cases, social security was financed by employee and employer contributions, as well as state subsidies. Private coverage through the ISS required a joint contribution by employee and employer of between 15 and 20 percent of the premium, and an additional 4 percent contribution was made by the employer for the family allowances fund. The lowest premiums paid, by contrast, were those of the public sector Cajanal program, in which workers contributed between 4 and 12 percent of the premiums and health and pension funds were fully subsidized by the state.

In addition to the fragmented, inequitable payment and benefits programs, the social security system's greatest failing was its low coverage of the population. Colombia ranked thirteenth among nineteen Latin American countries in social security coverage of the population; only 16 percent of the population was covered by a social insurance fund in 1985. Moreover, the programs failed to cover the neediest members of society, including women, children, and low-income male workers.

The social security system was also one of the most expensive in Latin America. In 1984 approximately 2.6 percent of GDP went to health care and pension programs. The World Bank estimated that extension of coverage at that level to the entire population would require the equivalent of 23 percent of GDP. Furthermore, state subsidization of public programs, particularly Cajanal, was

excessive and varied from 60 percent to nearly 90 percent of the costs. According to experts, Cajanal operated an intolerably large deficit in the mid-1980s. The lack of a coordinated, consistent management and administrative system was largely responsible for many of these cost overruns, as well as the high level of premiums paid by the state.

## Religion

In the late 1980s, Colombia remained an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country. More than 95 percent of the population had been baptized in the Catholic Church, and the Colombian variant was widely renowned as one of the most conservative and traditional in Latin America. Colombians were among the most devout of Latin American Catholics. The church as an institution was authoritarian and paternalistic and had traditionally been associated with elite structures in the society.

The Concordat of 1973 defined relations between the Colombian government and the Vatican. The concordat replaced the clause in the Constitution of 1886 that had established the Catholic Church as the official religion with one stating that "Roman Catholicism is the religion of the great majority of Colombians." The concordat also altered the church's position on three major issues: the mission territories, education, and marriage. First, the mission territories—lands with Indian populations—ceased to be enclaves where Catholic missionaries had greater jurisdiction than the government over schools, health, and other services; by agreement the vast network of schools and social services was eventually to be transferred to the government. Second, the church surrendered its right to censor public university texts and enforce the use of the Catholic catechism in public schools. Under the new concordat, the church retained the right to run only its own schools and universities, and even these had to follow government guidelines. Finally, Colombians were allowed to contract civil marriages without abjuring the Catholic faith. The civil validity of church weddings was also recognized, although all marriages were also to be recorded on the civil registry. Catholic marriages, however, could only be dissolved through arbitration in a church court.

Despite these changes, the tenacity of custom and the church's traditional position as a moral and social arbiter ensured its continued strong presence in national life. The parish church still was recognized as the center of nearly every community, and the local priest was often the major figure of authority and leadership. Moreover, most priests were native Colombians, in sharp contrast to the dependence on foreign clergy generally prevalent in Latin

America. Approximately 95 percent of diocesan priests and 65 percent of priests belonging to religious orders were Colombians. Since independence, all but four bishops have been Colombian.

In comparison with Catholicism, other religions continued to play a small role in the 1980s. The Protestant population numbered roughly 200,000; Jews were far less numerous, having only a few small congregations in larger cities. In the past, restrictive immigration policy kept most non-Catholics from entering the country. Although Protestant missionaries had been officially allowed to proselytize since the 1930s, they often met with opposition from members of the Catholic clergy and laity. Non-Catholics are guaranteed freedom of worship under the Constitution, however.

Few of the indigenous religions encountered by the Spaniards survived. In the 1980s, the Indians of the highlands were at least nominally Catholic, and only a few tribes in the most isolated regions continued in their traditional beliefs. The nation's black population also was nominally Catholic, although vestiges of African religion and beliefs survived in some communities. The black population on Isla de San Andrés and Isla de Providencia was Protestant, however, having originally been colonized by Britain.

## The Church in Society

The influence of the church varied in different regions of the country and among different social groups, but it was felt everywhere and was rarely questioned. The population in general continued to attach great importance to observance of the formal acts of Catholicism. The rate of attendance at mass was high, particularly among women, who generally took the practice of religion more seriously than men. Church attendance also served traditionally to attest to a woman's general virtue. In some urban parishes, more than 85 percent of the Catholics attended mass. Some cities or regions were noted throughout the country for their religious observance. The people of Antioquia Department, for example, were reputed to be particularly devout Catholics, and the Indians of the southern highlands and residents of Popayán were recognized for their regular attendance at mass and traditional observance of holy days, especially during Holy Week.

To the average Colombian, such primary rites of the church as baptism, first communion, marriage, and extreme unction marked the main turning points in the life cycle and identified him or her as a social being. The Catholic faith was felt to be a part of a person's cultural heritage passed on like language and became an integral part of a person's being.



*Holy Week procession, Popayán*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

Members of the upper class and the upper middle class frequently had close personal relations with members of the religious hierarchy. Most of the clergy and nearly all prelates were of upper-class or middle-class origin and therefore shared the interests and attitudes of these groups and felt the closest affinity with them. The upper social levels supported Catholic charities with time and money and provided most of the membership of lay religious associations.

Religious beliefs and practices in the rural peasant communities reflected centuries of geographic isolation and a lack of formal religious training. People in these areas were said to be more devout than those in the cities, but their Catholicism was often very different from that of the urban upper and middle classes. Fusion of Catholic practices and beliefs with indigenous, African, and sixteenth-century Spanish ones was widespread in the countryside. Traces of the rural folk religions also were found in urban lower-class communities, particularly those with many rural migrants.

Most people in rural villages were careful to fulfill what they considered to be their religious obligations to protect themselves from supernatural punishment or to secure blessings from one of the saints. The Virgin Mary and the saints were deeply revered by most people. The saints, especially one's patron saint, were considered to be more accessible than God and sometimes willing to intervene in the individual's temporal affairs.

The mass, the sacraments, religious processions, and objects of religious veneration were shared by nearly all Colombians. Holy day celebrations, particularly the fiestas honoring a community's patron saint, were events of great significance, not only in the religious life of the people but also as elements of social cohesion that united members of the community in a common bond.

Critics within the church contended, however, that this emphasis on the ritual aspects of the faith masked serious deficiencies in the exercise of that faith. In their view, Catholicism had a limited impact on the personal lives of the laity. Many couples had chosen alternatives to a Catholic wedding, such as consensual union or a civil ceremony. In addition, many Catholics lacked even an elementary grounding in church doctrine. Critics also argued that Colombia's ratio of priests to inhabitants—one to 4,000, one of the best in Latin America—was highly misleading. Like most elites, clerics gravitated toward urban areas. In contrast, many rural churches lacked priests for extended periods of time.

Despite these deficiencies, the church continued to exercise considerable influence in a number of areas, including education, social welfare, and union organization. Catholic control over education in Colombia was the strongest in Latin America and even greater than its official powers suggested. The church had its own Secretariat of Education, which maintained two research organizations, a literacy program reaching thousands of rural Colombians, and more than 3,500 schools and universities. With a total enrollment of nearly 300,000 students in the 1970s, the church system was estimated to include over 85 percent of the students in preschool, 20 percent of those in the primary grades, more than 50 percent of those in secondary school, and almost 40 percent of those in universities. Church institutions of higher education were among the most highly respected in the nation, and religious courses played an important part in a student's curriculum (see Education, this ch.).

In 1944 the Episcopal Conference established Catholic Social Action, or simply Catholic Action, a loose collection of programs for social and educational development. Some of the programs for Catholic Action were begun by the hierarchy, whereas others, such as Popular Cultural Action (Acción Cultural Popular—Acpo), a program involving specialized education programs for peasants, were initiated by individual priests and later adopted by the hierarchy. Acpo was best known for its literacy programs, which were conducted through Radio Sutatenza. Most of Acpo's budget was financed by the church, but some assistance was received from the government and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 1988 the government negotiated a buy-out of Radio Sutatenza, which became part of the state education system.

The church-operated research institutes were founded in the 1960s to conduct socioeconomic studies and act as advisers to the hierarchy. The Center for Research and Social Action (Centro de Investigación y Acción Social—CIAS), subsequently renamed the Center for Research and Popular Education (Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular—Cinep), was run by Jesuits, and the Colombian Institute of Social Development (Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Social—Icodes) was staffed by diocesan priests. Both had done studies on housing and population problems, church-sponsored development programs, and land reform, and both were well respected for the quality and reliability of their studies.

Although education was still the most important area of church activity in the mid-1980s, mission activity and social welfare were also major efforts. In the early 1980s, about 1,100 charitable institutions were run by the church, including orphanages, hospitals, and leprosariums. Other welfare institutions were staffed by nuns whose orders were reimbursed by the government. Because of its involvement with the mission territories, the church was also represented in the National Indian Institute. Although the government was slowly taking over the functions of the church in the Indian territories, the church continued to play an important role there.

Two important social welfare programs were Colombian Charity (Caritas Colombiana) and Communal Action (Acción Comunal). Colombiana Charity was set up to coordinate the welfare work of various Catholic institutions. To most Colombians, it was identified with the distribution of agricultural surpluses, shoes, and clothing to the poor. Communal Action, a community development program established by the government in 1958, had significant input from the church at the local level. Priests served as key organizers in Communal Action groups, trying to educate rural Colombians in self-help methods.

The church had been involved with labor organizations since the middle of the nineteenth century, when it was instrumental in the formation of various economic and political pressure groups and later of craft unions. As Liberal-backed unions and communism began to be more influential within the working class during the 1940s, the church moved to increase its own influence. Moving to counteract the Liberal and leftist-oriented Confederation of Colombian Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Colombianos—CTC), several Jesuits helped to form a labor union inspired by Catholic social doctrine, the Union of Colombian Workers

(Unión de Trabajadores Colombianos—UTC) (see The Labor Movement, ch. 3).

Responding to the need to organize and maintain the loyalty of the campesinos as well as to supply the UTC with badly needed leverage in its battle with the CTC, the church organized the National Agrarian Federation (Federación Agraria Nacional—Fanal) in 1946. Although not as successful as other rural organizations, Fanal was fairly important in rural land invasions in the 1960s, and it was not unusual to find invasions led by priests.

## Trends Within the Church since the 1940s

The church's involvement in such activities as social welfare and union organization flowed in part from changes in Colombian society beginning in the 1940s. Of equal importance was the process of renewal that characterized the worldwide Roman Catholic Church in the early 1960s. Both Pope John XXIII (1958–63) and Pope Paul VI (1963–78) issued a series of encyclicals that were unequaled in their efforts to modernize the church as an institution and modify its role in society. These encyclicals stressed the government's obligation to reduce socioeconomic inequalities and the church's obligation to take a leading role in reform.

Although the papal encyclicals pointed the Colombian episcopate in the direction of change, it was not until the 1968 Latin American Bishops Conference (Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana—Celam) in Medellín that these proposed reforms were brought home in the form of a declaration specifically involving Latin America. The core concepts developed during the Medellín conference were the conflict between the "haves" and "have-nots," the need for fundamental institutional reforms, and social action as the key means of Christian influence in the world. The conclusions of the Medellín conference gave the Latin American church the necessary mandate to implement social justice and church reform.

In accordance with the thrust of the Medellín conference, the Colombian bishops endorsed the call for social action. Unlike other Latin American colleagues, however, the Colombian bishops shied away from some of the more dramatic aspects of Medellín. They did not, for example, accept Medellín's view that institutionalized violence characterized Latin American societies. Unable to change the shape of the Medellín documents, the Colombians published a dissenting treatise in the secular press.

The bishops' inability to agree on an approach to social reform and to implement it through strong and effective leadership increased the fragmentation within the church in Colombia and the

controversy surrounding the latter's role. Some of the problems developed over organizational rather than ideological disagreements between groups fighting for the same resources or powerful positions. The insufficient economic base and the lack of qualified personnel further limited developmental efforts. Consequently, only development programs operating in strongly Catholic areas had substantial success. Competition among upwardly mobile priests for the attention of the local bishop also detracted from reform and tended to promote those priests eager to conform to the status quo.

Frustration over the lack of dynamic leadership caused some priests to strike out on their own. The first to do so was Camilo Torres Restrepo, an upper-class Colombian who left the priesthood to become a guerrilla. Torres was killed in 1966, less than six months after he joined the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN), thus becoming the first so-called martyr of the Catholic left in Latin America (see Guerrilla and Terrorist Groups, ch. 5). He became a symbol for many leftists with his commitment to radical change through violence.

In the late 1960s, many Colombian clergymen, encouraged by Torres's example, were determined to work for social change. Except for Gerardo Valencia Cano, bishop of Buenaventura, none of the episcopate supported their work. Spurned by the hierarchy, the group attempted to develop a power base strong enough to break the religious and secular hold of the elite. Basing their platforms on Marxist concepts, they began to hold protest demonstrations to rally support against the hierarchy and to promote programs of radical social change.

In spite of the rejection of the Medellín conclusions by the majority of Colombian bishops, the activists led by Bishop Valencia became the first group in Latin America to issue a manifesto and a platform for social reform based on the resolutions of the Medellín conference. Meeting in 1968 and taking the name Golconda Group—"Golconda" after the farmhouse where they first met—the group led the revolutionary wing of the Colombian church until early 1970. The Golconda Group elaborated an anticapitalist, anti-imperialist stance and a platform that included recourse to violence under certain conditions. By advocating violence, however, the group touched a sensitive nerve among Colombians and undercut potential support from many progressive Catholics who were ready to promote change.

The Golconda Group became involved in political as well as social issues and encouraged the Colombian people to boycott the elections of 1970 and thereby refuse to give a democratic stamp to either of the official parties. This antagonistic attitude toward

the government led to charges of communist sympathies and to the eventual repression and imprisonment of members of the movement. Because the group was small and radical and because government and ecclesiastical opposition was effectively organized against it, it was short lived. After several members were imprisoned on the eve of its third annual meeting in early 1970, the Golconda Group ceased to exist as a single organization, although individuals continued to use its name. Despite the fact that their efforts to effect sweeping social changes were not successful, members of the Golconda Group came to be considered forerunners of the controversial liberation theology (see Glossary) movement among the Catholic clergy elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere.

After the demise of the Golconda Group, radical activity remained largely diffuse and ineffective, appearing to have subsided. Bishop Valencia was killed in an airplane crash in February 1972, and with his death the radical clerics lost their only supporter among the hierarchy. Other groups were formed, and support grew for the radical wing of the church, but no group was as dynamic or controversial as the Golconda Group had been.

The lack of active commitment on the part of the bishops had several effects. On the one hand, the weakness of the hierarchy's approval and/or disapproval of radical clergy led to confusion in the public interpretation of Catholic social ideology among Colombians. On the other hand, the lack of protection against government repression convinced many that the official church was not genuinely interested in change. Finally, the national effort at socioeconomic development was hampered because, without consensus, the impact of the church on reform remained piecemeal.

The explanation for the Colombian church's relatively undynamic nature rested primarily with the distinctive political context within which the church operated. The church had become most prominent in those countries of Latin America where a repressive political context simplified options and displaced ordinary social pressures and where the episcopal leadership—more often than not impelled by lower-level activism within the church—was willing to commit the institution to an active role in public conflict. Neither of these conditions existed in Colombia after the Medellín conference.

The Colombian church functioned within a relatively open, competitive political system. Despite continuing high levels of violence, Colombia's political context allowed some play of social and political forces, keeping open channels that when closed in other societies displaced pressures onto the church. The political system showed at least some responsiveness to changing demands and was

accompanied by considerable economic success. The nation's imperfect, oligarchical democracy, muddling as usual through a series of crises, did not offer a target to justify violent corrective action. No convincing case had been made by anyone—whether militants in the church or the secular left more generally—that gathered significant popular support behind armed overthrow of the regime.

The absence of a repressive political context limited the political role of the Colombian church. Indeed, after the 1960s the church's ability to shape the outcome of political issues declined substantially. Nor did the church use its teaching authority compellingly enough to affect clearly the broader agenda of social choices. Its negative pleas—for example, against birth control and political violence—were notably ineffective.

The one way in which the church may have been important politically was in upholding the legitimacy of Colombia's oligarchical democracy. It came to this position in the mid-1950s, after having been long divided over identification with the Conservative Party. The horrifying spectacle of *la violencia* (1948–66) and the affronts of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla led the church hierarchy to endorse his overthrow and the subsequent regime of the National Front (see Collapse of the Democratic System, 1946–58, ch. 1). It consistently defended the National Front regime and its less formally consociational successor against critics in the church itself and in society in general.

Has this church legitimation of the existing political system made a difference? Colombia's oligarchical democracy survived, against many predictions and in contrast to the civilian politics of many other countries. The continuing support of the institutional church was one potential explanation. A long line of "rebel priests" and nuns, beginning with Torres in the mid-1960s, believed that the church's legitimation of established politics was both morally wrong and politically important. They frequently suggested that the church's support was crucial to the status quo.

The recent past, however, did not bear out this assertion in any clear way. The church had demonstrated a potential negative power to topple a regime (for example, in helping bring down Rojas Pinilla in 1957). From that, however, the weight of its positive support, as distinguished from its neutrality, could only be indirectly inferred. If progressive activists had been able to move the institutional church into a militant, liberationist position against the regime, they would undoubtedly have threatened the regime's foundations. In addition, if they had even won enough support for the church to have publicly divided internally over the legitimacy of

the regime, they would have deeply shaken the regime's stability. However, neither development occurred.

## Education

The education sector has grown explosively at all levels since the early 1960s. By 1987 primary-school enrollment had more than doubled, secondary-school enrollment had grown sixfold, and university enrollments had increased fifteen times. The literacy rate was approximately 88 percent in 1987. Private schools accounted for 15 percent of the enrollments at the primary level, 40 percent at the secondary-school level, and 60 percent at the university level. But the principal reason for the rapid expansion of the education system was the massive increase in public outlays for education.

Government funding for education increased fivefold in real terms between 1966 and 1986. In 1987 federal education expenditures represented between a quarter and a third of the national budget. The country's rapid urbanization fostered the overall expansion of education from the 1960s through the late 1980s. Various modifications in national legislation regulating education increased national government responsibility in education financing. Among the key modifications were the nationalization laws that in 1960 transferred financial responsibility for primary education to the national government and in 1975 did the same for secondary education. In addition, mechanisms for revenue-sharing between the regions and the national government were developed. Despite considerable progress, however, major disparities in education quality persisted among social classes and regions, as well as between the public and private sectors and between rural and urban areas.

### Historical Background

Until well after the achievement of independence early in the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church remained the principal authority in the sphere of education. The first schools were established by the church during the sixteenth century, and in the seventeenth century the sons of Spanish settlers received schooling in the first seminaries. Two universities were founded by the church before 1700, and, although the eighteenth century saw the emergence of some secular influence in education, an effort to found a public university was abandoned because of clerical opposition.

After the achievement of independence, the government's control over the school system increased progressively, and ever-larger numbers of students attended public schools. Nevertheless, the traditionally dominant role played by the church in education profoundly influenced the role played by education in society and probably

contributed to a reluctance to change educational institutions. Observers of Colombian education repeatedly pointed out that far from furthering social mobility, the system reinforced social stratification.

Primary education served as an instrument of mobility to some extent because it raised the level of literacy and thus enabled many people to enter the mainstream of national life. In urban localities, it also enabled workers to find better-paying jobs and thus to raise their standard of living, if not their social status. In the countryside, however, schooling was of little value. In general, a vicious circle existed in which a low technological level in agriculture and a low educational level mutually reinforced each other.

In the past, education above the primary level perpetuated the class system because of the near absence of schools of any kind in rural localities, the unavailability of enough secondary schools to accommodate many of the qualified applicants, and the disproportionate acceptance of students from the more prosperous upper-class families. In addition, above the primary level, tuition was charged in public as well as in private schools. This cost, plus the cost of books, supplies, and school uniforms, placed secondary schooling beyond the means of most working-class families. Rural and small-city parents also had to bear the frequently prohibitive costs of transportation and room and board. Private secondary education prospered through its ability to cater to the needs of the elite. The Ministry of Education in a 1966 report criticized the secondary schools for accentuating social differences rather than encouraging vertical social mobility. The children of the poor were unable to enter the best schools offering an academic education, and the few secondary agricultural and other vocational schools available to them tended to discourage upward mobility. The ministry's report added that for most students the principal reason for completing secondary or higher studies was the social status conferred.

In Colombia, as in most other Latin American countries, a distinction was drawn between the academic and the vocational secondary school, and working-class as well as elite families much preferred the former. The distinction was so sharp that, although it was possible in some instances for vocational graduates to go on to universities, the term *secondary* was customarily applied only to the academic schools. The faster growth of the already much larger academic school enrollment during the 1960s and 1970s reflected a continued disregard for manual labor and a continued tendency to attach little social value even to the highest of manual skills. The largest vocational enrollments were in the commercial institutions teaching white-collar skills.

Until after World War II, a university education was the exclusive province of the country's elite. But after many new universities were established and their enrollment growth exceeded that at other levels of education, the universities lost something of their exclusive character.

## Administration and Finance

In the 1980s, the national government continued to bear the primary responsibility for public and private education. The authority was extended downward from the president to the minister of education and by delegation to the secretaries of education in the departments, the national territories, and the large municipalities that maintained their own school systems. It extended also to several decentralized institutions concerned with education matters.

There were various kinds of schools. At all levels of schooling, the central government operated a small system of national schools ranging from preschool units in major urban centers to the massive UNC in Bogotá. Only in Caquetá Department, however, were national schools in a majority. Most of the schools were maintained by the departments and the national territories, and many were maintained by municipalities with populations of more than 100,000. Because schools in the national system were large and well known and their teaching staffs were in a favored position, analysts often overemphasized their numerical importance.

The private sector of education was made up of schools operated by the Roman Catholic Church, schools operated by other religious denominations, private schools, and cooperative schools operated by communities. Catholic schools predominated.

The Constitution guarantees freedom for private ownership and operation of schools in the private sector. However, they had to be licensed, meet public-school standards, and generally use the public curriculum, and they were subject to supervision by the public inspection system. Private institutions administered by foreign organizations could use the language of the home country for instruction, but they had to employ Colombian teachers to conduct classes in the Spanish language on the country's history and geography. Catholic schools used texts prepared by Catholic publishers adapted under government order to conform to the prescribed official program of study. The Colombian government relied heavily on the private school system, and it financially supported institutions that provided scholarships to children from poorer families.

In the 1980s, the administration of the education system involved an interplay between forces of central control and forces of regional

decentralization in which political considerations had an important part. This interplay had existed for many years, and the complexity of the issues involved was perhaps best exemplified by the issuance in 1968 of a decree establishing the system of Regional Educational Funds (Fondos Educativos Regionales—FER) as a many-faceted attack on the country's educational problems. Theoretically, the public education system had been a unit in which the Ministry of Education set down patterns and rules and coordinated and supervised the day-to-day administration provided at the regional levels. In practice, a kind of anarchy had developed, in which the departmental and municipal systems had operated with a degree of de facto autonomy that prevented the central authority from effectively using the material and human resources theoretically at its command.

The FER program sought to remedy this situation by establishing a relationship between the Ministry of Education and the regional school systems in which the amount of money assigned to each regional system and the manner in which it was to be spent were determined by contract. To administer the FER program and to provide a direct line of communication between the national and departmental levels, delegates were named by the minister of education to oversee the FER programs and to cooperate with the regional secretaries of education in administering the local education systems. Because the delegates were to reside in the departmental capitals and devote their attention exclusively to the departmental and municipal school systems in a particular area, the Ministry of Education maintained that the change was one of decentralization. In fact, it was the exact opposite.

Before the end of 1969, contracts had been signed by each of the departmental governors. The most significant portion of each contract was a section requiring that the department establish a special bank account to receive the monthly national contributions. If the terms of the contract were violated or if during any month the corresponding regional contributions to the education fund were not deposited, the contract would be suspended, and any unexpended funds would be returnable to the national government. Although this was the only sanction set forth in the contract, it was a highly potent one.

The FER system achieved mixed results. The varying degrees of noncompliance resulted from and illustrated the problems that had plagued the country's education system in the past and continued to disturb it into the 1980s. The root causes were intense regionalism and the politicization of the local systems.

The presence of the delegate as the representative of the control authority was frequently resented. What the central authority wanted did not always meet regional needs. The regional delegate could work only through the regional secretary of education, who was not an educator and who was not concerned primarily with education. In addition, the regional delegate was responsible not to the minister of education but to the governor of the department, who was in turn responsible to one of the two major political parties.

Although the education sector grew continually after the 1930s, the most rapid changes occurred after the 1960s. Colombia began to move toward a long-standing educational goal, equal access to primary education for all sectors of society. In 1987 about 90 percent of the children between seven (the age established for obligatory primary-school attendance) and eleven years of age attended primary school in urban areas. In many rural areas, however, the number was often below 70 percent, and in some areas it even dipped below 50 percent in 1988.

The educational levels of the population improved in tandem with the country's economic growth. Around 30 percent of the twelve-year-old population went to secondary school in 1985, in contrast to only roughly 8 percent in 1951. Nevertheless, percentages were much lower in the rural areas because there were few secondary schools. Moreover, 80 percent of all university students attended classes in just five cities.

In quantitative terms, the performance of Colombia's education sector has been impressive. Although increases in the number of young people entering the school system have remained constant—roughly 3 percent annually throughout the 1970s and 1980s—the system not only has kept pace with population growth but also has increased its rate of absorption of students. In absolute figures, one of the most difficult tasks for the public primary schools was the absorption of 2 million new students in less than twenty years. This growth was particularly remarkable, given that the system had less than 1.5 million students in 1960. But this accelerated growth was achieved at the cost of a decline in the quality of public education because it focused largely on the increased availability of classrooms and teachers without taking into account the need for supplying other critical resources.

## Primary Education

The constant efforts to improve the coverage provided by public primary schools produced remarkable results. The fact that 90 percent of the children in the appropriate age-groups in urban areas and nearly 70 percent of children in rural areas attended primary

school indicated that further expansion would require carefully developed regional strategies rather than a broadbrush approach.

This requirement was especially true of the ten-year-old age-group, which had not increased in the 1980s and was projected to grow by a mere 1 percent during the 1990s. Because many urban areas had achieved very high coverage levels, further expansion of the primary system was not needed. Substantial differences in enrollment rates among departments were directly correlated with levels of urbanization, although there were also other intervening variables: size of age-groups, population growth rates, and migratory patterns.

Although quality education was a difficult and subjective concept, many indicators suggested that there was substantial room for improvement. Rates of attrition had decreased, and rates of graduation had improved since the 1960s. The repetition rate had also gone down slightly. Nevertheless, only 62 percent of those students who entered primary schools in urban areas finished sixth grade, and in rural areas the rate was just 18 percent. In the departments, the variations were quite large, ranging from 34 percent to 81 percent in urban areas and from 9 percent to 41 percent in rural areas. The grade repetition rates were uniform by region but still quite high, ranging from 20 percent in the first grade to 7 percent in the fifth. Students in urban areas completed an average of 3.7 primary-school grades, whereas those in rural zones completed an average of only 1.7 grades.

The low quality of education was one of the reasons for the high rates of student attrition and the major reason for the high rate of grade repetition. To improve the quality of education, in 1985 the Plan of Curriculum Revision was approved after years of testing. But up until 1988, it had been implemented only partially because of administrative and financial problems.

Levels of teacher preparation have improved gradually since the 1960s. In the 1960s, 11 percent of primary teachers had only primary-school education or less; in the 1980s, only 1 percent fell into this category. In 1960 only 2 percent of primary teachers had any postsecondary education. In the 1980s, the corresponding figure was 13 percent.

A 1983 law stipulated that 1 percent of the education budget be targeted for the purchase of textbooks, but the law was not applied. In practice, the availability of materials was a function of the goodwill and financial situation of the individual teacher and the community in which he or she worked.

Thus, despite relatively better-qualified teachers and more classrooms, other ingredients essential for high-quality teaching were

unavailable. Teacher orientation, teacher assistance, and administration of the system had degenerated dramatically, leaving many schoolteachers frustrated and demoralized.

## Secondary and University Education

Secondary education, concentrated in the principal urban areas, evolved much as had primary education in urban areas but remained virtually nonexistent in the countryside. Increases in coverage at the secondary level occurred in response to increased demand, but 40 percent of all secondary enrollment and 60 percent of higher education still were absorbed by the private sector.

Inefficiency and low quality were also major problems in Colombia's secondary schools, although to a lesser degree than at the primary level. At the secondary-school level, 55 percent of all teachers had completed university studies, students used modern learning aids in class, and teaching materials of high quality were generally available.

The technical education sector, except for the so-called commercial branch, was relatively small and expensive in Colombia. Seventy-six percent of students were enrolled in regular academic schools. Another 12 percent were enrolled in commercial schools. Since 1970 the National Institutes of Diversified Intermediate Education (Institutos Nacionales de Educación Media Diversificada—INEM) have taken on increasing importance, as has the National Apprenticeship Service (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje—Sena), which was charged with financial responsibility for the formal technical schools, has received significant backing from both the public and private sectors, and has proved quite successful. In 1987 some 15 percent of the urban work force was estimated to have attended Sena counseling. The technical education sector also included normal schools, which were charged with preparing primary-school teachers, but these schools were heavily criticized for inflexible, irrelevant curriculum and poor quality.

Higher education had expanded more than the other two levels of the system. This expansion was especially true in private institutions. There were few reliable data on the quality of higher education except in those universities that maintained high entrance requirements. Most of these were concentrated in Bogotá and a few other principal cities. Nonetheless, observers agreed that the rapid expansion of higher education had in general occurred at the expense of quality. It was common to find professors working part time in several institutions and students attending only night courses. In most universities, there was a notable imbalance between the development needs of the country and the areas of

specialization offered and a virtual absence of scientific and technological research. The frequent suspension of classes as a result of student strikes was a constant problem until early in the 1980s, when strike activity dropped substantially in most universities. In the 1970s, however, the best public universities were closed at least half the time because of student strikes.

Various studies of the education system in Colombia have demonstrated its highly stratified character. A disproportionate number of secondary-school students came from the upper-income brackets, and higher education further amplified this socioeconomic bias, even though all public universities and many private ones had adopted admission requirements based solely on academic performance. The bias in favor of higher-income students was slightly higher in private than in public institutions.

### Resource Allocation

The national government had assumed a progressively more important role in financing education in Colombia since the 1960s. In addition to the Ministry of Education, the only important source of public funds for education was Sena, which spent around 10 percent of the total spent on education. Sena obtained its resources from a special tax on corporations based on their number of employees.

In Colombia public expenditures for education hovered around 3 percent of the gross national product (GNP—see Glossary) from the beginning of the 1970s through the mid-1980s. Private expenditures represented between 1.5 percent and 2 percent of GNP. These statistics indicated that public expenditures on education in Colombia fell well below the average of other similar Latin American countries, whereas private expenditures were higher than in comparable nations.

## Drugs and Society

In the 1980s, Colombia achieved international notoriety as a major narcotics trafficking center (see Interest Groups, ch. 4). Nonetheless, the country's involvement with drugs was rooted farther back in history. As in Bolivia and Peru, although on a smaller scale, Colombia's indigenous populations had grown and chewed coca for thousands of years. Marijuana cultivation, in contrast, was a much more recent phenomenon. It arrived in Colombia along the Caribbean coast via Panama during the first decade of the twentieth century. By the 1930s, limited cultivation had begun among the Costeño black population centered on Barranquilla; urban criminals there routinely smoked marijuana. During World War II,

experiments with hemp cultivation designed to increase fiber production for the war effort substantially expanded its cultivation.

The real takeoff of Colombian marijuana production began in the mid- and late 1960s as a result of the growing demand generated by the United States market. By the early 1970s, Colombia had emerged as a major United States supplier, although most of the market remained in the hands of Mexican traffickers. When in the early 1970s the United States tightened up drug enforcement along the United States-Mexican border and the Mexican state launched a major drive against its domestic producers, the epicenter of marijuana production in the hemisphere rapidly shifted to Colombia, especially to the Guajira Peninsula and the slopes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. By the end of the decade, Colombia accounted for about 70 percent of the marijuana reaching the United States from abroad. Between 30,000 and 50,000 small farmers along Colombia's Caribbean coast came to depend directly on marijuana cultivation for their livelihood, while at least another 50,000 Colombians—including seasonal pickers, transporters, guards, and bankers—made a living from it (see Crops, ch. 3).

The trade proved to be an important source of new wealth for the Caribbean coast, providing the population with income, comforts, and a degree of economic stability that they had never before enjoyed. The Caribbean port cities of Barranquilla, Santa Marta, and Riohacha, in particular, experienced unprecedented prosperity. At the same time, however, the Guajira Peninsula experienced a dramatic upsurge in drug-related violence and a concomitant disintegration of local police and judicial institutions as the result of corruption and bribery. Local food production declined as tens of thousands of hectares were converted to marijuana cultivation. Farmers engaged in growing traditional crops such as bananas found labor more expensive and in short supply. Inflation was stimulated, especially in land markets, as drug barons bid up prices. Many legitimate businesses, including banks, hotels, airlines, restaurants, and casinos, were bought up by the *mafiosos* and used for laundering illicit profits.

The Colombian cocaine trade followed in the footsteps of the marijuana traffickers. In the late 1960s, a relatively small cocaine smuggling network, largely under the control of exile Cuban criminal organizations based in Miami, sprang up. Coca was cultivated in small plots by Paez Indians in the San Jorge Valley in the department of Cauca in southwestern Colombia and in the Cordillera Occidental. Smuggling was carried out largely by individual carriers, or "mules," who transported a few kilograms at a time using commercial airlines.

In the early 1970s, as demand for cocaine expanded rapidly in the United States, the limited raw coca supplies produced in Colombia were augmented with coca paste imported from Bolivia and Peru, refined in "kitchen laboratories" in Colombia, and smuggled into the United States. The 1973 Chilean military coup that deposed President Salvador Allende Gossens also proved to be a severe blow to the Chilean criminal gangs involved in the cocaine trade in that country. When the military government of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte clamped down, many Chilean "chemists" fled Chile and ended up swelling the ranks of the nascent smuggling and refining networks in Colombia and Miami. In addition, two Colombians—Carlos Lehder Rivas and Jorge Luis Ochoa Vásquez—worked with the Medellín criminal networks in the mid-1970s to transform the cocaine transportation system from small-time mule activities into huge airlift operations.

By late 1977, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) had opened a file under the name "Medellín Trafficking Syndicate." Violence was an integral part of the operations of the Medellín syndicate from the start. As the organization grew in size, power, and wealth, it also grew in ruthlessness and violence. After first establishing their dominance on the South American side of the market, in 1978 and 1979 the Medellín drug bosses turned their attention to control of wholesale distribution in the United States. Thus began a period of violence in South Florida known as "the Cocaine Wars." It peaked in 1981 with a reported 101 drug-related murders in that year.

As the violence subsided in late 1981 and afterward, what emerged was a loosely organized criminal organization known as the Medellín Cartel. In effect, by installing their own middlemen in Miami, the Colombians "forward integrated" their operations and thus were able to capture additional profits. By reinvesting their profits in the business, they were able to expand and streamline production in Colombia and farther south in the Andes. They also purchased bigger and better airplanes and boats for transporting drugs, purchased more sophisticated electronic communications devices and radar to escape detection, and paid huge sums in bribes for protection to law enforcement officials in Colombia, the United States, and elsewhere.

By the early 1980s, the marijuana traffic was already being eclipsed by the cocaine trade in terms of the wealth and power associated with it. Cocaine also generated criminal organizations that were more profitable, more vertically integrated, more hierarchical in structure, and more ruthless in their systematic use of bribery, intimidation, and assassination than the marijuana traffickers.

Although Colombia had long been accustomed to extraordinarily high levels of violence, the rise of the drug mafia provoked a qualitative change. Relying on paid assassins, locally known as *sicarios,* Colombia's drug lords not only fought among themselves but also launched a systematic campaign of murder and intimidation against Colombia's government authorities intent upon extraditing them to the United States. In the process, they effectively paralyzed the country's system of justice and drove scores of prominent Colombians from all walks of life out of the country and into self-imposed exile. They also contributed significantly to the "devaluation" of life throughout Colombia and converted murder and brutality into a regular source of income for some sectors of society.

Unlike marijuana money, which was concentrated along the Caribbean coast, cocaine money made its way into the major metropolitan areas, especially Barranquilla, Medellín, Cali, and, to a lesser extent, Bogotá.

Along with their enormous economic power, the drug lords reached out for a larger quota of political power. Several, like Lehder, bought interests in local radio stations and newspapers. Others, like Pablo Escobar Gaviria, sought to create patron-client followings in the cities by handing out cash to the poor, building low-income housing in the slums, or purchasing sports teams and constructing sports stadiums. A number contributed to political campaigns. Lehder went so far as to create his own Latino Nationalist Party and to publicize his hybrid political ideology (a combination of Colombian and Latin American nationalism, leavened with elements of fascism) through his newspaper, *Quindio Libre.* In 1982 Escobar was actually elected as an alternate congressman on a Liberal Party slate in his home department of Antioquia.

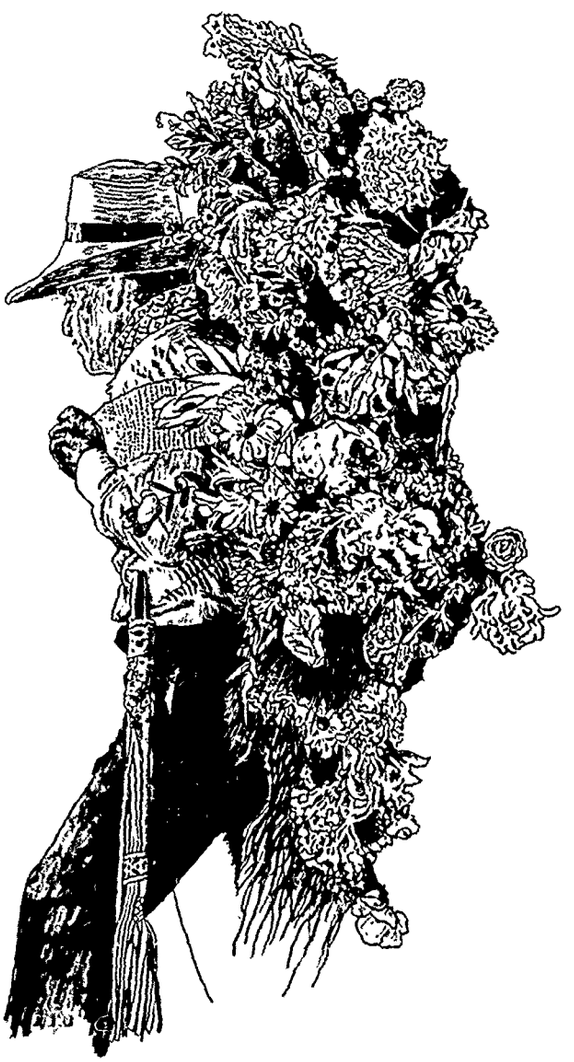
In addition to corrupting the political and economic systems, narcotics trafficking generated a growing domestic drug problem. In the early 1980s, there developed among Colombian youths a widespread addiction to *basuco.* A highly contaminated, addictive, and damaging form of cocaine normally smoked with marijuana or tobacco, *basuco* was dumped by the cocaine smugglers on the Colombian market because it was not of "export" quality. Sold cheap, it soon became more popular in many cities than marijuana, leaving hundreds of thousands of addicts in its wake, many suffering from permanent nervous disorders.

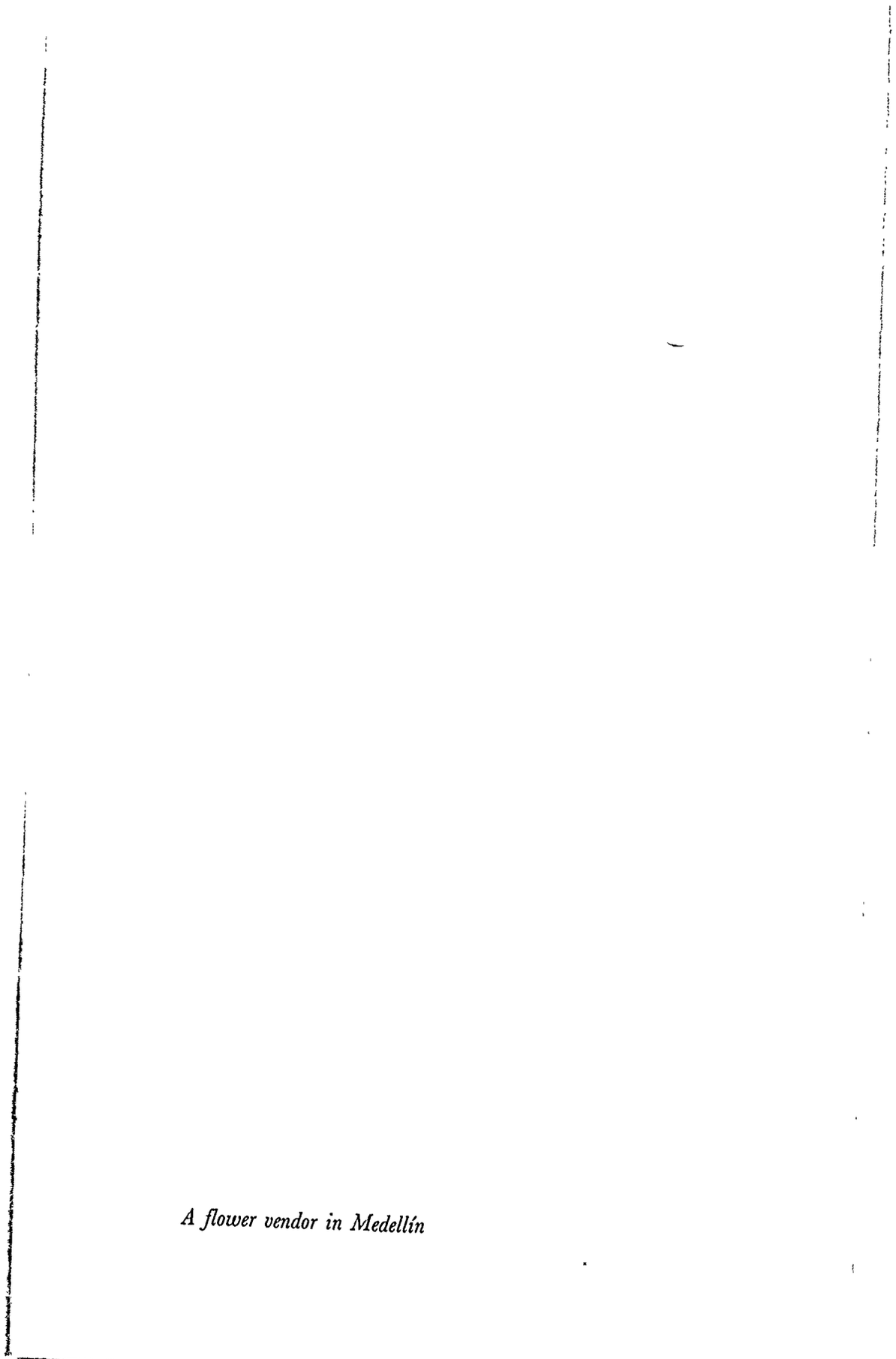
* * *

For readers interested in scholarly works in English on Colombian society, T. Lynn Smith's *Colombia: Social Structure and the Process*

*of Development* provides an overview of the profound changes in the country's traditional agrarian social structures during the twentieth century up to the mid-1960s. Orlando Fals Borda's *Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes* is a classic case study of the impact of modernization on Colombia's rural communities in the 1950s and early 1960s. In *Internal Colonialism and Structural Change in Colombia,* A. Eugene Havens and William L. Flinn bring together a set of essays that probe the causes and consequences of Colombia's accelerated transformation from a rural to an urban society during the 1960s. Rakesh Mohan's *The People of Bogotá* provides a case study of the changing internal structure of the nation's burgeoning cities and the problems associated with rapid urban growth at the end of the 1970s. The World Bank's *Colombia: Economic Development and Policy under Changing Conditions* presents an authoritative synthesis of Colombia's principal socioeconomic characteristics, trends, and public policies as of the mid-1980s. R. Albert Berry and Miguel Urrutia's *Income Distribution in Colombia* explores how the benefits of Colombia's rapid economic growth in the post-World War II era were distributed by regions and strata in the mid-1970s. Urrutia's *Winners and Losers in Colombia's Economic Growth of the 1970s* revises and updates his earlier work with Berry through the end of the 1970s. The changing role of the Catholic Church in Colombia in the 1980s is discussed by Daniel Levine in *Religion and Politics in Latin America.* On public health conditions and trends in the 1980s, Volume II of the Pan American Health Organization's *Health Conditions in the Americas, 1981–1984,* is informative. Bruce Michael Bagley's "Colombia and the War on Drugs" gives an analysis of the scope and impact of illicit drug consumption and trafficking in Colombia in the 1980s. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

# Chapter 3. The Economy





*A flower vendor in Medellín*

DESPITE GROWING POLITICAL and drug-related violence, Colombia's economy retained its essentially capitalist, free-market orientation in the 1980s. The nation's strong public sector continued its commitment to liberalized trade and investment relations with foreign countries, and it worked toward development of a national economic program that would eradicate extreme poverty. This was accomplished, in part, by joint efforts involving both private business concerns and government agencies. The government continued to depend on entrepreneurial efforts and private capital (both foreign and domestic) as the sources of economic growth and limited its domestic role to coordinating fiscal and monetary policy, providing for public sector and infrastructure development, and establishing a political environment conducive to investment and industrial development.

Colombia's economic growth in the late 1980s resulted from the prudent development and use of the nation's economic endowments, as well as the existence of highly favorable external circumstances. The country enjoyed an abundance of natural resources and land, a skilled work force, healthy levels of investment and savings, and modern agricultural, manufacturing, construction, and service sectors. Rebounding international markets and the 1986 coffee boom also had an important effect on Colombia's growth in the late 1980s.

Colombia's collective economic attributes defined a middle-income developing country that had a strong and diverse resource base, as well as assorted production capabilities grounded in industry, manufacturing, agriculture, and various services. Services (including finance, transport, communications, trade, and public administration) accounted for almost 51 percent of the gross domestic product in 1987, agriculture almost 21 percent, industry over 25 percent, and mining and energy about 3 percent. In 1988 analysts contended that the Colombian economy could grow at an annual rate of 4 to 5 percent until at least the early 1990s, limited only by the ability of entrepreneurs, planners, and policy makers to employ the country's vast resources. Because of its high levels of foreign exchange earnings from coffee, petroleum, and mining, Colombia also was expected to remain among the more solvent of the Third World debtor states.

Despite the economic situation's many positive aspects, three fundamental problems remained in the late 1980s. First, despite

sustained growth levels similar to those of other middle- and upper-middle-income developing countries, Colombia had a highly skewed distribution of income and a relatively low per capita income. Indeed, in the late 1980s the economy appeared to become even more concentrated with the rewards of production remaining predominantly in the hands of a minority. Second, Colombia experienced chronic inflation and unemployment throughout the 1980s. Despite growth in manufacturing and mining, as well as continued support from more traditional sectors such as agriculture, the economy seemed unable to absorb enough workers to push unemployment below 10 percent.

Finally, the infamous drug trade, which was partially responsible for Colombia's economic growth during the 1970s and 1980s, caused numerous socioeconomic problems, not the least of which was that the political and economic power of narcotics traffickers rivaled that of the national government. Among other effects, the drug trade skewed income patterns in certain areas associated with cocaine and marijuana trafficking, which exacerbated inflation because of a steady influx of United States dollars, and disproportionately expanded the financial, real estate, and construction industries because of their capacity to absorb laundered money. The drug trade also spread corruption and violence through much of society, particularly the public sector, exacerbating economic and social problems.

## Growth and Structure of the Economy

Colombia first became an exporting region in the sixteenth century, under the Spanish system of mercantilism (see The Colonial Economy, ch. 1). Spanish imperial rule defined much of Colombia's social and economic development. The colony became an exporter of raw materials, particularly precious metals, to the mother country. With its colonial status came a highly structured socioeconomic system based on slavery, indentured servitude, and limited foreign contact. Colombia's modern economy, based on coffee and other agricultural exports, did not emerge until well after independence (1810), when local entrepreneurs were free to capitalize on world markets other than Spain.

Although colonialism fostered minimal domestic economic growth, small entrepreneurial efforts began to take shape, so that by the nineteenth century, well-defined economic enterprises were under way. The economy at that time was based primarily on mining, agriculture, and cattle raising, with contributions also made by local artisans and merchants.

Socioeconomic changes proceeded slowly; the economy existed essentially as a loosely related group of regional producers rather than as a national entity. Land and wealth were still the privilege of a minority. Forced labor continued in the mines, and various exploitative labor arrangements existed on the haciendas, such as sharecropping, renting, and low-wage labor. In each case, those owning the land benefited excessively, whereas those working the land remained impoverished.

The late nineteenth century witnessed the development of tobacco and coffee export industries, which greatly enlarged the merchant class and led to population expansion and the growth of cities. Wealth was concentrated in agriculture and commerce, two sectors that focused on opening channels to world markets, a process that continued slowly but steadily throughout the nineteenth century.

Following the War of a Thousand Days (1899–1902), Colombia experienced a coffee boom that catapulted the country into the modern period, bringing the attendant benefits of transportation (railroads) and communications infrastructure and the first major attempts at manufacturing (see Consolidation of Political Divisions, ch. 1). The period 1905–15 has been described as the most significant growth phase in Colombian history, characterized by an expansion of exports and government revenues, as well as an overall rise in the gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary). Coffee contributed most to trade, growing from only 7 percent of total exports in the 1870s to nearly 75 percent by the mid-1920s. Unprecedented amounts of foreign capital found their way into both private investment and public works during this period as a result of the strong performance of coffee and other exports.

Despite the outward signs of growth, serious flaws remained in the Colombian economic system. The benefits of economic growth accrued disproportionately to the export sector, cities, and manufacturing groups, with perhaps as much as 70 percent of the population receiving little or no benefit from this period of expansion. Skewed income patterns would continue throughout the twentieth century, as manufacturing and services developed and became significant parts of the national economy.

The rapid growth and development of the economy in the early twentieth century helped prepare Colombia for the economic problems that accompanied the Great Depression of 1929. Colombia continued to produce raw materials, and although coffee prices collapsed during the depression, output continued to expand. Nonetheless, social and economic improvements remained uneven. Wages

for agricultural laborers remained low, whereas other workers, notably urban employees, received large salary increases.

The expansion of the coffee industry laid the groundwork for national economic integration after World War II. During the course of the postwar expansion, Colombia underwent a distinct transformation. Before the 1950s, because of the steep terrain and a relatively primitive transportation network, Colombia's manufacturing sector was dominated by local industries that were only loosely linked to other regional businesses. National development proceeded from improved transportation facilities, financed directly and indirectly by the coffee industry. Greater economic integration soon became evident with the heavier concentration of industry and population in the six largest cities. Coffee's success, therefore, was ultimately responsible for a reliable transportation network that hastened urbanization and industrialization.

In addition to coffee production, economic expansion of both the noncoffee industrial sector and the service sector was accomplished in two distinct stages. From 1950 until 1967, Colombia followed a well-defined program of import substitution industrialization (see Glossary), with most manufacturing start-ups directed toward domestic consumption that previously had been satisfied by imports. After 1967 planners in both government and industry shifted the economic strategy to export promotion, emphasizing nontraditional exports, such as clothing and other manufactured consumables, in addition to processed coffee.

From 1967 to 1980, the Colombian economy, and particularly the coffee industry, experienced sustained growth. GDP grew at an average annual rate of over 5 percent during this period, supported by an expanded labor force, increased labor productivity, and accelerated investment. Strong export earnings and a large increase in foreign exchange reserves were the most noticeable results of this economic expansion.

Despite the successes of the 1970s, the national economy began to flounder in the early 1980s. This was largely because the global recession that began in 1981 caused demand in external markets to fall precipitously.

