

**COERCIVE ENTREPRENEURS AND STATE CAPACITY:
COLOMBIAN STATE WEAKNESS (1750-2004)**

by

Peter J.D. Larose

B.A. The University of Victoria, 1999

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

We accept this thesis as conforming
To the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

February 2004

© Peter J.D. Larose, 2004

Library Authorization

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Peter J.D. Larose

Name of Author (*please print*)

02/23/2004

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

Title of Thesis: Coercive Entrepreneurs and State Capacity: Colombian State Weakness (1750-2004)

Degree: Master of Arts

Year: 2004

Department of Political Science

The University of British Columbia

Vancouver, BC Canada

ABSTRACT

Since 1982 Colombia has undertaken one of the most ambitious agendas of institutional reform in the Americas, yet these reforms have had little effect upon limiting the expansion of violence throughout the country. This research argues that these formal political reforms have been ineffective because the state has been unable to monopolize the use of force and promote the rule of law throughout the country. Using the state-formation model of Charles Tilly, it describes how the coercive capacity of the Colombian state has always been historically weak, due to the continuous manner in which entrepreneurs have privately financed coercive organizations that challenge the state's hegemony over the use of force. This expansion and diffusion of coercive means has resulted in the inability of any single organization to monopolize the legitimate means of coercion and establish the rule of law, which are the necessary preconditions for democratic reforms to be meaningfully implemented. Accordingly, the research examines the evolving relationship between the state security apparatus and other major coercive centres, including the political parties, private counter-insurgency groups, narcotics militias, and peasant-based guerrilla organizations. It demonstrates how all aspirants to state power are constrained by the same requirements of extracting capital from subject populations, developing coercive capabilities, and mobilizing citizens to fight for their cause. From such a vantage, the continued weakness of the Colombian state is placed within a historical and comparative context that helps illuminate why it has been unable to end its persistent internal conflict.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables and Figures.....	v
List of Acronyms, and Translations.....	vi
CHAPTER I Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER II The Colombian Puzzle.....	11
2.1 The Expansion of Violence.....	12
2.2 Institutional Reform.....	14
2.3 Political Parties and the Electoral System.....	14
2.4 The Colombian Judiciary and the Rule of Law.....	17
2.5 Increased Violence Amid Institutional Reform.....	20
CHAPTER III Theorizing Civil Conflicts within Weak States.....	25
3.1 Charles Tilly and State Development.....	28
3.2 State Formation – Combining Capital and Coercion.....	30
3.3 War-Making and the Latin American State.....	35
CHAPTER IV Pre-Independence and Formation of Colombian State (1750-1958).....	41
4.1 Pre-Independence and <i>La Patria Boba</i>	42
4.2 Early Independence.....	43
4.3 War-Making and Party-Making.....	47
4.4 Victor's Justice and Political Change.....	50
4.5 Into the 20 th Century – <i>La Violencia</i> and Beyond.....	52
CHAPTER V The National Front (1958-1982).....	59
5.1 Elite Coalescence after <i>La Violencia</i>	62
5.2 Exclusion, Repression and Birth of Guerrilla Movements.....	65
5.3 Military Neglect and Birth of Paramilitarism.....	66
5.4 The Onset of Paramilitarism.....	70
CHAPTER VI Organizational Adaptation in a Time of Violence (1982-2004).....	75
6.1 Competitive Emulation and the Race to the Bottom.....	78
6.2 The Self-Defense and Paramilitary Groups.....	81
6.2.1 Attempts at Legitimization.....	84
6.3 Guerrilla Insurgency Groups.....	87

6.3.1	Financial Expansion and Structural Adaptation.....	88
6.3.2	Attempts at Legitimization.....	91
6.4	Government Armed Forces.....	93
6.4.1	Reform of the Armed Forces and Police.....	96
6.4.2	Revenue Increases and Military Expansion.....	97
6.4.3	Privatization and Decentralization of Security.....	98
6.4.4	Privatization and Specialization of Urban Policing.....	100
6.4.5	Shifting the Bounds of Democratic Accountability.....	101
CHAPTER VII	Conclusions and Recommendations.....	107
	Bibliography.....	118

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Average Homicides per year (1975-2003).....	12
Table 2: Homicides per 100,000 (1990-2000).....	13
Table 3: Average Annual Kidnappings.....	13
Table 4: Freedom House Classification for Colombia.....	14
Table 5: Human Rights Violations by Colombian Armed Forces.....	19
Table 6: Percentage of Population in Armed Forces.....	46
Table 7: Percentage of Population in Armed Forces.....	68
 Figure 1: Tillean Collective Action Model.....	 34

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND TRANSLATIONS

- Alianza Nacional Popular* (ANAPO): "National Popular Alliance" political party, founded by former military dictator, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1958).
- Autodefensas Colombianas de Cordoba y Urabá* (ACCU): "Self-defense Corps of Cordoba and Urabá" paramilitary organization created in the 1990s.
- Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC): "United Self-Defense Corps of Colombia," the main paramilitary organization in Colombia, created in the mid-1990s.
- Bandolerismo*: The phenomenon of widespread banditry.
- Bandolero*: "Bandit."
- El Buen Vecino*: "The good neighbour," referring to community neighbourhood watch programs.
- Caudillo*: Political strongman who organizes labourers and manages local political decisions.
- Chuvalitas*: Derogatory term for members of the armed forces
- Convivialista*: Party moderates who supported partisan cooperation rather than continued violence during La Violencia.
- Cuerpo Especial Armado* (CEA): "Special armed body" police unit created by Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) to combat the growing number of hired assassins and narcotics traffickers.
- Despeje*: the demilitarized zone offered to the FARC in 1998.
- Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN): The "National Liberation Army," a small foquista guerrilla group created in 1965 and still present in 2004.
- Estado de conmoción*: "State of unrest," which can be declared by the President of the Republic, which grants reserve domains of power to the executive, armed forces and police.
- Foquista guerrilla*: Guerrilla organization that does not establish a permanent presence with populations, and that primarily undertakes surprise attacks upon the state, private companies, and state infrastructure.
- El Frente Nacional*: "The National Front" consociational regime that shared and alternated political power between the Liberals and Conservatives between 1958 and 1986.
- Gamonal(es)*: Powerful economic elites, usually landowners, that possess considerable sway over the decisions made in rural regions.
- Grupos de Operaciones Especiales*: "Special Operations Groups" that were responsible for limiting kidnappings and threats to public officials during the mid-1990s.
- Latifundia*: Large estates
- La Violencia*: "The Violence," termed for the civil war that lasted between 1948 and roughly 1958.
- Pajaros*: "The birds," in reference to Conservative Party militia units that specialized in displacing smallholding farmers from their lands.
- Partido Comunista de Colombia* (PCC): Colombian Communist Party
- Procuraduría General*: Attorney General's Office, created in 1991 with the goal of overseeing the trial of human rights violators throughout the country, including public officials.
- Rondas campesinas*: Peasant patrols used by the Peruvian government of Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s to root out guerrillas and their sympathisers
- Sicarios*: hired criminal assassins, often without explicitly political orientation
- Unión Patriótica*: "Patriotic Union" political party that was created in 1958 as the coalition of the Liberal and Conservative Parties

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis examines one of the central paradoxes in contemporary political analyses of Colombia: why the democratic regime has persisted, and in many respects formally strengthened, amid the widespread expansion of social and political violence since 1982. Since the early 1980s, the judiciary has been strengthened and made more accountable, political parties have remained stable and vibrant, several mechanisms for citizen input to governmental decision-making have been established, and a significant degree of political decentralization has been undertaken. Yet this strengthening of formal democratic institutions has not curtailed the expansion of social and political violence, which has increased more or less consistently since 1982. In this period the country has witnessed increasing incidences of kidnapping, political assassination, the intimidation and extortion of public officials, “disappearances,” common criminal violence, and increases in most types of human rights violations. Like much of the research already undertaken on Colombia, this analysis maintains that the central element of the present “illiberal democracy”¹ has been the historical weakness of the Colombian state.² However, an explanation of the causes of this state weakness has not been adequately addressed in the existing literature, and as such will be central to this analysis.

This paper describes Colombian state capacity – or more accurately *incapacity* – in terms of how effectively any single organization has been able to eliminate rivals to state power and establish a monopoly over the legitimate use of coercion. When no single organization is able to eliminate all other contenders and establish a relatively fixed set of rules to govern subject

¹ This is defined as a formally democratic regime where civil and political liberties are noticeably absent. See Ana María Bejarno and Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, “From ‘Restricted’ to ‘Besieged’: the Changing Nature of the Limits to Democracy in Colombia,” (Notre Dame: Kellogg Working Paper #296, April 2002).

² See Gonzalo Sánchez, “Introduction: Problems of Violence, Prospects for Peace,” in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia – the Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001). Bejarno and Pizarro, *ibid.* Catherine Legrand, “The Colombian Crisis in Historical Perspective,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28 (55, 56), 2003, pp. 165-209.

populations, the state is relatively weaker, and thus less able to implement meaningful agendas of social and political reform.

Such an analysis regarding the competition to monopolize coercion is best undertaken using the framework of Charles Tilly.³ Tilly's model of state formation emphasizes how military competition compels would-be state makers to make critical decisions regarding the dual processes of extracting capital from subjects and the development of coercive means.⁴ The various manners in which capital and coercion interact during the process of state formation dictates how power will be consolidated and what type of capacity the state will possess. Thus by examining the historical development of the Colombian security forces (military and police) relative to other centres of coercion, especially partisan militias, guerrilla organizations and paramilitaries, one can gain much analytical clarity and parsimony in an otherwise incomprehensible assemblage of actors, identities, institutions, and social forces. In essence, when the overall power of the dominant coercive organization (the would-be "state") is weak relative to that of other organizations, its ability to govern will be severely limited.