The combination of domestic economic achievements in the 1970s and generous foreign aid, however, placed Colombia in a relatively favorable position to ride out the global recession, especially in comparison with other Latin American states. Drawing down foreign exchange reserves (20 percent in 1982 and 50 percent in 1983) to compensate for both trade and national account imbalances minimized the financial and social consequences of the recession. In contrast, other Latin American nations, facing similar deficits,

borrowed heavily from both private financial and multilateral development institutions, which forced them to restrict government spending severely. In addition to the large foreign reserves, external assistance in the form of grants and concessional loans further relieved stress on Colombia's international and domestic finances. Throughout most of the 1980s, Colombia ranked among the leading recipients of World Bank (see Glossary) loans, as well as direct assistance from the United States. Although this aid allowed Colombia to maintain a relatively higher rate of GDP growth than the rest of Latin America, aggregate production remained depressed.

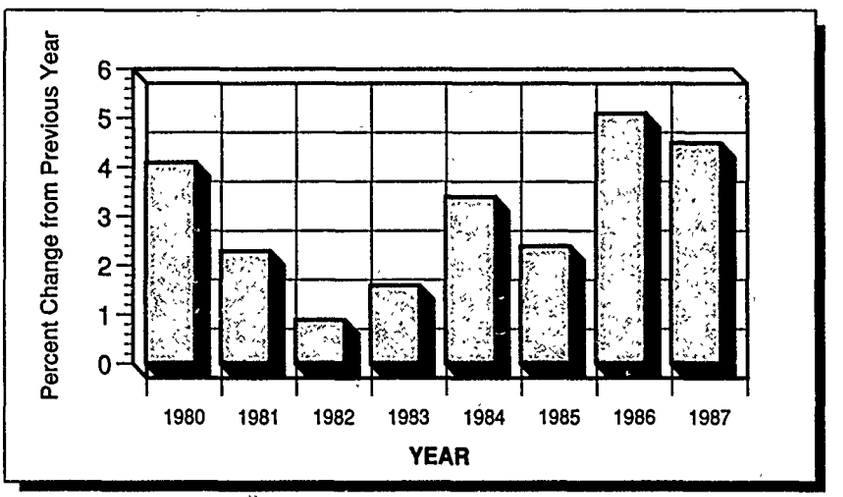
By the late 1980s, Colombia's short-term economic outlook had become more promising, in large part because of an unusual confluence of circumstances that occurred in 1986. That year, a coffee production boom in Colombia coincided with a poor harvest in Brazil and rising international prices. The overall effect was a stronger national economy, which benefited most sectors and classes. GDP grew by 4.5 percent in 1987, thanks in part to a particularly strong contribution by the construction industry. For the near future, analysts predicted continued growth and stability. Nevertheless, Colombian planners advocated diversification of the economy to reduce its dependence on coffee, so that future downswings in the industry would not have equally severe consequences.

## Macroeconomic Trends

### Economic Growth

Following the global economic downturn of the early 1980s, Colombia's economy began to grow at a respectable level in 1984 (see fig. 5). Economic growth occurred in all sectors, with the volatility of the coffee market determining the relative strength of each. During the 1980–85 period, for example, generally low commodity prices forced domestic public and private consumption to lead the economic expansion, admittedly at a low level. By contrast, during the 1986 boom, coffee earnings rose more than 60 percent, which encouraged increased saving and improved public finances.

Nontraditional exports—including textiles, coal, oil, and noncoffee agricultural products—also contributed to economic growth. Output by this group rose by an average of 10 percent during the 1983–86 period and, depending on the relative contribution of the coffee industry, was responsible for a large portion of GDP. In 1987 nontraditional export revenues exceeded earnings from coffee, with oil earnings reaching US$1.1 billion, an increase of 66 percent over the previous year (see Petroleum, this ch.).




Source: Based on information from Colombia, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Plan de Economía Social, Agosto 1987,* Bogotá, 1987, 191, 224.

*Figure 5. Real Growth of Gross Domestic Product, 1980–87*

By the late 1980s, per capita income—another telling measure of growth—had improved only slightly for the past three decades and remained at a level below that of most of Colombia's neighbors. Per capita income in 1986 was approximately US$1,330, which placed Colombia tenth among the nineteen Latin American countries. Real change in per capita GDP had consistently lagged behind change in aggregate GDP by two percentage points since 1982 and was actually negative for 1982 and 1983.

Despite indications of solid performance in aggregate terms, individual social and economic indicators suggested that Colombia was still a society of numerous disparities. Colombia in reality did not distribute the fruits of economic production more equitably in 1986 than it had fifty years earlier. In the 1980s, as much as 70 percent of income went to only 20 percent of the population, and three-quarters of all Colombians were classified as members of the lower class and the masses. Furthermore, per capita income in agrarian areas was only half the national average.

Although workers made gains in the 1970s, improvements in income distribution that occurred at that time were lost during the 1980s (see Income Distribution, ch. 2). Despite government efforts to improve education, health services, and aggregate output, Colombia may have actually experienced a widening of the income gap. Inequalities inherent in fast growth strategies (such as capital-intensive industrialization), continued rural-to-urban

migration (which swelled the urban labor market), and the effects of the global recession were cited as the major reasons for the downturn.

In the 1980s, ownership of land, financial resources, and productive assets remained highly skewed. One percent of all shareholders controlled 50 to 80 percent of all stock issued. Debt was also distributed unevenly; only 1 percent of all debtors held 50 percent of all outstanding loans. Furthermore, industrial and agricultural wealth tended to overlap, so that most financial and economic assets were concentrated in the same hands.

Other indicators of social well-being, such as literacy and education, closely followed income patterns. Government estimates in 1987 suggested that although the nationwide illiteracy rate was only 12 percent, it ranged from a low of 5.7 percent of those at the upper-income level to nearly 30 percent of those in the lower-income bracket. Illiteracy was most common in rural areas.

## Inflation and Unemployment

High inflation and unemployment also confronted Colombia in the late 1980s. Although Colombia was able to avoid the hyperinflation characteristic of Argentina and Brazil in the 1980s, persistent annual increases in the consumer price index (CPI—see Glossary) of 20 to 25 percent had been evident since the mid-1970s.

Higher coffee revenues in the 1970s caused rapid increases in demand and costs, which boosted inflation. This occurred at a time when the Third World was also experiencing rising oil prices. As the economy entered the 1981–85 recession, accelerated deficit spending by the government continued to fuel inflation. By the early 1980s, Colombia had entered a period of rising prices combined with economic stagnation. The rapid growth of the money supply and frequent devaluations of the peso (for value of the peso—see Glossary) also fed inflation in the 1980s.

The annual inflation rate dipped below 20 percent in 1983 for the first time in more than a decade, only to surge upward again in 1985. In 1986 government efforts to control public debt and funnel windfall proceeds from that year's coffee boom into the public sector may have eased inflationary pressures, but the CPI nevertheless rose by 21 percent.

Inflation was estimated at 25 percent in 1987, fueled by price increases in domestically produced items, including housing, food, and clothing. In the case of food prices, shortfalls in domestic production shot prices upward increasing dependence on more

expensive foreign foodstuffs. A price-indexed minimum wage and market adjustments throughout the wage structure also contributed to inflation. In 1987 the minimum wage rose by 24 percent, nearly equaling the price increases for the year.

The large number of United States dollars that entered Colombia illegally because of the drug trade also contributed to inflationary pressures by raising the overall level of demand. Estimates varied as to the relative importance of the drug trade, but most observers believed that it may have accounted for as much as 25 to 30 percent of total inflation in the 1980s.

Government efforts to ameliorate the effects of inflation proved relatively unsuccessful because of the combined effects of wage indexing, drug money, and volatile prices, which prompted economists to forecast inflation rates above 20 percent into the 1990s. Furthermore, it appeared that the government was reconciled to this level of inflation and would likely give priority to other economic problems.

Rising unemployment was also part of the economic malaise of the early 1980s. Although the economic boom of the 1970s had caused some researchers to conclude that unemployment would not be a serious problem in the 1980s, the Colombian unemployment rate rose steadily from 8.4 percent in 1981 to 14.9 percent by June 1986. The trend was finally reversed in 1987, as all sectors of the economy began to expand following the 1986 coffee boom. Unemployment fell to 12 percent in 1987, the lowest level since 1982, and continued to decline in early 1988. Although a welcome sign, this reduction reconfirmed Colombia's continued dependence on coffee.

Unemployment was driven by numerous variables besides the level of economic output. These determinants included demographic changes, migration patterns, education and experience levels, the relative costs of labor and capital, wage rates, and the segmentation of the labor market. Collectively, these factors pointed to a fundamental change in the nature of employment since the turn of the century.

Colombia's demographic makeup changed substantially after the 1940s. Although birth rates declined steadily (the population grew only 2 percent in 1986), the labor force expanded rapidly (see Population Trends, ch. 2). By 1985 the size of the economically active population had reached 11.3 million people, or 38 percent of the population. This represented an average annual growth rate of 3.9 percent from 1973 to 1985, with women and youths accounting for most of the increase.

By 1985 one-third of the labor force consisted of women, many of whom were housewives who had recently entered the job market because of the attractive wages. Studies suggested that this addition to the work force accounted for much of the increase in family income among the very poor.

The rise in the number of adolescent workers constituted the other significant demographic development. Because there was an influx of relatively uneducated and unskilled young workers into the labor market, many youths found it impossible to gain employment. The unemployment rate was highest in the fifteen to nineteen age-group, reaching 30 percent by 1986. Planners hoped that this situation would correct itself as demographic trends changed in the 1990s and as government efforts to keep young people in school longer began to have an effect.

Internal migration trends also affected the urban labor market. By the late 1980s, Colombia had become a predominantly urban society, with over two-thirds of the population residing in cities. In contrast, as recently as the 1950s the population had been concentrated principally in rural areas (see Urbanization, Migration, and Immigration, ch. 2).

Shifts in employment activity over time made these rural-to-urban migration patterns evident. As the country became more urbanized, it also became less dependent on the agricultural sector for employment (see table 7, Appendix). In 1938 nearly 60 percent of the population worked in agriculture and resided in rural areas. By 1984, however, only a third of the labor force was engaged in agricultural activity; most workers were employed in services, commerce, manufacturing, and construction.

Wage levels and type of employment also depended on education. Improvements in education occurred at all levels after 1951, when 42 percent of the labor force was uneducated and only 50 percent and 7 percent, respectively, had finished primary and secondary school. By 1978 only 16 percent of the work force was considered uneducated; 55 percent had finished primary school, and 24 percent had graduated from a secondary program. Most of the urban unemployed, however, continued to be rural migrants and others having little or no formal education.

Local business costs also affected employment levels. In a broad sense, Colombian capital and labor could be easily substituted for each other; consequently, the manufacturing sector inclined toward a capital-intensive export strategy in the late 1960s. As a result, fewer workers were employed in this sector than might have been the case had a more labor-intensive approach been taken.

The cost of labor was relatively high in Colombia. This resulted, in part, from social legislation and demands made by unions, including minimum wage requirements and nonwage compensation such as severance and vacation pay, pensions, and disability allowances. Some economists also argued that government subsidies designed to encourage investment actually placed the marginal and relative costs of capital at below-market rates and at levels significantly lower than the cost of labor for many businesses. This situation appeared unlikely to change without some type of government initiative.

Of increasing interest in the labor market was the level of segmentation, which could be conceptually represented by dividing the work force into two categories—the formal and informal sectors. The formal sector, or traditional labor market, is easily identified in national employment data. The informal sector, by contrast, is a segregated portion of the employment market characterized by a lack of formal record keeping and by small enterprises that employ little capital and only a few, if any, usually undereducated employees. Many economists believed that the informal sector constituted as much as half of the labor force in the 1980s, including many peasants and other workers engaged in drug production and trafficking. The informal sector played an important role in absorbing unskilled workers who would otherwise have remained unemployed; the nature of this sector, however, dictated that wages remain well below those of the formal sector, and other nonwage compensation, such as paid leave or insurance, was unavailable to the workers. Those engaged in the drug business were the exception. They usually earned wages or salaries in excess of what their skills would bring in the formal employment market.

In 1987 government estimates indicated an expansion of the informal sector in major urban centers, probably as a result of high unemployment. The size and profitability of the informal sector, therefore, appeared to be inversely related to the prospects of the formal labor market.

## The Labor Movement

The labor movement, although rich in history, has been criticized by analysts for its inability to develop effective representation for the Colombian worker. Scholars have variously described organized labor as weak, nonradical, nonoppositional, and as virtually co-opted by the national government. Although prominent at times, unions lacked the strong adversarial presence characteristic of organized workers' groups in other Latin American countries.

Historically, Colombia's worker groups formed unions to attain political goals but failed to coalesce into enduring collective bargaining units. Nevertheless, the labor movement did express itself clearly through strikes, sit-ins, and other forms of work stoppage and contributed directly to the long-term development of society by bringing workers into the political process.

The first workers' group was formed in 1857. Known as the Bogotá Artisans Society (Sociedad de Artesanos de Bogotá), it represented a reaction to liberal economic reforms bent on opening the Colombian economy to free trade. It functioned primarily as a medium for local artisans to vent their political displeasure over the new competitiveness of the economy, rather than as a forum for grievances concerning workers' rights.

Societies that followed in the nineteenth century were similarly nonconfrontational and served as foci for achieving mutually beneficial goals—such as establishing joint savings and insurance schemes—rather than as means of presenting collective bargaining demands. Although some attempts were made to improve wages and working conditions, a genuine workers' movement did not emerge until the end of World War I.

The earliest episodes of violent confrontation between workers and management centered on the foreign enclave industries of oil and banana exportation. The most noted job action occurred at the United Fruit Company's Santa Marta complex, where in November 1928 railroad, banana, port, and field workers went on strike to force changes in wages, hours, and nonwage compensation. This attempt to win resolution of grievances unsuccessfully aired ten years earlier was marked by the violent deaths of about 1,000 people, as the government intervened repressively on the side of the United Fruit Company. The banana and oil industries elected to retrench, however, rather than face continued worker unrest. Colombia's labor issues thereafter were fought over more vigorously in the domestically owned coffee industry and eventually in the urban industrial sector.

In 1930 the Liberal Party (Partido Liberal—PL) was elected for the first time in decades (see The Reformist Period, 1930–45, ch. 1). Its victory was directly associated with the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador—PC) government's handling of the United Fruit Company strike. This political transition was one of the most important in Colombian history. It signaled the end of a government policy designed to repress labor's efforts and the beginning of the PL's pragmatic and conciliatory philosophy of selectively meeting labor's demands to bring its political leadership, including

members of the Communist Party of Colombia (Partido Comunista de Colombia—PCC), into the Liberal fold.

During the 1930s and early 1940s, coffee workers enjoyed numerous small successes. They gained control over small parcels of land for their own cultivation, improved labor contracts on large estates, and received legal permission to organize. These victories were won through both individual and collective efforts. The perceived successes of the coffee workers, however, were a disincentive to their greater participation in the national labor movement, which diminished the long-term political power of the unions. Nonetheless, the urban work force was determined to establish an institutionalized labor movement and set about integrating some of the unions that had already formed.

The 1930s and 1940s saw the growth of unions nationwide; labor supported the PL, which, in turn, created an environment conducive to labor's participation in politics. Labor interests were partially consolidated in 1935 with the creation of the Confederation of Colombian Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Colombianos—CTC), which represented the first successful attempt at uniting smaller unions from various professions into a collective political organization. The CTC was leftist by definition, but the reformist policies of the Liberal government allowed for a lengthy and mutually beneficial relationship. What labor failed to realize, however, was that by aligning itself with a single political party, it would suffer the consequence of the inevitable change of power.

The heyday of the labor movement was clearly over by the mid-1940s. Expressly anticommunist, postwar conservatism turned on the labor movement, and the split and eventual fall of the PL in the 1946 elections eliminated labor's influence on national government. The rising PC also provided a means to express the ruling class's growing fear of what it perceived as an increasingly radical labor movement. Soon, even the moderate middle sectors of society turned away from the movement. The CTC's new impotence was made evident by a string of unsuccessful strikes in the mid-1940s.

Taking advantage of the weakened state of the CTC, the Roman Catholic Church established the Union of Colombian Workers (Unión de Trabajadores Colombianos—UTC) in June 1946. It immediately attracted many members—some from the ranks of the CTC and others from small unions, particularly industry groups—that had not been enticed to join the leftist CTC. Both industrialists and the Conservative government supported the UTC, largely because it did not represent a threat to the political and



*A family in Popayán checks its coffee bean crop. Courtesy Inter-American Development Bank*

economic elite. The subsequent period of labor repression and co-optation by the government served to eliminate radical elements of the movement while taming the less militant segments. During the period known as *la violencia* (1948–66), organized union labor was effectively dead; it had no means of articulating its interests, and the chaotic nature of society at that time delayed further coalition for at least ten years (see The Emergence of La Violencia, ch. 1).

The near anarchy that followed the 1948 assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a member of Congress who had long been a champion of the disadvantaged, had a different although equally demoralizing effect on rural workers. The plight of smallholder coffee farmers worsened rapidly, and many of them fled the countryside in the face of widespread violence. This served to consolidate landholdings in rural areas, as well as drive large numbers of unskilled rural laborers into the hands of the UTC. Collectively, labor emerged from the 1950s demoralized and virtually without political power. The UTC, which at this point commanded the majority of organized labor and the diminished rural groups, had no political means of effecting even the slightest changes and was without an advocate in national government.

After 1960 two more labor federations surfaced: the Trade Union Confederation of Colombian Workers (Confederación Sindical de

Trabajadores de Colombia—CSTC), formally recognized by the government in 1964, and the General Confederation of Workers (Confederación General de Trabajadores—CGT), created in 1975. The CSTC, which was aligned with the Colombian Communists, and the CGT, which was affiliated with the Christian Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrático Cristiano—PSDC), accounted for a combined total of 20 percent of the unionized work force. Neither union had a strong political role, however, under the National Front, which served to unify all significant political interest groups within a shared two-party structure from 1958 to 1974 (see The National Front, 1958–74, ch. 1). There was no apparent need to incorporate labor as a political ally. Additionally, during the National Front period the CTC and UTC faced numerous internal problems, which caused many individual unions to withdraw from the larger federations.

Regardless of political setbacks, the labor movement was not totally ineffective. Various groups engineered successful strikes in the 1970s and 1980s. Bolstered by leftist leadership, the weakened status of the CTC and the UTC, and the economic austerity measures of the government of Belisario Betancur Cuartas (1982–86), labor groups coalesced in 1986 in a fashion reminiscent of the 1930s. A majority of the independent unions and those affiliated with the CSTC joined forces in September 1986 to form the United Workers Central Organization (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores—CUT). Analysts estimated that this body included 75 percent of the organized work force, the majority of whom were no longer willing to accept an acquiescent platform. The CUT also emerged as a major voice against organized violence and served as a catalyst for uniting other labor elements. It was not, however, timid about organizing strikes, and key industries reacted to CUT initiatives by meeting many of its demands rather than face prolonged confrontation.

By the late 1980s, the confederated labor movement appeared to be playing a larger role in representing workers' rights, as well as focusing on major political issues. Although it seemed unlikely that a collaborative effort similar to the one struck with the Liberal administrations of the 1930s would again be possible, the CUT was reshaping organized labor into a stronger bargaining movement.

The early months of 1988 were rife with strikes by workers in the banana, banking, cement, public service, and other industries. The most common demands centered on protection for union leaders, who were the targets of right-wing assassins, and cost-of-living adjustments in wages. Despite their growing hostility

toward management, the CUT and other union groups refrained from openly defiant stands against the government. Nevertheless, observers believed that the extent to which the government would tolerate a more active labor movement depended on whether or not the unions seriously threatened the economic and political interests of the elite, as well as the degree to which they contributed to the persistent problem of organized violence in the country.

## Role of the Government in the Economy

The economy in the late 1980s was predominantly a capitalist-oriented free-market system, requiring a minimum of state interference in its overall operation. Nonetheless, the president had the authority to take corrective action on a number of levels, as well as the constitutionally guaranteed right to determine the general direction of economic and social development.

Historically, government intervention in the economy took the form of preferential treatment for a particular sector, such as the creation of protective barriers to promote import substitution industrialization, and cooperative ventures undertaken with the private sector, chiefly to develop energy resources. The government also supported the promotion of exports through financial guarantees and the management of exchange rates, price supports, and fiscal and monetary policies. The government generally did not subscribe to a heavy regulatory policy but did manage some enterprises either directly or as joint ventures with private firms. Since 1950 one of the most visible examples of government intervention had been the sector-specific economic development planning advocated by particular administrations.

The Constitution of 1886 and its subsequent amendments provide the legal justification for strong executive authority (see Constitutional Development, ch. 4). Although Congress is granted powers to establish guidelines for economic development, legislative control of economic policy faded during the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953–57) (see The Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship, ch. 1). The National Front governments that followed further consolidated economic planning within the executive office, an effort that culminated in the Social Development Plan of 1961–70.

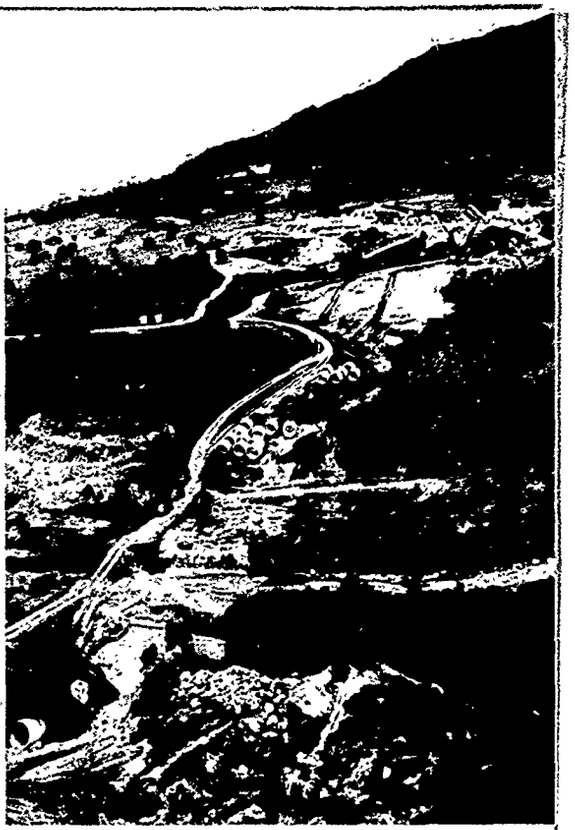
Executive dominance of economic policy making was further reinforced by the 1968 amendments to the Constitution, which limit congressional authority to various checks on executive programs. These amendments charge the president with general control over

economic policy, which may be altered only with a two-thirds vote of Congress. This power extends to public and private investment initiatives, the allocation of public resources, and tax policy. Any congressional changes in budgetary matters are referred to the finance minister for final arbitration. Congress retains authority to approve the president's development plan, however. In the event that Congress does not act on this plan, the president may proceed by decree. Nonetheless, congressional efforts to control economic policy have, at times, impeded implementation of economic plans. In 1974, for example, Congress refused to act on the "Four Strategies" plan of President Misael Pastrana Borrero (1970–74), forcing the executive branch to act by decree to implement what were technically illegal policies. Congress immediately challenged the president on legal grounds, with subsequent rulings by the Supreme Court again favoring executive supremacy. This allowed carefully structured programs to be planned, funded, and implemented virtually without congressional approval. Congress, however, continued to find ways to frustrate executive policy.

Congressional authority to influence executive economic policy making carried over to the administration of Alfonso López Michelsen (1974–78), as legislators attempted to loosen the grip of the executive branch's strong hand. López Michelsen's plan, dubbed "To Close the Gap," was designed to increase funding for more equitable social development by altering the tax code (see The Liberal Tenure, ch. 1). Congress again refused to act, which contributed to the plan's eventual failure. Although López Michelsen went so far as to declare a state of economic emergency, he never succeeded in implementing a comprehensive economic reform package.

The constitutional reform of 1979 slightly reduced executive control of the economy. President Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978–82) had only recently been inaugurated, and his long career in the legislature convinced him of the need to curb executive authority over the economy. Furthermore, efforts to regain any control of economic policy would receive the support of both Liberal and Conservative legislators.

The 1979 reform authorized congressional intervention under specified circumstances and called for the president to submit a national development plan to Congress for its approval. If Congress failed to act on the plan within 100 days, however, the president could proceed without further delay. Although the executive branch basically retained power over economic planning, the mechanisms for a coordinated legislative response were in place.



*Water diversion project at Chingaza, Meta Department Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

Executive goals for national economic development were clearly defined in the next three administrations. The Turbay and Betancur administrations chose to emphasize development of energy resources and transportation networks, as well as overall economic stability. This trend, however, was altered in 1986 when a new president, Virgilio Barco Vargas, stressed economic reform.

Barco outlined his major economic development goals in the Social Economic Plan, 1987–90. The administration turned its attention to the social needs of the poor, embarking on a program designed to direct public funds to the basic health, education, and welfare needs of the lower class. The overall strategy consisted of three plans to manage broad social issues. The National Plan for the Eradication of Extreme Poverty concentrated on social and health improvements, including the upgrading or installation of sewage, water, power, health, and education facilities. The plan also outlined a strategy to reduce the vast housing shortage affecting every Colombian city. The National Rehabilitation Plan focused on development of smaller regional urban centers, and the Plan for Comprehensive Peasant Development concentrated on improving market and production capabilities for some 4 million smallholder farmers.

Planners counted on continued annual economic growth of 5 percent to provide the revenue necessary for the overall plan's implementation. Given sufficient resources, they assumed that prudent

management of macroeconomic policy would allow the goals to be met. Two years into his administration, economic indicators pointed to the success of Barco's plan. Despite some partisan resistance in Congress, coordinated fiscal and monetary policies were implemented that directed economic and financial resources toward desired ends. The combined objectives of macroeconomic policy and the development plan seemed closely linked, so that success of the first implied completion of the second.

## Fiscal and Monetary Policy

To realize the ambitious goals of his economic program, Barco initiated coordinated fiscal and monetary policies that he hoped would influence major macroeconomic variables, including GDP, interest rates, and price levels. His primary goals included reducing real interest rates to encourage business investment and economic expansion, stabilizing the inflation rate at 20 to 25 percent, and redirecting public resources to help the poor.

The administration embarked upon a restrictive fiscal scheme designed to reduce deficit spending. Whereas the previous administration's annual deficits averaged nearly 5 percent of GDP, the Barco plan called for reducing deficit spending to less than 3 percent of GDP. To meet his spending goals, Barco counted on solid growth of GDP as well as a new budget approach that would redirect funds away from infrastructure to social programs. The tax burden was also shifted slightly from businesses to individuals. Planners had anticipated that the combined effects would allow the administration to meet spending levels within deficit guidelines, but by early 1988 it appeared that the deficits would exceed initial estimates.

One of the first steps taken by the Barco administration to implement the deficit reduction policy was to alter the tax structure. Principal changes included reducing the corporate tax rate to 30 percent of revenues, eliminating double taxation, phasing out tax deductions related to inflation adjustments, and increasing personal income taxes. The government assumed that an energized business sector would bring growth to other areas of the economy.

The Barco administration outlined a strict budget to curtail deficits. Preliminary estimates of the 1988 budget indicated that income tax and indirect taxes, such as customs, gasoline, and sales duties, would be the primary revenue sources. Additional income, constituting 20 to 30 percent of total revenue, would be earned from capital receipts, including long-term debt, and various nontax income. Expenditure targets were more difficult to meet; approximately 57 percent of all expenses were absorbed by operational

expenditures of the government with 29 percent allocated to foreign and domestic debt service and 14 percent to public investment. This deviated from initial budget projections, which had indicated slightly higher allocations to debt service and public investment. Seventy-five percent of the deficit was to be financed from domestic sources; the remainder was to be financed from foreign borrowing.

Although expenses exceeded budget projections, revenues often failed to meet expectations as well. For example, President Barco inherited a budget of dwindling revenues, reflecting in part the reduction in gross tax receipts consistent with the economic downturn earlier in the 1980s. Colombia's public finances depended on coffee taxes, including a value-added tax (see Glossary) on coffee exports, customs duties, and profits from central bank exchange operations, all of which suffered in the mid-1980s. In 1986, however, receipts rebounded sharply because of the coffee boom, which yielded greater import receipts based on additional sales abroad. Publicly managed enterprises that operated at a loss also contributed to budget deficits. Improving management and budgetary control in these organizations was outlined as another specific way to reduce public costs.

Like the budget process, public investment was seen by the Barco administration as an important means by which to re-order priorities. In the early 1980s, for example, at least 55 percent of all public investment funds had gone to physical infrastructure, with the sole exception of 1982, when 43 percent of public investment was so allocated. Money was concentrated in power, transportation, and communications projects, in that order. Social infrastructure, including water, education, and health projects, absorbed 7 to 13 percent of public investment during these years, with 10 to 25 percent going to the productive sector, primarily to expand agriculture and mining. Any remaining funds went unallocated until the next fiscal year.

By contrast, the Barco government planned to change the composition of public investment by increasing the allotment to the social sector while reducing funds previously directed toward physical infrastructure projects. This was consistent with his administration's long-term goal of alleviating poverty so that social discontent and widespread violence might be defused. By early 1988, however, the fiscal deficit exceeded earlier estimates, which forced the government to reduce some of the planned increases in social programs in order to meet other obligations, such as interest payments on the national debt.

The Barco government also adjusted monetary policies to meet program goals. Monetary policy was coordinated under the Monetary Board (Junta Monetaria), which by the 1980s had responsibility for policy development; specific directives were carried out by the Bank of the Republic (Banco de la República). As the central bank, the Bank of the Republic issued currency, sold or purchased securities in the open market, set reserve requirements for the banking system, and acted as the "lender of last resort." In 1986 the government also controlled Colombia's money through numerous public sector saving institutions responsible for funneling credit to specialized projects such as housing and agricultural development.

The government implemented monetary policy by traditional methods, such as adjusting lending rates to banks, controlling monetary growth, setting reserve requirements, and determining exchange rate policy in the belief that, under certain circumstances, inflation and interest rates could be controlled. The Barco government, however, demonstrated a clear preference for allowing the money supply and interest rates to float relatively freely, provided that prices remained within certain broad limits.

Government bodies sometimes have intervened in money markets, however, in an attempt to influence price levels. Fearing that the money supply's relatively quick expansion in 1987 would be too inflationary, the government chose to raise reserve requirements. By early 1988, this tactic was considered inadequate, and the central bank turned to open market operations (see Glossary) to reduce the money supply.

Managing exchange rates was another form of monetary control, and it too contributed to economic expansion. The Barco administration continued with the "crawling peg" (see Glossary) devaluation system begun in 1967. This policy succeeded in keeping prices of Colombian goods attractively low in the external market. It also drove the prices of imported goods up, improving the trade balance and foreign exchange reserves (see Balance of Payments, this ch.).

By early 1988, the Barco administration's moderate approach toward economic management appeared to be working. A cautious fiscal policy combined with a free monetary policy seemed to help real interest rates fall from about 10 percent in 1985 to a little over 5 percent in 1987. Private investment grew during this same period from slightly less than 8 percent to over 10 percent of GDP, with aggregate economic growth reaching an average of approximately 5 percent for the two-year period. Inflation remained within the prescribed 20 to 25 percent range.

Colombia, however, was a relatively small economy by world standards, and its interest rates tended to follow those of the major world economies. Because global interest rates also fell during the late 1980s, it was likely that any success attributed to Colombia's macroeconomic policies in meeting stabilization and growth goals was assisted, at least in part, by similar trends in the international economy.

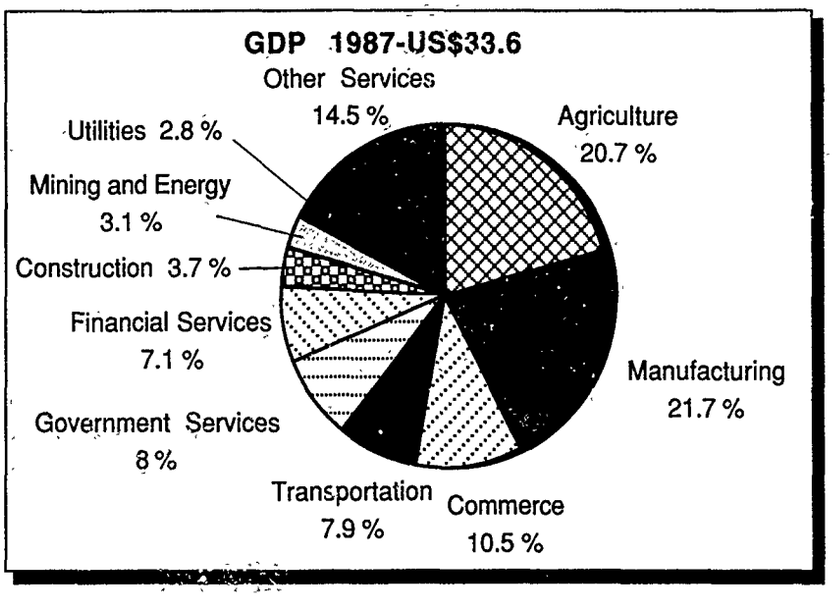
### Parastatal Management

The government's role in the economy also included the creation and operation of state enterprises through either direct ownership of companies or the establishment of joint ventures with private firms. These enterprises, often referred to as parastatals, enabled the state to ensure that policy goals were being met for the welfare of the country. Analysts estimated that by the late 1980s, the value of total public sector ownership and control of economic assets had reached 13 percent of GDP.

State involvement in economic management of parastatals dated back to the 1930s and represented some of the earliest attempts at development planning. Financial organizations were the oldest type of parastatal, founded to create a credit market for sectors—especially housing, railroads, and agriculture—that needed additional capital. Notable among the earliest such financial institutions were the Agricultural Mortgage Bank (Banco Agrícola Hipotecario), the Agrarian Bank (Caja de Crédito Agraria), the Central Mortgage Bank (Banco Central Hipotecario), and the Land Credit Institute (Instituto de Crédito Territorial). In the 1950s and 1960s, the government created nonfinancial parastatals encompassing numerous agricultural commercial and industrial entities, such as the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria—Incora), the Colombian Coal Company (Carbones de Colombia—Carbocol), the National Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers (Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia—Fedecafe), and the Colombian Automotive Company (Compañía Colombiana Automotriz).

## Agriculture

Agriculture has been an important part of the Colombian economy since colonial times. With the establishment of the tobacco and coffee industries in the nineteenth century, agriculture's role in economic development was assured. Since then, agriculture has provided food both for domestic consumption and as a source of export revenue.




Source: Based on information from Colombia, Departamento Nacional de Planeación. *Plan de Economía Social, Agosto 1987*, Bogotá, 1987, 190.

*Figure 6. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by Sector, 1987*

Its historical significance notwithstanding, agriculture began to grow more slowly than the rest of the economy by 1960. Although GDP grew at an average annual rate of 5.5 percent from 1960 to 1982, agricultural output increased by only 4.1 percent, indicating, among other things, the increasing importance of the manufacturing and service sectors.

Although agricultural production increased only slightly after 1982, the sector continued as the foundation of the economy, accounting for nearly 21 percent of GDP in 1987 and nearly 68 percent of all export revenue in 1986 (see fig. 6). Numerous factors—including low world commodity prices, increasing input costs, poor weather, inadequate investment, and greater regional competition for export markets—contributed to sluggish agricultural development in the 1980s.

Colombia is known for its mountainous terrain, but the country's diverse topography and climate allow the cultivation of a variety of crops. From the Caribbean lowlands where banana plantations are prominent, to the Andean highlands, which favor coffee production, Colombians have been able to produce a variety of agricultural products. These production efforts, however, required only a small fraction of the total land area available for

farming. Of Colombia's nearly 115 million hectares, 13 percent of the total was considered arable, and only 27 percent of that amount was under cultivation. About 20 percent of all cultivated land was dedicated to coffee.

Cattle-raising areas stretched from the Andean highlands into the eastern plains. These areas constituted nearly 17 percent of Colombia's total land. Forty percent of the land on which cattle were raised also supported some type of short-term or subsistence agriculture. Forests covered 68 percent of the country; 15 percent of this land also was considered arable.

Land tenure patterns had remained remarkably unchanged since the initiation of agrarian reform efforts in the 1930s. In 1961 the government created the national land reform agency, Incora. Despite success in retitling land during its first ten years of operation, Incora had a minimal impact on land distribution. Problems such as inadequate provision of investment credit and agricultural inputs further impeded Incora's efforts.

Because of the earnest but unsuccessful efforts of several administrations to implement a comprehensive land reform program, landholding remained highly concentrated. The national agricultural census of 1971—the most recent as of mid-1988—indicated that the largest 10 percent of all farms, including ranches, encompassed 80 percent of the farmland.

Both public and private funds contributed to investments used to provide agricultural infrastructure, inputs, and technology. After 1970 there was a distinct trend toward a gradual reduction of public expenditures and a compensating increase in private investment. The private sector, considered well managed and capable of expanding agricultural output, was responsible for more than 90 percent of current expenditures and assumed most of the responsibility for research, training, credit, processing, and marketing activities.

Producer groups were the major force behind private sector coordination of agricultural policies and programs. The larger producer organizations provided research and statistical support, lobbying programs, and other services to influence agricultural policy. Fedecafe, the largest and most powerful agricultural organization, represented some 300,000 coffee producers in the mid-1980s. Fedecafe exceeded normal association boundaries by inviting public officials to hold seats on the board of directors, receiving public funds, and taking on projects normally associated with the public sector, such as developing infrastructure, promoting balanced economic growth, and setting government coffee policies.

Other significant agricultural producer associations included the Federation of Rice Growers (Federación Nacional de Arroceros—

Fedearroz), the National Federation of Oil Palm Growers (Federación de Cultivadores de Palma Africana—Fedepalma), the Colombian Association of Flower Producers (Asociación Colombiana de Productores de Flores—Ascolflores), and the Colombian Association of Seed Producers (Asociación Colombiana de Productores de Semillas—Acosemilla). These organizations individually represented between 55 and 100 percent of their respective constituencies.

## Crops

Colombia produced a variety of crops for both export and domestic consumption; in the late 1980s, many had yields above regional and international levels because of the technological advances in production. Improvements in fertilizer, seeds, and machinery were particularly effective in enhancing yields for export crops such as coffee, rice, sugarcane, and potatoes (see table 8, Appendix).

Many domestically consumed crops did not perform as well as export crops, however, largely because they were produced on small plots using traditional farming techniques and were cultivated without the benefit of modern agricultural inputs. Colombia lacked the market incentives to provide these improved inputs for many consumable crops, a situation that contributed to lower output and a higher agricultural import bill.

Coffee remained Colombia's primary export crop throughout the 1980s. The entire industry, including processing and transporting, accounted for about 8 percent of GDP, contributed 12 percent of government revenues, and generated approximately 50 percent of foreign exchange. Coffee provided a livelihood for more than 300,000 farmers, and over 2 million jobs were linked to some stage of coffee production.

Despite stagnating or slightly declining output during the mid-1980s, Colombia ranked second in world production of coffee, surpassed only by Brazil (see table 9, Appendix). Known for the mild arabica coffee grown in the temperate central highlands, the Colombian coffee crop often commanded above-average prices in the market place. Because coffee is a tree crop grown on rough, steep terrain, harvesting remained a labor-intensive process, and most coffee farms were still small, occupying an average of fewer than six hectares of land.

Bananas were second to coffee in economic importance. Concentrated on the southern Caribbean coast around the Golfo de Urabá, production took place on both large plantations for export and small plots for domestic consumption. Banana production grew at relatively high rates in the early 1970s, only to slow later because of the reduced competitiveness of Colombian banana prices.

Production again rose in the mid-1980s as domestic prices moved toward lower international levels.

Cut flowers, including carnations, chrysanthemums, dahlias, and roses, became a significant export crop in the late 1970s and in 1986 earned US$155 million in revenue. Singled out as the definitive example of Colombia's diversification strategy, the Colombian flower industry became the second largest in the world, surpassed only by that of the Netherlands. The principal markets were the United States, which purchased more than 80 percent of Colombia's flowers, and Western Europe.

In 1987 there were more than 250 farms dedicated to producing cut flowers; the average size was about eight hectares. Because producing cut flowers was a labor-intensive process and amenable to the temperate mountain valley areas surrounding Bogotá and Medellín, the cut flower industry operated year round, providing jobs to more than 70,000 workers. Related industries, such as air transport and packaging, also benefited from the development of cut flower exports.

Other important export crops included sugarcane and cotton. Sugarcane was grown on large estates in valleys and other lower-lying areas, principally in southwestern Colombia's department of Cauca. Production remained relatively steady throughout the 1980s, taking advantage of the area's temperate climate and even pattern of rainfall. The sugarcane industry was regarded as well managed and produced yields well above regional and world standards.

Cotton production developed, among other reasons, to provide the textile industry with raw materials. Both large and small cotton farms were found along the economically expanding Caribbean coast. After a substantial drop in the early 1980s, production surged again in the late 1980s because of increased land cultivation and improved yields. An additional 65,000 hectares of cotton—representing a two-thirds increase in total land cultivation—were sown in 1987 in anticipation of higher international prices.

Food production for domestic consumption represented the other major agricultural endeavor and included staple crops such as rice, beans, cassava, potatoes, barley, corn, and wheat. Although Colombia had long sought self-sufficiency in food production, certain cereals, particularly corn and barley, were produced inefficiently and were not competitive with imports. Despite government intervention to improve the yields of these crops, planners doubted that production inefficiencies could be eliminated by the early 1990s.

Corn, a staple of the Colombian diet and the most widely grown subsistence crop in the 1980s, flourished on steep slopes as well

as on level ground. Although wheat and barley were also adaptable to highland areas, production costs often exceeded market prices, causing output to vary greatly from year to year. Other foods grown for consumption included tubers (such as potatoes and cassava) and beans, which were often planted together in subsistence or small-farm operations. Dietary requirements also were met with numerous types of indigenous fruits.

A discussion of the agricultural sector would be incomplete without mention of illegal crop production. In the late 1980s, cannabis flourished in Colombia's fertile northeastern mountain areas, and coca was grown in the more secluded portions of the Amazon Basin. The production of marijuana and cocaine from these plants had long been associated with the Colombian economy.

The United States Department of State estimated that approximately 13,000 hectares of land were devoted to cannabis production in 1986, an increase of 62 percent over the previous year. The average yield per hectare was 1.1 tons, or potentially 14,100 tons nationwide. Despite government attempts to eradicate marijuana cultivation, growers continued to produce it in vast quantities, moving into areas not traditionally associated with cannabis production, such as Antioquia in central Colombia and areas near the Panamanian border.

Like Bolivia and Peru, Colombia was a major cultivator of coca. Total land area devoted to coca production increased 60 percent from 1983 to 1986, reaching 25,000 hectares. Cultivation occurred largely in secluded areas and employed small quantities of land, usually less than two hectares per parcel, which made detection difficult. Each hectare could produce an estimated 1.6 kilograms of cocaine base. Total annual production in 1986 was estimated at twenty-seven tons.

Colombia's reputation as a global drug center rested primarily on its capacity to process coca into cocaine and distribute it worldwide, rather than on production of the coca leaf itself. In the 1980s, Colombia processed and shipped an estimated 75 percent of all South American cocaine destined for the United States, most of which was transported by ship and airplane from Colombia to Florida.

## Livestock

The Colombian cattle industry expanded in the late 1980s from producing meat and dairy products to supporting a growing leather business. There were more than 150,000 cattle ranches, two-thirds of which were under 250 hectares in size. They were located in the Caribbean coast departments of Bolívar, Córdoba, Magdalena,



*Harvesting carrots in Boyacá Department*
*Courtesy Inter-American Development Bank*

and Atlántico, as well as in the eastern plains departments of Boyacá and Meta and the intendancy of Arauca.

In the 1980s, Colombia ranked fourth among Latin American countries in cattle raising, with an average annual herd size of 20 to 24 million cattle. This placed Colombia behind Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico, which had herds of 95 million, 54 million, and 33 million, respectively. Herd size had been relatively stable since 1970.

Fifteen percent of the cattle were raised for dairy purposes and the remainder for meat. Beef production stagnated and then declined slightly through the 1980s. Total beef output fell from 627,000 tons in 1983 to 620,000 tons in 1985 because of declining prices and lower profit margins. Milk output reached nearly 3 million liters in 1985.

In contrast to beef production, the leather industry grew rapidly in the late 1980s. Leather output rose by 26 percent in 1986; more than 300 enterprises, each employing at least ten workers, consumed nearly 1,400 tons of cattle hides valued at US$9.2 million. In 1986 the total value of finished goods—luggage, footwear, and other accessories—reached US$87.2 million.

Poultry and sheep constituted the largest share of Colombia's livestock business. Poultry was the fastest growing nonbeef sector. The total number of chickens grew from 68 million in 1980 to 85 million in 1985, largely because of modernization completed in the late 1970s. From 1976 until 1985, sheep herds grew from approximately 2 million to 2.7 million; the wool produced was considered of inferior quality, however, and generally was not used in the textile industry, except for local consumption.

## Forestry and Fishing

Numerous types of tropical forests covered Colombia; most, however, remained unexploited for commercial use. In the late 1980s, commercially viable forest tracts may have covered as much as 78 million hectares, with between 500,000 and 1 million hectares logged each year. Although more than 1,000 types of tree grew in Colombia, only 30 types had commercial value. Replanting occurred infrequently, and in the late 1980s only one hectare in ten received any type of restoration treatment, largely because of poor government regulation of the logging industry.

Colombia produced wood in the late 1980s for construction and crafts and also supplied fuel wood and wood pulp for heating and printing. Lumber production was, however, a minor industry in Colombia, limited in part by the country's terrain.



*A rancher and his daughter in Caquetá Department Courtesy United States Agency for International Development*

The vast Amazon region of southeastern Colombia was one of the most heavily wooded areas in the country. Large-scale logging had not yet been very successful, however, because of the low value attached to most tropical woods and because usable trees grew among less valuable ones. Nonetheless, because of the development of new processes to make cardboard and other stiff paper products from some tropical trees, such as the cecropia, loggers became more interested in opening new areas of the Amazon for logging in the late 1980s. Once initially logged, these areas could then be replanted with a single type of tree for future exploitation.

Colombia still supported only a fledgling fishing industry despite long coastlines on two oceans and extensive inland river and lake networks. In 1984 approximately 100,000 tons of fish were caught, more than half from freshwater inland sources. The fishing industry constituted less than 1 percent of GDP and did not meet the domestic demand for fish. Commercial fishing for export was restricted to small businesses pursuing shrimp and oysters. Most canned commercial fish, such as tuna and sardines, were consumed domestically.

Despite its lack of development, ocean fishing represented one of the most promising industries in Colombia. The government targeted Buenaventura, a large port on the Pacific coast, for expanded facilities to support both domestic and foreign fishing vessels. Planned development included the addition of docks,

refrigerated storage facilities, and canning and oil-processing plants. The potential ocean catch was estimated to be as large as 240,000 tons, or ten times the amount of fish caught in 1986.

## Mining and Energy

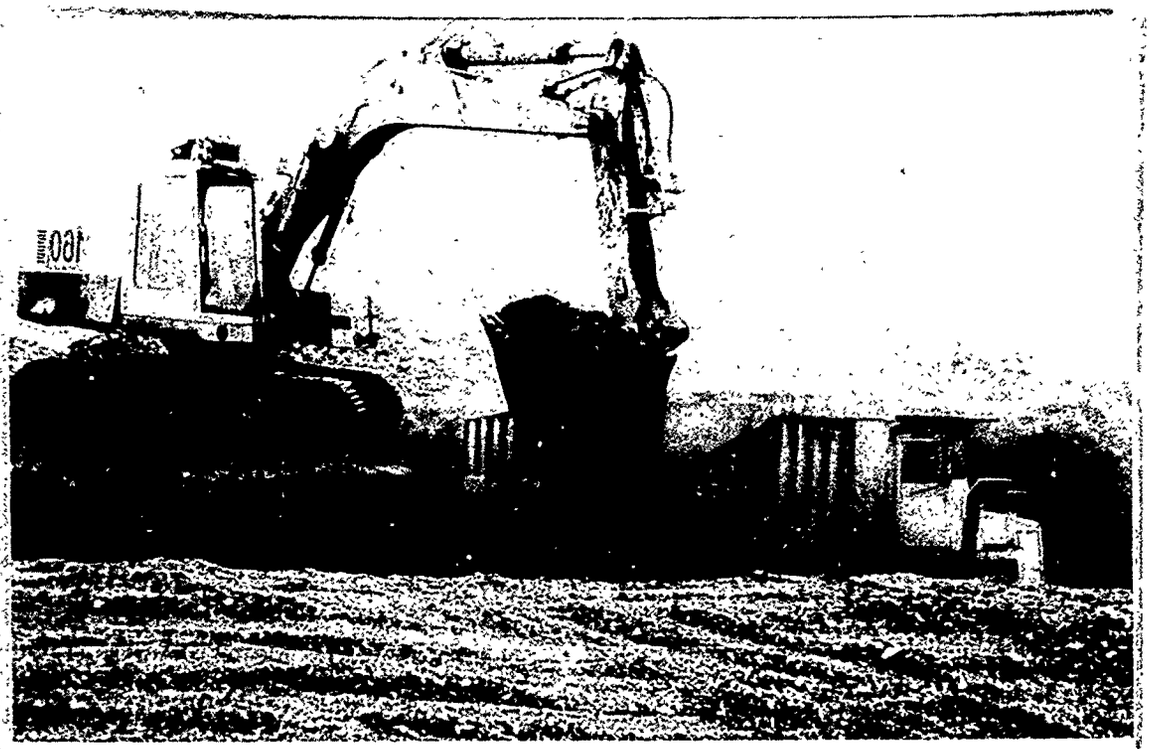
Mining in Colombia began in the 1500s. Although significant in the colonial economy, it never commanded a large portion of Colombia's GDP in modern times. With the discovery and exploitation of large coal reserves, however, the role of mining in the national economy expanded in the late 1980s. Precious metal and stone mining was still carried out in the late 1980s. Gold was the most important metal in terms of short-term revenues. Other important metals included platinum and silver, which were extracted in much smaller quantities. Colombia also produced 95 percent of the world's emeralds (see table 10, Appendix).

Other metals common to Colombia included nickel, small amounts of iron ore, copper, and bauxite. Nickel deposits, estimated at 25 million tons, were exploited through a joint venture program between the government and a subsidiary of Shell Oil Company. Nonmetallic mining produced salt, limestone, sulfur, gypsum, dolomite, barite, feldspar, clay, magnetite, mica, talcum, and marble. Despite the variety of minerals available for exploitation, Colombia still had to import substances such as iron, copper, and aluminum to meet its industrial needs.

Government efforts to expand mining in Colombia were needed to encourage private sector investment. In the late 1980s, much of Colombia remained inadequately charted, and reserve estimates were considered only marginally reliable. The government set a policy of developing infrastructure (roads, electricity, and communications), providing technical assistance, and encouraging sound credit and legal policies to minimize problems with land titling. Through joint ventures and the promotion of small mining companies, government officials believed that the mining sector could contribute more to national employment, income, and wealth.

### Coal

In the late 1980s, much of Colombia's mining future rested with coal deposits. Estimates of reserves ranged from 16 to 40 billion tons in 1987, considered indisputably the largest in Latin America. Coal reserves existed throughout much of the country, from the Andean highlands to the Caribbean coast (see table 11, Appendix). Only 20 percent of the known coal reserves, however, had been surveyed by 1987.



*An open coal pit at El Cerrejón coal field*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

Among the many areas where coal was found were the Caribbean lowlands department of La Guajira and the Andean highlands departments of Cundinamarca, Santander, and Antioquia. Although all these areas produced coal in 1987, most Colombian coal was extracted from the El Cerrejón field in La Guajira Department.

El Cerrejón was discovered in 1882, explored in 1950, and brought on line for production in 1985. The project was divided into the northern, central, and southern zones; the northern zone was given priority for production because of its estimated 3 billion tons of high-grade recoverable reserves. El Cerrejón was organized as a joint venture between the Colombian government and a subsidiary of Exxon known as International Resources.