While Tilly's analysis is usually understood as an explanatory model for the *initial* formation of national states and the nation-state system, recent research by Fernando López-Alves has shown that a Tillean perspective is also valuable in explaining the evolution and consolidation of states.⁵ López-Alves maintains that until a state establishes a monopoly over

³ The primary works used in this paper include *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), *Big Structures, Large Processes and Huge Comparisons* (1984), *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime* (1986), most importantly *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992* (1992). For full citations see the Bibliography. Much of the theoretical framework also rests upon the extension of Tilly's work by Fernando López-Alves upon state consolidation in Latin America. For example, see Fernando López-Alves, *State Formation and Democracy in Latin America, 1810-1900* (Duke University Press: 2000).

⁴ Throughout this thesis, the term "coercion" is employed according to Tilly's definition: "all concerted application, threatened or actual, of action that commonly causes loss or damage to the persons or possessions of individuals or groups who are aware of both the action and the potential damage." See Tilly (1992), p. 19.

⁵ See López-Alves (2000). Also Fernando López-Alves, "The Transatlantic Bridge: Mirrors, Charles Tilly, and State Formation in the River Plate," in Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves eds., *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 153-176.

the legitimate means of coercion within its national territory, political outcomes are achieved primarily by direct coercion.

In the first 137 years of existence of the Colombian state (1821-1958), the primary forces behind the suppression of state capacity were the two dominant political parties: the *Partido Conservador* (Conservative Party) and the *Partido Liberal* (Liberal Party). These parties have been the central protagonists in Colombian politics since the early post-independence era. They were responsible for almost all organization of rural labourers (*campesinos*), coordinated most economic exchanges, provided the main avenues for upward social and economic mobility, were the most important forums for airing political grievances and contesting political authority, and were the primary funders of central military expansion. The internal cohesion within the parties was strengthened by almost constant inter-party violence up until 1958, and from 1958 until roughly 1982 the majority of violence has been directly related to the exclusionary nature of the party system, and the efforts of party elites to suppress the rise of other military contestants to their dominance. The violence and political parties grew together during the initial period, with partisan wars strengthening intra-party cohesion, and intra-party cohesion fuelling inter-party animosities. This process occurred unabated until 1958, after the conclusion of a devastating civil war that endured for the previous ten years. In order to quell the violence of the civil war, a power-sharing pact (The National Front agreement) was signed between the two parties in 1958. This agreement formally excluded new parties from the political process, sheltered the political class from the demands of both peasants and regional economic elites, and limited the size and centrality of the military in political matters. The result of this was the nearly constant expansion of rural violence between landowners and peasants in a virtually anarchic contestation for land, and the disillusionment of almost all segments of Colombian society with the political class, which was

increasingly viewed as being unresponsive, corrupt, and unable to provide either economic opportunity or physical security.

This is where the period from 1982 onward demonstrates a decisive break with Colombia's past, wherein various administrations have attempted to address the mounting security crisis throughout the country by undertaking substantial programs of institutional reform. Elements of both horizontal and vertical accountability have been placed over the military and national police, with citizens able to file claims of human rights abuses against any private or public citizen, and these have been prosecuted by an independent Attorney General's Office since the early-1990s. The armed forces have been placed under greater civilian control, with the Minister of Defense more actively overseeing military activities and ensuring the compliance of military officials with the executive's security strategy. In this period there has been an increase in the number of non-traditional parties involved in both Congressional and Senate elections, and more recently there has been an expansion of the armed forces and police. However, despite these myriad reforms, the only tactic that has appeared to limit the consistent expansion of violence between 1982 and 2004 was the recent enhancement of central military capabilities that began in 2002.

This paper is divided into three historical periods that demonstrate distinct manners in which state weakness was produced: 1821-1958; 1958-1982; and 1982-2004. The first was the period of nearly constant partisan violence between 1821 and 1958. During this period, the weakness of the state is explained via reference to Tilly's model of "capital intensive" state formation. Under this model, the development of military power is undertaken to benefit political and economic elites, who establish private security forces in order to protect their investments. The minimal state military apparatus that *does* exist is co-opted by these elites, which limits the military's functions to pacifying rural populations, quelling urban union activity, and ensuring sufficient defense from foreign and domestic threats to ensure secure

economic transactions. This model can be found in the Dutch Republic of the 16th and 17th Centuries, and the Italian city-states from the 1300s to 1500s. Such a model is usually only possible with the absence of major international security threats, as the decentralized and uncoordinated military coalitions lack the strength and cohesion that is required to stave off significant organized military assaults from large and powerful state armies.

Between 1821 and 1958 in Colombia, military capabilities were developed primarily by political and economic elites via the political parties, with rural militias providing local order, security from the militias of the other parties, and pacifying the potentially rebellious *campesinos*. During this period the parties limited the rise and influence of other organizations via armed repression and by co-opting them into the party bureaucracy, including independent rural peasant associations, industrial unions, new political parties, and an autonomous military. The period was one of almost constant partisan warfare, in which the victors drafted new Constitutions that reflected their members' interests and imposed a new vision of the state and society that would ultimately lead to future violent contestations for power. Thus while strong and vibrant political parties were created, it was at the expense of a state that was able to independently establish a set of relatively stable institutions that could consistently enforce the universal rule of law.

The second historical period that provides the framework for the present era of state weakness is the *Frente Nacional* (National Front) regime of 1958 to 1982,⁶ in which members of the two traditional parties united in order to halt the expansion of partisan violence that dominated the country for the previous 137 years. This unification resulted in the formal political exclusion of rural *campesinos* and economic elites by state officials in Bogotá, with the result being the progressive dissociation of the state from rural dispute resolution. This period

continued with the trend of privatized coercion described by the Tillean *capital-intensive* process, but with landowners increasingly developing their own private militias in order to counter the newly mobilized guerrilla movements. During this period, in which the state finally began to independently possess administrative and fiscal control over the country's hinterlands, it progressively lost its capacity to regulate or limit the expansion of the guerrillas and paramilitaries.⁷ And while other Latin American states were experiencing the rise of military dictatorships during this period, Colombian landowners and the traditional political class were able to secure their positions of privilege within the new system by facilitating and encouraging the rise of private paramilitary organizations. These organizations, in concert with the ostensibly counter-insurgency focused armed forces, were able to limit the increasing agitation of radical, reform-seeking guerrilla groups. Unfortunately, the end result was the net militarization of rural regions, the expansion of rural land conflicts, and the erosion of state legitimacy.

The final era under analysis is the contemporary period (1982-2004), in which extensive political reform was undertaken in order to make the political system more inclusive and to limit the expansion of violence, but the proliferation of private armed actors prevented these reforms from achieving their goals. The non-state groups increasingly expanded their capacities to mobilize citizens and challenge the hegemony of the Colombian state by procuring considerable financial resources, renewing their claims to legitimacy, and by structurally reorganizing. The expansion of the narcotics industry during this period allowed both the guerrillas and

⁶ The National Front officially ended in 1986 under the administration of Virgilio Barco. This period is used because the beginning of the Betancur administration signals the beginning of a new era of negotiation and conciliation with the guerrillas, and the widespread reform of political institutions.

⁷ Due to the lack of a better term, "paramilitaries" will be employed to indicate any counter-insurgency group that is not entirely integrated within the armed forces. The term "paramilitary" technically indicates an organization that operates at arms-length from the official military, yet provides similar functions as the military and operates with either its explicit assistance or tacit support. Throughout Period II (1958-1982) this is largely the case, though there were other self-defense and counter-insurgency groups that were not directly associated with the state. After the mid-1990s, executives have attempted to distance themselves from the counter-insurgency groups, but for the

paramilitaries to expand in military capabilities, provide *campesinos* with economic opportunities, and thus witnessed the increasing inability of the government to prevent the growth of either group. The continued repression of peasant groups at the hands of both the military and paramilitaries greatly eroded the legitimacy of the political class in the eyes of the popular sectors, fostering extra-democratic forms of bargaining.⁸ Perhaps more importantly, the three groups adjusted their organizational structures and adopted tactics to make them more effective at controlling territory and subject populations.

The framework for the discussion on organizational restructuring is based upon Tilly's theory of *competitive emulation*, in which groups adopt tactics that are more effective at financing war efforts and establishing legitimacy among host populations. This competition for power resulted in a general "race to the bottom" in which progressively more violent tactics were adopted, especially regarding the inclusion of a broader section of the public as both actors and targets in the escalating internal conflict. Other tactics utilized by the non-state groups include the use of progressively more violent practices, especially group massacres, the extortion and intimidation of public officials, kidnapping, and other egregious human rights violations aimed at controlling populations and procuring economic resources. The government's armed forces primarily restructured by privatizing security functions and by declaring *estados de conmoción* (states of unrest), which allowed it to operate at the margins of democratic norms. Such practices, such as expanding the use of military tribunals for civilians, distributing arms to paramilitary groups, and increasing search and seizure rights of the armed forces, further undermined the legitimacy of the political class and led to further citizen discontent with its practices.

sake of parsimony these groups will still be defined as "paramilitaries" unless there is a clear emphasis upon their independence from state control.

⁸ Tilly self-consciously devotes some attention to the misuse of the term "bargaining" with regard to state formation, as the process has historically involved such nefarious practices as mass slaughters, intimidation, and extortion than actual negotiation. See Tilly (1978).