To promote the exploitation of Colombia's vast coal reserves, Carbocol was created in 1976. Formed as a commercial company of the state, Carbocol was placed under the Ministry of Mines and Energy and initially capitalized with US$10.6 million. Carbocol sold shares to other government agencies; majority ownership rested with the Export Promotion Fund (Fondo de Promoción de Exportaciones—Proexpo) and the Colombian Petroleum Enterprise (Empresa Colombiana de Petróleos—Ecopetrol). Investment in Carbocol grew rapidly in its first decade of operation, reaching US$347 million by 1985.

Carbocol managed all facets of the coal business from exploration and mining to marketing and sales, both locally and abroad. Carbocol's primary goal—to make Colombian coal a permanent competitive commodity in the international market—proved difficult because of low international prices for coal in the 1980s. Nonetheless, Carbocol continued to assist the coal industry by attempting to reduce production costs, developing strategies to expand exports, and creating opportunities for both domestic and foreign capital investment in the industry.

In the late 1980s, Colombia's coal was consumed both at home (40 percent of mined coal) and abroad (60 percent). The generation of electricity accounted for about a third of domestic coal use, but this use was not expected to grow, given the completion of hydroelectric projects. Industrial use, which accounted for two-thirds of the domestic consumption of coal, was the most likely area for internal growth. Low international prices threatened further development of the industry because it could not attract long-term investment funds. Nevertheless, industry analysts expected this situation to change in the 1990s because of an anticipated increase in international demand for coal, allowing a competitive return on investment for Colombian coal projects.

In the short term, however, financial problems required that the coal industry solicit support from government agencies operating the oil industry. Ecopetrol's convertible assets permitted government planners to sell shares of El Cerrejón to Ecopetrol in order to inject money into the cash-poor project. This allowed the government to retain half-ownership of the industry rather than lose control of the coal program by selling equity shares to private investors.

## Petroleum

Colombia achieved oil self-sufficiency for the first time in the early 1970s, only to require imports again by 1976. Despite low international prices during most of the 1980s, Colombia continued with exploration and reattained self-sufficiency in 1986. At that time, analysts believed that known reserves would provide for self-sufficiency until 1994. The government sought to extend this period by encouraging joint ventures between public agencies and private drilling companies. Estimates of total reserves as of late 1986 ranged as high as 1.9 million barrels. Analysts believed that the eastern plains (llanos) held 59 percent of these reserves and that 38 percent was located in the department of Magdalena in northern Colombia. The intendancy of Putumayo in southwestern Colombia and the department of Norte de Santander in northeastern Colombia were thought to hold the remaining 3 percent.

Through 1987 crude oil production increased each year in the 1980s, reaching 400,000 barrels per day by 1987. The largest field, Cravo Norte, produced 150,000 barrels per day in 1986 and accounted for most of the increased output for that year, allowing Colombia to become an oil exporter again. Secondary recovery (see Glossary) methods in the older oil fields, some of which dated back to 1918, enhanced production. Crude exports reached 16.5 million barrels in 1986; industry analysts speculated that they would triple in 1987.

In 1986 there were 3,658 oil wells in Colombia, 2,770 of which were producing. Although the majority belonged to Ecopetrol, many of the newer projects were joint ventures with private foreign firms. The quality of oil varied from very heavy, sludge-like crude, used only for asphalt and related products, to very light, high-quality crude that was easily refined into gasoline and other fuel products.

Colombia had four refineries producing for domestic and export markets. In 1987 two refineries—located in Barrancabermeja and Cartagena—accounted for virtually all of Colombia's crude oil distillation capacity of 226,000 barrels per day (bpd). The Barrancabermeja plant was new and was considered among the most sophisticated and productive refineries in the world, capable of processing 150,000 bpd. The Cartagena plant had a refining capacity of 70,000 bpd. Two other refineries—the Norte de Santander and Putumayo refineries—had a combined capacity of only 6,000 bpd.

Besides production and refinery capacity, Colombia boasted more than 8,300 kilometers of oil pipeline in 1987. This network connected producing areas in the eastern plains, including Cravo Norte, to the Barrancabermeja refinery. After the pipeline network suffered continued attack from guerrilla groups in the late 1980s, Ecopetrol assumed control of all pipeline operations.

Oil fields also produced natural gas, which was used to help Colombia meet its goal of energy self-sufficiency. Reserves were estimated at 1.3 trillion cubic meters in 1986, most of which was located in La Guajira Department. A total of 4.1 billion cubic meters was marketed in 1986, primarily as an alternative energy source to oil.

## Industry

Colombia's industrial sector—including manufacturing, assembly, and construction—was mostly developed after World War I using resources accumulated by the coffee and tobacco industries in the nineteenth century. Industry grew slowly but steadily up

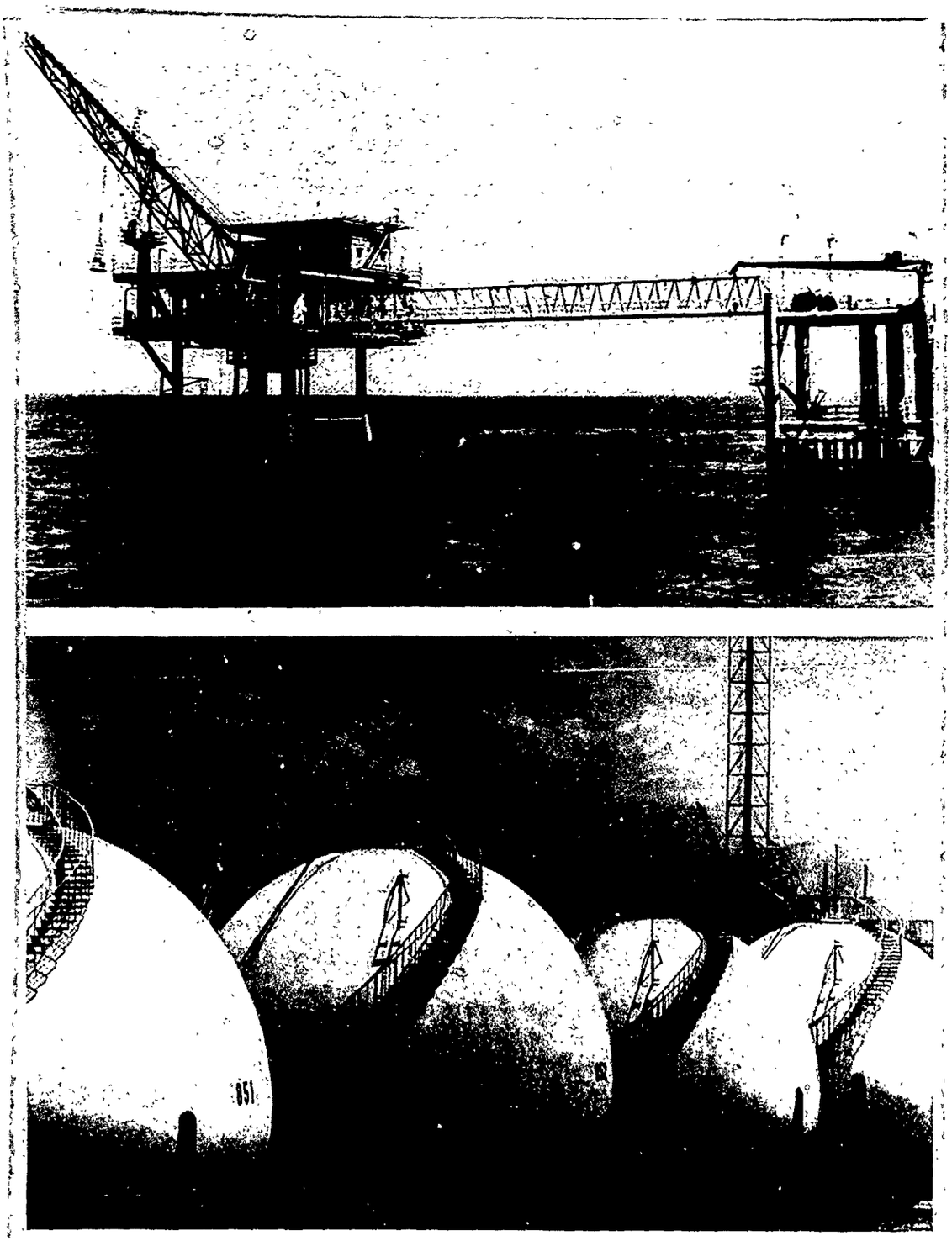
to the 1970s, then declined until the mid-1980s. Initial manufacturing efforts followed the import substitution industrialization model prevalent throughout Latin America during the Great Depression. Production focused on meeting domestic demand previously met by imports and emphasized consumer rather than capital goods. Because it delayed intensive industrialization until the 1950s and was a relatively open society politically and economically, Colombia did not suffer as severely from the negative protectionist effects usually associated with the import substitution strategy of national development.

By the late 1960s, however, protectionist policies had caused balance of payments problems, forcing policy makers to opt for an export promotion strategy. Industry responded by developing both consumer and capital goods industries, although emphasis was still placed on consumer goods. Particularly from 1967 to 1975, the success of the industrial sector resulted from the combined efforts of entrepreneurs and government planners. Private business leaders accepted the export promotion strategy as a way to expand output, and government officials devised a comprehensive plan to help Colombia compete in external markets.

Two policy decisions critical to the development of an export-oriented industrial sector were the creation of Proexpo and the adoption of a "crawling peg" exchange rate system. In the first case, Proexpo effectively marketed Colombian exports to the outside world. The second strategy proved even more effective at making Colombian exports more attractive. By constantly devaluing the peso against major traded currencies, the government ensured competitive prices for Colombian goods abroad.

The result of this coordinated economic strategy was a substantial increase in industrial output, which peaked in 1976 at 24.2 percent of GDP. The success of the export strategy was evident in the value of manufactured goods sent abroad, which rose from 8 percent of total exports in 1967 to 28 percent in 1975. Although it appeared that this coordinated approach had changed the nature of Colombia's economy, its success was questioned when growth halted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The downturn once again demonstrated Colombia's dependence on the international coffee market.

From 1976 to 1983, Colombia went through a phase of deindustrialization in which manufactured output fell to 21 percent of GDP, the equivalent in real terms of production in 1970. Manufactured exports as a percentage of total exports also fell dramatically, attaining only a 15 percent share of total exports in 1983. Many variables—including the dependence on domestic demand



*Top: Offshore oil drilling in the Caribbean Sea*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*
*Bottom: Barrancabermeja refinery*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

and production of consumer goods, failure to diversify, insufficient investment, and public sector (tax) policies—contributed to the decline. The crucial factors, however, were the appreciating exchange rate and the reallocation of economic resources to the agricultural sector that occurred during the coffee boom.

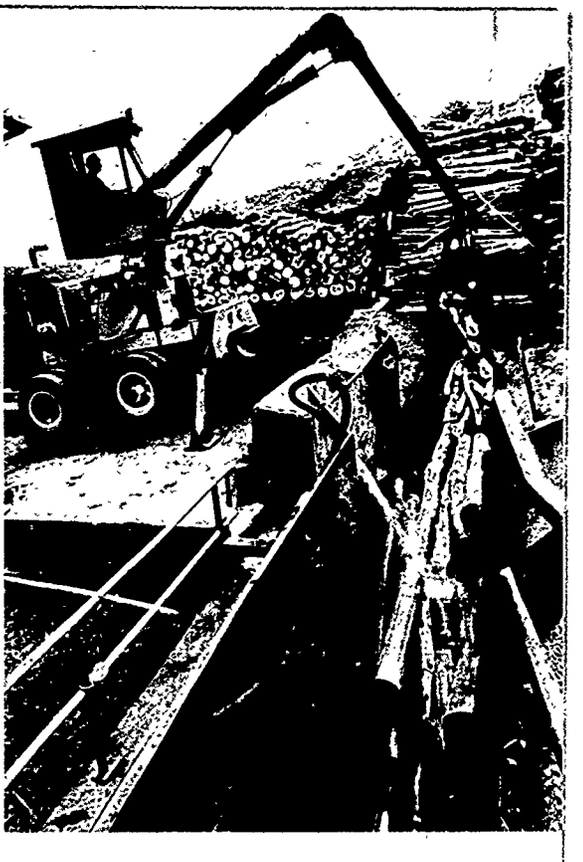
In the late 1970s, Colombia experienced what some analysts refer to as "Dutch disease," in which a boom in the primary export market adversely affects other sectors of the economy. Production and export of coffee reacted to market incentives in the late 1970s, nearly doubling output and sales from 1967 levels. The export boom generated a large increase in foreign exchange, which had the effect of increasing the value of the peso and the price of domestic goods. This caused Colombian manufactured products to become less competitive in world markets, a decline that lasted until 1984.

Recognizing the problems brought on by "Dutch disease," the government took direct action to mitigate adverse effects when the next coffee boom began in 1986. A windfall tax on coffee receipts restrained domestic spending and purchases of exports. Domestic price increases that would have accompanied an influx of foreign cash failed to materialize. The fact that "Dutch disease" did not recur and the manufacturing sector expanded in 1987 indicated the apparent success of the government's strategy.

In 1984 the industrial sector experienced real growth for the first time since 1980. Although analysts expected production to grow slowly following the coffee boom of the late 1970s and the subsequent global recession, government programs supporting a coordinated industrial policy once again emphasized diversification and growth through exports, which brought renewed life to Colombia's industry in the late 1980s.

In 1987 manufacturing grew more than 7 percent; it constituted 21.7 percent of GDP and employed about 35 percent of the urban labor force. Output still favored consumer goods, which composed 50 percent of total production. Intermediate and capital goods represented 37 percent and 13 percent of manufactured products, respectively. Despite increased industrial output, Colombia still imported many industrial goods because of its inability to produce competitively many manufactured items it needed to sustain economic growth. This suggested that a number of areas might be ripe for industrial expansion, particularly if Colombia could increase its capital goods production.

Colombia's industrial core developed around four urban areas: Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla. More peripheral industrial centers emerged in the departments of Boyacá, Magdalena, Nariño, and Santander. These areas became more dependent on



*Transporting logs to a mill near Medellín Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

export-based production and were the sites of numerous small and medium-sized firms that sprouted in the late 1970s.

The industrial sector in the late 1980s had a broad structure consisting of large conglomerates engaged in massive projects for the production of oil, food, ceramic products, building materials, beverages, clothing, machines, and tools, as well as smaller cottage industries competitive in the manufacture of wooden furniture, leather goods, and footwear. Although labor productivity and profits tended to be higher in the larger industries, the small and medium-sized factories continued to play an important role in industrial development. In 1986 they accounted for 36 percent of manufacturing production and employed 51 percent of the industrial labor force.

Food, beverages, textiles, and chemicals contributed the largest shares of GDP from the manufacturing sector. Total value added by this group constituted 52 percent of manufactured output. After consumable products, chemicals were the most important industrial products in the mid-1980s. In addition to pure chemical products, such as acids and petrochemicals, Colombia produced numerous chemical derivatives, such as fertilizers, insecticides, detergents, and paint, used in other sectors of the economy. Colombia also ventured into automotive assembly and had plants affiliated with Mazda, Chrysler, and Renault, as well as motorcycle firms attached to Japanese multinational companies such as Yamaha, Suzuki, Honda, and Kawasaki.

The manufacturing sector also supported the relatively small but vital construction industry. Colombia produced metal, cement, wood products, plastic, and steel in increasing amounts in the late 1980s. Construction itself accounted for nearly 4 percent of GDP and 6 percent of the work force. Public sector emphasis on transportation infrastructure and low-income housing encouraged construction in the early 1980s; the Barco administration decided to continue this emphasis in 1987.

## Services

Colombia's heterogeneous service sector grew steadily over the three decades ending in 1986. Encompassing both public and private enterprises, the service sector grew to nearly 51 percent of GDP by 1987 and captured a similar portion of the employment market. The expansion of the service sector coincided with a decline in the relative importance of the agricultural sector, an indication of Colombia's economic development.

By 1987 Colombian services had expanded to include private enterprises such as banks, transportation, communications, commerce, hotels, and restaurants, as well as public sector services, which also included some financial institutions and transportation firms, in addition to utilities, public services, and other government activities. There was a strong private sector component in Colombian services, but because of direct government operation and regulatory control, most services were subject to government scrutiny. Banking and air transportation, for example, were considered public services regardless of the type of ownership; as such, they were watched closely by the state.

### Banking

Financial services, a large and important component of the service sector, included private financial institutions that facilitated business and individual loans, as well as public institutions that directed funds to socially desirable activities that might not meet the credit requirements of private banks. The government played a major role in the financial sector because of the unwillingness of banks to make long-term loan commitments to riskier programs, such as coal development, and because of the necessity for periodic public intervention to stabilize financial markets. Although the banking system grew in the 1960s and 1970s and was considered relatively modern, it entered a period of deep crisis in 1982, which forced the government to redefine the basic structure of the private financial system.

One problem was the banking sector's concentration of ownership in the hands of a few large conglomerates. This reduced competition and made lending a precariously balanced game in which funds were shuttled among the larger institutions.

The economic downturn of the early 1980s also threatened the profitability of banking. Colombian financial institutions came under increasing pressure as the 1981 recession induced retrenchment of the manufacturing sector. This, in turn, caused a sharp rise in loan defaults. Real interest rates at the time averaged 10 to 12 percent, which exacerbated the payment problems of indebted companies. The number of loans considered unlikely to be collected as a percentage of the lending portfolio increased from 5.6 percent in 1982 to 11.3 percent in 1984. Foreign interests in Colombian banks also began to withdraw capital rather than deposit it, which further drained reserves necessary to meet regulatory requirements. Subsequent bank failures and nationalizations resulted in a decline in public confidence and led to massive government intervention.

In an effort to increase liquidity, the government reduced reserve requirements for certain types of deposits and shifted public funds into the financial system. In 1985 the government created the Financial Institutions Guarantee Fund (Fondo de Garantías de Instituciones Financieras) as the authority responsible for intervening in or recapitalizing, if necessary, financial institutions on the brink of bankruptcy. Despite these efforts, the government was forced to nationalize banks as they approached insolvency. Eighty percent of the Colombian financial industry had come under government control through this means by the mid-1980s.

Notwithstanding increased government supervision, a large infusion of public capital, and improved economic conditions, the remaining private financial institutions continued to flounder in the late 1980s. Because of high inflation and unstable real interest rates, most depositors placed their money in readily accessible accounts such as checking accounts or short-term certificates of deposit. This constrained lending strategies, because larger portions of loan portfolios now had to be constructed with short-term arrangements in mind. Much of the long-term credit for mortgages and business investment had to be secured through the central bank or any one of the many government-operated development funds.

By 1988 the financial sector's problems appeared to go beyond a difficulty with short-term liquidity. Ownership remained highly concentrated, and inflation continued to increase the cost of transactions. An inadequate capital base, gross management inefficiencies, and high operating costs were other persistent problems. Loan defaults also occurred at alarming rates. To compensate, the

government provided credit directly through public financial institutions financed with public funds or by forced investment from businesses and pension funds. These financial entities included the Institute of Industrial Development (Instituto de Fomento Industrial—IFI), the Land Credit Institute, and the Agrarian Bank; they served the long-term credit needs of industry, urban housing, agriculture, and other special interest groups.

Despite continuing doubts about the soundness of Colombia's banks, there were some signs that the financial sector was becoming more stable in 1988. Market interest rates began to fall, and the government used forced investment less frequently to attract lending funds. In addition, financial authorities planned to strengthen both the financial sector and the stock market by selling shares of the expropriated banks to small and medium-sized investors.

In 1988 the government announced plans to reprivatize the banking sector, beginning with the sale of the Bank of Bogotá (Banco de Bogotá). The government authorized the central bank to extend credits to the public that could be used to purchase shares of the expropriated bank. Restrictions were placed on the sale of the bank to avoid the ownership and management problems that had contributed to the institution's failure. Specifically, none of the previous owners were permitted to purchase bank shares, and no individual or family could acquire more than 3 percent or 10 percent, respectively, of any one bank. Authorities hoped that these measures would lead to other bank sales and return stability to a sector that was vital to the development of the national economy.

## Tourism

Tourism, normally a vital component of the service sector—particularly for a country as diverse culturally, geographically, and historically as Colombia—did not contribute significantly to economic growth. Although Colombia had attractive, modern hotels in the capital city and other major metropolitan centers and offered natural attractions such as the Caribbean coastline, remote jungles, and steep mountain ranges, persistent reports of kidnappings, assassinations, drug-related violence, and guerrilla activities diminished tourist interest in Colombia, even though foreigners generally were not the targets of this violence. The government did not actively pursue tourism.

The cost of Colombia's poor image was made evident by statistics. In 1978 more than 826,000 tourists contributed US$328.5 million to Colombia's foreign exchange earnings. By 1984 tourist arrivals had dropped to about 715,000 and had rendered only US$231 million in foreign exchange. The prospects for expanded

tourist receipts, despite enormous potential, were dismal under the social conditions prevailing in the late 1980s. Analysts did not expect violence to subside, and as a result they did not believe that tourism would recover significantly.

## Utilities

In 1987 both national and local governments provided basic utility services, including water and electricity. In the case of water and sewerage services, the system was simple in design and basically incapable of meeting the needs of the country. Water and sewerage services were coordinated in urban areas by the Departmental and Municipal Sanitary Works (Empresa de Obras Sanitarias Departamentales y Municipales) and in rural areas by the National Institute of Health (Instituto Nacional de Salud). Quality and area of service covered, however, varied markedly.

Only 60 percent of Colombia's inhabitants had access to some type of water supply, and only 49 percent were served by a sewerage system. As might be suspected, the major urban areas had the most comprehensive systems, with 85 percent of the population having access to potable water and 75 percent to sewerage facilities. Although efforts had been made to expand basic services, in 1988 the lack of adequate facilities was still a major problem in much of Colombia.

A loose network of national and local companies supplied electricity to most rural areas. Two national companies, the Colombian Institute of Electric Energy (Instituto Colombiano de Energía Eléctrica—Icel) and the Caribbean Coast Electric Corporation (Corporación Eléctrica de la Costa Atlántica—Corelca), produced most of Colombia's electricity. Regional companies, such as the Cauca Autonomous Regional Corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional del Cauca—Cvc), and municipal organizations, including the Medellín Public Works (Empresas Públicas de Medellín—Eeppm) and the Bogotá Electric Energy Enterprise (Empresa de Energía Eléctrica de Bogotá—EEEB), produced their own electricity while acting as connectors to the national system. In its entirety, the national electric system was known as the Electric Interconnection Company (Interconexión Eléctrica S.A.—ISA) and had headquarters in Medellín.

Icel was the largest electricity company in 1987. It produced one-third of all national electricity and served fifteen departments through thirteen subsidiary plants. Corelca, the second largest, provided electricity to six coastal departments, as well as to Isla de San Andrés and Isla de Providencia. EEEB serviced much of Cundinamarca, including all of Bogotá.

Installed electric capacity as of June 1987 was 8.1 gigawatts. Seventy-six percent was provided by hydroelectric plants, with the remainder produced by thermoelectric projects. Electricity output met only 8 percent of total energy requirements in 1987, however, whereas petroleum, natural gas, and coal provided 57 percent, 14 percent, and 21 percent, respectively. Consumption of electricity was greatest in the residential sector, which accounted for 49 percent of demand, followed by industry with 28 percent, the public sector with 12 percent, and the commercial sector with 11 percent.

Although the expansion of electricity works placed enormous strains on financial resources, Colombia was proceeding with the development of new hydroelectric projects. More than 800 megawatts were added to the country's generating capacity in 1987; loans from development agencies provided needed capital to continue expansion into remote areas, such as the Amazon.

## Transportation and Communications

Colombia's mountainous terrain has been a perennial obstacle to economic development. As recently as the early 1900s, it took days to travel between the larger urban centers, and major connecting roads to coastal areas did not exist until the early 1960s. Although road and rail networks expanded, albeit slowly, the nation was not easily traversed by any means until the completion of regional and international airports in the 1940s.

People and cargo still traveled primarily by road in the late 1980s. In 1987 the government reported a total of 104,000 kilometers of finished roads, 10,300 of which were paved. Road construction and repair remained a chronic problem. Responsibility for roads rested with municipal, departmental, and national entities, under the coordination of the Ministry of Public Works. Funds supporting road projects were obtained from local public revenues, the National Highway Fund (El Fondo Vial), and loans from development agencies. Fuel taxes and toll collections were the main sources of local funds. In 1987 the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) arranged for road construction loans amounting to US$180 million and US$220 million, respectively.

In the late 1980s, Colombia had three main highways, two of which ran north to south on either side of the Cordillera Central (see fig. 7). The western highway, doubling as the Pan American Highway for part of the way, began at the border with Ecuador and passed near Cali on its way north through Medellín to the Caribbean coastal city of Cartagena. The eastern highway ran north from Bogotá to Cúcuta and the Venezuelan border. It also linked

up with the Pan American Highway west of Bogotá. The third major highway ran east to west through the northern Caribbean lowlands, circumventing the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and meeting up with the eastern highway at Cúcuta.

A highway running north from Bogotá between the eastern and central mountain ranges connected with the eastern highway, and a second horizontal link was made from Bogotá to the western highway. Another paved road was completed south of Bogotá into the department of Huila. Although many improved secondary paved roads were added in the late 1980s, particularly in the central highlands, many areas of the country remained virtually inaccessible. Two such areas were the eastern plains and the Amazon region. Although the Barco government was committed to extending roads into these marginal areas, swamps and dense forests precluded construction.

In 1983 over 75 percent of all cargo and 80 percent of all vehicular passengers moving through Colombia were transported by automobile. In 1985 more than 1.2 million vehicles were registered in Colombia, including 19,000 buses and 60,000 transport trucks.

The rail system had been in decline since the 1960s. Colombia's terrain had been even more challenging to the railroads than to the road system, and maintaining the railroads was very expensive. As a result, the road network continued to take business away from the failing railroad system. In 1987 there were some 3,300 kilometers of railroad track, but only 2,600 were in use, and no more than 20 percent of the nation's locomotives were in operation. Although the Barco government proposed that a comprehensive study be done to develop a strategy to revitalize the rail system, a coordinated response had not been made as of mid-1988.

By the late 1980s, mass transit rail systems for urban areas were in the early stages of development. Work had already begun on a system for Medellín, and the government was calling for bids on a subway system to serve Bogotá. Construction in Bogotá was to begin in 1988, and the finished subway system was to be linked to existing railroads.

In the late 1980s, transport by water was still very important to Colombia. Shipping operated out of five key ports: Santa Marta, Barranquilla, and Cartagena on the Caribbean coast and Buenaventura and Tumaco on the Pacific coast. Buenaventura was the most important trading port, but Barranquilla was gaining in stature because of the increasing amount of oil exports, all of which left Colombia through this northern terminal. A major port rehabilitation project supervised by the Colombian Port Authority

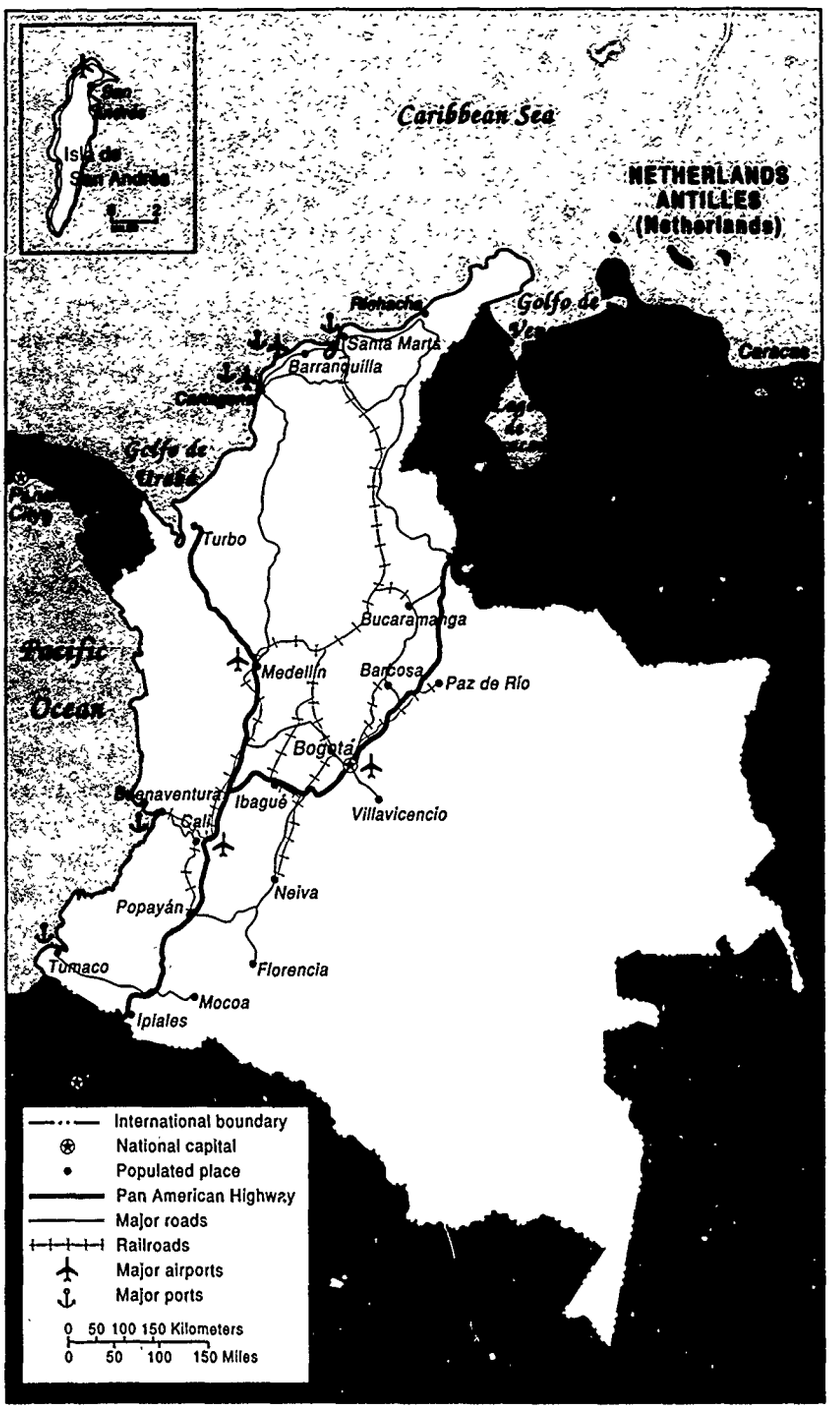



*Figure 7. Transportation System, 1988*

(Empresa Puertos de Colombia) was being partially financed by the World Bank.

Inland waterways were historically important modes of transportation, but by 1987 they carried only 2 percent of the nation's cargo. Inland waterways consisted of 5,445 kilometers of navigable rivers, but many of the river facilities had become dilapidated by the late 1980s, and business had fallen to an all-time low. The Río Magdalena and Río Cauca were the most used waterways, providing transport from the mountainous interior to the Caribbean ports; the volume of traffic on these estuaries was diminished, however, by more modern transportation options, including the expanding road network and air transport services.

Colombia was served by five international airports and more than forty regional airports located throughout the country. Hundreds of smaller airfields in remote areas catered to both legal and illegal transport. Colombia had one of the oldest privately operated national airlines, dating back to 1919. The National Airline of Colombia (Aerovías Nacionales de Colombia—Avianca) dominated the Colombian airline business from its inception and flew regularly to many countries in the Western Hemisphere. In 1986 it carried 5.4 million passengers and nearly 85,000 tons of cargo.

In 1962 the government established a small company, Air Navigational Service to National Territories (Servicio de Aeronavegación a Territorios Nacionales—Satena), to provide cargo and passenger services to the eastern periphery of the country. In 1988 Satena continued to operate with the assistance of the military.

Telecommunications, which were still lacking in many of the more secluded areas of the country, improved markedly after the 1960s in western and northern Colombia. Once a fragmented system of local companies virtually incapable of communicating with each other, in the 1980s the telephone system became modernized, using satellite technology to link most of the larger towns with the outside world.

The National Telecommunications Company (Empresa Nacional de Telecomunicaciones—Telecom) provided local telephone and telex service to nearly 500 of the larger cities and towns. Local companies that could hook up to the national system served more than 2,800 small communities. As many as 60 percent of the rural communities, however, were still without telephone service. In 1987 there were an estimated 1.6 million telephones in Colombia.

Broadcasting included approximately 500 radio and 100 television stations. Equipment was in poor condition, and the quality of broadcasts, particularly for television, could not be guaranteed. The government's national television and broadcasting network,

the National Institute of Radio and Television (Instituto Nacional de Radio y Televisión—Inravisión), produced for most affiliate stations; many of these, however, were privately operated.

## Foreign Economic Relations

In the late 1980s, because its economy remained highly dependent on the outside world, Colombia conducted its foreign economic relations on several levels. In addition to the dynamic trade links long established with the developed world, Colombia also sought foreign investment and economic assistance. To achieve these goals, Colombia gradually opened its economy to the outside world, particularly after 1967, in order to integrate foreign markets, technology, and capital with its diversifying and expanding economic efforts at home.

In the pursuit of economic liberalization, Colombia forged strong bilateral relations with both developing and industrialized countries. Colombia maintained trade relations with numerous industrialized nations, including the United States, Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), the Netherlands, Canada, and Britain. Economic arrangements with developing countries, by contrast, were important but constituted a much smaller portion of Colombia's trade.

In addition to bilateral trade agreements, Colombia also participated in several organizations dedicated to improving trade among regional members. As one of the original signatories to the Latin American Integration Association (Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración—Aladi), formerly the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA), Colombia supported early attempts to develop a common market in Latin America. Although no more than 8 percent of trade among its members could be attributed to Aladi, integration efforts were an important aspect of both political and economic relations in Colombia and Latin America. Colombia was also a signatory, in 1969, to the Cartagena Agreement, which established the Andean Common Market (Ancom), also known as the Andean Group (Grupo Andino). Formed as a reaction to LAFTA's poor performance, the Andean Group was particularly important to Colombia because most of the nation's subregional trade in Latin American was with its northern neighbors.

The Andean Group was created to encourage greater economic cooperation within the region; although problems arose among member countries, it continued to operate with the full support of its constituency in the late 1980s. Commerce orchestrated by



*El Dorado International Airport at Bogotá*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

Andean Group agreements, however, amounted to no more than 5 percent of the combined trade of the group's members at that time. Colombia was the group's largest trading partner.

In addition to regional trade groups, Colombia was a member of all United Nations (UN) organizations, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Moreover, Colombia participated in concessional trade arrangements, such as the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) offered by the United States.

As a leading exporter of coffee, Colombia supported the provisions for coffee trade outlined in the International Coffee Agreement (ICA). Originally struck in the early 1960s, the agreement had nearly seventy-five signatories by the mid-1980s, one-third of which were importing countries. The goals of the agreement included stabilizing world coffee prices and ensuring that a steady supply was available to consuming nations. In an international environment emphasizing free trade, however, the provisions for fixed prices and export quotas came under attack in the late 1980s. By the end of 1987, importing countries led by the United States had decided against extending the agreement, preferring to let international markets set the prices and quantities of coffee sold in the world. Despite this setback, the exporting countries argued that

the ICA had been beneficial to all parties for twenty-five years and lobbied for the agreement's resurrection.

Colombia also offered free-trade zones and continued to expand them after they were introduced in 1964. Numerous parts of the country provided facilities for transshipment, assembly, packaging, or sampling of goods. Goods that were then sold in Colombian markets were treated as normal imports, whereas those that continued on to markets outside Colombia traveled free of any government duty or regulation. To encourage foreign participation, these zones also provided exchange rate incentives, allowed free repatriation of profits for the foreign investors, and granted preferential rates on utility use. In 1988 free-trade zones were operated as autonomous organizations under the stewardship of the Ministry of Economic Development. They were located in Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Cartagena, Cúcuta, Palmasca, and Santa Marta.

In addition to trade, Colombia nurtured foreign investment. The Andean Group's adoption of Decision 220 in 1987 further loosened foreign investment regulations, allowing greater freedom for the repatriation of profits, a higher percentage of foreign ownership, and investment in a wider variety of firms. In 1986 there were more than 700 foreign firms operating in Colombia, totaling US$2.7 billion in investment. Approximately 85 percent were concentrated in mining and manufacturing. Government efforts were directed toward attracting capital for export industries that would maximize the use of local materials and labor. Additionally, the government was courting foreign banks as potential investors in the restructured financial sector and hoped to bring in more capital for the highly promising petroleum industry.

The United States accounted for two-thirds of all foreign investment in 1986; it was followed by Western Europe with 21 percent, the Caribbean and Latin America with 9 percent, Canada with 2 percent, and the rest of the world with 1 percent. United States interests included manufacturing, such as affiliates of General Motors, International Business Machines, Union Carbide, and Goodyear; pulp and paper producers, such as W.R. Grace and International Paper; and food-processing companies, such as Borden and R.J. Reynolds, in addition to mining and petroleum companies.

In the 1980s, Colombia continued to be a major recipient of foreign economic aid and assistance. In 1949 it became the first Latin American country to receive a World Bank mission dedicated to analyzing its foreign assistance needs for development. As a member of the World Bank group of lending agencies, as well as the IDB,

Colombia had consistently received financing for the development of infrastructure, public services, and other areas often neglected by capital allocated on purely economic grounds. Nearly 40 percent of Colombia's outstanding public debt in 1986 was in the form of long-term credits from the World Bank and IDB, totaling US$3.8 billion.

Bilateral aid and concessional loans also played an important role in financing Colombia's economic development. In 1986 total outstanding loans to government development agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development and the United States Export-Import Bank, amounted to US$2.4 billion. Approximately 50 percent was owed to the United States, 18 percent to Japan, 9 percent to West Germany, and 23 percent to numerous other donors. Since the 1940s, Colombia had consistently ranked among the top Latin American countries in terms of subsidies provided by the United States; total value of development assistance, food aid, and other economic support was US$1.5 billion as of 1987. Most of that assistance had been terminated by 1978, however. Since that time, Colombia had not received significant amounts of development assistance from the United States.

## Foreign Trade

Colombia's foreign trade regime underwent numerous changes after it began to flourish around the turn of the century. Following a period of high coffee exports that continued through the 1920s, Colombia enacted strict foreign exchange provisions and instituted a restrictive trade program to stimulate economic growth during the Great Depression, when global markets dried up. This was a common response by Latin American nations during the Great Depression; in Colombia's case, the extent to which these controls were loosened or tightened depended largely on the prevailing price of coffee and the country's willingness to expand coffee exports for higher returns.

In the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II, Colombia employed protectionist trade policies in full force as part of an import substitution industrialization strategy. From 1950 to 1967, Colombia implemented a sophisticated system of exchange rate controls, tariffs, quotas, and licensing designed to shelter the fledgling industrial sector from foreign competition, a technique that was still espoused by a minority of industrialists in the 1980s. This policy served to restrict the importation of manufactured goods that competed with Colombian-made products; however, the undervalued peso penalized the agricultural sector by reducing coffee revenues. Because Colombia required expensive capital goods to

build its industrial base, cheap coffee, which was the main source of funds for the purchase of foreign goods, eventually induced serious balance of payments problems.

Besides financial problems, import substitution industrialization caused inefficiencies in Colombia's manufacturing sector, inhibited the efficient allocation of resources, employed fewer workers than export industries, and further skewed the distribution of income. Collectively, these difficulties forced Colombia to change its economic course; policymakers shifted from import substitution industrialization to export promotion with the reforms of 1967. The economy was redirected toward producing for export markets in order to solve the problems created under import substitution industrialization. Because opening the economy to international markets fostered greater competition from abroad, economic planners expected a more efficient manufacturing sector to emerge as it responded to stronger market forces. A crucial element of this strategy was the adoption of a "crawling peg" exchange rate system.

The results of the market-oriented policies were quickly realized: export manufacturing became the fastest growing sector, which, in turn, encouraged employment growth, the diversification of markets and products, and the overall expansion of the economy in the 1970s. This continued until the late 1970s, when the expansion in coffee production devastated manufacturing by reallocating resources to the agricultural sector and by overvaluing the peso.

The fall in manufacturing exports, the subsequent decline in coffee prices, and the global recession of the early 1980s once again caused balance of payments problems for the government, which reinstated import controls in 1983 to prevent the draining of foreign exchange reserves. The economy did not begin to recover until 1984, when policies were adopted that were aimed at reemphasizing international competitiveness and a diversified export structure. The more open trade polices were approached timidly at first for fear that the manufacturing sector would not recover at a sufficient rate, rekindling trade imbalances and capital flight. Between 1984 and 1986, however, nontraditional exports grew at a healthy pace.

Despite the existence of a few remaining import controls in 1987, policymakers, business leaders, and international consultants agreed that the economy's growth was linked to increased international competitiveness in industry, mining, and agriculture. Programs were in place in 1988 under the Barco government to phase out the final deterrents to free trade, and Colombia approached the 1990s with a firm commitment to open international economic relations.

In the late 1980s, Colombia's exports were still based on natural resources, with coffee and petroleum the two largest foreign exchange earners (see fig. 8). Crude and refined petroleum products represented 12 percent of total exports in 1986; the Colombian Foreign Trade Institute (Instituto Colombiano de Comercio Exterior—Incomex) reported that petroleum and its derivatives were the fastest growing export commodities in 1987.

In addition to legal exports, the shipment of marijuana and processed cocaine abroad had an important effect on Colombian trade. Colombia was the largest supplier of illegal drugs in Latin America in the 1980s, although estimates of the value of these drugs varied tremendously. From 1981 to 1986, annual receipts from the drug trade ranged from US$1 billion to US$4 billion. The actual amount of money that was laundered back into the economy each year, however, was much lower; estimates varied from US$200,000 to more than US$1 billion. Regardless of the precise dollar figure, most analysts agreed that drug money had a significant effect on foreign exchange reserves. Many believed that narcotics accounted for as much as the equivalent of 50 percent of officially recorded exports. Although the drug trade was highly lucrative, the government made significant efforts to restrain the production and export of this dangerous contraband (see Drugs and Society, ch. 2; Narcotics Control and Interdiction, ch. 5).

## Direction of Trade

Colombia's primary export markets were the Western industrial countries, which purchased 79 percent of all exports in 1985. Developing countries absorbed 18 percent; the remainder went to the Soviet Union and East European countries. The United States was the largest market, accounting for 33 percent of Colombian exports in 1985. It was followed by West Germany with 16 percent of the market, Latin America and the Caribbean with 14 percent, the Netherlands with 5 percent, Japan with 4 percent, and Britain with 3 percent.

The role of the United States in Colombia's export strategy was expanding in the late 1980s. This resulted primarily from the growing United States market for Colombian oil. Colombia exported 57,000 barrels of oil per day to the United States in 1986, and twice that amount in 1987, to become the ninth largest supplier of crude oil to the United States. Colombia also registered small increases in the manufactured goods and cut flowers markets.

Colombia's imports, unlike its exports, were predominantly processed or manufactured goods; in 1986 approximately 40 percent

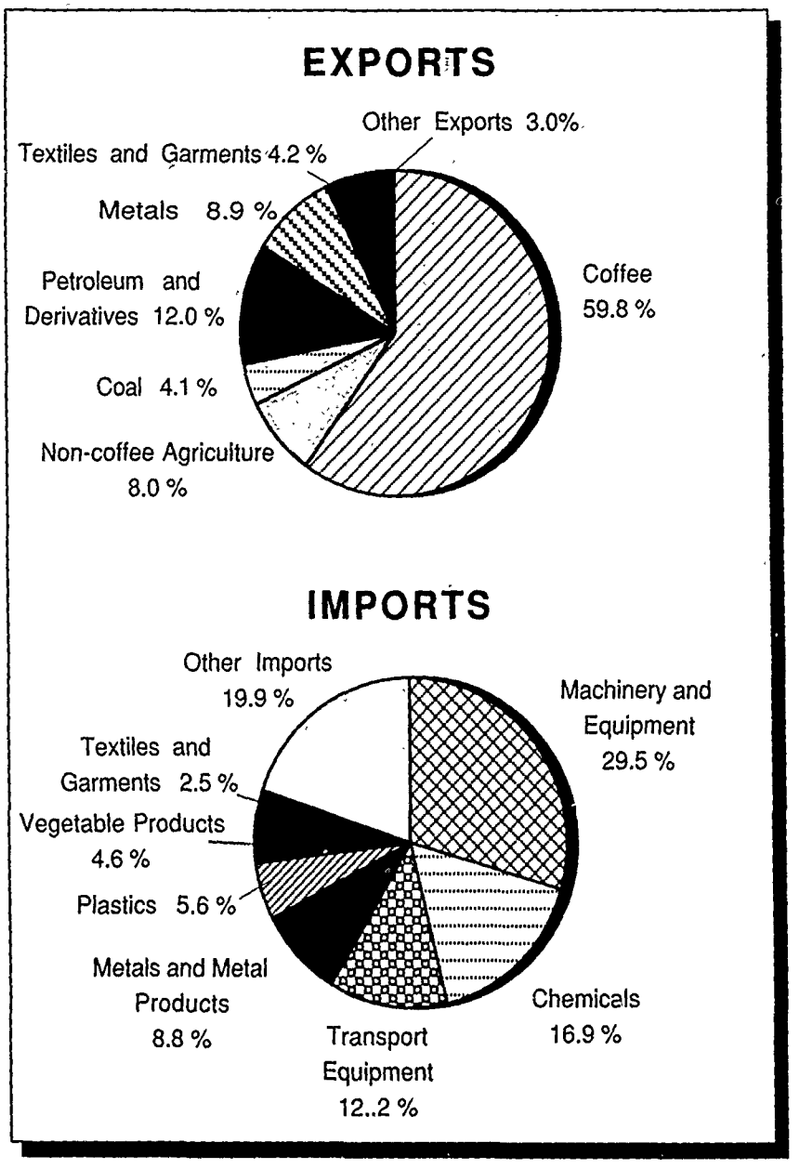



*Figure 8. Trade Structure, 1986*

were categorized as capital goods, and 46 percent were considered intermediate goods or raw materials necessary for manufacturing. Machinery and equipment, including specialized transport equipment, constituted 38 percent of total imports.

Developed countries produced most of Colombia's imports. In 1985 nearly 73 percent of total imports originated in Western industrial countries, 26 percent in developing countries, and 1 percent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The United States was the single largest exporter to Colombia, providing 35 percent of all goods shipped to Colombia in 1985. The Western Hemisphere—excluding the United States and Canada—provided 24 percent of Colombian imports, half of which came from Venezuela, Brazil, and Mexico. Other exporters included Japan with 10.4 percent of the market, West Germany with 6.4 percent, Canada with 3.8 percent, and France with 3.1 percent.

## Balance of Payments

The Colombian balance of payments paralleled overall trade and economic trends, fluctuating from a surplus in the late 1970s to a deficit in the early 1980s, only to rebound strongly in 1986. The reasons for these swings ranged from changes in domestic production capabilities to external factors such as the international price of coffee and the health of Colombia's export markets (see table 12, Appendix).

Following the coffee boom years, Colombia found itself with unusually high levels of foreign exchange reserves. These reserves grew to US$4.6 billion by 1980. From 1981 to 1983, however, Colombia experienced a turnaround in its reserves balance, owing to deficits in both merchandise trade and services. Capital receipts were insufficient to cover the shortfalls in the current account, and Colombia was forced to draw down its reserves. To mitigate the effects of this action, Colombia imposed import controls and continued to devalue the peso, which eventually caused a reduction in the import bill in 1985. At that time, manufacturing production was recovering and coffee prices were rising, which once again produced a credit balance in merchandise trade.

From 1984 through 1987, the services account, by contrast, remained in deficit each year by some US$2 billion. This resulted from lower interest income on the reduced foreign reserves balance, a decline in tourist receipts, and reduced remittances from Colombian laborers working abroad, particularly in Venezuela. In addition, Colombia had higher interest payments on both private and public debt. Although there were signs that the services account might improve in the late 1980s, many analysts expected it to remain negative well into the 1990s.

In the 1980s, the trade and services imbalances combined to generate annual long-term current account deficits, with the exception of 1986. Although this was a major problem during the

recession years of the early 1980s, when debt and equity capital were scarce, Colombia traditionally covered its current account deficit with capital inflows. This was again the case from 1985 to 1987, when Colombia recorded a positive difference between long-term capital and the current account—sometimes referred to as the basic balance. Although Colombia's ability to attract foreign capital counterbalanced the current account deficits, it also threatened the national economy with even higher current account deficits in the future because more funds would have to be set aside to service the expanding debt.

## Foreign Debt

Colombia's debt situation, unlike that of much of the developing world, was manageable in the late 1980s. Conservative borrowing strategies and a strong reserve position in the late 1970s had provided Colombia with the necessary cushion to minimize international borrowing in the early 1980s. A willingness to refrain from adopting a rescheduling strategy ensured Colombia's continued good standing in the international lending community. The country preferred instead to incur the cost of slightly higher interest rates in order to maintain its credit worthiness.

As of 1988, Colombia's credit standing was still the best among the major debtor nations in Latin America. Colombia was the only Latin American country to be offered loans from private banks voluntarily and was able to draw down debt accounts from the World Bank and other public sources without major interference from the International Monetary Fund (see Glossary). Colombia's outstanding debt, however, was rising in real terms, and there was concern among lending agencies that it would eventually reach a level incompatible with the government's conservative strategy (see table 13, Appendix).

As of December 1986, Colombia's total external debt, including private and public commitments, amounted to US$14.6 billion, or more than double its obligations in 1980. Although this represented less than 4 percent of total debt outstanding in Latin America, Colombia's debt service obligation, which included interest and principal for all loans, more than tripled over the same period, indicating the growing burden of these foreign loans.

Colombia's debt service burden grew from 9 percent of exports in 1980 to 27.6 percent in 1986. Although this was not out of line for debtor nations in general, it raised the issue of Colombia's increasing debt problem and supported the policymakers' goal of continuing diversification efforts and attracting foreign investment

rather than relying on increased borrowing to finance the economy's future.

* * *

An abundance of material exists relating to the Colombian economy, of which William Paul McGreevey's *An Economic History of Colombia, 1845–1930* still provides an unparalleled historical background. More recent works on general macroeconomic topics include *Economic Policy and Income Distribution in Colombia,* edited by by R. Albert Berry and Ronald Soligo, and Miguel Urrutia's *Winners and Losers in Colombia's Economic Growth of the 1970s.* Charles W. Bergquist's essay on the Colombian labor movement in his book *Labor in Latin America* is among the best integrated treatments of the subject. A broad discussion of the relationship between Colombian politics and economics may be found in *The Politics of Colombia* by Robert H. Dix. Richard M. Bird's study, *Intergovernmental Finance in Colombia,* gives complete coverage of the government's role in the national economy. The Economist Intelligence Unit's annual *Country Profile: Colombia* provides current summaries and statistical tables on all aspects of economic production and trade. The Banco de la República's statistical department produces ample data on Colombia's domestic and foreign economic activities. The *Plan de Economía Social, Agosto 1987* of the National Planning Department (Departamento Nacional de Planeación) is an invaluable source of supporting data and current economic policy directions. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

# Chapter 4. Government and Politics



*The creators of the National Front, clockwise from the top: Mariano Ospina Pérez, Eduardo Santos, Alfonso López Pumarejo, Alberto Lleras Camargo, and Laureano Gómez Castro*

SEVERAL FEATURES DISTINGUISH Colombia's political system from that of other Latin American nations. Colombia has a long history of party politics, usually fair and regular elections, and respect for political and civil rights. Two traditional parties—the Liberals and the Conservatives—have competed for power since the mid-nineteenth century and have rotated frequently as the governing party. Colombia's armed forces have seized power on only three occasions—1830, 1854, and 1953—far less often than in most Latin American countries. The 1953 coup took place, moreover, only after the two parties—unable to maintain a minimum of public order—supported military intervention. Colombia's conservative Roman Catholic Church traditionally has been more influential than the military in electing presidents and influencing elections and the political socialization of Colombians.