Structure of the Paper

This paper is divided into six chapters that address the relationship between state capacity and the organization of violence throughout Colombia's history. *Chapter 1* explains in greater detail the nature of political reforms and the expansion of different forms of violence from 1982 to 2004, and provides an overview of competing explanations for this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon. *Chapter 2* describes the theoretical framework that will be used to guide the discussion of state capacity and the organization of coercion. *Chapter 3* covers the period of state formation (1750-1958), describing how the incessant partisan violence limited the establishment of autonomous state capacity and reproduced patterns of rural independence from centralized state control. *Chapter 4* addresses the National Front period (1958-1982), explaining how processes of political exclusion and repression of rural workers and their violent reactions to landowners led to the establishment of rural counter-insurgency militias and the overall expansion of violence. During this period in which state capacity was enhanced, the state gradually lost control over the production of legitimate coercion, lost its legitimacy in the eyes of most Colombians, and increasingly became divorced from the control of rural and later urban populations. *Chapter 5* outlines how the expansion of the private counter-insurgency groups and the guerrilla organizations eroded the ability of the state to implement political reforms. By their mere existence, these groups eroded the capacity of the state to integrate and mobilize Colombians in a cohesive national development strategy. This chapter outlines how these groups enhanced their capabilities by expanding their resource bases, convincing subject populations of their legitimacy, and adapting their organizational structures to become more militarily effective. During this period various executives were caught in a vicious trap between the armed forces, landowners, rural peasants, and the middle class, without being able to completely satisfy the demands of any of the groups.

In order to validate the claims made in this thesis, the research must not simply demonstrate that “war matters” – indeed this would result in a tautological argument along the lines of “in times of warfare and divided sovereignty there is more conflict, which erodes state capacity.” Rather, the analysis demonstrates how until a single organization establishes a monopoly over the use of legitimate coercion, the various aspirants to power function under similar premises of capital extraction and the development of coercive capabilities. Where no group establishes a clear monopoly over the legitimate means of coercion, political reforms become increasingly difficult to implement.

A Tillean perspective will not explain all phenomena in Colombia’s social and political realm – indeed that is not its intention. However, it does help clarify and illuminate the essential elements of the state building processes over the *longue duree*. Tilly’s model of state building appears to be compelling where there is an apparent atomization of the main political actors without clear ideological groupings. It is also buttressed when different types of coercive organizations demonstrate similar opportunities and constraints in their quests to govern subject populations. And where cohesion within organizations (such as parties or armed groups) is based upon shared material interests rather than cohesive ideological, class, ethnic, or other dimensions, a Tillean analysis is further substantiated.

The primary conclusion that such a perspective helps elucidate is that throughout Colombia’s history, two essential elements needed to establish an inclusive and competitive polyarchy have never truly co-existed: a state and political parties.⁹ From 1821 to 1958 there were two political parties but very little in the way of state infrastructure, with the parties organizing nearly all aspects of economic and political life. From 1958 to 1982 the beginning elements of permanent state infrastructure were established, but within the context of a regime

so completely lacking in elements of both inclusion and contestation that it is debatable whether we can truly call the political establishment as “parties” according to established definitions. Finally, from 1982 to 2004 there has increasingly been a return to the establishment of clearly delineated parties that present candidates for election, but in which the absence of state capacity has resulted in the massive erosion of the rule of law. This inability of the state to enforce the rule of law is indicative of the progressive deterioration of state’s ability to establish a monopoly over the legitimate use of coercion throughout the period. This monopoly has been so seriously eroded that it is debatable whether one can truly define modern Colombia as a state at all. At best it is an extremely weak one.

Accepting the division of labour among academics, this thesis does not try to make broad claims about the processes of state formation and consolidation in the rest of the world, or even in Latin America, via the Colombian case. A single case can not substantiate such broad claims. Rather, it seeks the more modest task of “teasing out” the more detailed elements of Colombia’s history in order to suggest potential avenues for future comparative and theoretical research in the area of conflict analysis and state capacity. But most importantly, it attempts to place the ever-increasing volume of detailed historical literature on the Colombian conflict within a broader theoretical and organizational framework in order to provide some sense and order to much of the senselessness and disorder that have permeated the country’s often tragic history.

⁹ Recognizing that both “the state” and “political parties” are defined in this paper as ideal types, it is nonetheless apparent that one or the other has been eroded to such an extent in each time period that it is further from the ideal than it is close to the ideal.

Chapter 2: The Colombian Puzzle – Democratic Reform and Expanded Violence

The central research question of this thesis finds its roots in earlier socio-political analysis of Colombia that date back to the 1970s and 1980s, especially in the research of Daniel Pecaú, who focused upon the relationship between regime type and expressions of political violence.¹⁰ More specifically, Pecaú addressed the reasons for the survival of democratic rule in Colombia in a period when political violence was escalating and other Latin American democracies were reverting to authoritarian regimes to address similar waves of popular unrest.¹¹

This analysis continues with that line of inquiry and addresses one of the most puzzling elements of the contemporary Colombian politics: why the state has lacked the capacity to implement the many laudable *de jure* reforms that have been implemented since 1982. In essence, it is an examination of Colombia's unique condition of being one of the region's strongest democracies while simultaneously being one of the weakest states – though the latter is decidedly the focus of the analysis. One would intuitively expect that as political institutions are reformed to increase citizen representation, participation, and competition that there would be a commensurate decrease in social and political violence. However, quite the opposite has been the case in Colombia, which is eloquently described by Bejarno and Pizarro as displaying

a tendency toward greater democratization – which includes the elimination of prior restrictions and the broadening of the space for political participation and competition – and a tendency toward deterioration of the indicators of 'civility,' of respect and protection of basic civil rights and liberties.¹²

This research sets out to explain how the state has lacked the capacity to implement these reforms and limit the expansion of political violence. In light of the failure of formal

¹⁰ See Daniel Pecaú, "Guerrillas and Violence," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Penaranda, and Gonzalo Sanchez, eds., *Violence in Colombia – the Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, PE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992).