Some analysts of Colombian political affairs have noted that in the 1980s the military gradually began to assume a larger decision-making role, owing to the inability of the civilian governments to resolve critical situations, such as the sixty-one-day terrorist occupation of the Dominican Republic embassy in 1980. The military had become somewhat more assertive in national security decision making as a result of the growing and more unified guerrilla insurgency and increasing terrorism of drug traffickers (*narcotraficantes*). Nevertheless, Colombia's long tradition of military subordination to civilian authority did not appear to be in jeopardy in late 1988. When military leaders attempted to challenge civilian authority on several occasions in the 1970s and 1980s, the incumbent president dismissed them.

A contradictory feature of Colombia's long democratic tradition is its high level of political violence (six interparty wars in the nineteenth century and two in the twentieth century). An estimated 100,000 Colombians died in the War of a Thousand Days (1899–1902), and 200,000 died in the more recent period of interparty civil war called *la violencia,* which lasted from 1948 to 1966. According to Colombian Ministry of National Defense statistics, an additional 70,000 people had died in other political violence, mainly guerrilla insurgencies, by August 1984. This violence included left-wing insurgency and terrorism, right-wing paramilitary activity, and narcoterrorism. For most of the forty-year period following the 1948 Bogotazo (the riot following the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in which 2,000 were killed), Colombia lived under a

constitutionally authorized state of siege (*estatuto de seguridad*) invoked to deal with civil disturbances, insurgency, and terrorism. In mid-1988 many Colombian academics who studied killings by drug smugglers, guerrillas, death squads, and common criminals believed that the government was losing control over the country's rampaging violence. They noted that even if the guerrillas laid down their arms, violence by narcotics traffickers, death squads, and common criminals would continue unabated.

Scholars, such as Robert H. Dix, have attributed the nation's violent legacy in part to the elitist nature of the political system. The members of this traditional elite have competed bitterly, and sometimes violently, for control of the government through the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, which changed its name to the Social Conservative Party in July 1987. These parties cooperated with each other only when the position of the upper class seemed threatened. Unlike their counterparts in other Latin American countries, Colombia's Christian democratic, social democratic, and Marxist parties were always weak and insignificant. Constitutional amendments and the evolution of Colombia's political culture reinforced its highly centralized and elitist governmental system. The elites managed to retain control over the political system by co-opting representatives of the middle class, labor, and the peasantry.

A number of Colombianists also contended that the traditional parties had impeded modernization. The fact that the guerrilla movement was still strong in the late 1980s, after four decades of "armed struggle," manifested to some scholars the elitist nature of Colombian politics. For Bruce Michael Bagley, the guerrilla insurgency was only the most visible "dimension of a far deeper problem confronting the Colombian political system: the progressive erosion of the regime's legitimacy" as a result of its failure "to institutionalize mechanisms of political participation." Bagley also saw the legitimacy problem reflected in rising levels of voter abstention and mass political apathy and cynicism, as well as declining rates of voter identification with either of the traditional parties and the emergence of an urban swing vote. This view notwithstanding, since the mid-1960s the elites dominating the two-party system usually have accommodated gradual change in order to preserve stability. For example, Colombia took a major step toward breaking with its elitist political tradition and modernizing the country's political structures by holding its first direct, popular elections for mayors in early 1988.

Although some political accommodation had occurred, the Colombian government has been less successful in reducing economic

inequality. During the 1980s, approximately 20 percent of the population controlled 70 percent of income. Rural poverty was particularly pronounced, with per capita income barely reaching half the national average. Analysts generally believed that these economic factors helped spawn political violence.

## The Governmental System

### Constitutional Development

Since declaring its independence from Spain in 1810, Colombia has had ten constitutions, the last of which—adopted in 1886—established the present-day unitary republic. These constitutions addressed three important issues: the division of powers, the strength of the chief executive, and the role of the Roman Catholic Church. The issue of a strong central government versus a decentralized federal system was especially important in the nation's constitutional development. The unitary constitutions of 1821 and 1830—inspired by President Simón Bolívar Palacios—gave considerable power to the central government at the expense of the departmental governments (see Gran Colombia, ch. 1). Between these Bolivarian constitutions and the 1886 version, however, three additional federal constitutions granted significant powers to administrative subdivisions known as departments (*departamentos*) and provided for the election of departmental assemblies (see Consolidation of Political Divisions, ch. 1).

In settling the federal-unitary debate, the 1886 Constitution specifies that sovereignty resides in the nation, which provides guarantees of civil liberties. These include freedoms of religion, speech, assembly, press, and education, as well as the rights to strike, petition the government, and own property within limits imposed by the common welfare. (The 1853 constitution already had abolished slavery, instituted trial by jury, and enlarged the franchise to include all male citizens over the age of twenty-one.) The Constitution, by noting that labor is a social obligation—protected by the state—guarantees the right to strike, except in the public service. The Constitution, as amended, also gives all citizens a legal right to vote if they are at least eighteen years old, have a citizenship card, and are registered to vote. The Constitution prohibits members of the armed forces on active duty, members of the National Police, and individuals legally deprived of their political rights from participating in any political activities, including voting. Individuals holding administrative positions in the government also are barred from political activities, although they can vote.

A second constitutional issue has been the strength of the chief executive's office, especially the presidential use of emergency

powers to deal with civil disorders. The 1821 constitution authorized the president to appoint all governmental officials at both the national and the local levels. The 1830 constitution further strengthened executive powers by creating the Public Ministry, which enabled the president to supervise judicial affairs. The 1832 and 1840 constitutions allowed the president to assume additional powers during a national emergency. The federal constitutions of 1853 and 1863, however, limited presidential control by granting many powers to the territorial departments, by allowing offices to be filled by election rather than appointment, and by depriving the president of authority to assume additional emergency powers. The 1886 Constitution establishes three branches of government—the executive, legislature, and judiciary—with separation of powers and checks and balances. Nonetheless, policy-making authority rests almost exclusively with the executive branch of government, specifically with a president who is both chief executive and head of state.

The 1886 Constitution restored strong executive powers primarily through the president's ability to invoke a state of siege under Article 121 and a state of emergency (*estatuto de emergencia*) under Article 122. The president may declare a state of siege for all or part of the republic in the event of foreign war or domestic disturbance. Such a declaration, however, requires the signatures of all of the government's thirteen ministers. A 1961 constitutional amendment also requires that Congress remain in permanent session during a state of siege, although it may not contravene the president's decrees. Under a state of siege, a president may issue decrees having the same force as legislation and may suspend laws incompatible with maintaining public order or waging war.

The relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to the state was a third constitutional issue. The 1832 and 1840 constitutions had affirmed the extraordinary position of the Roman Catholic Church. In contrast, the 1853 and 1863 constitutions, which guaranteed religious freedom and prohibited religious bodies from owning real estate, abolished the church's privileged status. The 1886 Constitution, as amended, guarantees freedom of religion and conscience but affords the Catholic faith preferential treatment. Article 53 authorizes the government to conclude agreements with the Holy See regulating functions between the state and the Roman Catholic Church on the "bases of reciprocal deference and mutual respect." The preamble to the amendments adopted by a national plebiscite in 1957 also notes the privileged position of the Roman Catholic Church, stating that the "Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Religion is that of the nation" and as such is to be "protected"

and "respected" by the public powers of the state. Nevertheless, Article 54 of the Constitution prohibits Catholic priests from holding public office in areas other than education or charity.

The Constitution has undergone extensive and frequent amendments, the most significant of which included legislative acts in 1910, 1936, 1945, 1959, and 1968; a national plebiscite and legislative decrees in 1957; and economic reform in 1979 (see Role of the Government in the Economy, ch. 3). The amendment process is relatively simple, which may explain why it was used so extensively. Congress initially passed an amendment by adopting an act in two consecutive sessions, the first time by simple majority and the second by a two-thirds majority. The 1936 amendment requires a majority of those present and voting in the first session of the bicameral Congress and a majority of the total membership of both houses in the second session.

Amendments adopted in December 1968 reaffirm a president's ability to declare a state of emergency and allow the executive to intervene selectively in specific areas of the economy to prevent crises or facilitate development plans. A president must obtain the consent of the ministers before making such a declaration and specify, in advance, a time period not to exceed ninety days. It may be called only to deal with a specific economic or social crisis, during which the president is limited to issuing decrees dealing with the problem named in the announcement of the state of emergency. The president may also use these emergency measures to raise revenue, adopt short-term economic plans, or override any of the semiautonomous government agencies involved in the crisis.

The most important constitutional amendments resulted from the Sitges Agreement and the subsequent San Carlos Agreement, drawn up by Liberal and Conservative leaders together at meetings in 1957 (see The Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship, ch. 1). These amendments were designed to impose bipartisan, noncompetitive rule for a sixteen-year period lasting until 1974. In May 1957, the two rival parties had united in the National Front coalition, which was envisioned as a bipartisan way to end *la violencia* and dictatorial rule. With the backing of the military, the National Front displaced the repressive regime of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (June 1953-May 1957). Although the military continued in power for a one-year transition period, the constitutional framework for a new governing system was institutionalized when the Colombian people overwhelmingly ratified the Sitges and San Carlos agreements in a national plebiscite in December 1957. The two parties governed jointly under the bipartisan National Front system from 1958 until 1974 (see The National Front, 1958–74, ch. 1).

The 1957 amendments essentially changed the nature of the government from a competitive system characterized by intense party loyalties and political violence to a coalition government in which the two major parties shared power. The first three National Front presidents succeeded in keeping the peace between the parties and in committing the country to far-reaching social and economic reforms. By the mid-1960s, *la violencia* had been reduced largely to banditry and an incipient guerrilla movement. In addition to ending *la violencia,* the National Front provided security and stability for the governmental system. The old patterns of blind partisanship and interparty hostilities declined markedly and were replaced with dialogue among leaders of the two parties.

Under the 1957 amendments, the National Front mandated three principles of government. First, it alternated the presidency between the two parties in regular elections held every four years (*alternación*). Second, it provided for parity (*paridad*) in elective and appointive positions at all levels of government, including cabinet and Supreme Court (Corte Suprema) positions not falling under the civil service, as well as the election of equal numbers of party members to local, departmental, and national assemblies. And third, it required that all legislation be passed by a two-thirds majority in Congress. The 1957 amendments also give women the same political rights as men, including the right to vote.

The 1968 constitutional reforms provided for a carefully measured transition from the National Front to traditional two-party competition. They also provided some measure of recognition for minority parties that previously were prohibited from participating in the government. The 1968 amendments additionally allowed for the "dismantling" (*desmonte*) of the National Front coalition arrangement by increasing executive powers in economic, social, and development matters.

The constitutional changes, particularly the abolition of the two-thirds majority requirement in both houses of Congress for the passage of major legislation, also affected the powers of Congress and its relationship with the president. Henceforth, the executive could more easily attain adoption of its legislative programs, although Congress could approve, delay, or veto an executive branch initiative. Other congressional changes included the creation of a special committee to deal with economic and social development plans; the extension of a representative's term from two to four years; and the adoption of amendments dealing with matters such as the length of sessions, meeting times, and the size of quorums. The 1968 reforms also ended, beginning in 1970, the parity requirement for legislative seats at the municipal and departmental levels.

Although the Sitges and San Carlos agreements' provisions for alternating the presidency and maintaining party parity in Congress ended in 1974 when both parties ran candidates for the presidency, parity in the bureaucracy continued for another four years. Beginning in 1978, presidents could select their cabinets and appoint other officials without consideration for party parity. Nevertheless, cabinet positions continued to be divided on the basis of Article 120 of the Constitution, which requires the president to give "adequate and equitable representation" in governmental positions to the major party not controlling the presidency. Liberal president Julio César Turbay Ayala, who took office in 1978, and Conservative president Belisario Betancur Cuartas—elected in 1982—both gave half of their cabinet positions to rival party members. Although the practice ended after President Virgilio Barco Vargas assumed office in August 1986, another president could decide to revive it.

The 1968 amendments led to other important changes in the governmental system, such as widening the scope of governmental authority, particularly in the area of the economy. The revised Article 32 guarantees free enterprise and private initiative but puts the state "in charge of the general direction of the economy." This amendment allows the government to intervene in the production, distribution, utilization, and consumption of goods and services in a manner responsive to economic planning for integral development. It also authorizes the government to promote development and organize the economy, including controlling wages and salaries in both the public and the private sectors.

In 1988 the provisions of the 1886 Constitution, as amended, still governed Colombia. That February, however, President Barco responded to a wave of attacks by drug traffickers and guerrillas by launching an effort to rewrite the Constitution and make it a more effective weapon in the fight against violence. He also wanted to streamline the state to permit authorities to better deal with political and drug-related crimes. The leaders of various political parties and factions signed a political agreement, called the Nariño House Accord (Acuerdo Casa de Nariño), that signaled a consensus on the need to hold a national plebiscite on October 9, 1988, on the institutional reforms proposed by Barco. In announcing the agreement, Barco singled out as major problems the eroded faith in judges, the decreased credibility of Congress, and people's loss of hope about public administration. A national plebiscite had not been held in Colombia since 1957, when a constitutional provision banned referenda as a means of reforming the Constitution on major social, political, and economic issues.

Municipal elections held in March 1988 determined the party composition of a fifty-member panel, called the Institutional Readjustment Commission, whose purpose was to ask voters to approve constitutional changes in the planned October plebiscite. The Nariño House Accord was suspended in April 1988, however, as a result of a decision by the Council of State (Consejo de Estado)—the highest court on constitutional and administrative matters—that the holding of a plebiscite would have raised a constitutional problem. According to the ruling, only Congress may revise the Constitution (a procedure that takes two years).

## The Executive

The president is elected every four years by direct popular vote and is constitutionally prohibited from seeking consecutive terms. A former president may, however, run again for the presidency after sitting out one term. The president must be a native-born Colombian at least fifty-five years of age and in full possession of his or her political rights. The Constitution also requires the president to have had previous service as a congressional or cabinet member, governor, or government official; as a university professor for five years; or as a practicing member of a liberal profession requiring a university degree.

As chief of state, the president oversees the executive branch of government, consisting of a thirteen-member cabinet, various administrative agencies, a developing bureaucracy, and more than 100 semiautonomous or decentralized agencies, institutes, and corporations, generally known as *institutos decentralizados* (see fig. 9). These appointive powers allow the president to select the cabinet and the chiefs of all the administrative agencies without the approval of either house of Congress. Under Colombia's unitary system of government, the president also appoints and may remove the governors of the twenty-three territorial departments and the heads of the nine national territories (*territorios*). Unlike the departments, which have limited self-government, the national capital controls the territories directly through presidentially appointed officials.

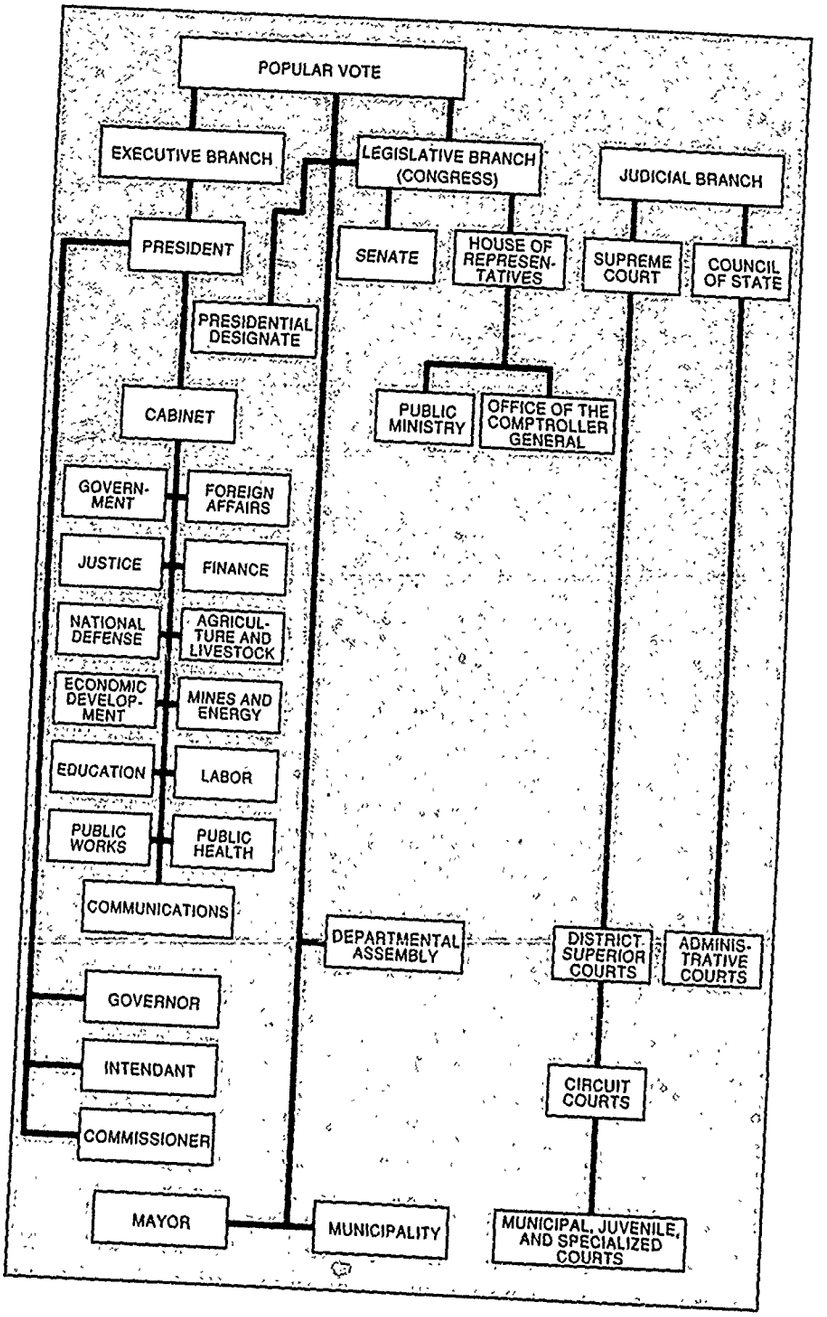
Presidentially appointed commissions—composed of government, party, and interest group representatives—occasionally played an important role in policy making in the executive branch. Their findings were usually highly respected and often turned into pending legislation. Development-oriented and well-qualified technocrats (*técnicos*)—such as economists, agronomists, and engineers—also strengthened the executive branch in the 1980s by staffing important decentralized government agencies. These included the National

Planning Department (Departamento Nacional de Planeación), Monetary Board (Junta Monetaria), and the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria—Incora). The expertise provided to the president and his cabinet by the technocrats moderated the influence of powerful interest groups and enabled the chief executive to develop complex legislation. Although the semiautonomous or decentralized agencies extended the influence of the executive into most areas of society, they had gained substantial independence by the 1980s. The larger and more skilled staffs and international funding sources of many agencies, along with the inability of ministers to supervise closely the agencies under their purview, contributed to this independence.

In addition to administrative powers, the chief executive had considerable legislative authority. During normal times, the president may promulgate decrees with the force of law called decree-laws (*decreto-leyes*). Congress may also delegate the president authority to decree regulations in a particular area or on a pressing matter. For example, in 1964 the president, at the request of Congress, reorganized the courts and the judicial processes. Many of the president's legislative powers are derived from his constitutional authority to direct economic policy, draw up a budget, and submit economic development plans to Congress. After deciding on a policy initiative, the president normally asks a minister to prepare the specific legislative proposal. The legislature may reduce the president's proposed budget, but it may not add to it without the executive's consent. The Constitution also allows a president to declare certain matters "urgent," thereby requiring priority congressional attention (Article 91), and permits the cabinet ministers to participate in congressional debates (Article 134).

The Constitution obliges the president, as commander in chief of the armed forces and the National Police, to maintain law and order, defend the nation, and deal with domestic disturbances. The president may declare war with the consent of the Senate or, in the event of invasion, without such consent. The president is responsible for making peace, negotiating and ratifying peace treaties, and, also with the consent of Congress, making treaties with other nations.

Although the aforementioned Article 121 and Article 122 give the president considerable powers to deal with internal conflict or war through a declaration of a state of siege or emergency, the judiciary limited their use in the late 1980s. Exasperated by these restraints, President Barco complained in an address to the nation in January 1988 that the Supreme Court had issued a series of rulings that had "virtually eliminated the practical side of the state




Source: Based on information from the Embassy of Colombia, Washington, June 1988.

*Figure 9. Government Structure, 1988*

of siege." He noted that the court had declared unconstitutional at least ten state of siege decrees issued by the government. According to one ruling, the president may not invoke Article 122 without having specific and clear authorization in the laws, the Constitution, or people's rights. Another ruling emphasized that the president may not use the state of siege power if the government's objectives can be obtained with the existing laws. Furthermore, the court insisted that the government may not use Article 121 to rule in socioeconomic matters if the crisis can be dealt with under Article 122.

Although presidential powers in Colombia greatly exceeded those of Congress or the judiciary, they were not without political or social restraints as well. Presidents needed to deal with and maintain the support of the nation's politically conscious elites. Lacking a single autonomous power base, such as a mass party or military control, the president had to be responsive to an array of competing economic, social, religious, and political elites.

In the temporary or permanent absence or incapacity of the president, a presidential designate (*primer designado*) serves as acting president. The presidential designate, appointed every two years by Congress, receives no salary and has no executive function but may hold other public or private positions while serving as designate. In case of the president's resignation or permanent incapacity, the acting president must call new elections within three months. Should Congress fail to elect a designate, the foreign minister becomes responsible for acting as president in case of the incapacity, absence, death, or resignation of the president.

After the president, cabinet ministers were the next most powerful individuals in the government in the late 1980s. Each minister directed a particular ministry and various subordinate decentralized agencies and institutes. Nevertheless, Colombia's tradition of allowing yearly reshuffles of the cabinet hampered governmental performance.

Certain ministries had more status or importance than others, although their relative standing was not clear cut. The Ministry of Government was perhaps the most powerful. The minister of government exercised considerable authority over elections, consulted with the president on the selection of departmental governors, and acted as a liaison between the governors and the executive branch. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs probably ranked second in importance, not only because its head had a central role in conducting the nation's foreign relations but also because the incumbent was third in the line of succession to the presidency.

Other important and powerful ministries were the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Finance. The minister of national defense directed the armed forces and National Police, which in addition to their other duties were charged with maintaining public order during a state of siege. The Ministry of Justice had risen in influence by the mid-1980s as a result of the increased importance in United States-Colombian relations of the prosecution and extradition of narcotics traffickers (see Relations with the United States, this ch.). The Ministry of Finance has been consistently significant because of its responsibility for economic affairs. As economic planning became more important, this ministry's powers increased proportionately.

## The Legislature

The Constitution grants certain legislative powers to Congress in general, divides other powers between the two houses, and apportions others between Congress and the president. Legislative authority is vested in the bicameral Congress, consisting of the Senate (Senado), with 114 members, and the House of Representatives (Cámara), with 199 members. Each house has a president who is elected for sixty days. Congress convenes annually from July 20 through December 16, but the president may call it into special session at other times. The Constitution requires that Congress be called into session during a state of siege and after a state of emergency is declared.

Both houses of Congress have joint responsibility for initiating, amending, interpreting, and repealing legislation; inaugurating the president and selecting the presidential designate; selecting the membership of the Supreme Court; changing the boundaries of the territories, creating new departments, granting special powers to the departmental legislatures, and moving the location of the national capital; supervising the civil service and creating new positions in it; and setting national revenues, providing for payment of the national debt, and determining the nation's currency.

The House of Representatives chooses the attorney general from a list of nominees provided by the president, selects the comptroller general, supervises the budgetary and treasury general accounts, and initiates all legislation dealing with taxation. The Senate tries officials impeached by the House of Representatives, accepts the resignation of the president and the presidential designate, grants the president permission to leave the country temporarily, approves appointments of high-ranking military officers, and authorizes presidential declarations of war and the movement of foreign troops through the country.

Members of Congress are elected for four-year terms at the same time as the president, or within a few months of his election. They may be reelected indefinitely. House members must be at least twenty-five years old, and Senate members must be at least thirty. All members of Congress must be in full possession of their political rights. Members have parliamentary immunity and may not be arrested or prosecuted without the permission of the house in which they serve.

All the members of Congress are elected from the territorial departments and national territories on a proportional basis. Each department and national territory has two senators, plus an additional one for each 200,000 inhabitants. A minimum of two House members also are elected from each department, and national territory, plus an additional one for each 100,000 people. For every congressman elected, a congressional alternate (*suplente*) also is selected to serve as a department or national territory's representative in the absence of the congressman. Although geographically representative, congressmen—as members of the upper middle class or the elite—have been unrepresentative of Colombian society.

High rates of turnover and absenteeism and a weak committee system were among the persistent problems that hindered congressional effectiveness. Congressional turnover was always high, ranging from 60 to 80 percent; few congressmen returned for a consecutive term, and even fewer served three terms. Absenteeism also was a chronic problem. Even with the alternate system, absenteeism was quite high, with an average of less than 75 percent of congressmen or their alternates present during voting, even on the most important issues. Absenteeism prevented Congress from approving many of Barco's proposals during the 1987 legislative session. Moreover, party discipline in both houses was weak, as evidenced by the numerous dissident factions within Congress. In 1988 a majority of congressmen belonged to Barco's Liberal Party (Partido Liberal—PL), but Barco was unable to control factional struggles in Congress. A Colombian political scientist described the situation as "parliamentary anarchy." Former President Misael Pastrana Borrero (1970-74) of the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador—PC), blamed the problem in Congress on Barco's failure to mobilize support for his program among his party's legislative majority. The committee system further weakened congressional effectiveness. The size of the eight existing committees varied, but they were usually large, met rarely, and made no use of subcommittees.

Committee chairmanships rotated, with a new chairman elected every month. The chairman's powers were limited essentially to

presiding. After a congressman or government minister introduced a bill in either chamber, the congressional leadership referred it to one of the eight standing committees. If approved by the committee, it was reported back for a second reading to a plenary session of the house of origin, where a member of the committee guided it through debate. If approved by the full membership, the bill was forwarded to the other house, where it underwent the same process. Conference committees composed of members of both houses resolved legislative differences between the two houses.

Its formal powers notwithstanding, Congress lacked a dynamic legislative and policy-making role in the late 1980s. It did not initiate important legislation; rather, the executive, parties, or bureaucracy took the initiative in preparing legislation. Congress affected policy making only by delaying or modifying legislation. Nevertheless, Congress was not completely without power. Its power of interpellation allowed it to question cabinet members and public officials on the manner of implementing legislation. The congressional "watchdog" function served as a check against excesses by government agencies and the executive branch.

Furthermore, Congress exercised purview over the Public Ministry by appointing its director, the attorney general. Although lacking cabinet status, the attorney general was an important official with broad powers of intervention in the nation's political processes. The attorney general's ministry consisted of the prosecuting attorneys of the district superior, circuit, and lower courts. Public Ministry officials supervised the conduct of public employees and prosecuted those accused of crimes.

Colombia's Congress traditionally has been one of Latin America's most independent bodies vis-à-vis the executive. Beginning in the early 1980s, Congress assumed a somewhat more active role in policy making. For example, in 1984 it refused to participate in the National Dialogue that the Betancur government had pledged to hold with the country's guerrilla groups. Leaders of the Senate and House sent a message to President Betancur, stating that "Congress is the natural stage for solving the country's problems."

Occasionally, when Congress blocked proposals introduced by the executive, former presidents and other party chiefs convened a summit-style meeting among government officials and thereby resolved the policy issue. These meetings usually included the president and leaders of key political or congressional factions or interest groups opposing the legislation.

## The Judiciary

The judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, under which are the district superior, circuit, municipal, and lower courts, and the



*Plaza de Bolívar, Bogotá, prior to the 1985 destruction of the Palace of Justice, seen here in background on right*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

Council of State, which supervises a system of administrative courts that scrutinize acts and decrees issued by executive and decentralized agencies. The executive branch exercises some control over the judicial process through the Ministry of Justice and the Council of State. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for administering aspects of the legal and judicial system, such as the actual operation of the courts and penal system.

The Supreme Court is organized into four chambers dealing with civil, criminal, and labor appeals and with constitutional procedure. The first three chambers sit together as a Plenary Committee to resolve particularly important matters and government business. The Plenary Court's constitutional mandate grants it the authority to try high government officials for misconduct or violation of the laws, to deal with legal matters concerning foreign governments, and to address other cases assigned by law to the Supreme Court. It also rules on the constitutionality of legislation under Article 90, which permits the president to challenge the constitutionality of a law, and Article 124, whereby any citizen may claim that a conflict exists between legislation and the Constitution.

The Senate and the House of Representatives each appoints one-half of the twenty-four-member Supreme Court from a list of

nominees submitted by the president. Appointments are for life. The Supreme Court selects the members of the district superior courts, who, in turn, select magistrates for the lesser judicial positions in their districts. District magistrates serve five-year terms and may be reappointed indefinitely. Congress may remove from office a judge considered to be unfit because of conduct or age.

The Council of State has two functions. First, it acts as an advisory board to the president by drafting bills and codes concerned with administration and even by proposing legislative reforms in this area. Second, it acts as the supreme administrative tribunal, presiding over a hierarchy of courts that hears complaints against the government and public officials. With its power of judicial review over the constitutionality of administrative codes, decrees, and legislation, the Council of State is given equal rank with the Supreme Court in the judicial structure. Half of the Council of State's ten members are elected biannually for four-year terms from a list submitted to Congress by the president.

The country is divided into judicial districts, each of which has a superior court of three or more judges. District superior courts supervise the lower municipal, circuit, juvenile, and specialized courts. The lower courts are distributed on a departmental basis. At the lower levels, the court system still tended to be overburdened and slow in the late 1980s; juries were used infrequently. The Constitution also establishes one administrative court for each department to hear complaints brought by individuals against officials of the executive branch and the public service. These courts are part of an administrative hierarchy headed by the Council of State.

Public Ministry attorneys have the same rank, receive the same compensation, and must have the same qualifications as the magistrates before whom they practice. Although not formally part of the judiciary, Public Ministry officials are empowered to enforce the execution of laws, judicial decisions, and administrative orders. The attorney general selects lower court prosecuting attorneys from lists of nominees prepared by the prosecuting attorneys of the district superior courts. The president selects the latter attorneys from a list submitted by the attorney general.

By the late 1980s, a loose coalition of about twenty Medellín-based cocaine-trafficking families or syndicates, known collectively as the Medellín Cartel, had demoralized Colombia's judicial sector with narcotics-related corruption and had virtually paralyzed it with a campaign of terrorism and intimidation (see Internal Security Problems, ch. 5). Operating with considerable impunity, the Colombian drug barons arranged for the murders of more than

fifty magistrates, including a dozen Supreme Court judges, between 1981 and 1988. The Extraditables (Los Extraditables), the name adopted by the cartel drug lords, also financed the assassination by hired killers (*sicarios*) of government judicial officials who favored compliance with the bilateral Extradition Treaty Between Colombia and the United States, signed by both countries in 1979. The drug traffickers feared extradition to the United States, where they were more likely to be convicted. Their victims included Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, assassinated on April 30, 1984; Lara Bonilla's successor as justice minister and ambassador to Hungary, Enrique Parejo González, seriously wounded in an assassination attempt in Budapest in December 1986; and Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos Jiménez, assassinated in Medellín on January 25, 1988.

On December 12, 1986, the Plenary Committee of the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional Law 27 of 1980, which approved the already ratified 1979 extradition treaty between Colombia and the United States. The ruling broke with a seventy-year majority opinion that a law approving an international treaty could not be subjected to constitutional revision. Other judicial decisions favorable to the cartel—such as the release from jail in 1987 of Jorge Luis Ochoa Vásquez and Gilberto Rodríguez Orejuela, two leading cocaine traffickers—suggested that the drug dealers had succeeded in either bribing or intimidating many key judges, from the Supreme Court down to the local tribunals. Indeed, a document found in an army search in Medellín in January 1988 revealed that since early 1986 bribes of over US$1 million had been paid to officials of the foreign affairs and justice ministries (including judges), to the military, and to politicians to guarantee Ochoa's freedom. In a further concession to terrorism, the Supreme Court in June 1987 declared that Decree 750 of 1987 was unconstitutional. That decree had created the three-member Special Tribunal of Criminal Proceedings (Tribunal Especial de Instrucción Criminal) for the purpose of investigating politically significant assassinations causing social unrest or trauma. To fill the resulting gap, the Barco government turned to a small cadre of "specialized judges" that was established in 1984 to deal with terrorist crimes, including kidnaping, with the support of forensic experts of the Directorate of the Judicial Police and Investigation, commonly referred to as the Judicial Police (see The National Police and Law Enforcement Authorities, ch. 5).

## Public Administration

Before 1957 the administrative system was a spoils system in which patronage served to reward political followers and public

resources were used to promote party loyalties. Each time a party fell from power, the bureaucracy had to be totally revamped. The absence of any career civil servants or public service ethic was not conducive to policy continuity and long-term planning.

The creation of the National Front in 1958 led to the establishment of a public service-oriented bureaucracy. According to the amendments approved by the 1957 plebiscite, party affiliations are not to be considered in the hiring, firing, and promotion of career administrators, and government leaders are obliged to follow civil service norms passed by Congress in dealing with administrative personnel. Although career bureaucrats retain the right to vote, they are not to engage in any other political activity.

To implement the amendments, the government enacted a career civil service law in 1958 and put it into effect by executive decree (Law Number 19) in 1960. Law Number 19 and subsequent decrees established the Commission of Administrative Reform to study ways to reorganize the executive branch and the National Civil Service Commission to centralize the government's personnel policies by establishing a professional civil service through oral and written examinations. It also created the Higher School of Public Administration (Escuela Superior de Administración Pública—ESAP) to train middle- and upper-level bureaucrats by offering a four-year college program, as well as graduate courses in public administration, urban planning, international relations, and other fields relevant to government service.

Law Number 19 also sought to complement the civil service by developing national planning and long-term programs through the creation of the National Council for Economic Policy and Planning (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Planificación—CNPEP) and the Administrative Department of Planning and Technical Services (Departamento Administrativo de Planificación y Servicios Técnicos—DAPST). The DAPST's mission was to formulate long-term development plans and create long-range programs of public investment. These administrative reforms created the conditions for developing a technically competent bureaucracy and served to standardize procedures, elevate the role of planning, and provide some administrative consistency.

Additional reforms in 1968 made various personnel offices of the ministries and agencies responsible for developing a career service (*carrera administrativa*) and allowed government employees to apply for competitive positions in the civil service. The career civil service system remained, however, highly partisan and small; by 1970 career service employees numbered only 18,000. In the mid-1980s, civil service employees still constituted only about 15

percent of the bureaucracy; the rest were patronage appointees. The sizable bureaucracy existed primarily to provide educated young people with socially prestigious and relatively well-paying jobs. It remained generally overstaffed, inefficient, and partisan, with appointments frequently made on the basis of political patronage, private influence, connections (*palancas*), or nepotism.

In addition to the various governmental reforms, the technical development of the small, professional, and public-service oriented segment of the civil service was furthered by the proliferation of decentralized agencies and the assistance of international and foreign agencies in supplying training and expertise. This group was able to legitimize planning, develop long-term programs, generate some grass-roots support, and occasionally minimize conflicts involved in administering programs. Three kinds of semiautonomous or decentralized agencies existed: the independents, such as Incora; the government-operated and government-controlled public enterprises, such as the Coffee Bank; and the mixed enterprises, which were financed and controlled by a combination of public and private sources. The proliferation and independence of these agencies during the 1960s and early 1970s, however, inhibited governmental coordination. Although a ministry or government department directed each agency, the large number of agencies limited the degree of control actually exercised by the executive branch.

## Local Government

The unitary nature of the governmental system relegated local governments to the status of implementors with quite limited policy-making authority. As of 1988, Colombia was divided into the Special District (Distrito Especial) of Bogotá, twenty-three departments, and nine national territories, which were comparable in area to the departments but were sparsely populated (see fig. 1). Unlike the departments, the number and size of the national territories were subject to administrative change. Although presidential appointees headed departments and national territories, national territories usually were managed from the national capital because of their small populations and minor economic importance. The national territories consisted of four intendencies (*intendencias*) and five lower-ranking commissaryships (*comisarias*).

The president names department governors for an indefinite term. Until 1978 these appointments were made strictly on the basis of party parity, and some modified forms of parity were maintained until Barco took office in 1986. The governor is responsible only to the national government for the handling of departmental affairs

and is bound to obey and enforce orders issued by the national government. The governor also issues decrees, appoints and removes departmental officials (except mayors), and assists in the judicial administration of the department, protecting and supervising public establishments and overruling unconstitutional acts of mayors and municipal councils. Although the departments had little actual self-government, they had local legislatures, or assemblies, that assisted the governors. The departmental assemblies met annually for a two-month session.

Within each department and national territory, the lowest level of local government was the municipality, of which there were at least 915. A mayor (*alcalde*), who was responsible to the departmental governor, directed a municipality. Until March 1988—when mayors were elected popularly for the first time—governors appointed mayors and rotated them frequently, without consideration for their local roots.

Popularly elected councils (*juntas*)—elected to two-year terms—assisted the mayors in planning public works projects. The councils' functions and powers were so limited, however, that they often did not even bother to meet. Unofficially, most municipalities were subdivided into zones (*corregimientos*), each supervised by an official known as a *corregidor,* who lacked official status but nevertheless performed a variety of judicial and police duties.

Indian reservations (*resguardos*) were the only other official administrative subdivisions besides municipalities with legal status. Specific laws and locally elected authorities governed the reservations, which operated as corporate communities occupying assigned geographical areas (see Contemporary Trends, ch. 2). The Indian authorities governed through a council (*cabildo*), which was elected popularly and met regularly. Although legally entitled to all rights and privileges of full citizenship, Indian rights groups frequently complained of being forced off contested land by armed thugs hired by landowners. Consequently, in the mid-1984 to 1987 period, the Quintín Lame Command staged numerous land occupations. Indian groups also sought to promote local improvements through community action, public education, and legal aid.

Prior to the March 1988 municipal elections, most major decisions regarding governmental matters in a municipality were made at the departmental level, or at least had to have the approval of the departmental governor. For example, the governor had to approve property and market taxes levied by municipalities. Because of the limited income raised by the municipalities, funds to provide for utilities and other public services also came from the departmental and national governments. Even these funds tended to be



*Isla de San Andrés*
*Courtesy Embassy of Colombia, Washington*

used inefficiently and for political purposes as a result of the extensive political patronage by local bosses (*gamonales*). In the mid-1980s, a "national civic movement" became increasingly militant in its strike tactics and emerged as a significant force for change at the local level. As a result of the first popular election of mayors in March 1988, the municipalities presumably gained a voice in decision-making processes affecting them.

Beginning with the March 1988 elections, mayors were elected for two-year terms, with the exception of the mayor of Bogotá, who was elected to serve a four-year term. The bill approving direct election of mayors posed a challenge to the traditional strongholds of political bosses, who could no longer use political patronage to fill these positions. The municipal appointments had long provided a spoils system, especially for the majority Liberal Party, which strongly opposed the bill. A poll taken in late 1984 showed that 96 percent of the municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants had a Liberal majority. Although the Liberals maintained their overall dominance in the March 1988 municipal elections, the Conservatives won in the two largest cities: Bogotá and Medellín.

## The Electoral System

In order to vote, a citizen must register at the municipal level. In the late 1980s, voting requirements were not strict, but

registration was still difficult and confusing, especially for those who had moved, as a result of complicated residency requirements. Individuals voted at places designated by the municipal registrar on the basis of their identification numbers. Therefore, the many citizens who had moved to another neighborhood, town, or city had to return to their original place of registration in order to cast a ballot.

Presidential elections in Colombia are held by direct popular vote every four years in April of even-numbered years. A plurality is sufficient to elect a president. Congressional elections also take place every four years. Beginning in 1978, they have been held two or three months prior to the presidential ballot and conducted in accordance with a system of proportional representation. Colombian political observers commonly viewed congressional and local government elections as primaries for the forthcoming presidential vote. The candidate whose supporters won the largest number of seats usually became the party's presidential nominee.

Elections for the delegates to the departmental and municipal assemblies are held every two years. In presidential voting years, they are conducted shortly after the presidential elections. In non-presidential voting years, they serve as mid-term elections (*mitacas*).

An electoral committee composed of two members from each party supervises the municipal ballot at each polling place. This committee reports the results to the municipal registrar's office, which then forwards them to the national registrar's office. The vote count is also overseen by a guarantees tribunal appointed by the president and consisting of the minister of government, the minister of communications, the national civic registrar, the national director of criminal rehabilitation, the director general of the National Police, and delegates from the political party leadership.

High voter abstention rates have been the norm in Colombia since universal male suffrage was adopted in the 1930s. This pattern was particularly evident in elections under the National Front agreement. Voter participation declined from 69 percent of those eligible to vote in the 1958 presidential elections to 37 percent in the 1966 elections. In the crucial 1974 elections—when both parties fielded candidates for the presidency for the first time in over thirty years—only 45 percent of those eligible voted. Despite the end of the National Front, only 20 percent of the voters went to the polls in the 1976 elections, when the voting age was lowered from twenty-one to eighteen. Colombian leftist observers argued that the 1978 abstention rate of 39 percent clearly reflected widespread rejection of the traditional parties, despite the renewal

of interparty competition. Scholars also attributed Colombia's traditionally high abstention rates to apathy, to noncompulsory voting, and to bureaucratic obstacles, such as inconvenient residency requirements.

Voter participation in presidential elections showed relative increases in the 1980s. About half of the electorate participated in the 1982 and 1986 presidential elections. Although 61 percent of voters participated in the 1986 municipal elections, only 48 percent cast their ballots in the March 1988 local voting. By the mid-1980s, the highest abstention rates in urban areas were among the poor, who had tended not to be affiliated with either major party.

## Political Dynamics

### Traditional Parties

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the most consistent features of Colombia's political system have been the elitism and dualism of party politics. Elites from the Liberal Party (Partido Liberal—PL) and the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador—PC), which in 1987 changed its name to the Social Conservative Party (Partido Social Conservador—PSC), have dominated the nation's political institutions. Consequently, the majority of Colombians had little input in the political process and decision making. The formation of the life-long party loyalties and enmities of most Colombians traditionally began at an early age. Campesinos adopted the party affiliations of their master or patron (*patrón*). Being a Liberal or a Conservative was part of one's family heritage and everyday existence. During the period of *la violencia,* party membership was sufficient reason to kill or be killed. Families, communities, and regions have identified with one or the other party. The PL traditionally dominated, the main exception being the period of Conservative hegemony from 1886 to 1930. For most of the twentieth century, the Conservatives have been able to gain power only when the Liberal vote was split.

Until the 1957 Sitges and San Carlos agreements, the parties had consistently used the perquisites of government to create and maintain popular support through a patronage relationship with members. The party that won an election rewarded party members by appointing them to public positions or by funding special projects. The party in power controlled the national budget, government jobs, and most of the economy. The party out of power did not necessarily lose support, however, because unemployed members in need of assistance often had nowhere else to go other than to the local party boss, who was usually a large landowner.

The cohesiveness of Colombia's nineteenth-century-style parties depended more on traditional patron-client ties than on elaborate organization. Party structures were complex, informal, and weakly institutionalized, extending vertically from the national to the local level. The two parties were multiclass (*policlasista*) alliances traditionally capable of high levels of mobilization at election time. Nevertheless, they were not genuinely mass parties that served to integrate individuals and groups into the politics of the nation. Members of the elite held all national leadership positions. The Liberals and Conservatives have continued to shape the traditional pyramidal structure of Colombian society as a whole by thwarting the emergence of modern parties organized around common socioeconomic interests.

Support for the two parties stemmed from traditional loyalties and identifications, rather than organizational activity and ideological or class differences, and required mobilization at the local level. In the larger cities, the parties were detached from any popular base. As a result, opinion polls indicated that party identification in the larger cities was beginning to diminish in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The two major parties were confederations based on regional party organizations headed by, and dependent on, the *gamonales,* who acquired their positions through birth or connections with the wealthy and prestigious families that made up the national party leadership. Although the *gamonales* retained their positions through personal loyalties, their role diminished somewhat as the country became more urban and literate. Nevertheless, local leaders acted as power brokers by trading votes and electoral support for programs from the national government.

The highly personalized nature of Colombia's political culture resulted from the patronage and brokerage patterns that were dependent on the subordination and loyalty of the lower classes. The elites felt that government leadership should be the prerogative of a paternalistic upper class, whose members made decisions and cared for the nation and its people. Within these elites, loyalties were as much to one's class as to the nation. Acceptance of paternalism by the lower classes, however, eroded further in the 1970s.

The political parties reinforced the traditional attitudes by demanding and receiving intense loyalty from their members in exchange for favors granted by the parties and party leaders. The National Front modernized the party system by institutionalizing elections, a mass base, and special representation for youth, women, and labor. Nevertheless, the front merely limited the traditional aspects of party structure, such as the *gamonales* and personal ties.

Observers noted that the National Front arrangement closed off access to political power to all the forces not aligned with the traditional bipartisan structure.

Despite their similar moderate and elitist orientations, ideological differences existed between the Liberal and Conservative parties. The Liberal Party was oriented toward urban areas, industrialization, and labor; it was also more pro-welfare state and anticlerical, and less private property-oriented than the Conservative Party. The latter had its greatest support in rural areas and favored the military, large landowners, and the Roman Catholic Church. The Liberals traditionally carried almost all of Colombia's significant cities, although the Conservatives' percentage of the urban vote increased in the 1980s. Until the May 1986 elections, the notable exception was the Conservative and industrial department of Antioquia. Another exception was Bogotá in the 1978 presidential election, when Betancur, a Conservative, won a plurality in that city.

In general, each party had interests and support among groups and classes associated with the other. The memberships of both parties included merchants, landowners, professionals, peasants, artisans, and workers. Interparty differences were largely personal, political, and pragmatic. For example, Liberal Party membership was more upwardly mobile than that of the urban Conservative members traditionally derived from old families of high social status. Of the two parties, the Conservatives had a more effective hierarchical structure at the regional and municipal levels.

## Factionalism

The far from monolithic Liberal and Conservative parties were divided internally on the basis of personal and regional rivalries as well as issues. By limiting interparty competition for patronage, the National Front arrangement gave momentum to the already strong tendency toward intraparty factionalism. Factions usually were highly structured and headed by a former president or potential presidential candidate. At the departmental level, dissident factions as well as party directorates often put up their own slates of candidates for legislative elections.

Colombia's traditional party factions posed a reformist, as opposed to a revolutionary, challenge to the social and political order. Colombianists have noted that factionalism actually helped to perpetuate the two-party system by serving as a de facto substitute for a more fragmented multiparty system. The factions did not evolve into new parties because the loyalties of dissidents remained ultimately with their original party. Nevertheless, factionalism in

the ruling party tended to diminish the president's ability to command party loyalty while in office. Competition among factions was most pronounced at election time, when a split in the party in power traditionally provided the opportunity for the other party to win.

In the 1980s, factional rivalry continued to weaken the Conservatives. Two main factions have been active since the 1940s. One—the *pastranistas-ospinistas*—was named after Pastrana and the late Mariano Ospina Pérez (president 1946–50). Its members also were known as *unionistas* (unionists). The other faction—the *alvaristas*—was named after Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, son of the late Laureano Gómez Castro (president 1950–53), a Conservative hard-liner who was widely blamed for the sectarianism that led to the bloodshed of *la violencia.* The *pastranistas-ospinistas* were allied to industrialists in Antioquia Department and to the coffee sector, whereas the *alvaristas* were closer to farmers in the Caribbean coast departments.

In the 1980s, the Liberals also were divided into two main factions: the New Liberalism Movement (Movimiento Nuevo Liberalismo—MNL), established in 1979, and the majority official wing (*oficialistas*). Each ran its own candidates in the 1982 and 1986 presidential elections, as well as separate legislative slates in the 1982 and 1984 congressional elections. The MNL, which won only 8 percent in the 1986 congressional and local government elections, was more technocratically oriented and concerned with promoting the role of the state in economic development and social reform. Its base of support was mainly among the urban middle class, especially in Bogotá. The broadly based official wing relied more on traditional patron-client ties and partisan appeals to mobilize support. In May 1988, the MNL's head, Luis Carlos Galán Sarmiento, signed an agreement with the PL to carry out joint activities to support fully President Barco's government. Under the agreement, the MNL would continue to be a PL faction, but it would cancel its legal registration with the electoral authorities on August 6, 1988, and attend the PL's national convention in Cartagena.

### Minor Third Parties

Although the amendments creating the National Front limited participation in the political process to the PC and the PL, minor parties were able to participate by filing as dissident factions of the two main parties. The two-party system notwithstanding, all parties were free to raise funds, field candidates, hold public meetings, have access to the media, and publish their own newspapers. Smaller parties, which were generally class oriented and ideological,

fielded candidates at all levels and usually were represented in Congress, departmental assemblies, and city councils. Nevertheless, with the exception of the populist National Popular Alliance (Alianza Nacional Popular—Anapo; created in 1961 by Rojas Pinilla) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these small parties had few members and little impact on the political system (see Opposition to the National Front, ch. 1).

Although the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Colombia (Partido Comunista de Colombia—PCC) regained its legal status in 1957 after having been outlawed by Rojas Pinilla, the party did not contest elections during the National Front. Beginning in the mid-1970s, however, the PCC ran candidates in various legislative elections, as well as joint presidential candidates in alliance with other leftist groups. In 1974 the PCC, some Anapo dissidents, and other minor parties on the far left combined in the National Opposition Union (Unión Nacional de Oposición—UNO), but their candidate for president received less than 3 percent of the total vote.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC), the guerrilla arm of the PCC, sought to make its presence felt in the political process through a legal political party called the Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica—UP), which the FARC founded in May 1985 after signing a cease-fire agreement with the government (see Guerrilla and Terrorist Groups, ch. 5). In addition to representing the FARC, the UP coalition included the PCC and other leftist groups. Using the UP as its political front, the FARC participated in the March 1986 local government and departmental assembly elections. The UP's main reform proposal was the opening of Colombia's tightly controlled two-party system to accept the UP as a third contender for political power. The UP received only 1.4 percent of the vote in the elections, instead of an expected 5 percent. Nevertheless, as a result of the elections the UP could boast 14 congressional seats, including one in the Senate, and more than 250 departmental and municipal positions.

The UP's presidential candidate in the election of May 25, 1986, Jaime Pardo Leal—a lawyer and president of the National Court Workers Union (Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de las Cortes—UNTC)—placed third witn about 350,000 votes, or 4.5 percent of the total vote, winning Guaviare Commissaryship. Although it was the left's greatest electoral victory in Colombia's history, observers suspected that the FARC's use of terrorist tactics—such as kidnapping, extortion, blackmail, and assassination—intimidated many voters into voting for the UP. The UP made some gains in

the March 1988 elections, but it won only 14 out of 1,008 mayoralties, considerably fewer than expected. The UP victories, which theoretically gave the UP legal jurisdiction over the armed forces and police in those districts, were in regions where the FARC was active.

The UP itself was a prime target of unidentified "paramilitary" groups. The UP claimed that by mid-1988 some 550 UP members, including Pardo Leal and 4 congressmen, had been murdered since the party's founding in 1985. In the six months preceding the March 1988 elections, gunmen reportedly murdered more than 100 of the UP's candidates for local office. According to the Barco government's investigation, a major drug trafficker, José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha ("the Mexican"), sponsored Pardo Leal's assassination, which took place on October 11, 1987. The PCC weekly, *La Voz,* published documents that allegedly revealed ties between Rodríguez and members of the armed forces, and it suggested that the military was linked to Pardo Leal's murder. In an April 1988 report on Colombia, Amnesty International charged the Colombian government and military with carrying out "a deliberate policy of political murder," not only of UP members but of anyone suspected of being a subversive. The Colombian government strenuously denied this charge.