¹¹ For Pecaú, the explanation was to be found in the exclusionary nature of the political system, which was limited to the two main political parties during the National Front years (1958-1974). The exclusionary nature and repressive approach to dealing with public protest was the primary cause behind the escalation of guerrilla organization and their ideological radicalization.

¹² Bejarno and Pizarro, op. cit., p. 10.

institutional change to mitigate the rising tide of violence, a more comprehensive analysis of the factors eroding state capacity is increasingly urgent. This research maintains that Colombia's institutional reforms have not resulted in significant improvements in the overall level of internal violence *not* because of the intrinsic qualities of the reforms, but rather because of the inability of the state to eliminate contenders for state power and enforce the rule of law.

The Expansion of Violence and Erosion of Civil and Political Liberties

Colombia possesses both the highest overall number of homicides and the highest per capita homicide rate in the Americas, as well as the second highest number of deaths by firearms per year in the world (behind South Africa).¹³ However, this unfortunate distinction has not always been Colombia's; in the mid-1970s it possessed a homicide rate that was roughly equivalent to the Latin American average, at approximately 25 homicides per 100,000 citizens. But the homicide rate has been rising consistently since the mid-1970s, peaking at more than 32,000 in 2002. In comparison, throughout the 1990s Colombia's homicide rate per capita was 313% higher than Brazil's, and 408% higher than Mexico's. From 1989 to 1999 Colombia witnessed an extraordinary number of political assassinations, including 138 mayors, 569 members of parliament, deputies, and city councilors, and 174 other public officials.¹⁴

Table 1: Average Homicides per year (1975-2003)

	Avg. Annual Homicides	Homicides per 100,000
1975-1978	6 313	24.8
1979-1982	9 645	35.7
1983-1986	12 246	43.0
1987-1990	21 524	67.4
1991-1994	27 799	82.9
1995-1998	24 628	65.6
1999-2002	28 667	71.7
2003	20 969	49.9

Source: Colombia Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (2003). (<http://www.dane.gov.co/>)

¹³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Centre for International Crime Prevention, "Seventh United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, covering the period 1998 – 2000" (United Nations: 2001).

¹⁴ Echandia (1999), in Bejarno and Pizarro-Leongomez, op. cit.

Table 2: Homicides per 100,000 (1990-2000)

Colombia	64.1
Brazil	20.5
Mexico	15.7

Source: Pan American Health Organization, World Health Organization (2003).

Kidnappings have also been increasing dramatically over the past 15 years, with more people kidnapped in Colombia each year than in any other country in the world.

Table 3: Average Annual Kidnappings

	Avg. Annual Kidnappings	Kidnappings per 100,000 People
1979-1982	158	0.6
1983-1986	245	0.9
1987-1990	670	2.1
1991-1994	1227	3.7
1995-1998	2129	5.7
1999-2002	3011	7.5
2003	2100	4.8

Source: Colombia Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (2003). (<http://www.dane.gov.co/>)

As a result of this progressively worsening epidemic of violent crime, the country has been classified as being only “partly free” from 1989/90 onward in the annual *Freedom House* classification of political systems.¹⁵ Political rights and civil liberties have been gradually eroding since the late 1980s, giving rise to this classification of “partly free” while significantly lesser developed Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and El Salvador remain classified as “free.”

¹⁵ The classifications are based upon a combination of political rights and civil liberties, on a scale of 0 (high degree of political rights and civil liberties) to 7 (low degree of political rights and freedoms). The political rights include such elements as the presence of free and fair elections, whether there are fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, fair polling, whether elected representatives have real political power, the possibility of opposition parties to gain real political power via elections, and other factors. Civil liberties include a free and independent media, freedom of assembly, political organization, civic organization, trade unions, peasant organizations (where applicable), the prevalence of the rule of law in civil and criminal matters, personal autonomy (of travel, residence), secure property rights, freedom from exploitation by or dependency on landlords, employers, union leaders, or bureaucrats, and other factors. See Freedom House, “FH Country Ratings, 2002.” <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>

Table 4: Freedom House Classification for Colombia

	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Classification
1975-89	2	3	Free
1989-91	3	4	Partly Free
1991-94	2	4	Partly Free
1994-95	3	4	Partly Free
1995-96	4	4	Partly Free
1996-98	4	4	Partly Free
1998-99	3	4	Partly Free
1999-2003	4	4	Partly Free