Another minor party was the Christian Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrático Cristiano—PSDC), founded in May 1959 and composed mainly of students and a few workers. The reformist PSDC identified itself with the Christian democratic movements that had become political forces in other parts of Latin America. The PSDC candidate for president in 1974 received fewer than 16,000 votes, however. In 1982 the PSDC supported Betancur's candidacy.

## Post-National Front Political Developments

With the return to normal interparty competition in the April 1974 presidential elections and the 1976 local elections, the PL's popular superiority enabled it to capture the presidency, a large working majority in Congress, and majorities in many of the departmental assemblies and municipal councils. Alfonso López Michelsen—the PL candidate in the 1974 presidential elections and the son of former President Alfonso López Pumarejo (in office 1934–38 and 1942–45)—won with 55 percent of the popular vote, easily defeating Conservative candidate Gómez Hurtado.

Despite a low voter turnout of 34 percent in the February 1978 congressional elections, the Liberals and Conservatives maintained their total dominance, winning 305 of the 311 congressional seats.



*Street vendor in Cali*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*

The PL again won majorities in both houses. The PL supporters of Julio César Turbay, who was closely linked to López Michelsen (1974–78), received more than 1.5 million votes, as compared with 800,000 for supporters of Carlos Lleras Restrepo, a highly respected former Liberal president (in office 1966–70). Turbay narrowly defeated the Conservative candidate Betancur in the June 1978 presidential elections, in which only 39 percent of the electorate voted. Turbay was elected president with 49.5 percent of the vote, as compared with Betancur's 46.6 percent. Thus, the second post-National Front president was also a Liberal who had the backing of his predecessor. In the National Front tradition, however, Turbay appointed five Conservatives to his thirteen-member cabinet.

Shortly after taking office in August 1978, Turbay was faced with the most serious guerrilla threat in decades. He strengthened his state of siege powers by decreeing the harsh National Security Statute, giving the police and military greater authority to deal with the growing domestic social unrest and political violence. The Turbay government used this statute to help minimize the security threats posed by the guerrilla and terrorist groups. The human rights situation deteriorated seriously, however, and armed opposition mounted dramatically.

Although the Liberals maintained majorities in both houses in the March 1982 congressional elections, Betancur won the

presidency in May 1982, owing to growing dissatisfaction with the eight years of Liberal rule, a split within the majority PL between two candidates, and Conservative backing of his candidacy. The PL division allowed for the first Conservative victory in fully competitive presidential elections since 1946. Defeating López Michelsen by almost 400,000 votes, Betancur garnered 46.5 percent of the vote, with 54 percent of the electorate abstaining.

A militant follower of Laureano Gómez's ultra-right wing of the PC in the 1950s and early 1960s, Betancur moved to the political center after Gómez died in 1965. He first ran for president in 1970 as an independent Conservative and again in 1978 as a moderate reformer. He ran in the 1978 elections as a candidate of the National Movement (Movimiento Nacional), consisting of Conservatives, dissident Liberals, Christian Social Democrats, and remnants of Anapo. Betancur owed his decisive 1982 victory for the National Movement in part to the support of the *alvarista* and *pastranista-ospinista* factions of the PC, as well as of independent Christian democratic and Liberal voters, especially among the urban poor and working class in the large cities (see Factionalism, this ch.). López Michelsen, one of the two PL candidates, had called for rescinding the constitutional clause on coalition governments so that the two traditional parties could compete with each other more effectively. For the first time in Colombia's electoral history, modern campaign techniques prevailed over the traditional reliance on party machinery and the informal patronage and brokerage system.

During his four-year term, Betancur's highest domestic priority was to pacify Colombia's four main guerrilla groups. His approach to dealing with the escalating political violence differed profoundly from that pursued by his hard-line predecessor. After his inauguration in August 1982, Betancur called for a democratic opening (*abertura democrática*), an end to Turbay's repressive policies, a truce with the guerrilla groups, and an unconditional general amnesty for the guerrillas. By August 1984, the Betancur government's peace commission had reached short-term accords with most of the major guerrilla groups, with the main exception of the pro-Cuban National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN). In June 1985, however, the peace process began to unravel when the 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril—M-19) resumed fighting, followed by other groups. Only the FARC agreed to renew its truce, although not all of its guerrilla fronts complied.

Despite his more open, informal, and honest leadership style—a sharp contrast with that of the more pompous and tradition-bound Turbay—Betancur's popularity declined markedly because of

persistent problems with inflation and deficits (see Inflation and Unemployment, ch. 3). This made it difficult to finance the ambitious social, political, and electoral reforms that he had promised. In the 1984 mid-term elections, the Conservatives received only 42 percent of the vote, which was about their usual proportion, and the Liberals received 58 percent. Betancur's policy toward the guerrillas was a principal factor in undermining confidence in him among many military, economic, and political leaders, including Conservative congressmen. The M-19 dealt Betancur's prestige and his strategy of national pacification a severe blow by seizing the Palace of Justice, which housed the Supreme Court and Council of State, in early November 1985. The M-19's action reinforced a widely held view among Colombians that Betancur had ceded too much to the guerrillas in his quest for peace. Betancur's handling of the courthouse takeover polarized public opinion within all sectors (see Interest Groups, this ch.). It also generated Colombian criticism of Betancur's role within the Contadora (see Glossary) group of Latin American countries seeking to negotiate a peace settlement in Central America, particularly after the M-19 arms used in the takeover were traced to Nicaragua (see Relations with Latin America, this ch.).

The decisive campaign issue leading up to the congressional and local government elections in March 1986 and the presidential elections in May 1986 was the candidates' positions regarding public order. Even with half of Colombia's 14 million voters abstaining, the congressional elections held on March 9, 1986, produced a record voter turnout. The poll amounted to a vote of no-confidence for the lame-duck Betancur administration, which received only 37.4 percent of the vote. The opposition PL swept 48.7 percent of the vote, including Bogotá, thereby giving the party a majority in both houses.

In the May 1986 presidential election, PL candidate Virgilio Barco, a close associate of Turbay, won a landslide victory over Gómez Hurtado, the Conservative candidate. Barco received the largest mandate in Colombia's history, with 58 percent (4.1 million) of the vote, as compared with Gómez's 36 percent (2.5 million). Barco won in twenty-one of Colombia's twenty-three departments, even taking the Conservative stronghold of Antioquia Department. As a former minister of agriculture (1962-64) and mayor of Bogotá (1966-69), Barco had gained a reputation as a skillful public administrator. His election was helped not only by endorsements from four former Liberal presidents—Alberto Lleras Camargo (1945-46; 1958-62), Lleras Restrepo, López Michelsen, and Turbay—but also by fears of a spread in public violence

following Betancur's failure to pacify the country's guerrilla movements and his liberal reforms of the penal system.

On assuming office on August 7, 1986, Barco confirmed his intention to end the thirty-year-old tradition of coalition governments by establishing a one-party government (*gobierno de partido*). He believed that the sharing of cabinet seats and other government posts under the old National Front arrangement stifled democracy by excluding other groups and making it difficult to distinguish the policies of the two main parties. Barco favored a more conventional system in which the winning party governed and the losing party served as a genuine opposition. Although Barco offered the Conservatives three cabinet positions in his administration in accordance with Article 120 of the Constitution, Conservative patriarch and former President Pastrana declined the token participation in order to "revitalize" the party's identity. The Conservatives declared themselves in "reflective opposition" to the Barco administration. Thus, Barco's Council of Ministers was the first one-party cabinet in almost three decades.

Barco outlined a program to end guerrilla violence and crime through social reforms, a reduction in poverty, and an effective judiciary. He inherited Betancur's battered peace initiative, which Barco perceived to be fatally flawed, and began his mandate with the country still under a state of siege. Although the Barco administration committed itself to the peace process initiated by Betancur, Barco deemphasized dialogue with the guerrillas and—in October 1987—centralized the peace program in his office by making his new peace commission—the Permanent Advisory Council on Political Rehabilitation, Reconciliation, and Normalization—an intergovernmental body. Government talks with the FARC made little progress, however, owing to the FARC's unwillingness to disarm and its continued guerrilla and terrorist attacks.

By the end of Barco's first year in office, analysts were criticizing him for being indecisive, too low key, and inaccessible. Barco reportedly communicated mostly with his closest advisers, consulting infrequently with his ministers. His controversial effort to make the political system more competitive floundered from the start. Despite the novel existence of a purely opposition party and the Conservatives' efforts to create an effective opposition, the two parties had few ideological and political differences. Consequently, instead of a system of checks and balances, the government—in the opinion of analysts—was experiencing administrative chaos. Pro-Barco critics accused the Conservatives of impeding congressional action and harassing the executive branch over the performance of various ministers, instead of offering clear-cut alternatives to

the government's program. They also scolded the Liberals for failing to take advantage of their electoral majority to govern the country forcefully and to carry out needed social reforms. The broader effects included deterioration of the peace process and increasing polarization and confrontation between the army and the guerrillas, with both getting stronger.

Although the Liberals won a majority of the votes in the March elections, the opposition Social Conservative Party (Partido Social Conservador—PSC) won an important victory over the governing PL by taking the mayoralties of Colombia's two largest cities: Bogotá and Medellín. Andrés Pastrana, the son of former President Misael Pastrana, became Bogotá's mayor, Colombia's second most important political position. Pastrana had been trailing in published voter polls until he was kidnapped in January, reportedly by drug dealers. The kidnapping of another top politician, the PSC's Alvaro Gómez, on May 29 pushed Colombian politics into a crisis. Gómez had been actively pressuring the ruling PL to give the military more power to combat the growing guerrilla threat. During the two months that the M-19 held Gómez, political analysts noted the polarizing effect the abduction was having on Colombians.

By early 1988, as the security situation continued to deteriorate nationwide, Barco came under increasing pressure to return to a national governing coalition similar to the old National Front. Politicians and diplomats in Bogotá reportedly believed that such an arrangement was needed to reassert legitimate authority and reach new accords on some basic issues, including new approaches to the guerrilla groups, cocaine traffickers (the Medellín and Cali cartels), and relations with the United States.

In May 1988, Barco and the PL leadership reached an agreement on a legislative agenda for constitutional and institutional reform. The reform package, consisting of about thirty-five bills, was designed to modernize the state in areas such as administration of justice, legislative efficiency, streamlining of public administration, and the state of siege provision in the Constitution (Article 121). The latter would be divided into three phases to be invoked gradually, depending on the national crisis situation. Each phase would call for different, measured responses by the state. Other measures called for the formation of a constitutional court to rule on the validity of treaties; another would restrict the attorney general's office to ruling only on human rights matters; and others would give constitutional status to the protection of human rights, provide for mandatory voting and voter registration, and legalize the use of the plebiscite vote to consult the voters on key issues.

## Interest Groups

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church and the armed forces have played an important role in Colombia's political system. Numerous Colombianists, such as Jonathan Hartlyn, have observed that the most powerful interest group in the 1980s was a small, informal elite composed of business, political, religious, and some military leaders. Some have argued that these power brokers effectively usurped power from Congress and the president by making the decisions—sometimes at informal meetings held in private homes—about what policies or laws should be implemented prior to final action by the legislature.

Observers have contended that the two main parties and the two most powerful interest groups—the armed forces and the Roman Catholic Church—traditionally have co-opted emerging sectors of Colombian society, thereby limiting the development and influence of other potential interest groups. For example, the Roman Catholic Church and the political parties created the two major labor unions at a time when labor was beginning to develop strength. They also established government-sponsored community action programs when the lower classes were beginning to develop some political awareness. The government also contained increasingly militant workers, peasants, and students through co-optation and intimidation. Economic groups, such as associations of farmers and industrialists, began to proliferate and become highly visible in the 1960s and 1970s, but their influence in decision making in the 1980s remained limited.

In the 1980s, the Medellín Cartel's kingpins were increasingly competing with the influence of the traditional interest groups through bribery and assassination of government officials. In addition, the cartel was using assassination to intimidate one legitimate interest group, the news media. Former President Betancur described the cartel's underground empire as "an organization stronger than the state." With estimated revenues of US$8 billion in 1987, the cartel was a power unto itself. It demonstrated its financial power when, at a meeting with Colombian government officials in Panama in 1984, its chiefs offered to pay off Colombia's national debt and terminate their involvement in the drug trade. The traffickers demanded in exchange that the Colombian government refuse to extradite them to the United States and permit them to invest their profits, deposited in foreign banks, in Colombian enterprises. The government, political elites, and public categorically rejected this offer.

As justice minister in late 1985, Enrique Parejo stated that "There is not a single Colombian institution that has not been affected in some way . . . by the illegal activities of the drug traffic." Colombian officials released drug boss Jorge Luis Ochoa Vásquez from prison twice during the 1986–88 period. The second time Ochoa was arrested, in November 1987, the cartel threatened to "eliminate Colombian political leaders one by one" if he were extradited to the United States under a 1984 request. Thirty-nine days later, he was released from Bogotá's La Picota Prison. In late January 1988, the cartel assassinated Attorney General Mauro, who had begun investigating the Ochoa release, during a visit to Medellín.

Until the mid-1980s, the influence of Colombia's cocaine billionaires and marijuana millionaires extended from high society in Bogotá to many cities and towns, where they were often popular figures in certain neighborhoods for providing jobs and financing soccer teams, athletic facilities, public housing projects, and disaster relief efforts. The public began to regard the drug lords negatively, however, after Lara Bonilla was assassinated in 1984 and after the problem of cocaine addiction in Colombia became widespread in the mid-1980s (see Drugs and Society, ch. 2). The results of the March 1988 mayoral elections—in which two strongly antidrug candidates, Pastrana and Juan Gómez Martínez, were elected as mayors of Bogotá and Medellín, respectively—reflected a growing antidrug sentiment among Colombians. Their elections prompted the military, in subsequent weeks, to mount numerous aggressive raids on suspected strongholds of cartel kingpins, including Pablo Escobar Gaviria and Rodríguez Gacha.

### *The Military*

Colombia has not had a long history of military coups. Its armed forces seized power from civilians only three times in the nation's history: in 1830, 1854, and 1953. The only instance of military control lasting longer than one year was the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship (see The Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship, ch. 1; The Political Role of the Armed Forces, ch. 5). After his ouster in 1957, the military held power for one year. Subsequently, the military served as the mainstay of the political and economic elites. Although the Constitution does not stipulate that the minister of national defense should belong to the military, army generals have held this portfolio since the beginning of the National Front. The defense minister was not obliged to tender his resignation in a cabinet reshuffle, unless specifically requested to do so by the president. Specific constitutional and legislative provisions, however, limited the political

involvement of the military. The traditional absence of high-ranking military officers from the elite also helped to explain the military's subordination to civil authority. Held in low regard by the elites and expected to be deferential to them, military officers traditionally came from the middle class.

Beginning in the 1960s, the armed forces attempted to increase their prestige and self-esteem by improving their competence and professionalism. The nonpartisan professional reputation that the military had begun to build, however, was damaged in the 1980s by accusations of human rights abuses and narcotics-related corruption among officers.

In 1988 mounting violence reportedly had forced the armed forces to install military governors in certain departments, presumably with the president's concurrence. In an unusually blunt public statement, General Manuel Jaime Guerrero Paz, commander general of the military forces, stated in a radio interview in April 1988 that Colombia should not hold dialogues with the guerrilla groups and drug traffickers because of their lack of sincerity.

Colombian presidents occasionally disciplined members of the armed forces who violated the constitutional and legislative proscriptions against involvement in political matters. On three occasions—1965, 1969, and 1984—presidents removed military commanders who appeared to challenge civilian authority. In 1965 President Guillermo León Valencia reluctantly dismissed his minister of war, General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, for his public criticism of the government and ruling class and his advocacy of "structural changes" and a more autonomous role for the armed forces in the socioeconomic development process. In February 1969, President Lleras Restrepo summarily removed the army commander, General Guillermo Pinzón Caicedo, for his article in a military journal criticizing civilian interference in the military budget. In early 1984, President Betancur replaced the army commander, Fernando Landazábal Reyes, after the general challenged the authority of the official peace commission to reach an agreement with the guerrilla organizations. Betancur reminded the National Security Council that the constitutional role of the armed forces was "nondeliberative." The military acquiesced in these presidential actions with little or no overt negative reaction.

Betancur angered the military, however, with his policy of negotiating truces with the guerrilla organizations. Consequently, when M-19 commandos seized the Palace of Justice in Bogotá in early November 1985, Betancur had too little credit left with the military to order it to negotiate with the terrorists. He therefore apparently did not object when the military took immediate



*A barrio on the outskirts of Neiva, Huila Department*
*Courtesy United States Agency for International Development*

counteraction by laying siege to the building with hundreds of troops, backed by heavy artillery (see Internal Security Problems, ch. 5).

### *The Church*

Colombia's Roman Catholic Church traditionally was one of the most orthodox, conservative, and powerful in Latin America. In the late 1980s, it retained influence within the PSC and kept close relations with the Union of Colombian Workers (Unión de Trabajadores Colombianos—UTC) and the National Agrarian Federation (Federación Agraria Nacional—Fanal), a rural labor organization organized by the UTC and Jesuits in 1946. The church also played a major role in the country's education system and had an impact on most charitable activities. Members of the clergy sat on the boards of directors of many government agencies. The church was further integrated into, or at least close to, the nation's decision-making elite because of the upper-class and upper-middle-class background of the church hierarchy. Nonetheless, the increasing secularization of Colombian society since the 1960s had produced a considerable erosion of the church's political power (see Religion, ch. 2).

### *Economic Associations*

By the 1980s, a wide variety of economic associations (*gremios*) existed in such areas as agriculture, banking, commerce,

construction, and insurance. They seldom initiated policy changes, but they often tried to amend or defeat legislation proposed by the executive; they also resorted to court challenges to delay or impede implementation. The largest *gremios* exercised significant influence on governmental leaders and had elaborate, well-staffed organizations with departmental and local affiliates. These associations included the National Association of Manufacturers (Asociación Nacional de Industriales—ANDI), the National Federation of Merchants (Federación Nacional de Comerciantes—Fenalco), the National Federation of Colombian Coffee Growers (Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia—Fedecafe), and the Colombian Popular Association of Small Manufacturers (Asociación Colombiana Popular de Industriales—Acopi).

A strong advocate of free enterprise, ANDI was composed of more than 500 of the largest industrial enterprises; its members were high in social and economic status, exercising influence not only on the economy but on politics and education as well. Fenalco supported much the same policies as ANDI and, like ANDI, was wealthy and well organized. Fedecafe, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving Colombia's coffee cultivation and raising the living standards of its coffee growers, was particularly influential in setting and administering the nation's official coffee policy. The government delegated Fedecafe total responsibility for coffee policy, including quality control of exports and all other matters related to the coffee sector. ANDI, Fenalco, and Fedecafe were effective not only because they were able to influence the initiation and outcome of legislation and executive decrees affecting the economy but also had close ties to most of the government's finance and development ministers and both major parties.

Acopi was not quite as influential, wealthy, and homogeneous in its membership as the larger associations, but it shared their general orientation. Acopi's influence derived largely from the connections some members had with government leaders. Acopi's greatest efforts were directed at reducing taxes on imports, finished products, and raw materials.

Large landowners traditionally had an important influence on the politics of the nation because of their membership in the elite, their relations with the political parties, and their great wealth. Despite the emergence of nonelite agricultural organizations in the 1970s, the large landholders still exercised considerable political power. For example, they waged an effective battle against the implementation of comprehensive agrarian reform. The most important of the nonelite interest groups in the agricultural sector was the National Association of Peasant Land Users (Asociación

Nacional de Usarios Campesinos—ANUC), a loose confederation of local peasant organizations who owned, rented, or sharecropped small plots of land. This well-organized, militant association—numbering over 1 million members by the early 1970s—represented a majority of the nation's peasants. The ANUC mobilized and radicalized the peasants to such an extent that other unions opposed it. Some ANUC leaders were arrested for alleged links with guerrilla groups. As a result of these pressures, the ANUC splintered and lost its cohesiveness. Although it remained ineffective and disorganized in the early 1980s, the ANUC continued to receive government subsidies, and its members served on various government boards.

In the National Front tradition, interest groups generally appointed equal numbers of representatives of the Liberal and Conservative party directorates on their boards of directors. Because the lobbying efforts of the interest associations focused mainly on the executive branch, the leadership of the larger groups also included representatives of government ministries. The government relied on some of the interest associations to act as agents of the state in establishing and enforcing commodity prices or collecting export taxes on products such as coffee. Representatives of banking, industrial, and agricultural interests were included in some government agencies, such as the National Council for Social and Economic Policy (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social—Conpes), which directed the nation's finances. Although contact with Congress was minimal, the boards of directors also usually included representatives of Congress or legislative posts at the departmental or local levels.

One group with a potential to become a political force in Colombia was a growing, mostly urban middle class that constituted about 20 percent of the population in the mid-1980s and included professionals, white-collar employees in the public and private sectors, and small businessmen (see Middle Class, ch. 2). Pressured by inflation and cuts in government budgets, members of this relatively unorganized group have attempted to make themselves felt in numerous strikes by their unionized members since the mid-1970s.

### *Labor Unions*

Unlike other countries in the region, such as Argentina and Chile, the Colombian labor movement did not have a long history of militant confrontation. The main exception was in the 1920s, when Colombia experienced sustained, violent labor revolts, including strikes against the United Fruit Company (see The Labor Movement, ch. 3). In addition to being moderate, fragmented, and closely

allied with the traditional parties or the Roman Catholic Church, the labor movement never has accounted for more than one-third of the organized labor force, which itself represented only about one-fifth of the total labor force. In 1988 an estimated 12 percent of Colombia's economically active population was unionized. Elements of the labor movement increasingly resorted to strikes and demonstrations in the 1980s, but these generally were resolved by concessions on both sides.

The labor unions sometimes had an impact on policy through the use of strike tactics. Persistent inflation, charges of government corruption, and high unemployment accounted for the increase in labor militancy in the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, by the 1970s labor legislation had developed in such a manner as to afford the government a large measure of control over the labor movement. Legislation gave priority to company-level unions by requiring them to bargain at the company level, rather than at the industry level. It limited the right to strike to forty days for most workers and for state employees, and it empowered the government to impose cooling-off periods and arbitration of disputes. Labor's links to government were limited to a few union representatives who served on special boards or commissions formed to resolve crisis situations or to propose policies. Unions also received sizable government subsidies. Unlike the producers' associations, the union leadership bodies did not include government officials.

In August 1986, the leftist union movement took a significant step toward unity by forming the United Workers Central Organization (Central Unitaria de Trabajadores—CUT), which grouped the Trade Union Confederation of Colombian Workers (Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Colombia—CSTC), members of the traditional PL and PC confederations, and nonaffiliated unions. Although not officially a member of the Soviet-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the CUT was strongly influenced by its pro-Moscow communist component and retained close ties to the international communist labor movement. The CUT's call for a national one-day general strike on October 13, 1987, to protest an alleged lack of government action to control the death squads met with a large response as teachers, transport workers, public employees, and members of the judiciary stopped work.

### *Students*

As in the rest of Latin America, students had a tradition of political activism in Colombia. Nevertheless, their importance in Colombian politics was marginal until the "days of May" in 1957

when their protest demonstrations and efforts to enforce a civic strike played a key role in the overthrow of the Rojas Pinilla regime. Subsequently, their protests often centered on university issues but also included domestic concerns, such as increases in bus fares, and on international themes, especially anti-imperialism. Although the students occasionally aligned themselves with other groups, such as labor, in seeking to promote reforms, most often they were unable to coordinate their activities or to create a powerful national organization. Government repression and division within the Colombian left, which affected student groups as well, inhibited the formation of a unified national student movement in Colombia during the 1970s and much of the 1980s. Political activism was most pronounced among university students, primarily at the National University of Colombia (Universidad Nacional de Colombia—UNC) in Bogotá but also at the universities of Valle, Antioquia, Cauca, and Los Andes. Repression of students in the 1980s was not so severe as in the 1970s, when many students saw no alternative to joining the guerrilla ranks. In May 1984, however, the UNC's Bogotá branch closed its doors to some 20,000 students following a protest in which security forces shot 10 students.

The principal problems facing the public universities in 1987 included financial crises, deteriorating academic quality, and a lack of cohesive government policy toward state institutions (see Secondary and University Education, ch. 2). A national congress, held by about 3,000 university and high school delegates in Bogotá in May 1987, and massive student rallies in the preceding months reflected continued student discontent.

## News Media

Freedom of the press and broadcasting were deeply rooted cultural traditions in Colombia. Governments generally respected constitutionally guaranteed rights of freedom of speech and the press. One exception was the Rojas Pinilla regime, which suspended them. As a result of the interparty political conflict that characterized Colombia through much of the twentieth century, civilian governments also frequently censored the opposition press, either through harassment by political activists or through government-issued state of siege decrees. Nevertheless, in the 1980–88 period, freedom of speech and the press were respected.

In 1987 all newspapers, other than the official government organ, *Diario Oficial,* were privately owned and under no governmental restraints. The press published a wide variety of political views and often vigorously criticized the government and its leaders. Almost all news outlets were affiliated—officially or semiofficially—with

either the Liberal or Conservative party. The urban middle and upper classes, for whom the press was a vital instrument of influence, purchased most newspapers. Traditionally, newspapers were the most credible sources of political information, as well as the major organs of political debate. In contrast, Colombians viewed radio and television as primarily entertainment or cultural media. Nevertheless, some journalists used the press as a vehicle to political power. For example, television journalist Andrés Pastrana was elected mayor of Bogotá in 1988.

Colombian journalists were generally well trained, and the top columnists had sophisticated worldviews. At least five daily newspapers, as well as a number of weekly news magazines, served Bogotá. Two morning newspapers, *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo,* each had circulations of over 200,000 on weekdays in the late 1980s. The Sunday circulation of *El Tiempo* reached 350,000. Although both were affiliated with the PL, *El Espectador* tended to support the New Liberalism Movement faction of the party. *El Tiempo,* one of Latin America's leading dailies, provided comprehensive and sophisticated coverage of international news. The small *El Siglo* and business-oriented *La República* were both affiliated with the Conservatives. *El Siglo* represented the party's right wing. Its editor, Alvaro Gómez, a kidnap victim himself, took a high-profile stand against drug traffickers and Marxist guerrillas. A new afternoon daily, *5 P.M.,* appeared in Bogotá in the mid-1980s, with an independent and nonpartisan orientation. In August 1988, former President Misael Pastrana Borrero launched a Bogotá daily, *La Prensa,* in an apparent attempt to compete with *El Tiempo* and *El Espectador* and to consolidate his control over the Social Conservatives.

Colombia had more than forty regional newspapers, including several with a daily circulation of more than 100,000 copies. The newspaper with the largest circulation outside the capital was Medellín's conservative *El Colombiano* (123,700). Both *El Colombiano* and Cali's *El Occidente* (53,000) took strong antidrug stances. *El Colombiano*'s editor, Juan Gómez Martínez, was elected mayor of Medellín in the March 1988 elections. The most widely read weekly general news magazines in Colombia were *Cromos* (65,000), *Semana* (40,000), the Conservative *Guión* (35,000), and the Liberal *Nueva Frontera* (20,000), all published in Bogotá.

Colombia had a flourishing and modern printing and publishing industry in the 1980s. In the 1983–87 period, Colombia led Latin America in the export of Spanish-language publications, ranking second only to Spain. In 1986 Colombia sold more than US$59 million in books and other publications to thirty-two countries; this

was double the 1979 sales. A relatively small group of five printers and ten publishers spearheaded the export drive. The Andean Common Market (Ancom), also known as the Andean Group (Grupo Andino)—primarily Venezuela—accounted for 55.3 percent of Colombia's exports of printed material and remained the industry's principal market. The Hispanic population in the United States absorbed about 20 percent of Colombia's publishing exports in 1986. Of the 1,100 entities in Colombia dedicated to publishing, about 400 were large scale. The two leading Colombian publishers were Editorial Oveja Negra and Carvajal.

The state regulated the broadcast media. The Telecommunications Division of the Ministry of Communications administered and controlled radio and television broadcasting. The government-run television and broadcasting network, the National Institute of Radio and Television (Instituto Nacional de Radio y Televisión—Inravisión), controlled three television stations: two commercial and one educational. A semiautonomous agency administered by a board of directors appointed by the president, Inravisión leased time to private companies and also transmitted as National Radio and Television of Colombia (Radiotelevisora Nacional de Colombia—RNC) and National Radio Network (Radio Cadena Nacional—RCN). Colombia's largest and most influential radio station, Colombian Radio Network (Cadena Radial Colombiano—Caracol), was pro-Liberal, whereas RCN was pro-Conservative. The state imposed some guidelines to ensure equal time for political candidates. For example, the government ensured that each of four announced candidates running in the 1986 presidential campaign received equal time for a series of national television appearances. Beginning in 1987, all legally registered political parties had access by law to national television; a different party was allotted ten minutes of time each week night, under an alphabetical rotation system.

The state reserved the right, in effect, to censor the telecommunications media in a national emergency. A press law, in effect since 1959, provided for freedom of the press in time of internal peace. This freedom, however, had to be balanced by a sense of responsibility to help maintain tranquillity. The law provided for the prohibition of news threatening national security and for censorship before publication during times of crisis. In issuing a decree on terrorism in January 1988, President Barco noted the state's constitutional right to control telecommunications media if considered necessary to reestablish public order in a crisis. That month Barco also announced the Statute for the Defense of Democracy and the amendment of habeas corpus procedures. The statute caused

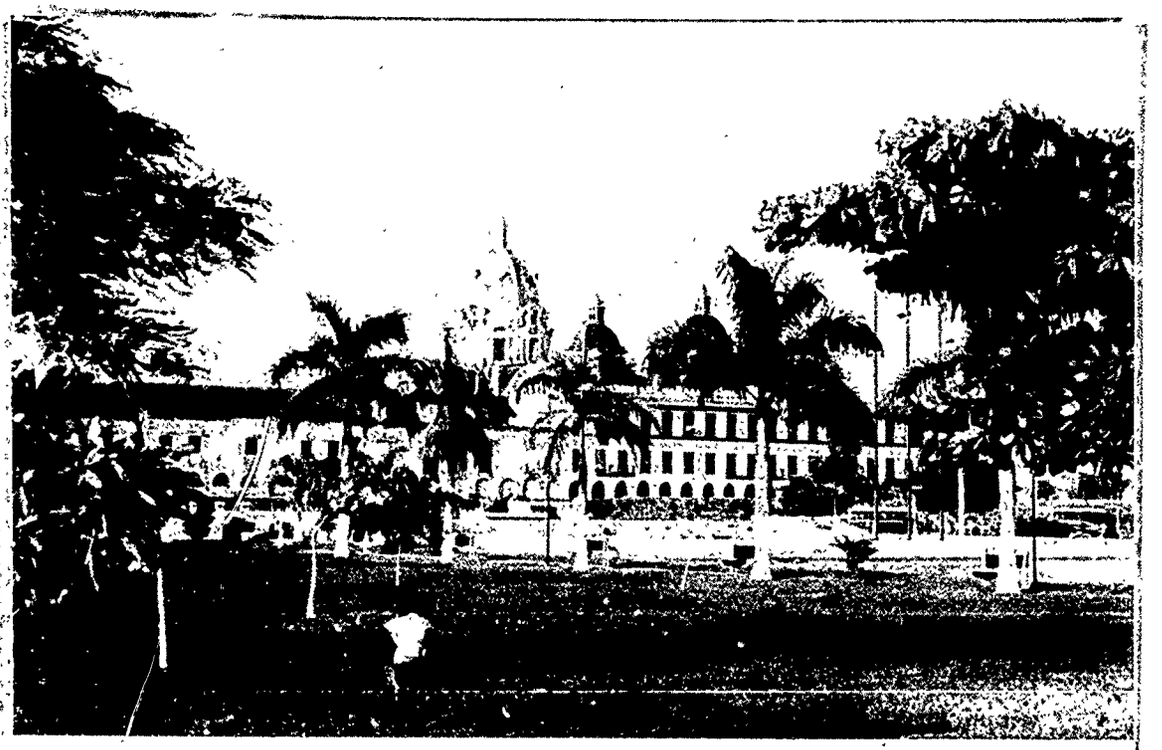
general concern within the media that the new measures could lead to press censorship. *El Tiempo* editorialized, however, that the statute should have been even stiffer.

In addition to the statutory regulations, an unofficial regulatory apparatus—consisting of political parties and economic interest groups, including financial conglomerates and drug traffickers—exerted strong pressure on the news media. For example, a powerful financial conglomerate, the Great Colombian Group (Grupo Grancolombiano), reportedly waged a campaign of intimidation in the early 1980s against *El Espectador* by withholding advertising in retaliation for reporters' probes into its business practices. Drug traffickers took more drastic measures to intimidate the press. For example, in 1983 a newspaper journalist in Buenaventura was machine gunned to death after he had written a series of reports accusing officials of involvement with drug trafficking. His editor also was assassinated that year. Hit-men hired by the Medellín Cartel assassinated *El Espectador*'s nationally recognized director, Guillermo Cano, in December 1986, shortly after his newspaper published a series of reports on the cartel. In October 1987, columnist Daniel Samper Pizano of *El Tiempo* fled the country after his name appeared on a death list. Drug traffickers assassinated approximately thirty journalists between 1983 and 1987. They were also blamed for kidnapping television journalist Andrés Pastrana in early 1988.

The media themselves have exercised self-restraint in times of crisis. For example, in response to M-19 demands for publicity in exchange for releasing Alvaro Gómez, the owners and directors of Colombia's major news media collectively agreed in July 1988 to exercise self-censorship when reporting on terrorist acts. They banned the transmission of all texts, interviews, and contacts with "kidnappers and terrorists" and with the kidnap victims.

## Foreign Relations

For much of the nation's history, Colombians focused more consistently on domestic issues and political personalities than on world affairs. In the nineteenth century, Colombia limited its involvement in foreign affairs to sporadic border disputes with immediate neighbors (Venezuela, Panama, Peru, and Brazil). Colombia and Venezuela began disputing boundaries after the breakup of Gran Colombia (Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador) in 1830 (see Gran Colombia, ch. 1). This territorial issue continued to cause friction between the two nations into the twentieth century. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the secession of Panama from Colombia in 1903 was a major source of friction in Colombia-United States relations (see Relations with the United



*Cartagena*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*

States, this ch.). Colombia's boundary with Peru was settled initially in 1922, but problems developed again in 1932 when Peru seized an area around Leticia in the Amazon Basin that both nations claimed (see The Development of the Modern Armed Forces, ch. 5). A League of Nations commission resolved the conflict in 1934, however, by suggesting a resolution that returned the disputed area to Colombia. Brazil and Colombia reached agreement on a border dispute in 1928.

Colombia broadened its foreign policy after World War II, becoming active among the Latin American states and small powers in general. It was an important participant in the 1945 San Francisco Conference creating the United Nations (UN) and was a leading opponent of the big-power veto in the Security Council. Colombia argued successfully for a primary role for regional organizations, whose recognition was secured under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Colombia also played an important role in creating the Organization of American States (OAS) in Bogotá in 1948. Former Colombian president Lleras Camargo was the OAS's first secretary general (1948–54).

Nevertheless, even in the post-World War II era, Colombia continued to view foreign policy within a limited context. Whenever Colombia initiated international actions, they were usually meant to complement more important national goals and were seen as

extensions of domestic policy. After World War II, Colombia's foreign policy emphasized economic relations and support for collective security through the OAS and the UN. Accordingly, Colombia pursued only limited objectives in bilateral international security and global politics, usually preferring multilateral diplomatic approaches. Colombia's approach to security issues has been characterized by a willingness to settle disputes peacefully through recourse to international law and regional and international security organizations.

## Relations with the United States

Although Colombia and the United States had cordial and friendly relations during the nineteenth century, relations were strained during the first two decades of the twentieth century as a result of the involvement of President Theodore Roosevelt's administration in the Panama revolt (see Consolidation of Political Divisions, ch. 1). Despite the diplomatic strain, economic ties with the United States were of great importance to Colombia even in the early twentieth century. The United States was the major market for Colombia's leading export and source of revenue: coffee.

In the early 1920s, Colombian president Marco Fidel Suárez (in office 1918–21) advocated a doctrine called Res Pice Polum (Follow the North Star), which linked Colombia's destiny to that of the "North Star," the United States, through geography, trade, and democracy. Colombia's powerful coffee exporters were particularly fond of the doctrine. Enrique Olaya Herrera, Colombia's first Liberal president of the century (in office 1930–34), reaffirmed the North Star doctrine, but Colombia did not fully embrace it until the nation enthusiastically received United States president Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy (see The Reformist Period, 1930–45, ch. 1).

A United States agreement to provide a military training mission and a 1940 bilateral trade agreement strengthened pre-World War II relations between Bogotá and Washington. Colombia's position as a close ally of the United States became evident during World War II. Although Bogotá's commitment to the Allied cause did not entail the sending of troops, Colombia's strategic position near the Caribbean and the Panama Canal and its pro-United States stance within the region were helpful to the Allied nations. Colombia's relations with the United States were somewhat strained during the late 1940s and throughout most of the 1950s because of the pro-Catholic Conservative government's persecution of the nation's few Protestants, who were also PL members, during the early years of *la violencia* and the dangers posed by the internal disorders to

United States nationals living in Colombia. Nevertheless, Colombia's partnership with the United States prompted it to contribute troops to the UN Peacekeeping Force in the Korean War (1950–53) (see The Development of the Modern Armed Forces, ch. 5). Colombia also provided the only Latin American troops to the UN Emergency Force in the Suez conflict (1956–58).

Colombia became one of the largest recipients of United States assistance in Latin America during the 1960s and early 1970s. Much of the United States aid was designed to enable Colombia to ease its external balance of payments problems while increasing its internal economic development through industrialization, as well as agrarian and social reforms. Nonetheless, Colombia failed to implement significant reforms. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, many Colombian policy makers had become disenchanted with the Alliance for Progress—a program, conceived during the administration of President John F. Kennedy, that called for extensive United States financial assistance to Latin America as well as Latin American support for social change measures, such as agrarian reform—and with United States economic assistance in general. Many felt that Colombia's economic dependence on the United States had only increased. By 1975, however, the United States was purchasing only 28 percent of Colombia's exports, as compared with 40 to 65 percent during the 1960s. In 1985 the United States accounted for 33 percent of Colombian exports and 35 percent of Colombian imports (see Direction of Trade, ch. 3).

Although Colombia voted fairly consistently with the United States in international security forums, such as the UN General Assembly and Security Council, its willingness to follow the lead of the United States within the inter-American system had become less pronounced by the mid-1970s. In 1975 President López Michelsen resumed diplomatic relations with Cuba. He also refused further American economic assistance to Colombia and terminated funding from the United States Agency for International Development, complaining that his nation's unhealthy economic dependency resulted from foreign aid. Other indicators of López Michelsen's independent stance included his refusal to condemn Cuban intervention in the Angolan civil war, his willingness to recognize the new Marxist government in Angola, and his support for Panama in its desire to negotiate a new canal treaty with the United States.

During the first half of his administration, President Turbay continued Colombia's policy of nonalignment. He demonstrated the nation's foreign policy independence in 1979 when his foreign

minister, along with the foreign ministers of other Andean countries, recognized Nicaragua's Sandinista guerrillas as a belligerent force.

The Turbay government retreated from its nonaligned policy course, however, after becoming concerned about the ideological direction of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, Nicaragua's territorial claims to Caribbean islands long held by Colombia, and Cuba's support of the M-19 in early 1981. Turbay reestablished close relations with the United States. A fervent anticommunist, he became the most outspoken Latin American leader affirming the thesis of United States president Ronald Reagan that Cuba and Nicaragua were the principal sources of subversion and domestic unrest in Latin America. Bogotá suspended diplomatic relations with Havana after the government of Fidel Castro Ruz admitted that it had supported M-19 guerrilla activities. The Turbay government condemned the rebel movement in El Salvador, strongly criticized the joint declaration by France and Mexico in 1981 that called for a negotiated settlement of the Salvadoran insurgency, and strongly supported the provisional government in El Salvador headed by José Napoleón Duarte Fuentes in 1981 and 1982. During the 1982 South Atlantic War between Argentina and Britain in the Falkland/Malvinas Islands, the Turbay government, along with the United States, abstained on the key OAS vote to invoke the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty). After the war, Colombia remained one of the few Latin American countries still willing to participate with the United States in joint naval maneuvers in the Caribbean. Colombia also sent troops to the Sinai in 1982 as part of the UN Peacekeeping Force required by the 1979 Treaty of Peace Between Egypt and Israel.

Turbay's good relations with Washington contributed to the resolution of a longstanding territorial problem between the two countries: the status of three small, uninhabited outcroppings of coral banks and cays in the Caribbean. Under the Quita Sueño Treaty, signed on September 8, 1972, the United States renounced all claims to the banks and cays—Banco de Quita Sueño, Cayos de Roncador, Banco de Serrana—without prejudicing the claims of third parties. The United States Senate, however, did not ratify the treaty until 1981. In the meantime, the new Sandinista government—emboldened by the extended delay—revived Nicaragua's longstanding claim in December 1979 over the reefs, as well as the San Andrés and Providencia archipelago, located about 640 kilometers northwest of Colombia's Caribbean coast. To emphasize its claimed sovereignty over the Isla de San Andrés, Colombia began

building up a naval presence on the island, including an arsenal of Exocet missiles.

During his campaign for president in 1982, Betancur gave no indication that he intended to transform Colombia's foreign policy. His only foreign policy statement was a promise, which he made repeatedly, that he would not normalize relations with Cuba. Shortly after assuming the presidency, however, Betancur steered Colombia away from support of the Reagan administration's Latin American policies and toward a nonaligned stance. Betancur reversed Turbay's anti-Argentine position on the South Atlantic War and called for greater solidarity between Latin America and the Third World. In 1983 Colombia, with the sponsorship of Cuba and Panama, joined the Nonaligned Movement, then headed by Castro.

Betancur also urged an end to all foreign intervention in Central America in order to prevent the region from becoming a zone of East-West conflict. At the same time, he was critical of what he viewed as United States attempts to isolate Cuba and Nicaragua from peace efforts in the region, its growing "protectionist" trade policies, its unwillingness to increase its contributions to the International Monetary Fund (IMF—see Glossary) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and its failure to do more to reduce the North American demand for drugs. Confronted with Colombia's financial problems, however, by 1985 Betancur had abandoned his nationalistic rhetoric on the debt and drug issues, adopted strict austerity measures to deal with his government's financial crisis, and cooperated more closely with the United States in the antidrug trafficking campaign. As a result, the United States supported Colombia's debt renegotiations with the IMF and the World Bank (see Glossary).

In his first year of office, Barco adopted a more pragmatic approach to foreign relations, returning Colombia to a lower profile in international politics. Colombia was fourth among the Nonaligned Movement's 100 members in voting with United States positions in international forums. Colombian-United States relations in the late 1980s were regarded as generally excellent, with minor differences confined to Colombia's antidrug trafficking efforts, its support of the August 1987 Central American Peace Agreement initiated by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias Sánchez, negotiations of new coffee and textile agreements, and Bogotá's refusal to condemn Cuba for its human rights violations.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Colombia's standing as the major source of illegal cocaine and marijuana smuggled into the United States plagued relations between these two countries. Although the

bilateral Extradition Treaty Between Colombia and the United States, signed by both countries in 1979, and US$26 million in United States aid helped to produce what Washington considered to be a model antinarcotics program, Betancur initially refused to extradite Colombians as a matter of principle. By mid-term, however, he changed his position after becoming alarmed over the implications for Colombia's political stability of the increasing narcotics-related corruption and drug abuse among Colombian youth and the Medellín Cartel's assassination of Justice Minister Lara Bonilla. In May 1984, following the murder of the strongly antidrug minister, Betancur launched a "war without quarter" against the cartel and began extraditing drug traffickers to the United States. During the November 1984 to June 1987 period, Colombia extradited thirteen nationals—including cartel kingpin Carlos Lehder Rivas—and three foreigners to the United States. (A United States jury convicted Lehder in May 1988 of massive drug trafficking.)

In a major setback for the antidrug effort, however, the Colombian Supreme Court in June 1987 declared unconstitutional a law ratifying the United States-Colombian extradition treaty. United States authorities had more than seventy extradition cases still pending, including requests for the three principal members of the Medellín Cartel still at large (Escobar, Ochoa, and Rodríguez). The annulment of the extradition treaty resulted from a ruling of the Supreme Court in December 1986 invalidating the treaty's enabling legislation (see The Judiciary, this ch.). New enabling legislation signed by President Barco worked only until February 17, 1987, when the eight-member criminal chamber of the Supreme Court refused to rule on an extradition because the treaty was not in force. After the Council of State argued otherwise, the Supreme Court ruled on the matter, voiding the enabling legislation on June 25, 1987. Consequently, the only course left open to the Barco administration was to resubmit the enabling legislation to Congress, which was not eager to act, being caught in the same world of threats and bribes.

The extradition issue came to a head after Ochoa was released from prison on December 30, 1987, prompting the United States to protest. The United States endorsed the Colombian Supreme Court's suggestion that extradition decisions could be made directly by the Colombian government, thereby bypassing the court, under an 1888 treaty between the two countries. Barco's justice minister argued, however, that the old treaty was revoked by the 1979 treaty. In any event, in early May 1988 the Supreme Court rejected the use of existing laws to send more drug traffickers to the United

States for trial. The Council of State thereupon suspended the issuing of warrants for the arrests—for the purpose of extradition—of cartel leaders, beginning with Escobar. Consequently, for future extraditions, the Colombian government will have to seek approval through Congress for a new law to validate the 1979 extradition treaty, or dispense with the treaty altogether in order to use the 1933 multilateral Montevideo Convention as the basis for extradition.

## Relations with Latin America

Traditionally, Colombia's diplomatic and economic interests in the rest of Latin America were limited mainly to its neighboring rival, Venezuela. Colombia did not begin to identify with and pay more attention to other Latin American countries and to the English-speaking Caribbean until the mid-1970s. Although Colombia's internal violence in the 1950s soured its relations with its neighbors, the nation's regional relations became largely congenial and its trade ties prospered with the creation of the National Front in 1957.

As a result of Colombia's commitment to subregional economic integration during the 1960s, it began to perceive economic relations largely in Latin American or Andean terms and no longer simply followed United States leadership in regional and economic security relations. In 1969 Colombia signed the Cartagena Agreement establishing the Andean Group (see Foreign Economic Relations, ch. 3).

Within a few years after the signing of the agreement, however, Colombia encountered difficulties in its relations with the Andean Group nations as a result of domestic politics. By the mid-1970s, Colombian policy makers—concerned that the nation was giving up more than it was receiving in tariff reductions—began to lose enthusiasm for the Andean Group. They continued to favor subregional economic integration, however, and Colombia's economic relations with the rest of Latin America increased considerably after the creation of the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA) and the Andean Group. Like most other Latin American countries, Colombia joined the Latin American Economic System (Sistema Económica Latinoamericana—SELA), which was created in 1975 to promote regional cooperation on trade and other economic matters. On July 3, 1978, Colombia joined seven other Latin American countries in signing the Amazon Pact, a Brazilian initiative designed to coordinate the joint development of the Amazon Basin. Colombia also joined LAFTA's successor, the Latin American Integration Association (Asociación Latinoamericana de

Integración—Aladi), created in 1980 to reduce trade barriers among Andean countries and coordinate economic policies.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Colombia also sought to develop a regional leadership role for itself by increasing its influence in the Caribbean. Colombia first joined the Caribbean Development Bank and then began expanding its trade with Caribbean countries. Nonetheless, Mexico and Venezuela remained Colombia's only significant trading partners in the Caribbean Basin region.

The Betancur administration placed a somewhat higher priority on relations with Central America. Colombia traditionally had very little experience in or contact with nearby Central America, but Colombians' awareness of the region increased considerably during the Betancur administration. In pursuit of Betancur's key foreign policy objective—peace in Central America—Colombia joined with Mexico, Venezuela, and Panama in January 1983 to form the Contadora Group. Betancur had proposed the Contadora initiative for three main reasons: he believed that it was consonant with Colombia's tradition of multilateral diplomacy, that Nicaragua had a right to self-determination, and that the United States should not intervene militarily and unilaterally in Nicaragua.

Betancur took an active role in other regional or inter-American forums. Serving as mediator between Latin debtor nations and creditor countries, he hosted a key meeting of representatives from eleven Latin American countries at Cartagena in June 1984 to discuss ways to obtain softer repayment terms on the region's US$350 billion foreign debt. As president of a country with a relatively small and well-balanced debt, Betancur counseled moderation on debt issues, advising the governments to increase incentives for foreign investment to reduce dependence on foreign credits instead of forming a "debtors' cartel." Betancur remained within the mainstream of Latin American foreign policy in his approach to other issues of general regional concern. In addition to supporting Argentina in the South Atlantic War, he supported Bolivia's aspirations for territorial access to the Pacific Ocean and to Belize's guaranteed territorial integrity.

Betancur came under heavy criticism in Colombia for his higher profile in Western Hemisphere politics, particularly his mediation attempts in Central American political conflicts, at the expense of domestic issues. Betancur became less sympathetic toward Nicaragua as a result of its alleged involvement in supporting the M-19's Palace of Justice takeover in November 1985 and Managua's surprise renewal, in April 1986, of its territorial claim to Isla de San Andrés and Isla de Providencia. Although the islands had been under Colombian rule for generations, Nicaragua claimed

in a press conference that the 1928 Barcenas-Esguerra Treaty recognizing Colombian sovereignty over the island territories was invalid because Nicaragua signed it at a time when United States troops occupied the country.

Barco had campaigned on a platform promising a lower profile for Colombia in the Contadora peace process and greater attention to Colombia's relations with its immediate neighbors. Accordingly, after taking office, Barco reduced Colombia's involvement in Contadora and Nonaligned Movement activities. He continued, however, to develop Colombia's bilateral relations in Latin America.

Although Colombia's relations with Venezuela have been more extensive than with any other state in the region, border disputes and territorial differences often caused those relations to be tense and acrimonious. During the Lleras Restrepo presidency in the late 1960s, Colombia attempted to negotiate contracts with foreign oil companies to do offshore exploratory drilling on the continental shelf of the Golfo de Venezuela, which may contain up to 10 billion barrels of petroleum. Caracas protested that the gulf was an inland waterway whose waters were "traditionally and historically Venezuelan." Both nations tacitly agreed in 1971 to suspend exploratory operations in the area until final agreement was reached. Nevertheless, the issue subsequently heated up again. At Venezuela's urging, talks to establish stricter boundary limits began in 1979. Several shooting incidents in the gulf in the 1981–86 period led both countries to mobilize troops along the border and engage in a minor arms race (see Geopolitical Interests, ch. 5). Despite a series of talks on the issue held between the Colombian and Venezuelan foreign ministers in 1986, little progress was made toward agreement. Barco hoped to submit the dispute to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, but the Venezuelan government of President Jaime Lusinchi opposed outside mediation.

The already tense relations between Colombia and Venezuela flared up again in mid-August 1987, when the Lusinchi government claimed that a Colombian warship had penetrated Venezuelan territorial waters. Both sides immediately increased their military presence in the border area, but Colombia was far outmatched by Venezuela. The Colombian defense ministry's request to Congress in September 1987 to quadruple the military budget to US$2.5 billion appeared to be related in part to the border dispute.

Additional border problems included the approximately 1 million illegal or undocumented Colombians who had entered Venezuela since the 1950s, cross-border guerrilla attacks by Colombian

rebel groups, and drug trafficking. In 1988 Colombian peasant migrants outnumbered Venezuelans by fifteen to one in some border areas. Venezuelans generally had a low regard for the Colombian immigrants, whereas the Colombians resented the free-spending Venezuelans. These Colombians—seeking security, jobs, and higher wages—worked as domestics and in other menial positions shunned by Venezuelans. Although many Colombians remained in Venezuela, others crossed the border illegally to work seasonally, returning home every year with their earnings. This migration contributed to the large volume of illegal and contraband trade that flourished in the border regions.