Source: Freedom House Country Rating. www.freedomhouse.org

Institutional Reform

Despite the significant deterioration in Colombia's civil and political liberties, its democratic institutions retain many formal qualities that are enviable within Latin America. Colombia has suffered fewer years of military dictatorship than almost every other Latin American state, with only one brief military coup in the 20th Century: that of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1958). But institutional reform really began more earnestly with the administration of Conservative president Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), which marked a new era of peace negotiations and institutional reform interspersed with periods of intense counter-insurgency at the hands of the government's armed forces. The reforms since 1982 have involved several elements, though the most significant have been to the political party system and the disciplinary institutions (armed forces, police, and judiciary). However, as will be demonstrated later, the following *de jure* reforms to political institutions have been undermined by armed groups throughout the country.

Political Parties and the Electoral System

The Colombian party system stands out among Latin American countries for its historical stability and the depth of affiliation.¹⁶ From 1848 to 2002, all fifty presidents elected

¹⁶ Legrand (2003), p. 170.

to executive office belonged to either the *Partido Liberal* (Liberal Party) or the *Partido Conservador* (Conservative Party). After the bloody civil war between members of the Liberal and Conservative Parties that claimed nearly 200,000 lives between 1948 and approximately 1958, the political elites from both parties agreed upon a power sharing agreement in an attempt to end the fratricidal epidemic of violence that was destroying the country. Thus the parties drafted and signed the consociational agreement of 1958, which was passed by plebiscite in 1959. This agreement automatically alternated executive office between the two parties every four years and guaranteed an equal division of cabinet positions between them. It also curtailed the ability of third parties to gain representation and limited political representation of more radical factions of the left, which is generally the agreed upon source of guerrilla discontent and their collective adoption of extra-democratic means.¹⁷

However, the consociational regime has been cumulatively dismantled since 1974, with the 1991 Constitution eliminating all of the final vestiges of the agreement, including the mandatory representation of the Liberal and Conservative parties in executive cabinet positions. The Constitution even formally enshrined the right to form parties and freely proselytise others.¹⁸ In addition, several other necessary reforms of the electoral and party system have been undertaken since the Betancur administration. The simple plurality "first past the post" system for electing presidents was changed to a two-round vote system, ensuring that a majority of voters must demonstrate support for the eventual winner, in an attempt at reducing the possibility of presidents voted into power with low overall levels of national support. Since 1991 members have been elected to the Congress and Senate via proportional representation

¹⁷ See Pecaut, op. cit. Also Sanchez, op. cit.

¹⁸ Constitución Política de Colombia, Artículo 40. "Todo ciudadano tiene derecho a participar en la conformación, ejercicio y control del poder político. Para hacer efectivo este derecho puede... [c]onstituir partidos, movimientos y agrupaciones políticas sin limitación alguna; formar parte de ellos libremente y difundir sus ideas y programas." ('Every citizen has the right to participate in the shaping, exercise, and control of political power. In order to exercise these rights, citizens can create parties, movements, and political groups without any limitation; freely expressing their ideas and agendas.'). Translation by author.

lists, with the Senators selected from a single national district and Congressional representatives elected in 162 districts, via the "largest remainder-Hare system." With such significant institutional reform to the party system, there is general agreement among Colombian scholars that the exclusionary aspects of the party system can no longer be cited as the reason for the violence of the present.¹⁹

There have also been radical decentralization reforms that have significantly opened the political aperture for greater inter-party competition and overall citizen participation in the electoral process. Until 1985 the vast majority of power was concentrated in Bogotá, with the *departamentos* (departments / provinces) possessing little legislative, executive, or fiscal autonomy. The departmental governor was also appointed by the president rather than being directly elected, and had veto power over all departmental legislation. Municipal *alcaldes* (mayors) were also directly appointed with no election or consultation or input from local populations.

However, decentralization of political power in Colombia commenced in 1985 when Betancur passed Legislative Act No. 1, which decreed that local constituents would directly elect mayors for the first time in Colombia's history.²⁰ This had drastic implications for local and regional political representation, especially with the considerable fiscal decentralization that accompanied the legislation. To further add to the process of decentralization, the popular election of departmental governors was introduced in the 1991 constitution, ending the domination of local and regional politics by *políticos* in Bogotá. Thus most scholars agree that the reforms introduced in the 1991 constitution have "resulted in substantial political, functional, and fiscal decentralization."²¹

¹⁹ Bejarno and Pizarro, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

²⁰ Eliza Willis, Stephan Haggard, and Christopher da C.B. Garman, "The Politics of Decentralization in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 34 (1), 1999.