Barco proposed a broad dialogue with Venezuela in August 1987 to encompass border issues such as contraband and the narcotics trade. In January 1988, Venezuela called for joint action with Colombia to control the growing activities of Colombian drug traffickers and leftist guerrillas along and inside Venezuela's western borders. The Venezuelan proposal was prompted in part by a surge of kidnappings of Venezuelan ranchers by Colombian guerrillas, who held their hostages for ransom on the Colombian side of the border. Venezuela was also concerned about Colombian drug traffickers who had begun developing Venezuela as an important transshipment point for cocaine en route to the United States or Western Europe.

## Relations with World Organizations

Colombia has been an active member of the UN since the organization was founded. It belonged to numerous UN organizations, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Under the National Front governments, Colombia became a major recipient of funds and programs from international bodies, such as the IDB, IMF, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and International Labour Organisation (ILO). Colombia preferred to handle security and global matters through the international forums provided by the UN General Assembly and Security Council. Pursuing a somewhat independent course, Colombia became a respected voice in the General Assembly and other international arenas on matters of international law. It played an active role in the various UN conferences on the law of the sea. In late 1975, it became the first nation to call on the General Assembly for a legal definition of outer space and geostationary orbits, arguing that nations have

"inalienable and untransferable" sovereign rights to the airspace directly above them, including the geostationary orbit.

Betancur also played a role in improving international trade conditions for developing countries through the International Coffee Agreement (which he helped to renegotiate in 1983), UNCTAD, Aladi, and the Inter-American Economic and Social Council (Consejo Interamericano Económico y Social—CIAES). Other international organizations to which Colombia belonged in the late 1980s included the World Bank and the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (Intelsat), the Washington-based communications consortium.

## Relations with Communist Countries

Throughout the post-World War II period, Colombia's international stance was based on consistent support of the United States against the Soviet Union and its allies. Colombia severed relations with the Soviet Union in the wake of the 1948 Bogotazo, amid accusations of Soviet complicity in the rioting. After reestablishing relations with the Soviet Union in 1968, Colombia made various commercial, scientific, and educational agreements with the Soviet Union and its allies. In early 1976, Colombia and the Soviet Union signed the Commercial Cooperation Treaty.

Colombia's relations with the communist nations of Africa and Asia were limited primarily to concern over these nations as economic competitors in the production of such primary commodities as coffee. For example, Colombia's relations with Angola during its civil war in late 1975 and early 1976 were influenced by the importance of coffee to both countries. President López Michelsen refused to condemn Cuba's involvement in the Angolan civil war and in 1976 recognized the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola—MPLA) as that nation's government in order to maintain the good relations that both countries enjoyed as coffee exporters. Bogotá's relations with China remained cordial in 1988, but trade between the two countries was negligible.

Colombia's relations with Cuba have been strained since Castro seized power in 1959. From the early 1960s, when it helped to establish the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN), Cuba supported Colombian guerrilla groups (see Guerrilla and Terrorist Groups, ch. 5). Colombia actively supported OAS sanctions against Cuba in 1962 and the expulsion of Cuba from the OAS in 1964. Bogotá reestablished full diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1975, after the OAS reversed its policy of isolating the Castro government. Bilateral relations again declined,

however, after the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in mid-1979 when Castro renewed Cuba's support for insurgency in Latin America. During Turbay's administration, Colombia actively opposed Cuba by blocking Havana's attempts to secure a UN Security Council seat. In 1981, after Cuba admitted supporting a failed M-19 attempt to launch a rural insurgency, the Turbay administration broke diplomatic relations with Havana. In late 1987, an official Colombian commission recommended that the country renew diplomatic relations with Cuba but "without haste."

## Relations with Other Nations

Bilateral relations with nations outside the Western Hemisphere were almost solely based on trade and other economic dealings. Largely as a result of imports from Colombia by the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), European Economic Community countries accounted for about a quarter of Colombia's primary export markets in 1985. Colombia's relations with West European countries in the late 1980s continued to be mainly pragmatic and trade oriented. Spain, though not a major importer of Colombian goods, continued to maintain cultural and historical ties with Colombia. The influence of France has been second only to that of Spain on Colombia's European-oriented culture. Portugal's relations with Colombia also were important because of the similarity of the goods that Portugal and its former African colonies produced.

Colombia also maintained trade relations with Asian countries, especially Japan, which accounted for 4 percent of Colombia's exports and 10.4 percent of its imports in 1985. In September 1987, Barco met with President Chun Doo Hwan of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and made public a communiqué concerning economic and technological exchange agreements, including a commitment to expand trade in natural resources.

Colombia's relations with Israel were strengthened by a trade accord signed by the two countries in April 1988 in which Israel agreed to purchase 2 million tons of Colombian coal during the 1988-91 period. In exchange, Colombia committed itself to buying fourteen Israeli-made Kfir combat jets costing US$60 million. The United States Department of State unofficially approved the sale of the Kfir (jets powered with American-made engines) in 1987.

## Foreign Policy Decision Making

Under Colombia's Constitution, the president and the rest of the executive branch of government have almost exclusive jurisdictional responsibility for the conduct of foreign relations. The

president—charged with formulating and executing foreign policy—clearly was the single most important player in the late 1980s. Despite the existence of committees on foreign relations in both houses, Congress had little role in making foreign policy.

Colombia's foreign policy has shifted frequently as a result of the president's key role and the fact that the nation's presidents have changed every four years. The president appoints and removes cabinet members, chooses diplomats to represent Colombia, and receives foreign diplomats and other representatives. In his responsibility "to direct diplomatic and commercial relations," the president also concludes treaties and conventions with other states, subject to the approval of Congress. The Senate must approve declarations of war made by the president, who controls and directs the armed forces, but he could wage a war without the consent of the Senate if it were urgent to repel a foreign invasion.

The primary agency charged with conducting foreign relations under the president's direction was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Within the foreign service, two positions were almost as important as that of the minister because of their prestige and value in furthering a political career. One was that of ambassador to the United States, a post considered to be one of the stepping stones to the presidency. Presidents López Michelsen, Turbay, and Barco all served as ambassadors to the United States. The other was that of ambassador to the Holy See. The role of the Roman Catholic Church in the life of the nation meant that this ambassador occupied a position of particular prestige and some importance.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not have exclusive responsibility for carrying out Colombia's foreign policies, however. Beginning in the 1960s, foreign policy also was influenced and developed by the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Finance, a variety of semiautonomous government agencies, and economic interest groups. Of the latter, the most important probably was Fedecafe, which maintained its own representatives in various foreign countries to manage Colombia's coffee exports for the government.

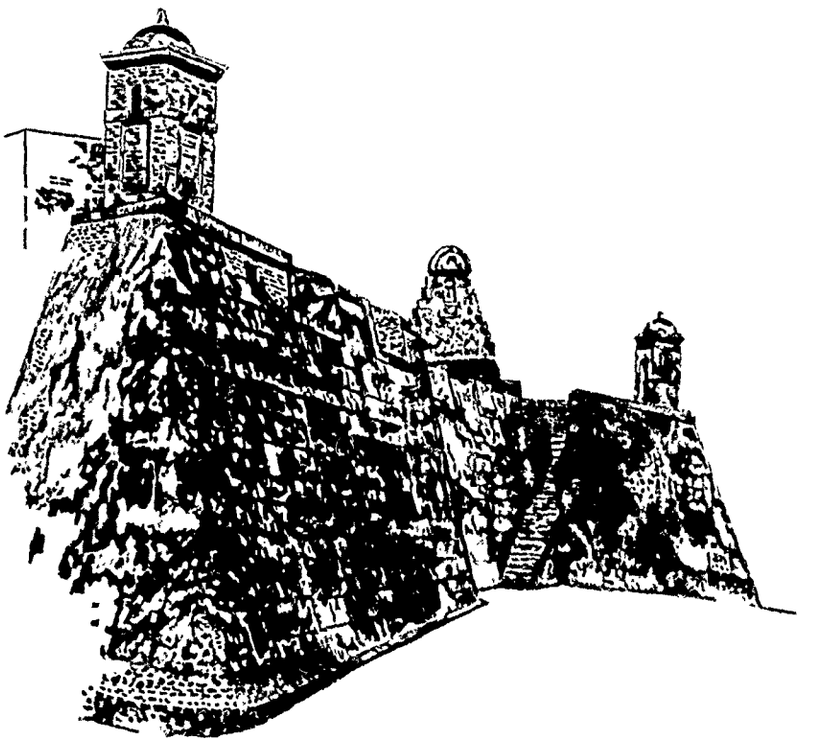
The Colombian military also played a key role in determining the nation's foreign policies in incidents involving border disputes or foreign support of domestic subversive groups. For example, the military pressed the Turbay government into suspending diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1981 after Cuba admitted its involvement in an M-19 guerrilla operation in southern Colombia. In 1983, days before President Betancur was to issue an official invitation to Castro to visit Colombia, General Gustavo Matamoros, the Colombian minister of national defense, declared

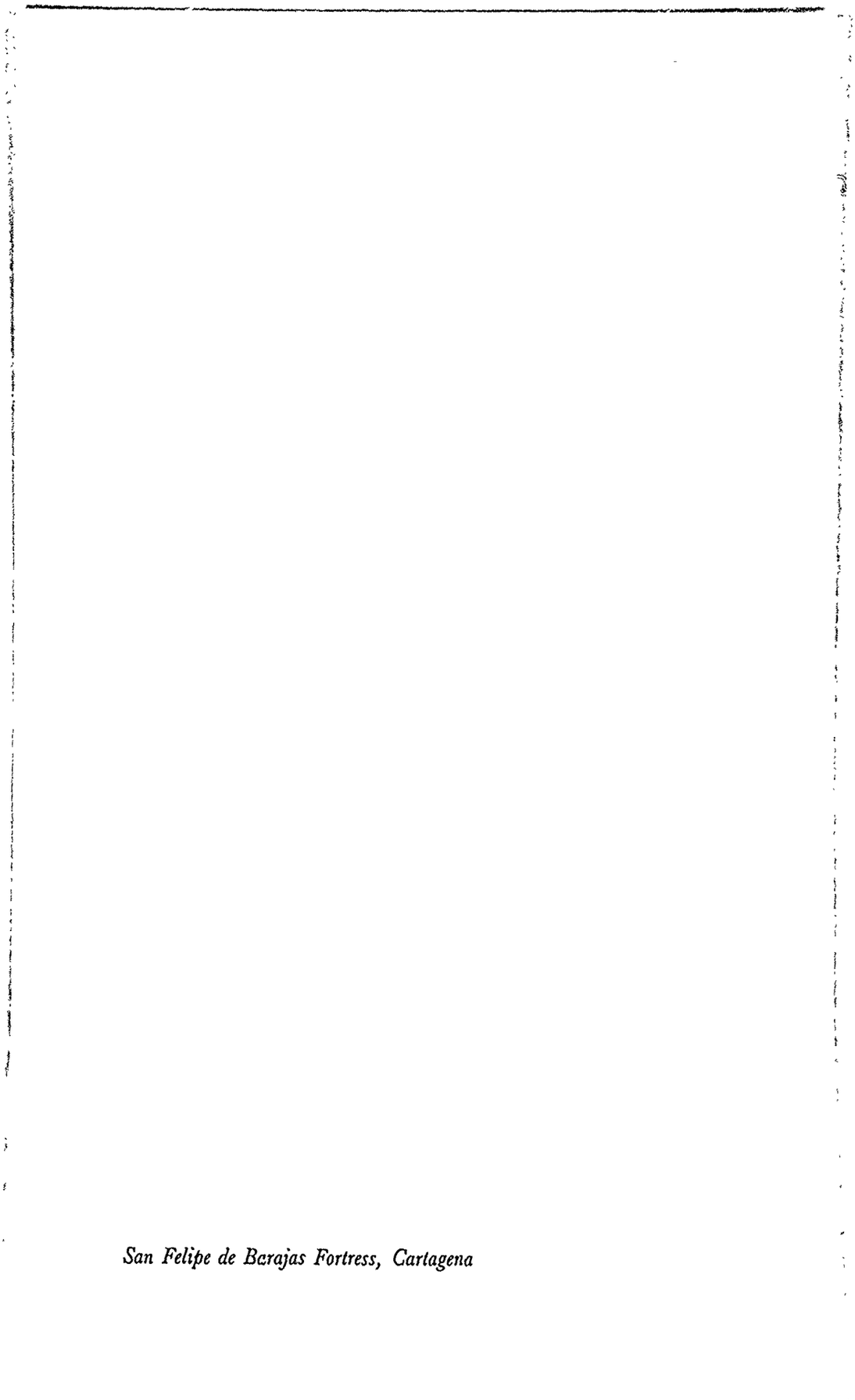
that restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba was a "moral impossibility." Having already defied the military with his peace overtures to, and general amnesty for, the guerrilla groups, Betancur subsequently dropped his plans for rapprochement with Cuba.

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Robert H. Dix's *The Politics of Colombia* offers a comprehensive and useful general overview of the Colombian political system. Although more dated, *Politics of Compromise,* edited by R. Albert Berry, Ronald G. Hellman, and Mauricio Solaún, contains a collection of scholarly essays on historical, institutional, and public policy aspects. Additional treatment on the state of Colombian democracy can be found in John A. Peeler's *Latin American Democracies.* Among the most insightful and scholarly articles on Colombian politics in the 1980s have been those of Bruce Michael Bagley, Jonathan Hartlyn, and Gary Hoskin in the annual South America issue of *Current History.* Useful articles or monographs on Colombian foreign policy include Daniel L. Premo's "Colombia: Cool Friendship"; Bruce Michael Bagley and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian's "Colombian Foreign Policy in the 1980s: The Search for Leverage"; and Mark V. Chernick's "Colombia in Contadora: Foreign Policy in Search of Domestic Peace." (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

# Chapter 5. National Security





*San Felipe de Barajas Fortress, Cartagena*

IN LATE 1988, THE INCIDENCE OF VIOLENCE in Colombia posed a general threat to national security and appeared to challenge the country's thirty-year record of stable civilian-led government. Colombia's tradition of violence dates from the war for independence in the early nineteenth century; but the level of violence was increasing in the late 1980s, for reasons ranging from land disputes to criminal and political actions. The perpetrators of violent incidents included the private armies and gunmen hired by the major narcotics traffickers, guerrilla organizations, and members of right-wing paramilitary groups, or "death squads." Their victims included government officials, students, professionals, unionists, members of opposition political parties, and even petty criminals.

During 1988 Colombian security forces were engaged in a highly publicized but unsuccessful campaign against narcotics traffickers. Enhanced by the military's two decades of experience in counterinsurgency and irregular warfare, the campaign focused on eliminating clandestine processing laboratories, eradicating crops, prohibiting drug shipments, and arresting and prosecuting known narcotics traffickers. In reaction, the traffickers increasingly turned to co-optation and bribery, intimidation, and murder. Prominent individuals whose views and activities were seen as compromising the profitability of the traffickers' illegal operations frequently were subjected to death threats—some of which were carried out. Between 1984 and mid-1988, a minister of justice, an attorney general, and a dozen Supreme Court judges were murdered by assassins allegedly hired by narcotics traffickers.

Colombian security forces in the late 1980s also continued to struggle against the country's major guerrilla groups. Despite stepped-up military efforts, the guerrillas continued to carry out robberies, kidnappings, ambushes of security personnel and facilities, attacks on the economic infrastructure, and murders. During the late 1980s, the Colombian government expressed a willingness to negotiate a political settlement, provided that the insurgents agreed to disarm before talks were held.

Despite the military's official role in the campaigns against the narcotics traffickers and the guerrillas, security forces allegedly were involved in some illegal activities. Some reports maintained that military and police officials helped narcotics traffickers process and transport contraband—most of which was destined for the United

States—and received payoffs for their cooperation. Other reports—one prepared by a Colombian attorney general—linked military and police personnel with the activities of numerous right-wing death squads. These death squads operated throughout the country with apparent impunity, killing suspected subversives as well as common criminals. The hierarchy of the armed forces (under which the police were incorporated) refuted such accounts and defended its members' integrity. The persistence of the reports, however, suggested that serious problems existed not only within the military institution but also in the civilian government's ability to exercise its authority over the armed forces.

## Background and Traditions of the Armed Forces

Unlike the militaries of several Latin American countries, the Colombian military did not significantly affect national developments during the nineteenth century. During the war for independence from Spain that began in 1810—the period from which most Latin American armies, including Colombia's, trace their official traditions—patriots from the territory that is now Colombia played a subordinate role to that of leaders from other parts of the Viceroyalty of New Granada. Many of the Colombian patriots' key military leaders, with the important exception of General Francisco de Paula Santander, were killed during the initial phase of the independence struggle that ended in 1816; their troops, which consisted mainly of poor, uneducated peasants, gradually came under the command of forces led by the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar Palacios. Indeed, in 1819 Bolívar became the first president of Gran Colombia (see The Independence Movement, ch. 1).

### Historical Background

The origins of the modern Colombian armed forces can be traced to the militia organized by the independent government of the United Provinces of New Granada declared in 1811. The force was composed of volunteers, divided among infantry and cavalry units, who were trained by the officers of a senior corps that was referred to as El Fijo (The Permanent). The constitutional charter of 1811 assigned the power to raise and organize the army to the congress, which proved supportive of the military. Spanish military structure and traditions were adopted, weekly drills were made mandatory, and plans were laid for the creation of an academy that would regularize military training.

Following independence, two developments combined to prevent the expansion of the armed forces' influence in Colombia's political affairs. First, an antimilitarist tradition emerged among

the nation's civilian leaders. Second, by the 1850s the organization of two strong political parties effectively limited political participation to those within these parties. Even though government leaders often held the rank of army general, party identification predominated. In response to popular sentiments of the era, government officials rarely displayed any interest in the development of a stronger military. Rather, as a result of the frequent rebellions that had occurred during the nineteenth century, the armed forces were continuously plagued by organizational problems. At one point—in the 1860s—the armed forces were disbanded and replaced by a popular militia.

When sectarian fighting subsided in the 1880s, the government approved the first organic laws governing the military and formally defined the military's constitutional responsibilities of providing for domestic order and external defense. The Constitution of 1886 also called for a first program of universal military conscription, but this provision was not uniformly enforced until the early twentieth century.

The limited progress these measures encouraged in military discipline and morale was dealt a severe setback with the 1899 Liberal Party (Partido Liberal—PL) revolt that marked the beginning of the conflict known as the War of a Thousand Days (see Consolidation of Political Divisions, ch. 1). Nearly a century later, this nearly three-year-long war, in which over 100,000 Colombians died, remained one of the most violent civil conflicts in the nation's history.

## The Development of the Modern Armed Forces

The national exhaustion from the violence of the long civil war helped form the basis for the establishment of a modern, professional military. The administration of Rafael Reyes, who came to office in 1904, included plans for the reorganization of the armed forces among its early initiatives to revitalize the country. The government's stated objective was to provide for national defense, a need that appeared pressing in 1905 when border tensions with neighboring Venezuela escalated. An equally important though less publicized goal was the creation of a nonpartisan professional institution that would be capable of maintaining domestic peace. Reyes's efforts to build a professional institution helped consolidate bipartisan support for the government and contributed to the maintenance of political stability.

### *Professionalization Efforts*

During the military reform of 1907, the centerpiece of Reyes's reorganization, the Military Cadet School (Escuela Militar de

Cadetes) at Bogotá and the Naval Cadet School (Escuela Naval de Grumetes) at Cartagena, were established as the army and navy service academies, respectively. This effort was aided by the arrival of Prussian-trained Chilean military advisers. The Chileans, who were stationed in Colombia from 1907 to 1915, helped to develop the schools' curricula and training programs and introduced what were then considered modern European concepts of military doctrine and technology. Indeed, Chileans commanded both service academies during the first years of their operation. Chileans also helped to found the armed forces staff school, the Superior War College (Escuela Superior de Guerra). Modeled after Prussia's Kriegsakademie, the college offered advanced training for the officer corps and graduated its first class of thirty-seven officers in 1910. Finally, in 1916 the Noncommissioned Officers School (Escuela de Suboficiales) was opened.

Also part of the military modernization program was the attempt to enforce provisions for obligatory military service. The government sought to expand the pool of conscripts beyond the traditional recruitment base of the lower classes and rural areas. President Reyes believed that universal conscription would help build a military that was not subservient to the specific interests of either the PL or the Conservative Party (Partido Conservador—PC). At the same time that increased numbers of conscripts were being introduced into military service, the size of the standing army (in 1904 authorized at the level of 5,000 soldiers) was reduced.

In attempting to generate professional standards, the military reform of 1907 also provided for the regularization of promotions and military pay scales based, in part, on the officers' completion of professional training programs. The military's involvement in civic action projects also began during this period. Troops helped construct new roads and bridges and rebuilt churches, convents, and hospitals that had been damaged during the War of a Thousand Days. The success of the modernization program resulted both from Reyes's political skill and from his selection of such able military leaders as General Tomás Rueda Vargas. Reyes was not without his detractors, however. Congressional leaders and partisan stalwarts, fearing the loss of civilian control, often resisted his professionalization efforts.

Despite Reyes's resignation in 1909, government attention to the development of the armed forces continued. For the first time in national history, the long-held prejudices against the military and military service were being broken down. Decree 623 of 1911 amended the law regulating implementation of the draft. By 1925 an increasing number of the students accepted at the Military Cadet

School came from the country's middle class. In 1919 the Military Aviation School (Escuela Militar de Aviación) was opened. Two years later, the government created the Colombian Air Force (Fuerza Aérea Colombiana—FAC). During the 1920s, a naval air arm also was established, and orders were placed with Britain for the construction of several gunboats.

Toward the end of the 1920s, however, governmental interest in the armed forces again began to wane. In 1928 the government called upon the army to suppress a series of strikes against the United Fruit Company by banana workers (see The Labor Movement, ch. 3). Although the army did restore public order—thereby fulfilling one objective of modernization—its use of extensive and indiscriminate force, which produced over 1,000 casualties, also suggested that it had not yet become wholly professional. In addition, partisan influence in the armed forces continued to be a problem. Following the return of the presidency to the PL in 1930, only one-fifth of the army's officer corps were Liberals. Despite the efforts of the preceding years, the upper ranks of the corps continued to be dominated by PC sympathizers.

### *The Leticia Conflict*

During the early 1930s, the navy still lacked the ability to defend Colombia's coastal waters from external attack, but the preceding decades of domestic warfare had enabled the small force to build a substantial riverine fleet. These vessels proved important in helping Colombia hold its territory during a 1932 war with Peru. The conflict, which centered on control over the Colombian harbor town of Leticia on the Amazon, had its roots in a boundary dispute dating from the colonial era (see fig. 1). In 1829 the first bilateral treaty pertaining to the disputed land drew the boundary according to the old colonial demarcation, based on the principle of *uti possidetis* (possession at end of war). The treaty, however, failed to specify with geographic precision the location of the colonial boundary. A second agreement, proposed in 1930, was considered favorable to Colombian interests but was never acknowledged by Peru.

Four subsequent treaties between Colombia and Peru—signed in 1906, 1909, 1911, and 1922—also dealt with boundary claims and charges of Peruvian penetration into southern Colombia's Putumayo region. The 1906 treaty affirmed both countries' willingness to withdraw from the area while ownership of the disputed territory was settled by arbitration. Colombia revoked the treaty during the following year, however, and troops from both countries moved back into the region. The 1909 treaty attempted to end the continuing fighting among the settlers in the region as well

as between the settlers and the region's Indian population. Although both countries agreed to work toward an arbitrated settlement, the issue was never submitted for arbitration.

In 1911 Peruvian troops attacked the Colombian garrison at the river town of Puerto Córdoba, giving rise to the July treaty in which both countries agreed to limit the number of troops in the area. The 1922 treaty recognized the legitimacy of Colombia's boundary on the Amazon River and provided for free navigation of the river by both countries. Because of continuing objections to the treaty's terms, however, Peru did not ratify the treaty until 1928. Upon Peru's ratification of the pact, it was widely believed that the Putumayo dispute had at last been resolved. Two years later, Colombia took possession of its territory in the region.

On September 1, 1932, over 300 armed Peruvian civilians seized the town of Leticia in a demonstration against the 1922 treaty. In response, the Colombian government announced plans to send a force of 1,500 soldiers to repel the invaders. Upon learning of Colombia's intent, the Peruvian government—which had earlier criticized the invaders' action— moved to support its nationals. The first skirmishes took place in early 1933, as the Colombian river fleet proceeded to the site of the invasion. After months of diplomatic wrangling over the selection of a mutually acceptable forum for the peaceful resolution of the dispute, Colombia and Peru accepted mediation by the League of Nations. A provisional peace agreement, signed in May 1933, provided for the league to assume control of the disputed territory while bilateral negotiations proceeded.

In June 1934, following the signing in May of yet another bilateral treaty, Leticia was returned to Colombia. Under the terms of the May pact, Peruvian concessions included a formal apology for the 1932 invasion and a reaffirmation of Peru's acceptance of the 1922 agreement. The treaty also provided for demilitarization of the area around Leticia, free navigation on the Amazon and Río Putumayo, and a pledge of nonaggression. As a gesture of mutual goodwill in continuing bilateral cooperation, the settlement also provided for future negotiations on trade and tariff issues, riverine transport, population settlements in the region, and the joint policing of the common border. In September 1935, the instruments of ratification were exchanged.

Following the dispute's resolution, national attention was again directed to the strengthening of Colombia's military forces. Despite the role played by the riverine fleet, the invasion of Leticia exposed the military's overall lack of preparedness. During the mid-1930s, the legislature approved higher budget allocations for the armed

forces. Recruitment efforts intensified. By the end of the decade, however, military spending again had declined. Comparable levels of military expenditures as a percentage of the national budget were not again achieved until 1949, when defense allocations represented approximately 17 percent of central government expenditures.

### *The Establishment of United States Military Ties*

The initial contacts between Colombian and United States military personnel in the early twentieth century were less than auspicious for the development of future relations. Although the settlement to the War of a Thousand Days was negotiated aboard a United States Navy ship, relations between the two countries soon soured when President Theodore Roosevelt, spurred by the Colombian Senate's refusal to ratify a treaty for the construction of a transisthmian canal across Colombian territory, took advantage of a rebellion in Colombia's westernmost department to achieve his goal. As Colombian troops headed westward to the department of Panama to put down the revolt, they were halted at the isthmus by the United States Navy gunships sent to intercept them. Within weeks, on November 3, 1903, Panama declared its independence from the Republic of Colombia. Two days later, the new national government was granted recognition by the United States. Colombia's resentment against the United States was only partially assuaged in 1922, when the United States government agreed to pay the Colombian administration the sum of US$25 million for the loss of its territory.

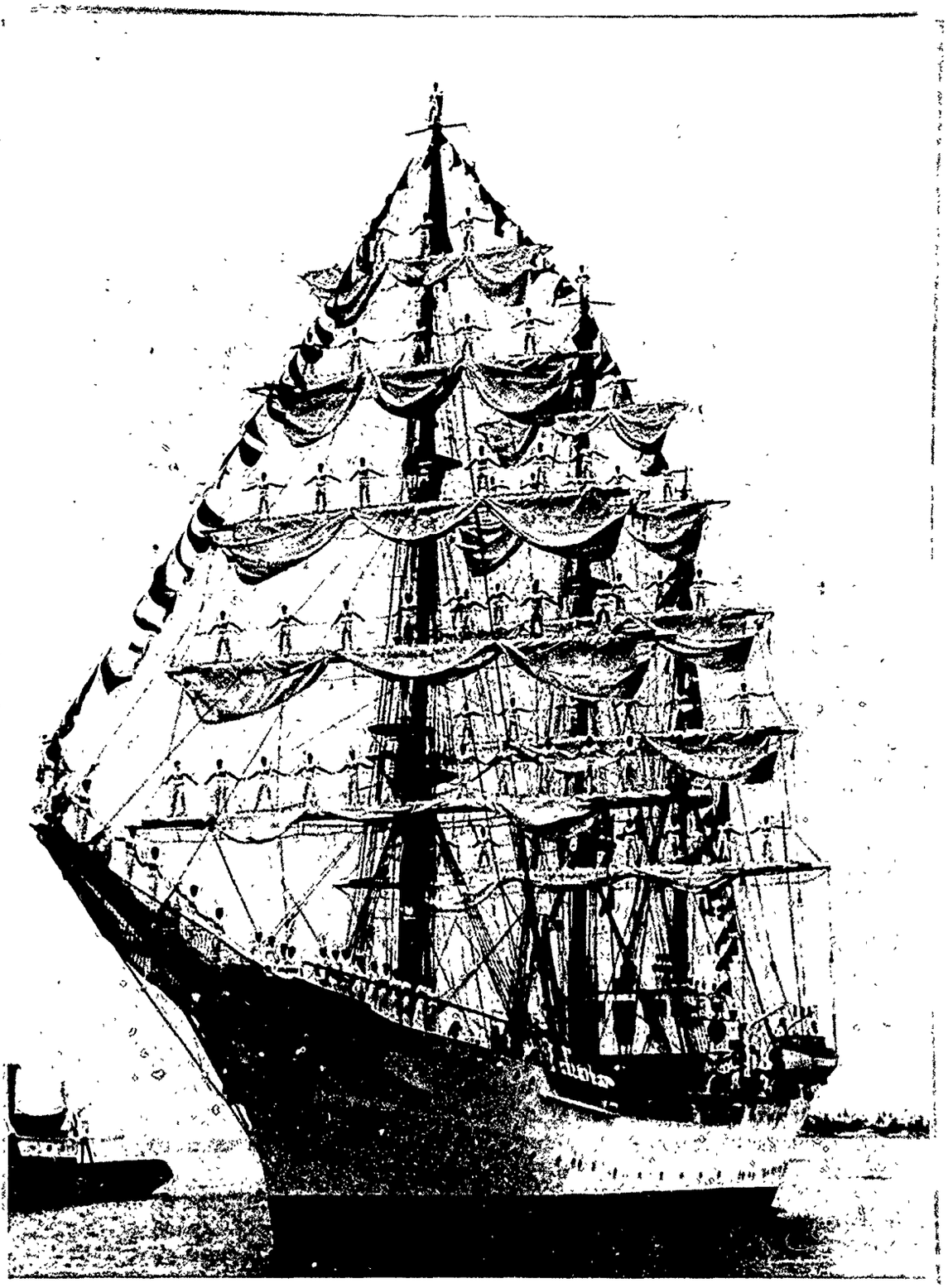
During the 1930s, United States-Colombian military contacts were reestablished under somewhat more favorable, though no less disconcerting, conditions. In 1932, on the eve of the Leticia conflict, the first United States naval officer was sent "on loan" to Colombia to assist with plans for the defense of the country's ports and with arms purchases. When fighting erupted, the United States government—which then had advisers in Colombia and Peru—briefly found itself supporting both sides in the war. The officer sent "on loan" resigned his commission in 1934 but continued privately to serve as an adviser to the Colombian navy. In 1938 the first United States Navy mission was sent to Colombia. Following the German invasion of Poland in 1939, formal contacts between the Colombian and United States armies also were established as plans were formulated for the overall defense of the Panama Canal.

Although Colombia had remained neutral in World War I, the government supported the Allies both prior to and during World War II. In 1940 Colombia allowed the United States to construct and operate air and naval bases on its territory, thereby providing

a strategic position for defending the western approach to the Panama Canal. Colombia also nationalized German holdings in the country, ordered the departure of all German nationals, and authorized the operation of a counterespionage network that was maintained by officials at the United States embassy and the consulates located throughout the country. In late 1943, following the sinking of several Colombian cargo vessels by German submarines operating in the Caribbean, Colombia formally declared war on the Axis Powers.

Although the PC had criticized the nature of Colombian-United States ties during World War II, the relationship between the armed forces of the two nations remained strong after the PC assumed power in 1946. Colombia continued to maintain a military representative on the Inter-American Defense Board, an organization established early in 1942 to provide for hemispheric military cooperation and collective defense. Colombia also was among the first Latin American countries to send personnel for training at the United States Army's School of the Americas, which opened in Panama in 1949. The amount of postwar United States military assistance made available to Colombia—initially under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act and later under the Mutual Security Act—also continued to rise. In 1951 Colombia became one of the first countries in Latin America to sign a Military Assistance Agreement with the United States, which made the country eligible for receipt of grant aid. Between 1950 and 1964, Colombia received the fourth greatest amount of United States military assistance in Latin America, after Brazil, Chile, and Peru.

In 1950 Colombia's cooperation with the United States military changed form after the newly installed administration of Laureano Gómez Castro decided to support the United Nations (UN) sanctioned police action in Korea. After being refitted for combat by the United States Navy, the frigate *Almirante Padilla*—the premier vessel of the Colombian navy—carried out coastal patrol duty for the multinational task force in Korea. Colombia also provided a 1,000-troop army infantry battalion. The battalion was assigned to a United States infantry regiment, and Colombian troops fought alongside United States soldiers. The Colombians remained in combat service until the commencement of the Panmunjom armistice negotiations in July 1953 and returned home in November 1954. Of the 3,089 Colombian soldiers who served in Korea, 131 were killed in combat and 448 were wounded; 69 men were classified as missing in action. Noncombatant casualties included 10 dead and 162 injured.



*A navy training ship*
*Courtesy Colombia Tourist Office*

During the Korean conflict, both domestic and foreign critics accused the Colombian government of being a United States puppet. The Gómez administration found pragmatic as well as political reasons, however, for sending Colombian troops abroad. In addition to earning the favor of the United States, Colombian troops were trained and equipped with United States matériel at no cost to the Colombian regime. The Colombian military kept the equipment upon returning home. The troops also gained valuable combat experience, which they used to help put down the rural fighting, then bordering on guerrilla warfare, that in the early 1950s represented a serious domestic problem.

### *The Legacy of La Violencia*

Through the early 1940s, political violence was again on the rise in Colombia and was especially intense in the region of the country's eastern plains (llanos). Although the PL retained control of the government until 1946, the party and, in particular, its rural supporters had become the targets for increasingly violent attacks by Conservative adherents. Much of the violence was motivated by the perceived threat posed to the minority PC and the vested interests of its members by the Liberals' reformist agenda.

In many respects, the July 1944 attempted coup against the government presaged developments that took place nearly a decade later. Known as the Pasto coup, the military revolt was staged by a group of disgruntled officers stationed in the southern Colombian town of Pasto near the Ecuadorian border. President Alfonso López Pumarejo, who had gone to the area to observe army exercises, was briefly held hostage, as were the several cabinet ministers who had accompanied him. After the military leadership in the capital refused to support the rebels, the leader of the failed coup—Pasto garrison commander Colonel Diógenes Gil—was arrested, and the president and his ministers were freed. Although the military continued to respect its constitutional mandate to support the government, the incident suggested that the long-standing constraints against political involvement by the military were being broken down by the deteriorating national situation. Moreover, as one Colombian scholar noted in 1955, at the time of the coup the army was beginning to be perceived by Colombians as the only national force that could "shield the nation from anarchy and bloodletting."

The period in Colombian history known as *la violencia* (1948–66) marked the return of civil war, which gradually eroded the civilians' ability to govern. Acts of violence perpetrated against Liberals did not end when the PC recaptured the presidency. Instead, the

country became increasingly polarized. The National Police, which were active primarily in the vicinity of the national capital, continued to support the PL. In contrast, police in the countryside became active agents for the Conservative cause and were accused of harassment and intimidation of Liberals as well as of support for if not complicity in the violence. Liberal supporters in the countryside were driven from their homes by Conservative vigilantes who raided their towns and burned their dwellings.

The escalating level of rural violence was followed by the April 1948 assassination of populist PC leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and massive rioting in Bogotá. Some forty years after the event, the Bogotazo, as it came to be known, remained the largest urban riot in the Western Hemisphere. Over 2,000 people were killed (see The Emergence of La Violencia, ch. 1). Army troops were called in to defend the capital after members of the National Police sided with the rioters.

At the height of *la violencia,* some 20,000 armed rebels operated in Colombia. Some of the rebels had organized themselves into guerrilla groups that established their own "independent republics" in the remote jungles of southern Colombia. Although the greatest amount of violence during the civil war took place in rural regions, urban violence also became a concern within a year of Gaitán's murder. At one point in 1949, the fighting extended even to the floor of the legislature, where one Liberal was killed and four others were wounded in a gun battle with Conservative congressmen. In all, *la violencia* claimed over 200,000 lives.

The PC government's policies during the late 1940s did little to encourage the continued development of professional armed forces. The government's earlier concern for maintaining partisan balance in the institution was abandoned. Open displays of favoritism toward Conservative officers in promotions and appointments became common. By the end of the decade, the government was regularly calling upon the army to harass Liberal opponents and thereby added a new dimension to the military's mission. The issue of loyalty within the ranks demanded increasing attention as the military became increasingly partisan. Liberal officers were ousted or, after 1951, assigned to combat duty in Korea.

The 1949 elections, in which the Liberals refused to participate, were held during a state of siege. The new Conservative administration, led by Laureano Gómez, quickly distinguished itself by sanctioning the use of even greater force and brutality against the resistance in the countryside. As a result, the administration increasingly relied upon the military. At the same time, the nature of the violence in the countryside also began to change as partisan

allegiance was supplanted as an issue by loyalty or opposition to Gómez himself. By mid-1952 as much as one-third of national territory was estimated to have been controlled by forces opposed to the government.

Throughout Gómez's tenure in the presidency, the boosts in military spending that he authorized were designed as much to ensure the military institution's continuing loyalty to his government as to support the restoration of public order. During Gómez's administration, the military's share of the budget rose from 16 percent to nearly 25 percent of government expenditures. The president also was careful to maintain military morale. His 1950 offer to send combat troops to Korea was envisioned as a means of building the military's fighting spirit. In April 1951, the first military reorganization in decades was carried out, and the new post of the General Command of the Military Forces (Comandancia General de las Fuerzas Militares) was created, consolidating administrative and command responsibility for the armed forces in one office. Thereafter, only the president and the minister of war had greater authority over the armed forces.

Gómez's efforts to ensure the favor and loyalty of the military were not well received by all members of the armed forces hierarchy. On the contrary, many officers viewed the president's policies as attempts to break the integrity of an institution that was beginning to perceive itself as professional and—in spite of its role in the ongoing violence—politically neutral. The June 13, 1953, coup that brought General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla to the presidency was supported by dissident officers as well as by military leaders who opposed Gómez's personal machinations—which reportedly included an assassination plan against the military leader. The coup marked the military's first intervention against the government in nearly a century.

Although initially reluctant to assume political power, Rojas Pinilla soon warmed to the notion after his coup was greeted with popular acclaim. Voted by Congress to serve out Gómez's term of office, which lasted until mid-1954, Rojas Pinilla declared his administration to be a "government of the armed forces." In an attempt to end the continuing rural violence, one of Rojas Pinilla's first acts as president was to announce a political amnesty for all who would surrender their weapons and abandon armed struggle. Within months, Rojas Pinilla's offer had been accepted by many weary combatants. For the first time in years, the fighting diminished. The interlude was brief, however; during the next two years, antigovernment activities and attacks on military garrisons continued. Especially heavy fighting broke out in early 1955 in the

vicinity of Tolima. The region was declared a zone of military operations, and the civilian population was evacuated as government troops clashed with an estimated 2,000 guerrillas. The nature of the violence again appeared to change when the government declared that it was now battling communist-inspired rebels.

Rojas Pinilla continued to enforce the state of siege throughout his tenure. By early 1954, the Rojas Pinilla government had lost its early momentum toward a return to domestic peace and democratic government. By the end of the year, the renewed fighting in the countryside combined with a growing economic crisis and charges of government corruption to undermine further popular support for the regime. In early 1955, emulating the Argentine ruler Juan Domingo Perón (1946–55), Rojas Pinilla pursued efforts to build an alliance among peasants, urban workers, and the military. The alliance, which he called the National Action Movement (Movimiento de Acción Nacional), was envisioned by Rojas Pinilla as forming the support base for his personal rule. Rojas Pinilla's appointment of the army's chief of staff as the movement's coordinator was opposed by key military leaders, however, and continuing institutional opposition eventually obliged the president to disband his erstwhile political group.

In December 1953, Rojas Pinilla reduced the power vested in the General Command of the Military Forces. Authority over the military budget again rested with the Ministry of War, whereas personnel management decisions were delegated to the General Staff of the Military Forces. The General Command retained responsibility for the military's administrative functions, including the military education system, the administration of military justice, the provision of health-care services, and the maintenance and provision of supplies. The office itself was separated as an organic component of the armed forces and placed under the Ministry of War. In 1956 an autonomous administrative department of military industry was established and assigned a budget separate from that of the armed forces. The new office was responsible for managing the domestic production of arms, munitions, and explosives and for overseeing the operation of the military steel mills.

The military benefited more substantially under Rojas Pinilla than under preceding administrations. Between 1948 and 1956, the size of the armed forces more than doubled, from 14,000 to 32,000 troops. The National Police were brought under the command of the armed forces, and an attempt was made to build a politically neutral force. A compulsory year of military service was again rigorously enforced. The lower ranks of the armed forces, which had been weakened by the guerrilla conflict, also were rebuilt.

The maintenance of good military relations with the United States during Rojas Pinilla's tenure facilitated the acquisition of new equipment, much of which consisted of then relatively new World War II matériel. The air force established two new training schools—the Ernesto Samper Military Aviation School at Cali and the Germán Olano School of Technical Classes at Madrid, in Cundinamarca Department. A luxurious officers' club, the Club Militar, was opened, and generous fringe benefits were made available that extended beyond the military's access to goods at the well-stocked commissary. Long-overdue raises were also authorized.

Despite the attention lavished on the military, some of its leaders turned against Rojas Pinilla's increasingly dictatorial rule. Although the institution's top leaders continued to vow their allegiance to the government, they became increasingly concerned that opposition charges of graft and corruption were further tarnishing the military's historically maligned image.

In May 1957, the military removed Rojas Pinilla from office in a bloodless coup. In a face-saving gesture, Rojas Pinilla was allowed to select his successors. A five-man military junta—headed by Rojas Pinilla's former minister of war, General Gabriel París, and including the commanders of the army, navy, National Police, and Secret Police—promised a return to civilian rule. The traditional political parties, which had set aside their political differences some ten months earlier in agreeing to form the National Front to restore civilian government and constitutional guarantees, fully supported the officers' actions (see The Rojas Pinilla Dictatorship, ch. 1).

According to plans announced by the junta shortly after the coup, the transitional government turned over power to an elected civilian president in August 1958. Nevertheless, Rojas Pinilla, who had gone into exile, continued to command significant support within some sectors of the armed forces, causing substantial tensions as the transition proceeded.

### *Civic Action, Counterinsurgency, and Internal Security*

The military became extensively involved in civic action and counterinsurgency programs during the 1960s and 1970s. During the early 1960s, when government concerns were directed at preventing the establishment of a Cuban-style revolution, the guerrillas remaining from the years of *la violencia* were cast as subversives or bandits. This portrayal of the government's opponents as foreign-directed or criminal elements was not wholly without substance and helped to legitimize the military's continuing role in the maintenance of internal security. It also strengthened ties

between the armed forces and the civilian population and, by extension, elevated the military's prestige.

In an effort to enhance the success of the military's internal security mission, the civilian leadership reorganized the military command and authorized measures to improve technical capacity and training. The General Command of the Military Forces was reorganized once again—this time as a planning agency under the Ministry of War—and was assigned to help rebuild the nation following the devastation wrought by *la violencia.* The General Staff, in turn, reported to the General Command and coordinated military, public, and private resources in helping the military maintain order and contribute to national development. The United States Military Assistance Program (MAP) also facilitated the development of the Colombian armed forces.

This strengthening of ties between the Colombian and United States militaries led to the adoption of new military strategies and tactics. Articles on unconventional warfare began to appear in the professional military journals. New emphasis was placed on assigning light, self-sufficient infantry units to combat brigades in regions with reported guerrilla activity. The navy and air force also became more involved in internal security and in developing capabilities to transport troops rapidly for combat in remote areas.

By 1964 as much as 70 percent of the country's military personnel was reported to have been deployed in various missions related to internal security. The military's first comprehensive counterinsurgency operation—the Lazo Plan—successfully employed psychological operations in winning peasant support away from the insurgents. Army troops were deployed throughout the rural areas in an attempt to eliminate the small independent guerrilla-led republics that had been established during the years of *la violencia.* At the same time, to win the peasants' confidence and break the guerrillas' hold on their allegiance, army personnel participated in building roads, bridges, and public housing as well as in such projects as literacy instruction and health care. After 1963 gradually increasing domestic budget allocations—complemented by United States financial aid, training, and equipment—enabled the Colombian armed forces to grow to approximately 60,000 troops by 1969.

Strong leadership was the key to building a strong professional institution during the 1960s. General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, who served first as commander general of the military forces and later as minister of war, and then-Lieutenant Colonel Alvaro Valencia Tovar, who helped implement the army's new strategies against the guerrillas in Colombia's eastern plains, were instrumental in the military's development in the early 1960s. Both supported the

controversial notion that the domestic insurgency could not be permanently eliminated without the implementation of substantial socioeconomic reforms in rural Colombia. In 1962 Ruiz Novoa directed the army to participate in the country's first national civic action plan.

Nevertheless, despite Ruiz Novoa's able leadership of the military, he became a target of attack by the country's civilian political leadership. Ruiz Novoa criticized the government's failure to address the pervasive socioeconomic problems—a subject outside the military's traditional domain—and his reported political ambitions led to his dismissal in January 1965. Ruiz Novoa's successor as minister of war, General Gabriel Rebeiz Pizarro, shifted the military away from the civic action component of the Lazo Plan. In its place, Rebeiz implemented the National Defense Law, which called for an intensified campaign to eradicate the pockets of guerrilla resistance.

The majority of the military's campaigns during the latter half of the 1960s were directed against the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN), which was active in the eastern plains, and against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC), which operated in the southern regions of the country. Despite greater official emphasis on armed action, some of the campaigns targeting these guerrilla groups continued to have a strong civic-action element. By the end of the decade, the military's role in civic action had become marginal; however, the combat experience it had gained from the antiguerrilla operations led it to be counted as one of Latin America's premier counterinsurgency forces.

The 1970s ushered in a different form of internal security threat as official concern focused on the growing disorder in urban areas. The military, often working in conjunction with the National Police, now assumed responsibility for breaking up illegal strikes and student demonstrations. On several occasions, members of the army or police were ordered onto university campuses—including that of the National University of Colombia in Bogotá—either to close the schools or to arrest student leaders. By mid-decade, assassinations, kidnappings, bombings, and other acts associated with urban terrorism began to pose a more serious threat to domestic order. Frequently, the newly formed urban groups declared that their actions were carried out in support of their comrades in arms in the countryside. In September 1975, the army's inspector general, who had been active in rural antiguerrilla campaigns in the 1960s, was assassinated. Prominent individuals kidnapped in 1975 and

1976 included the consul of the Netherlands, a United States-born Sears executive, and a Colombian labor leader. The Dutch consul and the United States executive both were released upon payment of ransom, but the union official was murdered.

Although the advent of urban terrorism did not lead to a cessation of the fighting in the country's rural areas, the military's continuing campaign did cause a decline in rural guerrilla activity that lasted through the end of the 1970s. The decline was primarily attributed to the military's increased reliance upon force and firepower. The limited availability of foreign weaponry and training for the guerrillas—particularly after Cuba abandoned its policy of open and active support for revolutionary movements throughout the hemisphere—led to a decision on the part of some groups to retrench, or, as in the case of the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación—EPL), to shift their operations to urban areas. The Civil Defense groups, a locally based intelligence and support network developed by the armed forces after 1965, also helped maintain the military's presence in the countryside.

## Foreign Military Influence

The first major foreign influence on the development of the modern Colombian military came with the arrival of the first of three Chilean training missions in the early 1900s. Chilean officers were instrumental in the early efforts to build a professional and modern military institution in Colombia.

During the early twentieth century, European countries also contributed to the development of the Colombian armed forces. In the early 1920s, a French mission provided advice and technical training that led to the creation of the Colombian Air Force. A Swiss training mission, contracted by the Colombian government in 1924, remained in the country until 1933. A mission from Germany, present from 1929 until 1934, assisted in the development of the navy. A British naval mission also participated in the Colombian training program between 1936 and 1938 and had a lasting influence not only on the Colombian navy's official traditions but also on its insignia. Following the departure of the British, the first United States Navy mission was established.

By the end of World War II, the United States had established itself as the principal foreign influence on the Colombian armed forces. The strong United States influence continued in the 1960s, when attention turned from the issue of hemispheric defense to concern for the maintenance of internal security in the face of a communist menace. During the next two decades, thousands of Colombian soldiers received training at United States military

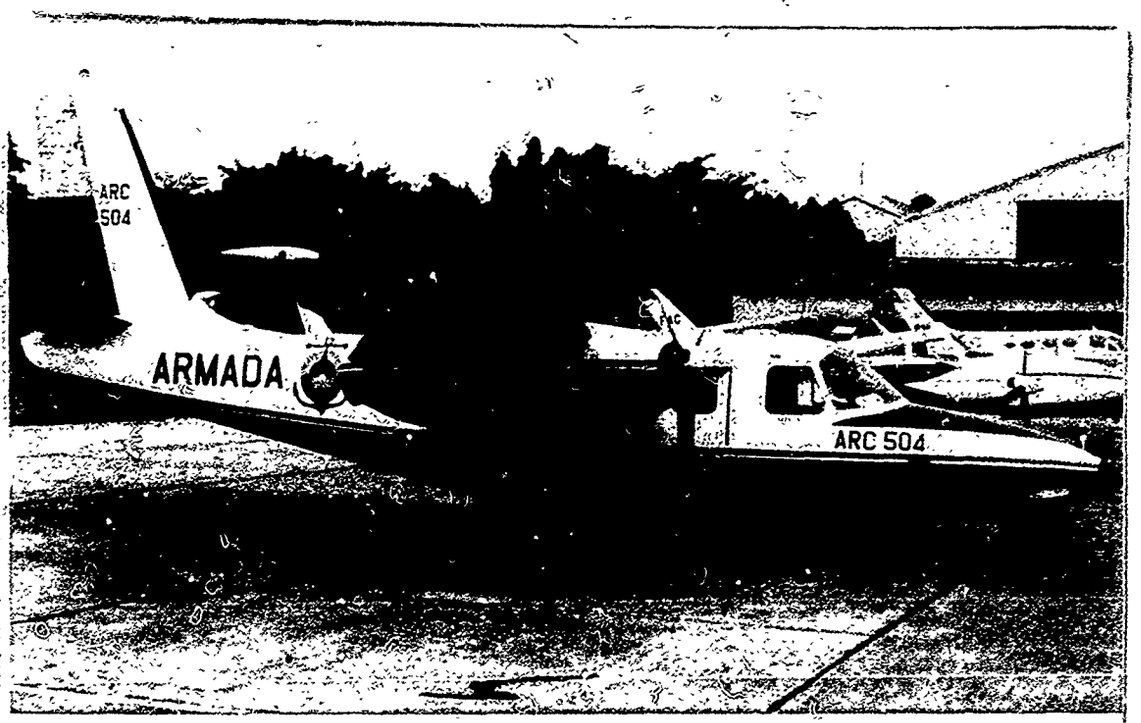
schools, participating in courses that ranged from counterinsurgency tactics to such topics as international law and security or resource management issues. Throughout the 1980s, Colombia participated in annual joint maneuvers with the United States Navy and United States Air Force along the coast of South America.

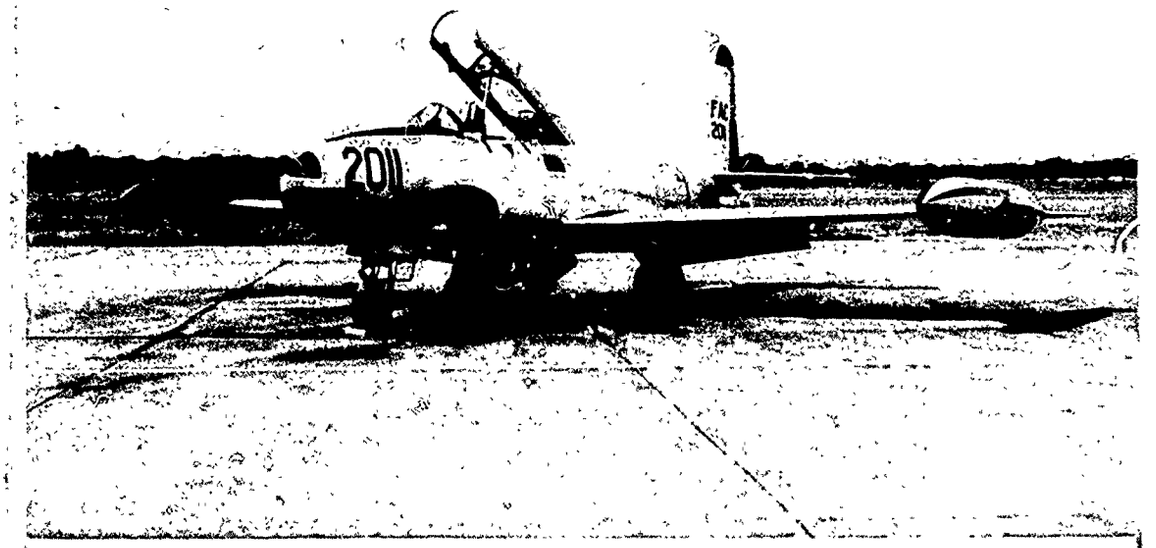
United States military doctrine and tactics remained the dominant foreign influence in the 1980s. At the same time, however, the armed forces' early exposure to Prussian-style professionalism and to the influence of other nations also was evident. By the late 1980s, the Colombian armed forces had in its equipment inventory a substantial amount of matériel from several European countries—among them France and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)—as well as from Argentina and Brazil. The United States continued to supply by far the greatest amounts of equipment, however, much of it on preferential terms. Bilateral military relations remained excellent in the late 1980s as new efforts were begun to improve the Colombian armed forces' capabilities in the area of narcotics control and interdiction.

## Geopolitical Interests

Although by the 1980s Colombia had not developed a distinctive geopolitical doctrine, such concerns did exercise some influence in the formation of the country's foreign and military policies. Colombia shares land borders with five countries—Panama, Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador. The country also has lengthy coastlines on the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. United States military planners also have considered Colombia to be important because of the latter's proximity to the Panama Canal, a classic geopolitical choke point.

In the late 1980s, Colombia's two dominant geopolitical concerns centered on its claims to sovereignty over the San Andrés and Providencia archipelago, islands lying off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, and over maritime territory lying off the Guajira Peninsula and in the Golfo de Venezuela (see Relations with Latin America, ch. 4). Both of these disputes were caused by vaguely defined territorial limits dating from the colonial epoch. In 1988 the Nicaraguan government maintained its claim to the islands but accepted Colombia's de facto occupation of the island chain. Colombia's conflicting claim with neighboring Venezuela, in contrast, had on several occasions brought the countries to the brink of war. The possibility that the Colombian maritime claims included seabed oil deposits helped maintain the dispute. These two areas of conflicting territorial claims continued to reflect the national will to maintain control over, if not expand, Colombia's national territory.




*Top: AT-33 at Military Air Base, Apiay*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*
*Bottom: Navy Aero Commander, Cali*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*

### *Isla de San Andrés and Isla de Providencia*

Colombian concerns pertaining to sovereignty over the San Andrés and Providencia archipelago were renewed after the 1979 victory of the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, when that country's new leaders revived the Nicaraguan claim to the territory. The Sandinistas asserted that the 1928 Barcenas-Esquerra Treaty between Colombia and Nicaragua was invalid because it had been signed under pressure from the United States. After Nicaragua renewed its claim, the Colombian government dispatched a naval task force, a squadron of Mirage fighters, and some 500 marines to San Andrés, the capital of San Andrés and Providencia Intendancy. A new military base was constructed to serve as Colombia's naval headquarters for the Caribbean. During 1980 and 1981, the presence of Nicaraguan fishing boats in waters near the islands provoked numerous minor clashes, yet Nicaragua maintained that it sought a peaceful resolution to the dispute and did not wish a military confrontation over the islands. At that time, the Colombian government also signaled its willingness to defend its claim over the islands, including use of military force if necessary.

Upon the inauguration of the administration of Belisario Betancur Cuartas in 1982, diplomatic relations between Colombia and Nicaragua improved. As a result, the Nicaraguan government placed less emphasis on its public campaign to reclaim the territory.

Nonetheless, the strategic location of the islands near the Caribbean side of the Panama Canal concerned United States policy planners. Although the Colombian government made clear that it would not permit the establishment of foreign military bases on the islands, it was also clear that the United States government did not wish to see the islands fall under the control of a government that it considered to be hostile to United States interests. Moreover, the Colombian government's position left open the possibility that the United States might be granted access and landing rights to the archipelago, a possibility that was especially appealing to United States strategic planners as the 1999 transfer of sovereignty over the Panama Canal approached.

### *The Golfo de Venezuela and Islas Los Monjes*

The territorial dispute with neighboring Venezuela—Colombia's traditional rival—appeared to pose a greater possibility for armed conflict than the claims to the island chain off the Nicaraguan coast. During the late 1980s, this dispute with Venezuela was exacerbated by problems over other issues related to the countries' shared border. As a result, the prospects for cooperation in resolving the

territorial claims were conditioned by the element of national prestige that was introduced into nearly all bilateral contacts. Other issues that heightened nationalistic concerns included armed clashes following incursions of Colombian-based drug traffickers and guerrillas into Venezuelan territory, as well as reports of civilian casualties caused by Venezuelan troops that entered Colombian territory in hot pursuit. In addition, an almost continuous influx of undocumented Colombian migrants into Venezuela in search of work had begun during the 1970s and continued into the late 1980s. This influx of migrant workers also contributed to heightened tensions between the two countries.

The territorial dispute centered on control over the entrance to the Golfo de Venezuela. The key to establishing this control was ownership of the Islas Los Monjes, a chain of three tiny islands lying at the gulf's northern mouth. At stake in the dispute was the control over a substantial amount of maritime territory in the Caribbean that extended into the gulf, an area popularly referred to by Colombians as the Golfo de Coquibacoa. By gaining recognition of its claim to the islands, which were said to be all but submerged at high tide, Colombia could expand national territory into the Caribbean by declaring the extension of its 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone around the islands. It would also be able to claim a portion of the waters of the gulf—located next to Venezuela's oil-rich Lago de Maracaibo—which, according to estimates of possible reserves, might contain as much as 10 billion barrels of oil.

Under an 1842 boundary agreement known as the Pombo-Romero Treaty, Venezuela had ceded its claim to the Guajira Peninsula. Conflicting boundary claims between the two nations remained, however, and the issue became more complex. In 1891 King Alfonso XII of Spain, who had been asked to arbitrate, awarded some portions of the disputed territory to Colombia and others to Venezuela. The Spanish arbitration did not, however, delineate the actual boundaries along the entirety of the shared frontier. The 1941 Treaty on Border Demarcation and Navigation of Common Rivers (also known as the Santos-López Contreras Treaty) presumably settled the dispute by delineating with geographic precision the boundaries along the length of the land border. As a result, most of the Guajira Peninsula remained under Colombian control, but uncertainty continued regarding the extension of the maritime boundary into the gulf.

Following the reestablishment of relative domestic peace in Colombia during the 1960s, the dispute over the islands again became a national issue. Several unsuccessful rounds of negotiations

were conducted during the 1970s and 1980s. In August 1987, Colombian warships (including the missile frigate *Caldas*) entered disputed waters at the mouth of the gulf, Colombian Mirage fighters reportedly conducted overflights of the area, and Venezuelan F-16 fighters were moved to a nearby air base. Open hostilities appeared imminent. Even after the withdrawal of the Colombian vessels by order of President Virgilio Barco Vargas, the armed forces of both nations remained on alert in the border area. The Venezuelan government maintained that the vessels' presence in the gulf for three full days represented an act of "intentional provocation" and sent a "strongly worded" formal protest to the Colombian president.

## The Political Role of the Armed Forces

During the 1980s, analysts generally viewed the Colombian military as one of the least politically involved armed forces of Latin America. Between 1900 and 1988, the military leadership participated in only a single successful coup d'état against a civilian government, the coup that brought Rojas Pinilla to the presidency in 1953. Since 1953 Colombia and Venezuela have been the only two Latin American countries that have maintained civilian-led governments.

Even before the 1953 coup, however, the leaders of Colombia's armed forces had shown a reluctance to support political intervention. The only other successful military intervention against an elected civilian government was an 1854 coup carried out by General José María Melo. One other coup attempt, the abortive Pasto coup of 1944, failed because the middle-ranking officers who led it lacked the support of the institution's hierarchy (see The Development of the Modern Armed Forces, this ch.). Though rumors of planned coups and military revolts often surfaced in the Colombian media during the 1970s and 1980s, there was little indication that such plans had widespread support within the armed forces. Most observers concluded that the professionalization efforts pursued during the early twentieth century had successfully ingrained in the armed forces the norms of respect for constitutional procedures and obedience to civil authorities.

Despite a record of minimal overt involvement in politics, Colombia's armed forces often have supported the civilian political leadership through the maintenance of public order and internal security. Military support for the ruling civilian political elite—with whom the officer corps often has agreed on political issues—was considered crucial for Colombia's continuing stability. Such military support for the political status quo first became evident during the

early 1960s, when, in supporting the first of the four bipartisan National Front governments, the military expanded its role in civic action and counterinsurgency and began to define those who opposed the National Front as enemies of the state.

Broad military support for the civilian leadership survived the dismissals of several popular officers who had made public statements that challenged the traditional limits of the armed forces' acceptable political involvement. These dismissals included the retirement of Minister of War Ruiz Novoa in 1963, Army Commander General Guillermo Pinzón Caicedo in 1969, and Army Commander General Alvaro Valencia Tovar in 1975. In January 1984, Minister of National Defense General Fernando Landazábal Reyes was retired for criticizing the Betancur administration's efforts to achieve truces with the country's guerrilla groups and for criticizing Colombia's foreign policy toward the revolutionary government of Nicaragua. The Betancur administration's policies did cause tension in civil-military relations, however. In November 1988, President Barco accepted the resignation of Minister of National Defense General Rafael Samudio Molina after the president publicly repudiated the general's call for an all-out war against leftist guerrillas.

One area of continuing friction related to the military's political role was the question of military autonomy. Many of the administrative reforms that affected the armed forces during the 1960s were poorly received by the officer corps. The officers believed the new measures undermined the military's ability to act independently in carrying out its constitutionally assigned missions. During the 1970s, however, some regions of the country occupied by guerrillas were placed under the control of military authorities. These militarized areas generally were rural and sparsely populated; nevertheless, the appointment of military officers as mayors or governors recalled the government's response to the rising violence of the early 1940s. The almost continuous state of siege during the four decades following *la violencia* also led the civilian government to expand the military's legitimate national role by assigning the armed forces jurisdiction over crimes against national security.

During the 1980s, the military's influence in government decision making was limited to internal security and certain foreign policy issues, such as the offshore boundary dispute with Venezuela. Its political orientation was strongly anticommunist, an attitude attributable to the influence of the United States armed forces as well as to the military's role in the struggle against Marxist-inspired domestic insurgents (which dated from the early 1960s). At the same

time, the military's input into government policy making on these issues remained subject to the approval of the civilian leadership. As a result, though the military considered itself a supporter of the Constitution, the relative ideological compatibility of the military and civilian leadership influenced the military's support for the government. Given this compatibility, respect for the president's constitutional authority remained sufficient to permit the chief executive to pursue his policy goals.

Following the 1986 inauguration of the Barco administration and an upsurge in political violence, military autonomy was somewhat expanded to buttress internal security. During the late 1980s, some analysts speculated that increasing political violence and repeated challenges to public order posed by the narcotics traffickers and guerrillas might prompt the armed forces to assume a more overt political role. At the same time, some international human rights organizations charged that military personnel were participating in right-wing death squads and were actively involved in torture and disappearances of leftist political opponents. The Ministry of National Defense strongly rejected these charges.

## Constitutional Provisions and Treaty Obligations

According to the Constitution of 1886, the president of the Republic of Colombia serves as the commander in chief of the country's armed forces. In addition to this obligation to maintain public order, the president is empowered to provide for the country's external security. The president has the right to declare war, with the consent of the Senate, or, if deemed necessary to repel a foreign invasion, without such consent. The president also has constitutional authority to conclude and ratify peace treaties and is responsible for reporting to Congress on the conclusion of such pacts. Military promotions for general and flag officers as well as military appointments are conferred by the president of the republic, subject to the confirmation of the Senate.

According to Article 121, in case of foreign war or domestic strife, the president, with the approval of the cabinet, is authorized to declare a state of siege in all or part of the republic, thereby placing it under martial law. Article 122 empowers the president, also upon approval of the cabinet, to declare a state of emergency in response to events that pose an imminent threat to the social and economic order (see The Executive, ch. 4).

### Constitutional Authority and the Legal Basis of the Armed Forces

The specific responsibilities of the armed forces and National Police are detailed in a series of articles in the Constitution. This

series of articles is entitled "The Public Force." Under Article 165, all Colombians are required to perform military service and have an obligation to bear arms to defend the nation. The length of service and terms of exemption from service are to be determined by law. As amended by presidential decree in 1968, Article 166 provides for the organization of a standing army to guarantee national defense. It also specifies that details relating to the army—including the number of troops, the regulation of promotions, and the definition of the rights and duties of military personnel—are matters to be decided according to legislation. The organization of a national militia and National Police, also to be established according to specific laws, is authorized under Article 167.

Article 168 establishes the basis for a nonpartisan, apolitical military. The article restricts the military's right of assembly, "except by order of legitimate authority," as well as its right to petition the government, except on "matters that relate to the good service and morale of the army, and in accordance with its laws." In addition, the article stipulates that military and police personnel are ineligible to vote while on active duty and are not permitted to be candidates for elective office.

Articles 169 and 170, in turn, represent the restoration of several privileges to which members of the armed forces had been entitled during the colonial era. As specified in Article 169, military personnel may not be deprived arbitrarily of ranks, honors, or pensions; such action may only be carried out in specific cases and in the manner determined by law. Article 170 makes active-duty military personnel immune from civil legal prosecution, providing them the right to trial by their peers under courts martial or military tribunals for crimes specified under the Military Penal Justice Code.

## Treaty Obligations

Colombia supported the two principal collective security agreements that have affected the interests of the Western Hemisphere nations since 1945. In March 1945, Colombia signed the wartime Act of Chapultepec. In the event of an attack upon an American state, this act provided for consultation among the member nations of the hemisphere in order to formulate a collective response. Following the end of World War II (and the resulting termination of the Chapultepec agreement), Colombia signed the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty). The Rio Treaty provided for collective defense in the event of an armed attack by an extra-hemispheric power.

The Rio Treaty bound Colombia to certain provisions for the peaceful settlement of disputes among signatory nations. In 1948 Colombia was a founding member of the Organization of American States (OAS), the regional organization responsible for determining when the Rio Treaty's collective security provisions should be implemented. As a member of both the OAS and the UN, Colombia was obligated first to seek redress for defense-related grievances at the regional forum before presenting them to the UN.

In 1972 Colombia signed the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America (Tlatelolco Treaty), which prohibits the introduction of nuclear weapons into the region. Colombian administrations, however, refused to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which was opened for signature in 1970. Nevertheless, though it refrained from endorsing the treaty, the Colombian government apparently accepted some of the treaty's provisions for safeguards and inspections that were carried out by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In 1974 Colombia joined with seven other Latin American countries in issuing the Declaration of Ayacucho, an agreement to promote peace in the hemisphere by limiting armaments. By 1975 the declaration's signers had reached a consensus on prohibiting a range of weapons and equipment, including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons; ballistic missiles; aircraft carriers; cruisers; and nuclear submarines. Colombia also remained adamant in opposing the introduction of strategic missiles into the region—a move favored by neighboring Venezuela—as well as all models of bomber aircraft. In September 1980, Colombia joined with three of the declaration's original signers plus Costa Rica in agreeing upon the Charter of Conduct, which reaffirmed support for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and for the principles of the 1974 declaration.

## The Organization of the Armed Forces

### The Command Structure

According to the Constitution, the president of the republic serves as commander in chief of the country's military and police forces. The president appoints the armed forces' highest ranking officer (by tradition an army general) to serve as head of the Ministry of National Defense. During the 1980s, the minister of national defense held both administrative and operational authority over the three armed services and the National Police. As authorized by the minister of national defense, military operations were executed under the mandate of the General Command of the Military Forces.

In 1988 General Oscar Botero Restrepo served as commander general of the military forces (see fig. 10).

Reflecting the armed forces' professed tradition of political neutrality, the head of the Ministry of National Defense, unlike other cabinet ministers, did not represent a political party. In 1986 President Barco appointed General Samudio as minister of national defense. The selection of Samudio, who previously had served as the commander general of the military forces and, before that, as commander of the National Army, provoked a minor crisis within the armed forces. Several higher-ranking officers were passed over for the post, and most were consequently obliged to retire from active duty. All but one of these officers, General Manuel Jaime Guerrero Paz, were retired. In November 1988, Guerrero Paz, the commander general of the military forces, replaced Samudio as minister of national defense.

The executive branch created the National Security Council, also known as the Superior Council of National Defense, in the early 1980s to oversee defense policies. The council tended to further institutionalize access for the military by including the commander general of the military forces in national security decision making to some degree. Although it had a nondeliberative role in policy making, the council gave the armed forces an important voice in areas of specific concern to them, such as the military budget, or matters of internal security or foreign policy, such as the border conflict with Venezuela and relations with Cuba.

## Operational Command, Deployment, and Equipment

In the late 1980s, the Colombian armed forces comprised three armed services: the National Army (Ejército Nacional), the National Navy (Armada Nacional), and the Colombian Air Force. In 1988 these military forces were made up of some 86,300 personnel, an increase of 16,100 since 1987. The General Command of the Military Forces exercised control over the three armed services. The General Directorate of the National Police (Dirección General de la Policía Nacional), although also headed by a senior military officer, was under the direct command of the Ministry of National Defense as it had been since the 1950s (see The National Police and Law Enforcement Authorities, this ch.). The building housing the Ministry of National Defense in Bogotá—called the National Administrative Center—served as the headquarters for the nation's military forces. Each of the three service commanders maintained headquarters in that building. Paralleling the United States military organization, the armed forces headquarters staff was divided into five departments: D-1 (personnel), D-2

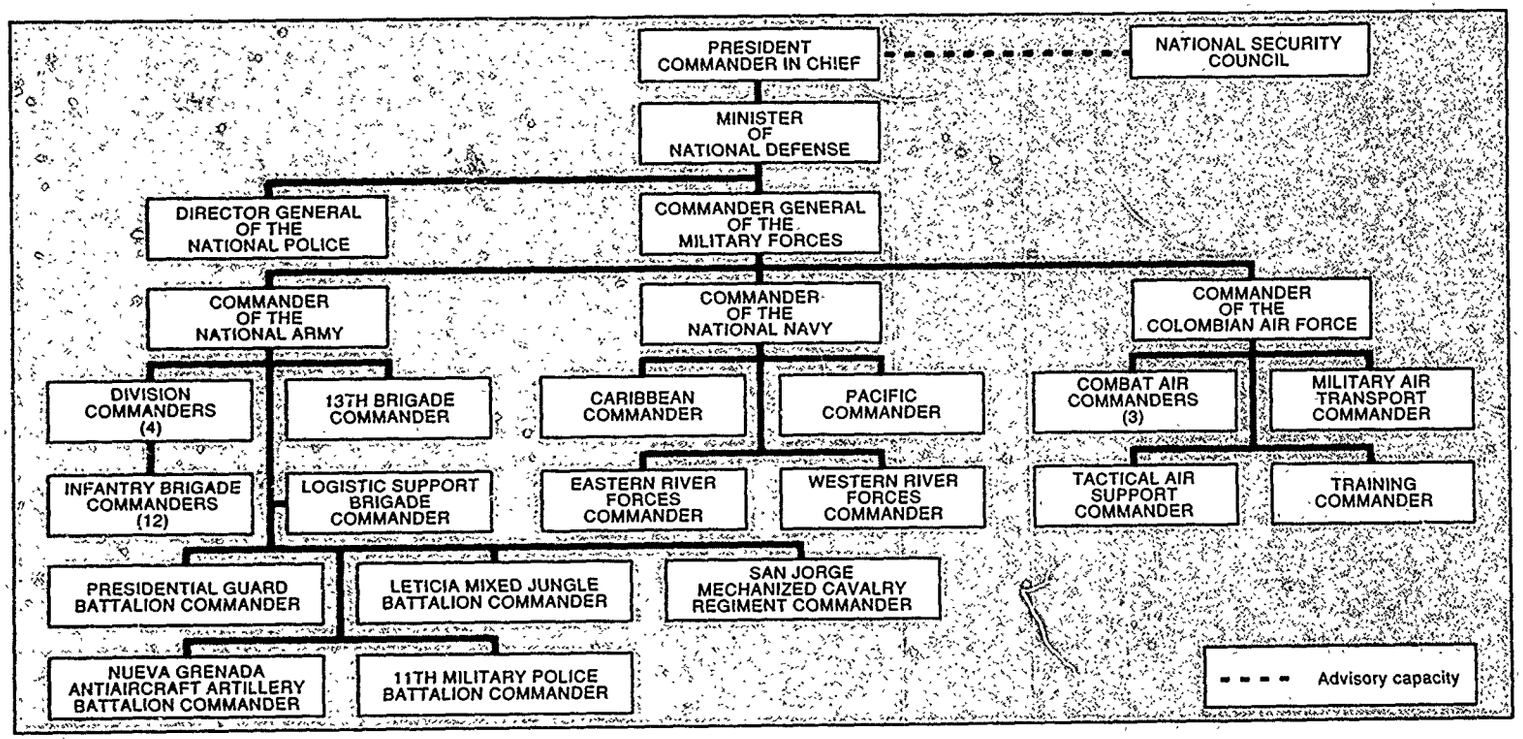



*Figure 10. Command Structure of the Armed Forces, 1988*

(intelligence), D-3 (operations), D-4 (logistics), and D-5 (civil concerns). Headquarters staff members were specifically denied command functions.

### *The National Army*

In 1988 the National Army was composed of 69,000 active-duty soldiers, including approximately 26,000 conscripts. The troops under the command of the National Army represented some 80 percent of Colombia's total military personnel. Approximately 500 of the army's troops were believed to be serving as military observers with the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in the Sinai. Between 1982 and 1987, the number of troops under the army's command remained relatively constant, possibly belying the army's recovery from personnel cuts that some sources allege were imposed during the mid-1980s. But in 1988 a significant increase (12,000 personnel) occurred. In addition to regular personnel, the army reserves (made up of persons who had fulfilled their military service obligation) added another 100,000 men to the army's potential manpower. Observers believed, however, that the service had limited capability to mobilize these reserve personnel in the event of a national emergency.

The commander of the National Army in 1988 was General Nelson Mejía Henao. By 1988 plans for a major restructuring of the army had been carried out. The restructuring included the reorganization of the service into four divisions and the formation of two new infantry brigades, which brought the total of infantry brigades to twelve. The troops assigned to these infantry brigades were dispersed among the country's ten military regions.

Each of the four army divisions had territorial command over two to three of the country's military regions and was organized into three brigades. Each brigade had a minimum of two infantry battalions and one service battalion. Most of the brigades were composed of three infantry battalions, one mechanized cavalry group, and one battalion each of artillery, engineer, and service personnel. In all, the four divisions commanded thirty infantry battalions, six mechanized cavalry groups, eight artillery battalions, six engineer battalions, twelve service battalions, and two military police battalions.

A thirteenth brigade—which represented the restructuring of the Military Institutes Brigade (Brigada de Institutos Militares—BIM)—was established as an army-level combat formation and was headquartered at Bogotá. This brigade included troops from the First Airborne Battalion (the army's sole paratroop unit); the infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineer, and combat support services

applications school battalions; and personnel belonging to the Lanceros Battalion. Troops in the Lanceros Battalion received special antiguerrilla training and assignments comparable to those of the United States Army's Rangers. The Logistic Support Brigade, made up of the Supply Battalion and the Ordnance Battalion, also was an army-level formation with headquarters at Bogotá. In addition, four battalions under the direct command of the National Army's headquarters included the Presidential Guard Battalion, the Leticia Mixed Jungle Battalion, the Nueva Granada Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, and the 11th Military Police Battalion. The San Jorge Mechanized Cavalry Regiment was also under army headquarters command.

In an effort to fight what the army leadership perceived as an escalating insurgency, the army initiated an equipment acquisition program during the early 1980s to improve the service's operational capabilities. Among the new purchases approved were armored vehicles, automatic rifles, submachine guns, and rocket launchers. As part of this program, a contract was signed in 1982 with the Brazilian firm Engesa for the purchase of its EE-9 Cascavel armored cars, EE-11 Urutu armored personnel carriers, and EE-3 Jararaca scout cars. By 1985 a total of 120 EE-9s and 76 EE-11s had been delivered to the National Army. The army also purchased tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) antitank weapons. By the late 1980s, TOW antitank guns had become the principal component of the army's antiarmor weaponry.

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the major military equipment in service with the Colombian army in 1988 (in addition to the new acquisitions noted above) included twelve M-3A1 Stuart light tanks, twenty M-8 Greyhound armored cars, fifty M-113 tracked armored personnel carriers, and forty-five M-3A2 half-tracked vehicles. By 1984 many of the newly acquired TOW antitank guns had been mounted on the turrets of the M-8 armored cars. With the exception of the newer Brazilian purchases, nearly all of the army's armored equipment was of World War II vintage. By the late 1980s, continuing budget problems had constrained plans for additional equipment purchases.

Artillery weapons included fifty M-101 105mm howitzers that also had been manufactured in the United States during World War II. Mortars in use included between 100 and 125 M1 81mm and 148 M2 107mm models. Approximately 120 of the 120mm Brandt models also were counted in the army's inventory. According to the IISS, Colombia's air defense weapons included thirty 37mm and thirty M-1A1 40mm guns, both types manufactured in the United States. By 1987 the West German G3 assault rifle

had become the standard infantry weapon—some 30,000 having been acquired in the mid-1970s—replacing the United States-manufactured M-1. Submachine guns in use included the three Madsen models—the M46, the M50, and the M53; the Walther MP-K; and the MAC-10. The Colombian armed forces' Division of Military Industries reportedly manufactured most of the army's ammunition.

### *The National Navy*

In 1988 the National Navy had about 10,600 personnel, including approximately 5,000 marines, 1,500 coast guard personnel, and 500 conscripts. Personnel under the command of the National Navy represented 12 percent of the country's total military forces. Naval reserve personnel were estimated at 15,000. The commanding officer of the National Navy in 1988 was Rear Admiral Manuel Fernando Avendano Galvis. Naval headquarters were in Bogotá. The naval commander was assisted by a chief of naval operations, a superior naval council, and a naval chief of staff. The navy was organized into four commands: the Caribbean Command, with its headquarters at Cartagena; the Pacific Command, with headquarters at Buenaventura; the Western River Forces Command, with headquarters at Puerto Leguízamo on the Río Putumayo; and the Eastern River Forces Command, with headquarters at Orocué on the Río Meta. The country's principal naval base was at Cartagena. In addition, the navy maintained a minor base at Barranquilla, the site of one of Colombia's shipworks. In 1988 a new naval base was reported to have been completed at Bahía de Málaga.

From 1978 to 1988, the navy's Corps of Marine Infantry (Cuerpo de Infantería de Marina) benefited from a gradual buildup. The marine corps was organized into five battalions. Two battalions each reported to the Atlantic Marine Brigade and the Pacific Marine Brigade, which corresponded to the navy's Caribbean Command and the Pacific Command, respectively. A jungle battalion, first organized in 1978, was also part of the Western River Forces Command. Several independent rifle companies were reportedly subordinate to the Eastern River Forces Command. Coordinated marine-army operations frequently were carried out during the late 1980s under the operational control of the army. In 1988 analysts anticipated that the EE-9 Cascavel armored cars and EE-11 Urutu armored personnel carriers would be used to form a mechanized element in each marine brigade.

In 1979 the navy organized the small Coast Guard Corps (Cuerpo de Guardacosta) to carry out coastal patrol duties and operate some

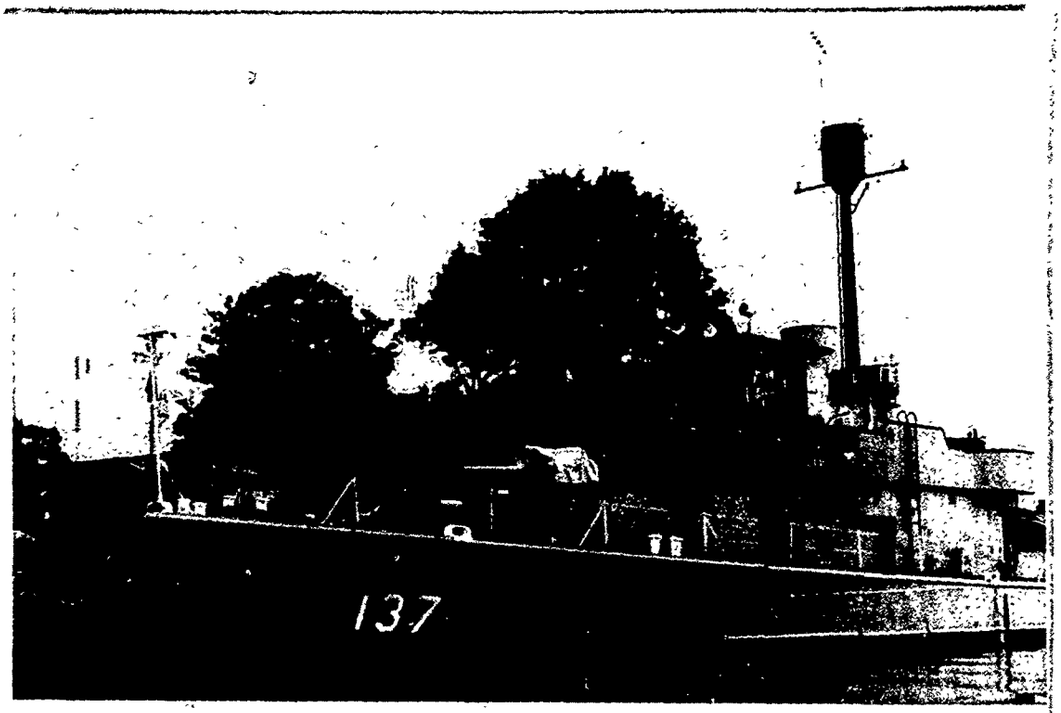
aircraft. In 1988 a naval air arm was being established to reduce the service's dependence on air force support. Two BO-105 helicopters as well as two Aero Commanders and one Piper Cherokee airplane made up the air arm's equipment inventory in 1988.

Observers regarded the navy as capable of patrolling and defending Colombia's offshore waters in the Pacific and the Caribbean but unable to project its seapower on a subregional basis. During the 1980s, the incorporation into the fleet of a number of ships purchased from West Germany—a decision spurred by renewed concern over conflicting maritime territorial claims with Venezuela and Nicaragua—appeared to have somewhat strengthened this capability (see Geopolitical Interests, this ch.).

The major vessels of the Colombian fleet in 1988 included four submarines, four frigates, four large patrol ships, two fast attack craft, three river gunboats, two coastal patrol vessels, and eight river patrol craft. The navy also had four survey/research vessels (one a former Honduran ship that was confiscated for smuggling), five transports, one floating dock, a sail training ship, and ten tugs. Two destroyers that had long been part of the fleet were decommissioned in 1986.

The submarines included two West German-built Type 1200 diesel-electric patrol submarines equipped with torpedo tubes and two Italian-built Type SX-506 midget submarines, each capable of carrying up to eight attack swimmers and two tons of explosives. The navy commissioned all four submarines during the early to mid-1970s. In 1988 the four Type FS 1500 frigates were among the newest vessels of the Colombian fleet. Each frigate was believed to be armed with eight MM-40 Exocet surface-to-surface missiles, an undetermined number of Seasparrow (Albatross) missiles, six Mk 32 A/S torpedo tubes, one 76mm gun, two 40mm Breda guns, and four 30mm Oerlikon guns. The vessels also were equipped with radar, sonar, and electronic countermeasures. The navy's BO-105 helicopters were used on the frigates.

The four large patrol ships were former United States Cherokee-class vessels, commissioned in 1943 and sold to Colombia in 1979. During the mid-1980s, the navy reportedly planned to replace these vessels with four Exocet-armed corvettes. The two fast attack craft were former United States Asheville-class craft, commissioned in 1969 and transferred by lease to Colombia in 1983. The fleet's three Arauca-class river gunboats were Colombian built, as were the coastal and river patrol craft. Most of these vessels, however, were commissioned in the 1950s. By contrast, two of the survey/research ships were new vessels acquired in the early 1980s. One vessel was employed in fishery research and the other in geophysical research.




*ARC Arauca-class river patrol craft, Leticia*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*

The survey/research ships were under the authority of the navy's Maritime Division (División Marítima—Dimar). The Dimar was the principal naval authority in charge of hydrography, pilotage, navigational aids, and port authorities.

### *The Colombian Air Force*

The Colombian Air Force (Fuerza Aérea Colombiana—FAC) had some 6,700 personnel in 1988, including approximately 1,900 conscripts, about 8 percent of the country's military forces. Members of the air force reserve were estimated at approximately 1,900. In 1988 the commanding general of the FAC was General Alfonso Amaya Maldonado. He was assisted by an air force chief of staff, an office of air operations, and an inspector general. Headquartered in Bogotá, the service consisted of three combat air commands, one tactical air support command, one military air transport command, and one training command.

The principal units assigned to the FAC's commands included two fighter squadrons, three squadrons dedicated to counterinsurgency missions (including a squadron of helicopters under the tactical air support command), a reconnaissance squadron, and a transport squadron. The two fighter squadrons were assigned to the First Air Combat Command, with headquarters at the country's principal air base, the Germán Olano Military Air Base at

Palanquero in Cundinamarca Department. These squadrons were composed exclusively of the fifteen Mirage 5 jet fighters that Colombia had acquired from France during the early 1970s following United States refusal to supply Colombia with advanced fighter aircraft. The FAC relied on the Skyguard air defense system, which was installed at three sites and equipped with some 240 AIM-7F Sparrow missiles. The air force also reportedly had an undetermined number of R-530 antiaircraft missiles. In addition to the base at Palanquero, Colombia's major air bases included the FAC's facility at the El Dorado International Airport at Bogotá, the Luis Gómez Niño Military Air Base at Apiay, the Ernesto Cortissoz Military Air Base at Barranquilla, and the Marco Fidel Suárez Military Air Base at Cali.

The counterinsurgency units were composed of fifteen aging AT-33 and two RT-33 ground attack aircraft and eighteen A-37 Cessna Dragonfly light attack aircraft, most of which were acquired in 1980. Two of the counterinsurgency units made up the Second Air Combat Command and the Third Air Combat Command. The helicopter squadron consisted of ten Hughes 500M OH-6A Cayuse and six Hughes 500-MG Defenders. The reconnaissance squadron was equipped with three RT-33 aircraft and seven Hughes 300C and eight Hughes 500C helicopters. Aircraft assigned to military air transport included a squadron composed of C-130s, a C-54, C-47s, HS-748s, F-28s, DHC-2s, IAI-201s, and PC-6s. The helicopter squadron was equipped with seventeen Bell UH-1B/Hs, most of which were purchased during the early 1980s, and eleven Bell 205 A-1s. The training command was equipped primarily with twenty-one Cessna T-41D and twenty-one T-34A/B aircraft; its helicopters included eight Bell 47s, seven Hughes 300Cs, and fourteen Hughes 500Cs.

In 1984 the FAC acquired an additional fifteen A-37s. The A-37s reportedly were intended to reinforce the country's coastal surveillance capabilities and were to be used in patrolling the San Andrés and Providencia archipelago. Colombia's military industry manufactured a number of the FAC's smaller aircraft, many of which reportedly were employed in counterinsurgency.

A highlight of the FAC's efforts at modernizing its force came with the announcement in early 1988 of its plans to purchase thirteen C-7 Kfir fighters from Israel. In part, FAC concerns over its capabilities were spurred by Venezuela's acquisition of some two dozen United States-built F-16 fighters in the mid-1980s. The contract for the Kfirs, valued at about US$200 million, included a supply of spare parts and pilot training in addition to the aircraft.

## Military Expenditures

During the late 1980s, the increased threat to national security posed by renewed guerrilla activities and the growing power of Colombian narcotics traffickers provided the rationale for considerable increases in military expenditures. In 1987 the armed forces budget stood at US$274 million, an amount nearly twice the spending level set a decade earlier. This amount represented nearly 15 percent of the federal government's total public expenditures for 1987, making military spending the second highest item after education in terms of official budgetary priorities. This proportion of spending was comparable to expenditures in the mid-1960s, a period when the armed forces were involved in an intensive effort to defeat the country's domestic insurgents. The proportion of government expenditures on defense in 1987 represented a significant increase over allocations approved during the early 1980s. At that time, military spending ranged from 7 to 10 percent of central government expenditures. In comparison, during the mid-1950s the Colombian armed forces received about 20 percent of the government's budget.

Military expenditures for 1987 represented only an estimated 1 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary). As a proportion of GDP, this level remained relatively constant throughout the 1980s, but it reflected a decline from an average of 1.7 percent of GDP during the 1970s. As a proportion of the gross national product (GNP—see Glossary), military spending also remained relatively constant through the mid-1980s. In 1985 military expenditures as a percentage of GNP were estimated at 1.2 percent, a level of spending proportionate to that maintained a decade earlier.

In 1987 the Ministry of National Defense estimated that the military's spending needs for the following year—which included plans for substantial equipment purchases—would total close to US$1.5 billion. Had this requested spending level been authorized, it would have been equivalent to roughly one-third of the Colombian government's total expenditures. The Colombian Congress, however, approved only US$313 million for the 1988 military budget, an amount that reflected an increase of 14 percent over the previous year's spending level. This approved increase in spending was insufficient to enable the armed forces to keep pace with inflation (see Inflation and Unemployment, ch. 3).

Nevertheless, in recognition of the country's security needs, the president and the legislature during 1987 devised alternatives to raise additional public funds for the armed forces without

compromising government programs in other high-priority areas. One such effort was a presidential decree, issued in mid-1987, that exempted arms purchases from customs tariffs and duties. In September, Congress approved a measure providing for the issuance of special government bonds that would be sold to firms and individuals whose taxable profits were above 5 percent of annual income. Analysts anticipated that the sale of the compulsory bonds would raise as much as US$40 million in additional monies for defense.

United States military assistance represented an important source of funds for the Colombian armed forces. Funds scheduled under the Military Assistance Program (MAP) for fiscal year (FY—see Glossary) 1986 included US$20 million in Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits and US$950,000 provided under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. The FMS credits were to be used for the purchase of replacement parts for vehicles and aircraft, infantry weapons, vehicles, construction equipment, and helicopters. Monies provided during FY 1987 included US$3.5 million in MAP funds and nearly US$1.5 million for the IMET program. At the beginning of FY 1988, according to one United States government report, Colombia owed no monies for credit financing that had been provided under the MAP.

## Conscription and Military Service

According to Article 165 of the Constitution, "all Colombians are bound to bear arms when public necessity so requires, in order to defend the independence of the nation and the institutions of the country." The military service law stipulated that all Colombian males, upon reaching eighteen years of age, were obliged to present themselves for military service. Colombian males maintained a military service obligation until reaching fifty years of age. Those males over the age of thirty who had fulfilled their service requirement were considered members of the military reserves until reaching forty-five years of age; those under the age of thirty who had completed their military service would first be called up in the event of a national emergency.

In 1988 women remained exempt from the service obligation and played virtually no role in Colombia's armed forces. Military service exemptions also were routinely granted to priests and physically handicapped individuals as well as to individuals who could prove themselves to be essential for the support of their families. Individuals who received an exemption based on family hardship were required to pay a special tax in lieu of performing the obligatory service. Deferments were available for students, who had to

renew them annually, and for young men who already had a brother in the service. Detention in jail also enabled one to obtain a deferment; those convicted of crimes that deprived them of their political rights were not subject to conscription.

Despite legislatively mandated military service, in practice only about 16,000 to 18,000 of an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 eligible male youths were drafted annually. In 1987 the term of service for these youths was one year, reduced from the previous requirement of two years' service. The number of youths carrying out the obligatory service requirement in 1987 rose to an estimated 28,200. The requirement could be fulfilled by duty with either the army, the navy, the air force, or the National Police. In 1987 over 90 percent of these youths were completing their service with the army. Upon completing their service, conscripts were given a reservist card (*tarjeta de reservista*). This card was an indispensable document in proving an individual's identity throughout his adult life.

Conscripts were selected for service by lotteries carried out in each municipality. The majority of those selected reportedly were poor and from rural areas. During the early 1980s, an attempt was made to enforce more uniformly the military service obligation, regardless of socioeconomic standing. Although by 1988 youths from middle-class families were being increasingly called on to complete their military service, those from wealthy families continued to evade the obligatory service requirement.

Because of the low level of education of many conscripts—who were commonly referred to as recruits—basic training frequently included literacy instruction as well as courses in military science and field maneuvers. This training customarily was carried out at the military's applications schools rather than with units in the field.

Male citizens between the ages of sixteen and fifty were eligible for enlistment in the army or navy. The army's minimum age for enlistees was nineteen, the navy's sixteen. Those enlisting under the age of twenty were required to present proof of permission granted by either their parents or their guardian. Both enlistees and conscripts had to take physical and mental examinations, the passing grades for which could be adjusted according to the military's manpower needs. Those showing aptitude were eligible for training in technical fields, such as electronics.

Those individuals considered candidates for the noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps were selected from the volunteers in each conscript class. In turn, those who wished to become career military officers were screened by a board of officers and were required to pass an examination in academic and practical military subjects.

Upon meeting these minimum requirements, the individual was appointed to the lowest NCO grade. Gaining admission to the Military Cadet School—which was considered difficult for most enlistees, given the school's high educational and physical entrance requirements—was viewed as a prerequisite for a career as a commissioned officer. Consequently, the wide gap between enlisted personnel and the officer corps—a function of the disparity between the two groups' socioeconomic standing and educational background—generally meant that there was little opportunity for NCOs to become commissioned officers.

Military promotions for the NCOs and the commissioned officer corps were strictly regulated by law. Promotions for the higher ranks of the commissioned officer corps required congressional approval. A variety of decrees and statutes established the professional requirements for an officer to achieve a specific rank. These laws also spelled out the minimum number of years that an officer had to remain in a rank before being eligible for promotion, the obligatory retirement age for each rank, and the maximum number of officers in each rank. Generals were required to retire at the age of sixty-five. It was not uncommon, however, for exceptions to this regulation to be made in the case of high-ranking military officials.

## The Military Education System

In the 1980s, the military education system continued to play a critical role in the formation of a professional officer corps. With the exception of officers trained in medicine or law, all commissioned officers were graduates of one of the three service academies. The Military Cadet School, the army's service academy, represented the backbone of the military's professional education system. The school's rigorous training program ranged from three to five years, depending upon the entrant's prior level of education. Reportedly, coursework in military science was emphasized during a cadet's final year of study. Beginning in the 1960s, increased emphasis was placed on courses dealing with national security and international relations. Fields of specialization included economics, engineering, and international law and diplomatic studies.

The navy's service academy, known simply as the Naval Academy, was established in 1938 in Cartagena. It offered a four-year course for youths who planned a career in either the navy, the marine corps, or the merchant marine. Navy cadets spent nearly a year at sea on the navy's sail training ship. The Air Force Cadet School, located in Cali and opened in 1933, placed primary emphasis on the cadets' technical training.

The requirements for admission to the service academies included being a Colombian male by birth, having a minimum of two years' secondary school education, being between eighteen and twenty years of age, and being unmarried. In addition to the physical examination that candidates were required to pass before admission, comprehensive examinations were given in history, geography, mathematics, and Spanish. Performance on these examinations helped determine the candidate's placement in the program.

Postacademy professional training—coordinated by the command of the BIM—was provided at a number of schools. In the 1980s, the completion of a number of the schools' programs had become a requirement for a successful military career. The Lancers School (Escuela de Lanceros), created during the 1950s, provided specialized training in counterinsurgency strategy and tactics. Completion of a one-year course at the school reportedly was required of all army personnel before promotion to first lieutenant. Each of the branches of the army—infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineering, and combat support services—operated its own applications school, which offered a forty-week training program required for promotion to the rank of captain.

Members of all three armed services were eligible to attend the Superior War College (Escuela Superior de Guerra). Completion of a one-year command and general staff course offered by the college was required for promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Completion of an eleven-month course that emphasized the formulation of national security policy and analysis of national and international affairs was required for promotion to the rank of general or admiral. In addition, an eleven-month course taught at the college, known as the Higher Military Studies Course (Curso de Altos Estudios Militares), was required of all personnel—usually officers holding the rank of major or lieutenant commander—before they were eligible for general staff assignments. A select number of Colombian officers also received advanced training in special programs for foreign military personnel that were offered by the United States military's professional schools.

Military officers who had received advanced professional degrees but who had not completed the Superior War College's general staff course, had to complete the special four-month Military Information Course. Another special course offered by the Superior War College was the six-month National Defense Information Course. The course, attended mainly by representatives of Colombia's governmental agencies and other civilian organizations, was designed to provide basic information on the military's mission and

organization as well as to familiarize civilian personnel with the military's perspectives on national policy.

## Uniforms, Ranks, and Insignia

Colombian military personnel wore a number of different uniforms for both cold and hot weather. Army officer uniforms included a full-dress uniform of blue coat and white trousers for a cold climate; a white full-dress uniform for a hot climate; several different dress uniforms for both hot and cold climates that consisted of some combination of blue and white coat and trousers with piping or fringe on the trousers to indicate branch of service; an olive-drab barracks uniform for a cold climate; a tan gabardine barracks uniform for a hot climate; and tan gabardine service and field uniforms for all climates. Army enlisted uniforms consisted of an olive-drab dress uniform for a cold climate, a tan flannel dress uniform for a hot climate, and tan barracks and field uniforms for all climates. All air force officers and enlisted personnel wore a full-dress uniform of midnight blue cloth for a hot or cold climate, a social dress uniform of midnight blue cloth for a cold climate, a street dress uniform of sky blue blouse and trousers, and a service dress uniform for a hot climate. Commissioned naval officers and cadets had two service uniforms (blue or white service coat and trousers), a white tropical working uniform, and a khaki tropical working uniform. Chief petty officers wore blue or white service coat and trousers. All other navy enlisted personnel wore blue jumpers and trousers.

The rank structure for all services closely paralleled that of the United States military. Each service had nine officer ranks, ranging from the equivalent of second lieutenant to general in the army and in the air force and ensign to vice admiral in the navy (see fig. 11). The army and navy had eight enlisted grades, ranging from the equivalent of basic private to command sergeant major and from seaman recruit to fleet force master chief petty officer, respectively. The air force had seven enlisted grades, from the equivalent of airman basic to chief master sergeant (see fig. 12).

Army and air force officer rank insignia were shown in gold on shoulder boards. Insignia for army enlisted personnel consisted of yellow, blue, and red chevrons placed with their vertices down at the bottom of the right sleeve. Air force enlisted insignia were in gold. Navy officer and cadet insignia were indicated in gold on shoulder boards or sleeves. Navy enlisted insignia consisted of gold markings worn on the outer left sleeve of the coat, jumper, or shirt (depending on the uniform), half-way between the top shoulder seam and the elbow.

## The National Police and Law Enforcement Authorities

In 1988 the National Police was Colombia's principal law enforcement organization. Colombia's first national police force, consisting of an estimated 450 men, was organized in 1891 with the assistance of a commissaire of France's National Police. Over the ensuing decades, the national police acted as a Liberal counterbalance to the dominant Conservative influence within the Colombian military.

During the 1950s, the PC government moved the force from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Government to that of the Ministry of National Defense. This was done both to eliminate the remaining Liberal sympathizers within the force and to bring the force under stricter government supervision. In 1962 the National Police assumed administrative and operational control over the separate police forces that had been maintained by each of the country's administrative divisions.

During the 1980s, the National Police remained directly subordinate to the minister of national defense. Officers holding military rank filled key posts within the National Police. Their uniforms and insignia of rank, however, were different from those worn by members of the country's military forces. Having passed through the police's own professional training institutions, these men were believed to have dedicated their professional careers to service with the force. Such career officers did not alternate between military and police service, as was customary with some Latin American armed forces.

In 1969 National Police personnel were estimated to total about 42,000. Recruitment plans announced during the mid-1970s projected an increase in the size of the force to some 75,000 personnel by 1980. Yet despite the increased challenges to internal security, the size of the force did not increase significantly and remained relatively constant at some 50,000 between 1974 and 1984. In 1988 the size of the National Police was estimated at approximately 55,000, of whom approximately 10 percent were civilians.

The headquarters of the National Police was located in Bogotá. The force's organization appeared to parallel the military's headquarters command; it was divided into separate functional departments, including personnel (F-1), intelligence (F-2), operations (F-3), and logistics (F-4) (see The Command Structure, this ch.). Personnel not attached to the headquarters staff were deployed in each of the country's administrative departments, in which a police commander served as the ranking police officer. Bogotá was treated

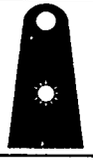
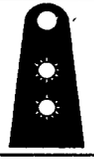
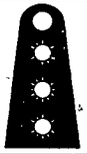
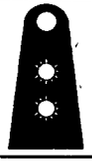
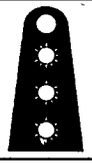
| COLOMBIAN RANK | SUBTENIENTE | TENIENTE | CAPITAN | MAYOR | TENIENTE CORONEL | CORONEL | BRIGADIER GENERAL | MAYOR GENERAL | GENERAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ARMY |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| U.S. RANK TITLES | 2D LIEUTENANT | 1ST LIEUTENANT | CAPTAIN | MAJOR | LIEUTENANT COLONEL | COLONEL | BRIGADIER GENERAL | MAJOR GENERAL | GENERAL |
| COLOMBIAN RANK | SUBTENIENTE | TENIENTE | CAPITAN | MAYOR | TENIENTE CORONEL | CORONEL | BRIGADIER GENERAL | MAYOR GENERAL | GENERAL |
| AIR FORCE |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| U.S. RANK TITLES | 2D LIEUTENANT | 1ST LIEUTENANT | CAPTAIN | MAJOR | LIEUTENANT COLONEL | COLONEL | BRIGADIER GENERAL | MAJOR GENERAL | GENERAL |
| COLOMBIAN RANK | TENIENTE DE CORBETA | TENIENTE DE FRAGATA | TENIENTE DE NAVIO | CAPITAN DE CORBETA | CAPITAN DE FRAGATA | CAPITAN DE NAVIO | CONTRA-ALMIRANTE | VICE-ALMIRANTE | ALMIRANTE |
| NAVY |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| U.S. RANK TITLES | ENSIGN | LIEUTENANT JUNIOR GRADE | LIEUTENANT | LIEUTENANT COMMANDER | COMMANDER | CAPTAIN | COMMODORE ADMIRAL | REAR ADMIRAL | VICE ADMIRAL |

*Figure 11. Officer Ranks and Insignia, 1988*

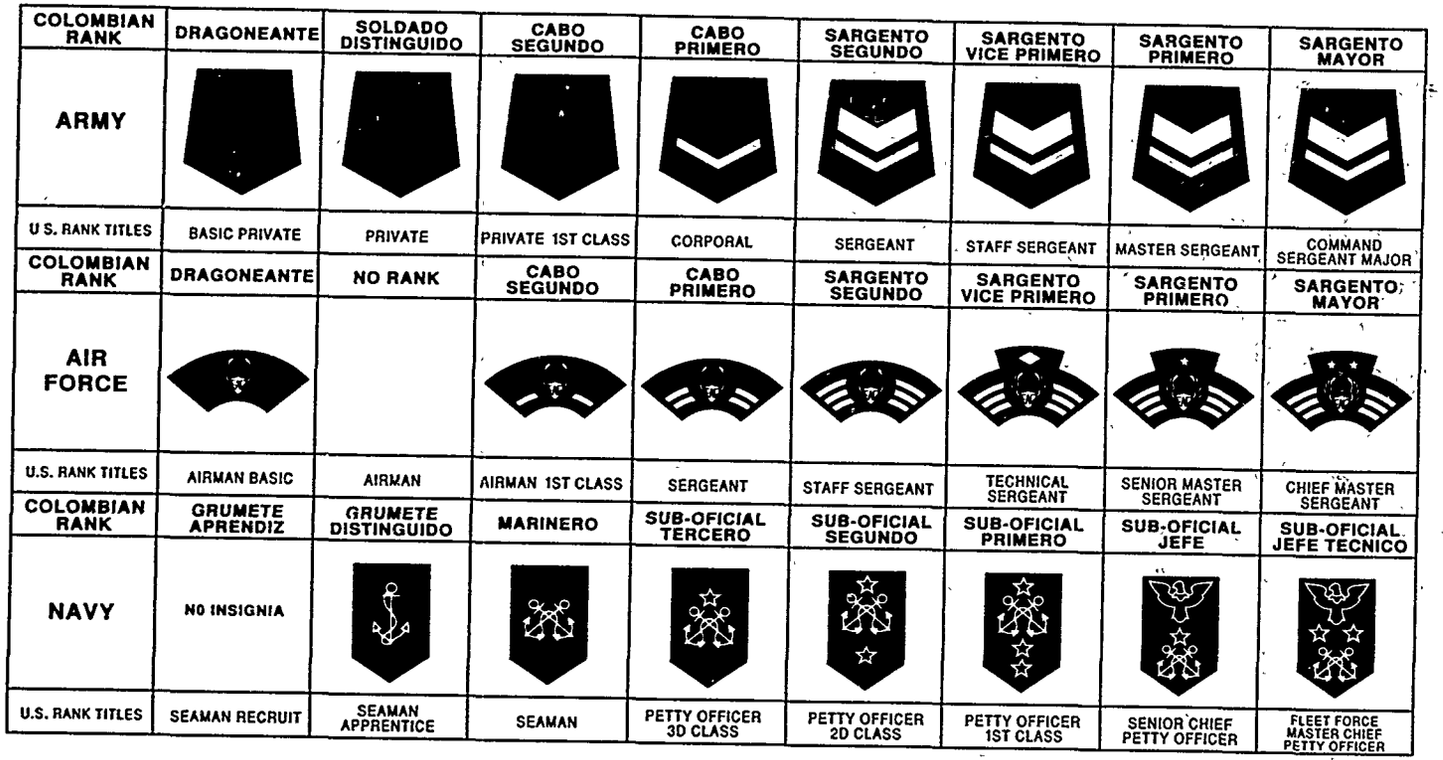



*Figure 12. Enlisted Ranks and Insignia, 1988*

as a separate police section. In addition to his own staff, the departmental police commander supervised police personnel assigned to the various districts, stations, substations, and police posts maintained throughout the department. The departmental commander was responsible to the director general for police operations and administration. The departmental commander was, however, subordinate to the departmental governor with respect to the manner in which law enforcement policies were implemented. Mayors and civil magistrates also were reported to have a say in law enforcement matters. During the late 1980s, some observers contended that the control exercised by these political officials was a corrupting influence within the National Police.

In addition to the force's primary charge to handle common crimes, its major responsibilities included narcotics interdiction, some counterinsurgency work, participation in civic action in rural areas, and riot control in the country's urban centers. Other duties included enforcement of traffic regulations, supervision of public recreation areas, provision of security at gold and emerald mines, provision of security in the transport of valuables between government banks and on the national railroads, and administration of and provision of guards for the country's prison system.

A number of special police units functioned under the overall jurisdiction of the headquarters' operations command. They included the Radio Patrol Group, the Antimugging Group, the Private Surveillance Group, the Highway Police, the Tourist Police, the Juvenile Police, the Railroad Police, and the Operational Group Against Extortion and Kidnappings. The Antinarcotics Police were important not only in the seizure of narcotics and the arrest of those involved but also in helping search out and destroy the concealed air landing strips and processing laboratories used by the narcotics traffickers. The National Police's Carabineros were a special rural police force that carried out counterinsurgency missions, frequently in conjunction with army units. Headquartered at the department and national territory capitals, the Carabineros were maintained in squadrons that were separate from those of the regular police; they wore distinctive uniforms and often traveled as mounted units. The National Police also administered and manned the country's fire departments. In support of these various police units, the National Police maintained a small air section equipped with some thirty light helicopters and one HS-748 airplane.

During the 1980s, the National Police reportedly also assumed control of the Directorate of the Judicial Police and Investigation (Dirección de la Policía Judicial y Investigación—Dijin). This law enforcement organization—commonly referred to as the Judicial

Police—was formerly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. The national Criminal Statistics Archives (Archivos de Estadística Criminal) and the Judicial Police represented the principal repositories of information required for the prosecution of criminal cases. The Criminal Statistics Archives also was transferred to the National Police and integrated as a section of the force's investigative division. Although located in Bogotá, the Judicial Police maintained its headquarters in a location separate from that of the National Police.

During the mid-1980s, the Judicial Police came to play an important role in Colombia's National Antinarcotics Campaign. Its responsibilities reportedly included carrying out criminal investigations and continuing to assist in the preparation of court cases against narcotics traffickers. Members of the Judicial Police also were believed to be assigned to duty with various governmental bodies that had responsibilities related to law enforcement and the administration of justice, including the Office of the Attorney General and the federal government's Administrative Security Department (Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad—DAS).

The National Police maintained its own professional education system, separate from that of the military forces and administered by the police's instructional division. The two principal professional schools for members of the National Police were the General Santander Police Cadet School and the Jiménez de Quesada Noncommissioned Officers School, both located in Bogotá. Completion of the cadet school's rigorous two-year program was required of all recruits who aspired to obtain a commission in the National Police. Completion of additional training was required for promotions. Noncommissioned officers were required to complete a five-month course for each advancement in rank from corporal to sergeant major. The National Police also operated seven smaller police schools in various locations throughout the country. These schools offered a five-month basic training course for recruits as well as in-service training; coursework included subjects as diverse as Colombian history and riot control. Members of the Carabineros were required to undergo a special three-month training program at the National School of Carabineros, also located in the national capital. During the mid-1970s, this specialized instruction included courses in horsemanship, basic veterinary medicine, and civic action.

In addition to the National Police, two other organizations—the DAS and the Customs Service (Servicio de Aduana)—had important law enforcement responsibilities. The DAS was the principal organization responsible for enforcement of laws relating to

national security. This organization had a national role comparable to that of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States. The formal responsibilities under the DAS's mandate included investigating crimes against the internal security of the state, fraud against the state and its financial institutions, breaches of the public faith, and crimes affecting individual liberty and human rights. The DAS also was responsible for screening and maintaining records on foreigners who entered the nation and for enforcing immigration laws. To carry out its mission, the DAS had both investigative and intelligence-gathering responsibilities.

Like the minister of national defense, the chief of the DAS reported directly to the president of the republic. In 1988 General Miguel Alfredo Maza Márquez served as chief of the DAS. Among the administrative units reporting to the DAS chief were the heads of the Office of Evaluation, the Office of Analysis and Programming, and the Rural Security Service. During the mid-1970s, the DAS was believed to have some 3,000 plainclothes personnel.

In comparison with the military and the National Police, the professional career system under the DAS was considered to be relatively weak, a factor that was thought to have contributed to the high attrition rate of DAS personnel during the late 1970s. The DAS did, however, operate its own training schools—one in Bogotá and the other in Boyacá. The DAS coordinated its domestic operations with the ministries of government, foreign affairs, justice, and national defense.

## Internal Security Problems

Public awareness of Colombia's internal security problems increased in the wake of the November 1985 siege by terrorists from the 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril—M-19) of the Palace of Justice, the Supreme Court building, in Bogotá. During the twenty-eight hours of intense fighting, which was referred to as the "twenty-eight-hour coup," all thirty-five terrorists were killed, but eleven Supreme Court judges, several dozen other hostages, and more than a dozen troops also were killed. In addition, the artillery shelling and the raging fire that resulted destroyed the courthouse.

According to a public opinion poll taken shortly after the siege, 85 percent of the population of Bogotá believed that the country had reached a crisis point. Within two years, some reports suggested, the violence associated with the country's growing internal turmoil had escalated to a level comparable to that of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Although public consciousness was piqued by the 1985 incident, the incidence of challenges to the public order

had been gradually increasing in frequency over the preceding decade. In 1988, however, observers doubted that a semblance of domestic peace could soon be restored.

During the late 1980s, various guerrilla organizations and two powerful groups of narcotics traffickers, who used the country as their base of operations, posed the principal threats to internal security. The frequent corruption of public officials by the lucrative narcotics operations also had become a serious national problem that hindered efforts to maintain domestic order and administer justice. Although the guerrilla organizations had long been active in the country—with some claiming to trace their organizational roots to the epoch of *la violencia*—the threat posed by narcotics trafficking was not officially recognized as a security problem until the late 1970s. At around this same time, the country's guerrilla groups, having recovered their strength after the military's counterinsurgency operations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, stepped up their attacks. Within months of the inauguration of President Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978–82), increasing violence had prompted the new executive to authorize a series of measures to broaden the armed forces' role in the struggle against the guerrillas and narcotics traffickers. Most prominent among the new measures was the National Security Statute. The statute expanded the arrest powers of the armed forces and placed punishment for a variety of crimes under the jurisdiction of military tribunals. In addition, in an attempt to curb the guerrillas' use of the press to gain publicity for their cause, the media was subjected to strict censorship. Finally, Turbay invoked the state of siege provision of the Constitution (see Constitutional Development; The Executive, ch. 4).

Throughout 1979 and 1980, critics charged that government policies allowed the military to carry out arbitrary arrests, torture, and "disappearances" in the campaign against subversion. Despite this criticism, however, the Turbay administration continued its tough stance until late 1980—following the tense two-month occupation of the Dominican Republic's Bogotá embassy during which twelve diplomatic personnel, including the United States ambassador, were held hostage. In 1981 Turbay extended an offer of political amnesty to the guerrillas; despite public disavowals and continued fighting, government and guerrilla leaders held secret amnesty negotiations until March 1982. The terms of the amnesty were finally rejected, however, by the guerrillas as well as by the military, which reportedly feared that it would demoralize the troops. Nevertheless, as casualties from the violence reached their highest level in thirty years, the state of siege was lifted on the eve of the presidential elections in 1982.

With the inauguration of the Betancur administration (1982–86), the government indicated its willingness to reach a truce with the guerrillas. The 1984 cease-fire agreement achieved with all but one of the major guerrilla organizations as part of the National Dialogue represented the first armistice ever reached between a government and its domestic insurgents. Analysts viewed the achievement as ineffectual and temporary, however, and the cease-fire repeatedly was violated by both sides. From the perspective of the Colombian military, the worst feature of the agreement was that it did not obligate the guerrillas to surrender their weapons. In 1984 the government was forced to recognize the challenge to its authority posed by narcotics traffickers, when the minister of justice (an outspoken opponent of the drug smugglers) was murdered.

Between the May 1984 reimposition of a state of siege and the inauguration of the Barco administration (1986– ), violence increased dramatically. Efforts to revive the peace process reached a stalemate, and the traffickers became increasingly bold. During the late 1980s, two new elements were introduced into the deteriorating situation when right-wing terrorist groups began carrying out their own vigilante-style attacks—operating, for the most part, with apparent impunity—and the traffickers formed their own paramilitary groups to forestall the government's campaign against them.

## Guerrilla and Terrorist Groups

During the late 1980s, four major leftist guerrilla organizations were operating in Colombia: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC), the 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril—M-19), the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN), and the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación—EPL). A number of smaller, less structured guerrilla groups also carried out operations against the government. These included the Workers' Self-Defense Movement (Movimiento Autodefensa Obrera—MAO), the Workers' Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores—PRT), Free Homeland (Patria Libre), and the Quintín Lame Command. The Quintín Lame Command received substantial support from Colombia's small Indian population (see Local Government, ch. 4). During the late 1980s, analysts estimated that there were between 8,000 and 10,000 guerrillas. In late 1987, guerrilla-controlled territory reportedly included a vast area in the eastern plains, Arauca Intendancy, the area at the southern end of the Golfo de Urabá in



*Military policeman, Bogotá*
*Courtesy Lloyd W. Mansfield*

Antioquia Department, southern Huila Department, and most of Caquetá Department.

In 1984 the FARC, the M-19, and the EPL signed the cease-fire agreement that established the vaguely defined National Dialogue, designed to help set the terms for the guerrillas' peaceful reincorporation into national political life. In 1988 the Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica—UP), which represented the political arm of the FARC, was the only group that continued to adhere to the terms of the agreement and had reintegrated itself into the political process (see Minor Third Parties, ch. 4). Nevertheless, both government and guerrilla representatives participated in efforts to achieve a political settlement in 1988.

During the 1980s, six organizations—the FARC, the M-19, the ELN, the EPL, the PRT, and the Quintín Lame Command—attempted to develop comprehensive political and military strategies through the National Guerrilla Coordinating Board (Coordinadora Nacional Guerrillera—CNG). The drive for unity intensified in the late 1980s, following a rash of assassinations of guerrillas and sympathizers by right-wing groups. As a result, the CNG was restructured in late 1987 as the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board (Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar).

Right-wing terrorist groups became increasingly active during the Barco administration and repeatedly targeted for assassination

UP members (including many public officials) and members of militarily active guerrilla organizations. The guerrillas justified their reluctance to comply with government demands that they surrender their weapons by referring to the threat posed by the terrorists. In 1988 the DAS identified 128 active right-wing "paramilitary" groups. Most of these groups were small, obscure, and capable of carrying out operations in a given region within the country's departments. Several groups, however, had distinguished themselves for their national-level operations. The most prominent of these were Death to Kidnappers (Muerte a Secuestradores—MAS) and The Extraditables (Los Extraditables), both of which had ties to the narcotics traffickers.

### *The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia*

In 1988 the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC) remained the largest of Colombia's guerrilla groups. The FARC traced its informal origins to the late 1940s and early 1950s, when some of its founding members participated in the establishment of the independent republics (see The Development of the Modern Armed Forces, this ch.). By the end of the first half of the 1960s, all of the small republics reportedly had been destroyed by the army.

The FARC was founded in 1966 by Manuel Marulanda Vélez—known by the nickname Sure Shot (Tirofijo)—and other members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Colombia (Partido Comunista de Colombia—PCC). At that time, the FARC embraced the PCC's Soviet-style Marxist-Leninist ideological orientation. The PCC reportedly also supplied the arms and financial assistance that proved critical during the early years of the FARC's organization. The early membership of the FARC consisted of communist ideologues as well as noncommunist peasants, many of whom had been active during *la violencia*.

The height of the FARC's early phase of operations came shortly after its founding, between 1966 and 1968. During this period, as many as 500 armed militants and several thousand peasants were recruited. FARC operations included raids on military posts and facilities, which enabled the organization to accumulate weapons, ammunition, military uniforms, and even telecommunications equipment. Nonetheless, an effective military counterinsurgency campaign and the opening of diplomatic relations between Colombia and the Soviet Union in 1968 reportedly combined to weaken the organization. By the early 1970s, the FARC appeared incapable of mounting sustained operations.

Nevertheless, like the country's other guerrilla organizations, the FARC enjoyed a resurgence during the late 1970s and 1980s. The organization turned to kidnappings in order to finance its operations as well as gain publicity for its objectives. By 1978 the FARC maintained operations on five fronts. In September 1980, the organization was regarded as the strongest of the guerrilla groups. Although the FARC attempted to carry out joint military operations with at least one other guerrilla group, the effort failed, reportedly because of difficulties caused by ideological differences.

In 1987 the organization's membership was estimated at 6,000 militants, who were active on at least twenty-seven fronts. In early 1988, one report maintained that as many as forty FARC guerrilla fronts were active throughout the country. Areas of the country considered to be FARC strongholds included portions of the departments of Huila, Caquetá, Tolima, Cauca, Boyacá, Santander, Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, Meta, and Cundinamarca and the intendancy of Arauca.

The FARC's role in the peace process was spelled out in the accord signed between members of the group and the government's National Peace Commission at FARC headquarters in La Uribe in March 1984. Following the truce agreement, which became effective in May 1984, the main body of the FARC reportedly abandoned armed struggle; in 1985 the FARC organized the UP as the political party through which the group would peacefully seek political power. Yet despite the FARC's continued adherence to the peace process in the late 1980s, various FARC fronts violated the terms of the truce by engaging in such activities as kidnappings and blackmail. Some analysts contended that the Ricardo Franco Front (Frente Ricardo Franco)—a hard-line splinter group that refused to participate in the 1984 truce—was responsible for many of these activities.

Nevertheless, given the prevailing atmosphere of violence and uncertainty, some of the FARC's activities were likely to have been defensive operations. By mid-1988 the UP asserted that 550 of its members and supporters—including Jaime Pardo Leal, the party's leader and its candidate in the 1986 presidential elections—had been murdered by right-wing terrorist groups and death squads.

In mid-1987, following the FARC's ambushes of military convoys and attacks on small towns, the Barco administration announced that the truce had been broken in the departments of Caquetá and Huila. The Permanent Advisory Council on Political Rehabilitation, Reconciliation, and Normalization (established in October 1987 as a permanent government organization and assuming what were previously the responsibilities of the

government's Special Adviser) continued efforts to achieve a lasting peace with the FARC as well as to build a dialogue between the government and the other guerrilla groups. At that time the FARC continued to refuse the government's call to disarm, an obligation that had not been incorporated in the terms of the truce reached with the Betancur administration. The FARC, in turn, called for a lifting of the state of siege, the elimination of the death squads, an end to alleged human rights violations by the armed forces, and the implementation of a number of political and economic reforms.

### *The 19th of April Movement*

The 19th of April Movement (Movimiento 19 de Abril—M-19) traces its origins to the allegedly fraudulent presidential elections of April 19, 1970, in which the populist party of former military dictator Rojas Pinilla, the National Popular Alliance (Alianza Nacional Popular—Anapo), was denied an electoral victory (see Opposition to the National Front, ch. 1). Although Anapo—which was subsequently led by Rojas Pinilla's daughter, María Eugenia Rojas de Moreno Díaz, following the dictator's death in 1975—denied all links with the M-19, the organization proclaimed itself to be the armed branch of the party. During the early 1970s, Carlos Toledo Plata and Jaime Bateman Cayón distinguished themselves as the M-19's principal leaders and ideologues. Toledo, a physician, was an Anapo representative in Congress. Bateman served as the M-19's principal commander for military operations. Both these men died during the 1980s—Toledo in a shooting by two men believed linked to the MAS and Bateman in an airplane crash. By mid-1988 Carlos Pizarro León-Gómez had emerged as one of the group's principal decision makers.

The M-19's ideological orientation was a mixture of populism and nationalistic revolutionary socialism. This orientation often led the group to seek political support from Nicaragua and Cuba, but the M-19's leadership also claimed that it resisted forming permanent foreign ties.

By mid-1985, when the number of active members was estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000, the M-19 had become the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia. According to the IISS, the size of the M-19 in 1987 was estimated at 1,500 militants. A member of the Barco administration who was in charge of the government's peace efforts, however, calculated that the organization had only 500 armed militants nationwide. By the mid-1980s, the M-19 had eclipsed all other guerrilla organizations in urban operations. The M-19 reportedly established columns (units) in each of Colombia's

major cities. These columns were in turn organized into independent cells.

Although the M-19's early operations, begun in 1972, were limited to bank robberies, it quickly gained national attention through the 1974 theft of Simón Bolívar's sword and spurs from the exhibit in the liberator's villa. Two years later, the group kidnapped and subsequently murdered a Colombian trade union official the M-19 accused of having ties to the United States Central Intelligence Agency. In 1977 the M-19 began a campaign of economic sabotage. The following year, government offices and police stations became the targets of numerous attacks. In addition, the offices and representatives of United States-based multinational corporations were repeatedly targeted in an effort to drive the foreign interests from the country. Kidnappings of prominent individuals continued, some of which resulted in the deaths of the abductees. In 1980 the seizure and occupation, for sixty-one days, of the Dominican Republic's Bogotá embassy gained the group international attention.

The M-19's increasingly bold activities, coupled with evidence of Cuban training and logistical support, prompted a hardening in the policies of the Turbay administration during its final year in office. In 1982, however, the newly installed Betancur administration offered political amnesty in exchange for the M-19's agreement to a cease-fire. In July 1984, government officials and guerrilla leaders signed a cease-fire agreement at Corinto in Cauca Department.

By late 1985, however, the accord unraveled. Charging the government with, among other things, a systematic violation of the truce provisions and failure to implement key political reforms that were part of the cease-fire agreement, the M-19 returned to armed struggle. In October 1985, guerrillas wounded then-Commanding General of the Army Samudio. By far the most spectacular operation of the M-19 came the following month, when commandos seized the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. The ensuing battle between the M-19 and the military left over 100 dead, including 11 Supreme Court judges (see Interest Groups, ch. 4).

After the Palace of Justice operation, the M-19 reduced its activities, leading some analysts to surmise that its membership base had declined. In early 1986, the M-19 reportedly attempted to establish a common guerrilla front with members of Peru's Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) and Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru) and with Ecuador's Alfaro Lives, Damn It! (¡Alfaro Vive, Carajo!) group. The March 1987 killing of Alvaro Fayad, the M-19's top political and

military strategist, was believed to have dealt the organization a severe setback, however.

In May 1988, the M-19 again burst into public prominence by kidnapping Alvaro Gómez Hurtado, a two-time presidential candidate and Conservative Party leader. Gómez Hurtado's release was obtained two months later in exchange for the government's agreement to meet with M-19 leaders at the papal nunciature in Bogotá. The meeting was to have paved the way for a national summit to include representatives of the country's principal guerrilla groups. Barco subsequently announced, however, that he would not send an official representative to the preliminary peace talks.

### *The National Liberation Army*

Founded in 1964 by Fabio Vásquez Castaño, the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional—ELN) adopted a doctrine for insurrection inspired by the Cuban Revolution. During the mid-1960s, ELN activities centered on the department of Santander and included seizing temporary control of small towns, opening jails to free prisoners, robbing banks, and making anti-government speeches in small villages throughout the country in an effort to gain recruits. The guerrilla organization gained international notoriety in 1966 when it recruited Father Camilo Torres Restrepo, a well-educated Roman Catholic priest from a socially prominent family. Torres joined the ELN following his unsuccessful efforts at organizing a political opposition to the National Front government. Only four months after taking up arms, Torres was killed in a confrontation with an army patrol (see Trends Within the Church since the 1940s, ch. 2).

Although the ELN was considered the most effective of the country's guerrilla organizations, in the early 1970s it was decimated by the military's counterinsurgency campaign. By 1973 the armed forces claimed that they had "virtually destroyed" the ELN. Although the military severed the ELN's ties to its urban support network, the guerrillas had recouped their strength by mid-decade. In 1975 and 1976, the ELN engaged in several kidnappings, bank robberies, and assassinations, including the killing of Inspector-General of the Army General Ramón Arturo Rincón Quiñones.

The ELN was the only major guerrilla organization that did not sign the 1984 cease-fire agreement. This refusal, along with the ELN's kidnapping of President Betancur's brother in an attempt to sabotage the peace talks, reportedly earned the organization a rebuke from Cuban leader Fidel Castro Ruz. Possibly as a result

of Castro's stance of support for the peace talks, three ELN fronts reached a temporary cease-fire agreement with the government.

In the late 1980s, the ELN's size was estimated at 500. Its theater of operations included vast stretches of Colombia's eastern plains and portions of the departments of Norte de Santander, Santander, Bolívar, Cauca, and Antioquia, and the intendancy of Arauca. The ELN's activities included kidnappings and attacks on petroleum installations, pipelines, and exploratory drilling sites. Such attacks were carried out not only to disrupt the national economy but also to draw attention to the exploitation of Colombia's natural resources by foreign companies.

### *The Popular Liberation Army*

The Popular Libeation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación—EPL) was the only major group in Colombia espousing a Maoist political ideology; as such, it endorsed the concept of a prolonged popular war. Organized in early 1968, the EPL was headed by pro-Chinese communists who formed the Communist Party of Colombia—Marxist-Leninist (Partido Comunista de Colombia—Marxista-Leninista—PCC-ML) upon breaking with the Soviet-line PCC in July 1965. The EPL served as the armed branch of the PCC-ML. Unlike the PCC, the PCC-ML did not enjoy legal status in 1988.

The EPL's first military operations were in the department of Córdoba, on the Caribbean coast, during the late 1960s. Internal dissension and the deaths of some of its key leaders during the 1970s weakened the EPL's operational capabilities. In 1979 continuing dissent within the EPL led to formation of the Pedro León Arboleda Movement, a splinter group named for an EPL leader slain in 1975. This group remained active as an independent organization in the 1980s.

Despite its Maoist orientation, the EPL chose to participate in the 1984 cease-fire, but it refused to sign a peace agreement. Following the reported killing in 1985 of its leader, Ernesto Rojas, the organization broke the cease-fire. In 1987 the EPL's size was estimated at approximately 350 guerrillas organized into four fronts. Its principal area of operations was in rural regions of the departments of Antioquia, Córdoba, and Risaralda. The organization also maintained urban support networks in major cities.

## Narcotics Control and Interdiction

The activities of Colombian narcotics traffickers represented a serious internal security problem. During the 1980s, government officials that had been murdered for their efforts to carry out their

responsibilities under the country's narcotics laws included a minister of justice, an attorney general, a dozen Supreme Court judges, and a former head of the Antinarcotics Police. In addition, scores of police personnel and lower-court justices had been murdered by the narcotics traffickers' hired assassins (*sicarios*). By early 1988, the narcotics traffickers had organized their own death squad, The Extraditables. The Extraditables issued threats against or murdered persons seen as abetting the government's attempt to comply with outstanding United States extradition warrants. The corruption spawned as a by-product of the lucrative trafficking operations had threatened, if not irreparably damaged, the integrity of the Colombian judicial system. Major traffickers often could obtain release by making substantial cash payments to the magistrates responsible for their cases.

Although some limited drug interdiction efforts occurred under the Misael Pastrana Borrero (1970–74) and Alfonso López Michelsen (1974–78) administrations, President Turbay implemented the first major campaign against narcotics trafficking. In November 1978, Turbay declared a state of siege and dispatched the military to quell the surge in drug-related activities then taking place in the Guajira Peninsula (see Drugs and Society, ch. 2). Over the next sixteen months, a 12,000-man army brigade destroyed marijuana fields in the countryside and arrested traffickers while the navy blockaded the coastline and confiscated narcotics shipments heading to the United States. The campaign ended in March 1980 because of growing concerns that it was disrupting the region's economy and exposing the armed forces to the corrupting influence of payments from narcotics traffickers. Turbay removed the military from the Guajira Peninsula and replaced them with 6,000 members of the National Police. During the Turbay administration, Colombia also agreed to a treaty authorizing the extradition to the United States of narcotics traffickers accused of crimes in that country. Finally, Turbay established the Judicial Police to assist in the investigation of narcotics-related crimes (see The National Police and Law Enforcement Authorities, this ch.).

Upon assuming the presidency in 1982, Betancur adopted a somewhat softer drug policy than had his predecessor. Betancur objected to the extradition treaty on nationalist grounds and also refused to allow the aerial spraying of paraquat on marijuana fields. At the same time, however, Betancur's minister of justice, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, aggressively pursued traffickers and authorized raids on the Medellín Cartel's principal cocaine-processing complexes. In April 1984, Lara Bonilla was assassinated, apparently in reprisal for the successful raid the previous month on the massive

Tranquilandia complex. The murder of the minister of justice shocked Colombians and galvanized Betancur into action. Declaring a "war without quarter" against traffickers, Betancur invoked his state of siege powers, extradited thirteen drug dealers to the United States, and committed substantial resources to massive antinarcotics operations by the police.

During its first two years in office, the Barco administration was rocked by a series of narcotics-related incidents. In rulings in December 1986 and June 1987, the Supreme Court essentially gutted the extradition treaty with the United States (see The Judiciary; Relations with the United States, ch. 4). Prior to the second ruling, however, the government extradited drug kingpin Carlos Lehder Rivas. In December 1986, a hit squad of the Medellín Cartel traveled to Budapest and seriously wounded Enrique Parejo González, Colombia's ambassador to Hungary and Lara Bonilla's successor as minister of justice during the Betancur administration. The following January, gunmen employed by the cartel assassinated Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos Jiménez and kidnapped Andrés Pastrana, PC candidate for mayor of Bogotá and son of former President Pastrana.

In response, in January 1988 Barco decreed a series of measures collectively known as the Statute for the Defense of Democracy. The statute, which was partly modeled on antiterrorist measures adopted in West Germany, Italy, and Britain, expanded the security forces' jurisdiction under a state of siege declaration and lengthened prison sentences for those convicted of terrorist acts. Returning to a policy of the Turbay administration, Barco recommitted military forces to the interdiction effort. Despite concerns in the armed forces' hierarchy about the potential corrupting influence of the drug lords, Barco felt compelled to order the military into action because of widespread public concerns over police effectiveness.

## Crime and Punishment

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Colombia had the third highest rate of homicides in the world. Nearly three decades later, Colombia still was counted among the world's top countries in terms of the ratio of the number of murders to the size of the population. According to the 1985 national census, murder was the fourth most common cause of death in the country. In 1984 murders, kidnappings, and street crimes reportedly were so common that the elite considered private bodyguards and armored cars a necessity. In 1987 an estimated 16,000 Colombians were murdered. In 1988 the continuing deterioration in the internal security situation suggested

that the trend toward an increased incidence of violent crime was unlikely to be reversed in the short term.

## Crime and Political Violence

The rising crime rate reflected an increase in politically motivated violence as well as criminal violence. During the Betancur administration's temporary cease-fire with the guerrillas in 1985, less than 10 percent of the crimes committed were adjudged related to political violence. However, following the abandonment of the cease-fire later that year by all but one of the nation's guerrilla groups, the incidence of political violence again began to increase. This trend continued throughout the latter half of the 1980s. Moreover, the increase in other forms of crime during the same period made this statistic on political violence less meaningful in absolute terms. Throughout the first ten months of 1987, political leaders were being killed by death squads at a rate of about 100 per month.

Data published by the Colombian government in 1987 estimated that nearly 80 percent of the crimes committed in the nation went unreported. In turn, of the 20 percent reported to the authorities, only 1 percent resulted in conviction and sentencing. In addition to the poor conviction rate, the administration of criminal justice was complicated by the mounting backlog of cases. In 1983 about 80 percent of those held in the country's prison system were awaiting trial. At that time, there were nearly 400,000 new penal cases each year, and the average load of 600 cases per judge was rising. In June 1983, the Colombian Institute of Penal Reform determined that the number of criminal cases awaiting adjudication exceeded 1.3 million (see The Judiciary, ch. 4).

Among the crimes plaguing the nation, drug abuse was considered to be a serious, escalating problem in the late 1980s (see Drugs and Society, ch. 2). Illegal domestic narcotics consumption also appeared to be related to the rise in such other crimes as theft and murder. The circulation of other forms of contraband through the nation also challenged law enforcement authorities. By 1984 Medellín, the center of Colombia's narcotics trade, also had established its reputation as the country's contraband capital. In Medellín a wide range of items, from guns and emeralds to methaqualone and United States cigarettes, was sold on the black market.

## The Penal System

The Penal Code of 1938, as subsequently revised, regulated the country's penal system. Laws were applicable to citizens and aliens alike who committed crimes as defined under the code. Crimes were

classifiable as either felonies or misdemeanors and were divided into six categories: crimes against property, crimes against persons, crimes against individual liberties, sex-related crimes, crimes against public administration, and miscellaneous crimes. In 1983 approximately 54 percent of all offenses were crimes against property; 35 percent were crimes against persons.

The maximum prison term allowable under the code was twenty-four years. Recognized punishments were confinement in a penitentiary, which included a mandatory one month to two years of solitary confinement; imprisonment, which was served at a prison facility less secure than the penitentiary; preventive detention, which mandated confinement at a minimally secure facility where the detainee could choose from a variety of jobs; simple confinement, which was comparable to internal exile; and fines. The death penalty, said to have long been a cause for public opposition during the nineteenth century, was eliminated in 1910.

In the early 1980s, the capacity of the country's prison system was only 12,000 prisoners, yet the size of the country's prison population was estimated at 30,000. Both the rising crime rate and the backlog of cases had contributed to the serious overcrowding. In July 1985, a number of important legal procedural reforms affected the administration of justice. Some of the reforms were designed to help empty the country's prisons of those convicted of minor offenses whose sentences were less than two years. These measures were believed to affect approximately 3,000 individuals who were awaiting trial or serving out their sentences. Preventive detention was mandated for those convicted of minor offenses but who were sentenced to a minimum of two years' incarceration. In addition, because of the lengthy delay in hearing cases, the issuance of arrest warrants for individuals suspected of minor crimes that had a sentence of less than two years was suspended. The penalties were stiffened for serious crimes, however. Persons convicted of committing such crimes as kidnapping for ransom, extortion, terrorism, drug trafficking, or serious economic crimes remained subject to the full penalties applicable under existing law.

The largest maximum security penitentiary was La Picota Prison in Bogotá. Smaller penitentiaries were located in Medellín, Palmira, Ibagué, Manizales, Pamplona, Pasto, and Barranquilla. Prison facilities for females were maintained at Tunja and Cuenca. In addition, agricultural penal colonies were located at Acacías and in the interior jungle near Araracuara. Two additional small prison facilities were located in Bogotá and on Isla Gorgona. Each judicial district and municipality also operated its own jail. During the 1980s, the majority of prisoners convicted or awaiting trial

were held at these small local facilities. The principal reformatories for juvenile offenders, holding youth aged fourteen to eighteen, were located at Bogotá and Fagua.

* * *

Resources for information related to national security in Colombia are diverse, yet few comprehensive accounts had been published by the late 1980s. The chapter on Colombia published in *The Armed Forces of Latin America* by Adrian J. English presents useful information on the military's history, organization, and matériel. The sections on the Colombian military in Robert Wesson's *The Latin American Military Institution* and the chapter by Daniel L. Premo in Wesson's *New Military Politics in Latin America* also are helpful in highlighting key points in the development of the institution. Russell W. Ramsey has written a number of studies on Colombia's armed forces, particularly with regard to their role in the maintenance of internal security.

J. Mark Ruhl's *Colombia: Armed Forces and Society* is one of the few published works dealing with the political role of the armed forces from a historical perspective. Richard L. Maullin's *Soldiers, Guerrillas, and Politics in Colombia,* published in 1973, continues to be one of the most comprehensive overviews of the security situation. Several books authored by General Fernando Landazábal Reyes provide excellent background for understanding the Colombian armed forces' perceptions of threats to national security. The best sources for information on Colombian narcotics trafficking operations as well as on developments related to the activities of the country's guerrilla organizations are press reports, articles in scholarly journals, and sundry specialized publications and reports issued by the United States government. The chapters on Colombia authored by Harvey F. Kline in several annual volumes of *Latin America and Caribbean Contemporary Record* also are useful in reviewing recent developments. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

# Appendix

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*Table 1. Metric Conversion Coefficients and Factors*

| When you know | Multiply by | To find |
|---|---|---|
| Millimeters | 0.04 | inches |
| Centimeters | 0.39 | inches |
| Meters | 3.3 | feet |
| Kilometers | 0.62 | miles |
| Hectares (10,000 m²) | 2.47 | acres |
| Square kilometers | 0.39 | square miles |
| Cubic meters | 35.3 | cubic feet |
| Liters | 0.26 | gallons |
| Kilograms | 2.2 | pounds |
| Metric tons | 0.98 | long tons |
| | 1.1 | short tons |
| | 2,204 | pounds |
| Degrees Celsius (Centigrade) | 9 divide by 5 and add 32 | degrees Fahrenheit |

*Table 2. Population Growth Rate and Its Sources, 1938–82*

| | Average Rate of Increase [1] | | Source of Change [2] | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Period | Total Increase | Natural Increase | Birth Rate | Death Rate | Net Migration Rate |
| 1938–51 | 2.0 | 2.4 | 46.5 | 22.4 | -4.1 |
| 1951–64 | 3.1 | 3.0 | 47.2 | 17.4 | 1.3 |
| 1964–69 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 43.0 | 11.7 | -2.8 |
| 1969–73 | 2.2 | 2.4 | 33.8 | 9.7 | -2.6 |
| 1973–78 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 30.4 | 8.5 | -2.1 |
| 1978–82 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 29.7 | 8.0 | -1.8 |

[1] Percentage per year.
[2] Per thousand population.

Source: Based on information from World Bank, *Colombia: Economic Development and Policy under Changing Conditions,* Washington, 1984, 13.

*Table 3. Demographic Indicators, Selected Years, 1966–67 to 1980–81*

| | 1966-67 | 1971-72 | 1975-76 | 1980-81 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fertility rate (children per woman) ..... | 6.4 | 4.8 | 4.0 | 3.5 |
| Life expectancy at birth (years) ..... | 56.5 | 58.3 | 60.1 | 61.6 |
| Infant mortality rate* (deaths per thousand births) .. | 87.0 | 78.0 | 69.9 | 63.1 |
| Dependency ratio (percentage of children under ten years of age in total population) ..... | 34.3 | 32.4 | 29.3 | 25.6 |

*The National Health Survey produced a maximum, minimum, and an average estimate for infant mortality. These figures are average estimates.

Source: Based on information from World Bank, *Colombia: Economic Development and Policy under Changing Conditions*, Washington, 1984, 14.

*Table 4. Urban and Rural Population Size and Growth Rates, 1938–82*

| | Urban [2] | | | Rural | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Years [1] | Size [3] | Percentage of Total | Growth [4] | Size | Growth | Size | Growth |
| 1938 | 2,879 | 30.9 | | 6,438 | | 9,317 | |
| | | | 3.7 | | 1.1 | | 2.0 |
| 1951 | 4,630 | 38.5 | | 7,397 | | 12,027 | |
| | | | 5.5 | | 1.1 | | 3.1 |
| 1964 | 9,328 | 52.1 | | 8,576 | | 17,904 | |
| | | | 4.1 | | 0.7 | | 2.6 |
| 1973 | 13,340 | 59.5 | | 9,141 | | 22,481 | |
| | | | 3.0 | | 0.4 | | 2.0 |
| 1982 | 17,500 | 64.9 | | 9,465 | | 26,965 | |

[1] Census years except for 1982.
[2] Urban population defined as persons living in a county seat (*cabecera municipal*, i.e., urban area of a municipality).
[3] Midyear population in thousands.
[4] Rate in average percentage per year.

Source: Based on information from World Bank, *Colombia: Economic Development and Policy under Changing Conditions*, Washington, 1984.

*Table 5. Trends in Rural-Urban Wage Differential, 1962–64, 1969–71, and 1978–79*
(in percentages)

| | 1962–64 | 1969–71 | 1978–79 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Agricultural workers* | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Unskilled construction workers in Bogotá | 109 | 117 | 90 |
| Industrial workers | | | |
| Blue-collar workers | 307 | 359 | 214 |
| White-collar workers | 702 | 889 | 476 |

*The figure of 100 for the three periods is an index on which the other figures are based.

Source: Based on information from World Bank, *Colombia: Economic Development and Policy under Changing Conditions,* Washington, 1984, 32.

*Table 6. Infant Mortality, Selected Years, 1950–84*
(deaths per thousand live births)

| Year | Maximum Estimates | Minimum Estimates | Average Estimates |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1950 | 144 | 136 | 140 |
| 1960 | 116 | 103 | 110 |
| 1965 | 105 | 89 | 97 |
| 1970 | 94 | 77 | 86 |
| 1975 | 85 | 67 | 76 |
| 1980 | 76 | 58 | 67 |
| 1984 | n.a. | n.a. | 52 |

n.a.—not available.

Source: Based on information from World Bank, *Colombia Health Sector Review,* Washington, 1982, 63; and Pan American Health Organization, *Evaluation of the Strategy for Health for All by the Year 2000,* Washington, 1986, 236.

*Table 7. Employment by Economic Sector, Selected Years, 1938–84*
(in percentages)

| Sector | 1938 | 1951 | 1964 | 1974 | 1984 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agriculture | 59.2 | 55.9 | 49.0 | 41.9 | 32.7 |
| Commerce | 5.7 | 5.6 | 8.9 | 12.6 | 17.8 |
| Construction | 2.8 | 3.7 | 4.5 | 4.7 | 5.0 |
| Manufacturing | 14.1 | 12.7 | 13.2 | 14.3 | 16.4 |
| Mining | 2.3 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 1.1 |
| Services | 15.9 | 20.4 | 22.8 | 25.7 | 27.0 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Based on information from Colombia, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Plan de Economía Social, Agosto 1987,* Bogotá, 1987, 168.

*Table 8. Average Yield Comparisons of Principal Crops, 1983*
(in kilograms per hectare)

| Crop | Colombia | South America | World |
|---|---|---|---|
| Barley | 1,030 | 1,258 | 2,113 |
| Cereals | 2,473 | 1,910 | 2,282 |
| Cacao | 571 | 479 | 333 |
| Coffee | 739 | 640 | 547 |
| Cassava | 10,381 | 10,950 | 8,277 |
| Maize | 1,450 | 1,956 | 2,798 |
| Potatoes | 12,500 | 10,210 | 8,277 |
| Rice | 4,490 | 1,953 | 3,114 |
| Sorghum | 2,105 | 3,001 | 1,344 |
| Soybeans | 2,017 | 1,787 | 1,601 |
| Sugarcane | 90,323 | 63,316 | 57,733 |
| Tobacco | 1,440 | 1,262 | 1,327 |

Source: Based on information from Food and Agriculture Organization, *1983 FAO Production Yearbook*, Rome, 1984.

*Table 9. Crop Production, 1981, 1983, and 1985*
(in thousands of tons)

| Commodity | 1981 | 1983 | 1985 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bananas | 1,109 | 963 | 1,104 |
| Barley | 56 | 28 | 50 |
| Beans | 73 | 82 | 99 |
| Cacao | 36 | 40 | 44 |
| Cassava | 2,150 | 1,615 | 1,910 |
| Coffee | 810 | 798 | 660 |
| Corn | 880 | 864 | 763 |
| Cotton | 116 | 77 | 125 |
| Cottonseed | 215 | 61 | 186 |
| Palm oil | 80 | 102 | 121 |
| Plantains | 2,400 | 2,247 | 2,228 |
| Potatoes | 2,105 | 2,187 | 1,910 |
| Rice | 1,788 | 1,780 | 1,796 |
| Sesame seed | 17 | 5 | 16 |
| Sorghum | 532 | 602 | 499 |
| Soybeans | 89 | 122 | 104 |
| Sugar, raw | 1,148 | 1,350 | 1,300 |
| Sugar, refined | 803 | 780 | 983 |
| Tobacco | 41 | 37 | 26 |
| Wheat | 62 | 77 | 76 |

Source: Based on information from United States, Department of Agriculture, *World Indices of Agricultural and Food Production, 1975-85*, Washington, 1986, 28.

*Table 10. Production of Precious Minerals, 1982–86*
(in troy ounces unless otherwise indicated)

| Mineral | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gold | 459,559 | 426,517 | 730,670 | 1,142,385 | 1,279,242 |
| Silver | 124,222 | 132,392 | 153,441 | 168,770 | 186,814 |
| Platinum | 11,886 | 10,301 | 10,106 | 11,528 | 14,368 |
| Emeralds (in carats) | 395,960 | 1,011,345 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |

n.a.—not available.

Source: Based on information from Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile: Colombia, 1987-88,* London, 1987, 13.

*Table 11. Actual and Projected Coal Production by Administrative Division, Selected Years, 1984–89*
(in thousands of tons)

| Administrative Division | Actual | | Projected | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1984 | 1986 | 1988 | 1989 |
| La Guajira | 1,497 | 6,030 | 11,900 | 14,400 |
| Cundinamarca | 1,813 | 1,930 | 2,044 | 2,079 |
| Boyacá | 1,509 | 1,400 | 1,550 | 1,577 |
| Antioquia | 782 | 890 | 926 | 942 |
| Norte de Santander | 304 | 490 | n.a. | n.a. |
| Valle del Cauca | 645 | 730 | 796 | 809 |
| Other | 87 | 75 | 484 | 493 |

n.a.—not available.

Source: Based on information from Colombia, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Plan de Economía Social; Agosto 1987,* Bogotá, 1987, 415, 417.

*Table 12. Balance of Payments, 1983-87*
(in millions of United States dollars)

| | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Current account | | | | | |
| Merchandise exports | 3,147 | 3,623 | 3,883 | 5,477 | 5,206 |
| Merchandise imports | -4,464 | -4,027 | -3,734 | -3,486 | -3,933 |
| Trade balance | -1,317 | -404 | 149 | 1,991 | 1,273 |
| Exports of services | 1,133 | 1,055 | 1,227 | 1,144 | 1,244 |
| Imports of services | -2,806 | -3,000 | -3,060 | -3,414 | -3,805 |
| Net transfers | 164 | 299 | 464 | 774 | 700 |
| Current account balance | -2,826 | -2,050 | -1,220 | 495 | -588 |
| Capital account | | | | | |
| Foreign investment | 514 | 561 | 729 | 689 | 418 |
| Portfolio investment | -2 | -3 | -1 | 39 | n.a. |
| Other long-term capital | 1,016 | 1,264 | 1,330 | 1,584 | 539 |
| Short-term capital | -92 | -878 | -208 | -1,220 | -445 |
| Capital account balance | 1,436 | 944 | 1,850 | 1,092 | 512 |
| Errors and omissions | -266 | -175 | -307 | -226 | n.a. |
| Counterpart items | -67 | 20 | -39 | 51 | n.a. |
| Overall balance | -1,723 | -1,261 | 284 | 1,412 | -76 |

n.a.—not available.

Source: Based on information from Colombia, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Plan de Economía Social, Agosto 1987*, Bogotá, 1987, 330.

*Table 13. Foreign Debt Statistics, Selected Years, 1980-86*
(in millions of United States dollars)

| | 1980 | 1982 | 1984 | 1986 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Debt level | | | | |
| External debt total (EDT) | 6,935.6 | 10,302.4 | 12,273.5 | 14,618.8 |
| Total debt service (TDS) | 528.9 | 877.9 | 1,088.7 | 1,795.3 |
| Interest payments | 278.9 | 570.5 | 545.2 | 871.2 |
| New loan commitment terms: | | | | |
| Interest rate (in percentages) | 12.9 | 10.7 | 10 4 | 8.5 |
| Maturity (in years) | 15.3 | 14.1 | 13.8 | 13.6 |
| Grace period (in years) | 4.4 | 4.7 | 4.2 | 3.1 |
| Key ratios | | | | |
| EDT to gross domestic product | 20.9 | 27.0 | 33.4 | 46.8 |
| EDT to exports | 118.3 | 207.1 | 230.4 | 225.0 |
| Public debt to exports | 69.7 | 120.4 | 149.6 | 176.0 |
| TDS to exports | 9.0 | 17.7 | 20.4 | 27.6 |

Source: Based on information from World Bank, *World Debt Tables, 1987-88*, II, Washington, 1988, 78-81.

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# Glossary

*compadrazgo*-Literally, copaternity. A system of ritual coparenthood that links parents, children, and godparents in a close social or economic relationship.

consumer price index (CPI)—A statistical measure of sustained change in the price level weighted according to spending patterns.

Contadora—A diplomatic initiative launched by a January 1983 meeting on Contadora Island off the Pacific coast of Panama, by which the "Core Four" mediator countries of Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama sought to prevent through negotiations a regional conflagration among the Central American states of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. In September 1984, the negotiating process produced a draft treaty, the Contadora Acta, which was judged acceptable by the government of Nicaragua but rejected by the other four Central American states concerned. The governments of Peru, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil formed the Contadora Support Group in 1985 in an effort to revitalize the faltering talks. The process was suspended unofficially in June 1986 when the Central American governments refused to sign a revised Acta. The Contadora process was effectively superseded by direct negotiations among the Central American states.

Corporatist—An hierarchical conception of society that assigns to elites the guiding roles of maintaining social harmony and identifying the general will of the nation.

"crawling peg"—A system of marginal and frequent adjustments of the exchange rate in order to enhance the attractiveness of a nation's exports.

fiscal year (FY)—Calendar year.

gross domestic product (GDP)—A measure of the total value of goods and services produced by the domestic economy during a given period, usually one year. Obtained by adding the value contributed by each sector of the economy in the form of profits, compensation to employees, and depreciation (consumption of capital). The income arising from investments and possessions owned abroad is not included. Hence, the term *domestic* is used to distinguish GDP from GNP (*q.v.*).

gross national product (GNP)—Total market value of all final goods and services produced by an economy during a year. Obtained

by adding GDP (*q.v.*) and the income received from abroad by residents less payments remitted abroad to nonresidents.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)—Established along with the World Bank (*q.v.*) in 1945, the IMF is a specialized agency affiliated with the United Nations that takes responsibility for stabilizing international exchange rates and payments. The main business of the IMF is the provision of loans to its members when they experience balance of payments difficulties. These loans often carry conditions that require substantial internal economic adjustments by the recipients.

import substitution industrialization—A pattern of economic development encouraging the local production of previously imported manufactured goods. Governments typically institute high tariffs to protect the infant domestic industries. Employed widely in Latin America in the wake of disruption of trading patterns during World War I and the Great Depression.

liberation theology—An activist movement led by Roman Catholic clergy who trace their inspiration to Vatican Council II (1965), where some church procedures were liberalized, and the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellín (1968), which endorsed greater direct efforts to improve the lot of the poor. Advocates of liberation theology—sometimes referred to as "liberationists"—work mainly through Christian Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiásticas de Base—CEBs). Members of CEBs meet in small groups to reflect on scripture and discuss its meaning in their lives. They are introduced to a radical interpretation of the Bible, one that employs Marxist terminology to analyze and condemn the wide disparities between the wealthy elite and the impoverished masses in most underdeveloped countries. This reflection often leads members to organize to improve their living standards through cooperatives and civic improvement projects.

open market operations—The process by which the central bank buys or sells securities in the open market to control monetary growth or interest rates. By selling securities, the central bank absorbs excess money, whereas by buying securities it adds to the money supply.

peso—Colombia's unit of currency. In keeping with Colombia's adoption of the "crawling peg" (*q.v.*) system, the government pursued a policy of frequent marginal devaluations of the Peso against major traded currencies. The exchange rate averaged Col$142.3 = US$1 in 1985, Col$194.3 = US$1 in 1986, Col$242.6 = US$1 in 1987, and Col$299.1 = US$1 in 1988.

secondary recovery—An artificial means of forcing oil out of rock by repressurizing older oil reservoirs with injections of gas or water.

value-added tax—An incremental tax applied to the value added at each stage of the processing of a raw material or the production and distribution of a commodity. It is calculated as the difference between the product value at a given state and the cost of all materials and services purchased as inputs. The value-added tax is a form of indirect taxation, and its impact on the ultimate consumer is the same as that of a sales tax.

World Bank—The informal name used to designate a group of three affiliated international institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The IBRD, established in 1945, has the primary purpose of providing loans to developing countries for productive projects. The IDA, a legally separate loan fund administered by the staff of the IBRD, was set up in 1960 to furnish credits to the poorest of developing countries on much easier terms than those of conventional IBRD loans. The IFC, founded in 1956, supplements the activities of the IBRD through loans and assistance designed specifically to encourage the growth of productive private enterprises in less-developed countries. The president and certain senior officers of the IBRD hold the same positions in the IFC. The three institutions are owned by the governments of the countries that subscribe their capital. To participate in the World Bank group, member states must first belong to the International Monetary Fund (*q.v.*).

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