²¹ Willis et al, *ibid.*

While it is true that democratic elections have been the norm in Colombia since 1958, the electoral system is permeated by significant *informal* distortionary elements to this day. The most prominent of these includes omnipresent threats to, and assassinations of electoral candidates and even entire political parties (in the case of the Unión Patriótica from 1983 to roughly 1991), as well as the intimidation and assassination of NGO and human rights workers, the academic community, and members of the media that openly support candidates that represent either guerrilla interests or those of the traditional economic and political elite. Direct coercion and manipulation of the electorate is also rampant, especially throughout rural communities where the state presence is limited and armed groups operate with impunity. As such, the Colombian political environment has been defined as no longer merely “restricted,” but “besieged.”²²

The Colombian Judiciary and the Rule of Law

Perhaps the most central component of the *de jure* / *de facto* divide with regard to Colombian institutions is demonstrated in the Colombian judiciary, for its inability to prosecute crimes and enforce the rule of law.²³ The most telling statistic is that at the start of the 21st Century, between 95% and 98% of crimes in Colombia went unprosecuted.²⁴ However, despite the apparent need to improve the performance of the judiciary in Colombia, there has been a surprising lack of systematic analysis of the sources of this *de facto* weakness and of the relationship between the armed conflict and judicial weakness. This paper maintains that the weak enforcement of the rule of law and the high degree of criminal impunity is the result of the increasing number and influence of the armed actors throughout the country rather than the specific design of the disciplinary institutions.

²² Bejarno and Pizarro, op. cit.

The Colombian armed forces have been the subject of intense criticism for alleged violations of human rights since practically the beginning of the National Front agreement. During the 1990s civil society groups ramped up their efforts to end systematic human rights violations by the armed forces and the collusion with private militias (normally given the blanket term “paramilitaries”).²⁵ In addition, the 1991 Constitution placed the army under civilian control for the first time in Colombia’s history, helping bridge the divide between the civilian government and the military. The Constitution also created the office of the Attorney General to independently investigate and prosecute human rights violations committed by both governmental and non-governmental actors in the country. Since 1991 the Attorney General’s Office has been increasing the number of charges against human rights violators, including those committed by members of the armed forces.²⁶ However, despite the fact that human rights violations by government forces have not been completely eliminated, the majority of the criticism leveled at the government is grossly negligent of the improvements that have been made. For example, between 1993 and 1996 human rights violations committed by state agents decreased from more than 50% to around 10%.

²³ For example, see Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Also Gabriel Marcella, “The United States and Colombia: the Journey from Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity” (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2003).

²⁴ Sánchez, op. cit.

²⁵ It should be noted here that definitional precision is required in this case, for “paramilitary” connotes an organization that operates in conjunction with the traditional armed forces, and while there has been much interaction between the various counter-insurgency groups, many of these groups commonly termed “paramilitary” that have little connection to the governmental armed forces would be better classified as “community self-defense groups” or “private militias.”

²⁶ From August 2002 to March 2003 the Attorney General’s Office opened 468 new investigations regarding human rights violations, the vast majority being against members of the paramilitaries and the guerrillas. This resulted in an increase of 105% in the number of cases brought against paramilitaries during the same period from the previous year, and of 62% in cases brought against members of the armed forces and the police. See International Crisis Group, “ICG Report N°5 – Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries” (ICG Press, Sep 16, 2003).

Table 5: Human Rights Violations by Colombian Armed Forces

<i>Year</i>	<i>Percentage of H.R. Violations</i>
1993	54.26%
1994	32.76%
1995	15.68%
1996	10.52%

Source: Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, Colombia, derechos Humanos y derecho humanitario (Bogota: 1996).²⁷

Another lauded reform of the 1991 constitution was the creation of *acciones de tutela* (trusteeship actions), which allow citizens to bring charges against government officials for violating or failing to protect their civil and political rights. In addition, the percentage of Colombia's GDP spent on judicial functions has increased considerably since 1991, and the top branches (the Constitutional Court and Prosecutor General's Office) now operate with greater independence.²⁸ Colombia now possesses the second highest number of judges per capita in the Americas, with 17.1 of judges per 100,000 people.²⁹

While the above may not prove that the Colombian judiciary possesses exemplary design, it does demonstrate that claims about its woeful design deficiencies are exaggerated. Some analysts even maintain that judicial reform was one of the strongest areas of institutional reform from the 1991 Constitution.³⁰ And while the Colombian judiciary no doubt suffers from other problems that afflict judiciaries across Latin America, such as executive encroachment and other types of partisan manipulation, its extensive reforms and the sheer number of magistrates

²⁷ In Sanchez, 2001 (ibid.). It should be noted that while there is practically no systematic information about the precise level of human rights abuses in the country by either the UNHCHR, Human Rights Watch, or other groups that research human rights, the general consensus is that in 2003 the overall percentage of human rights violations committed by the government forces (including the police) is now considerably lower than 10%, with Uribe's office officially claiming that the figure is below 1% of the total offences.

²⁸ Corporación Transparencia por Colombia, "Colombia National Integrity System, 2001," p. 15.

²⁹ See Gabriel Marcella, "The United States and Colombia: the Journey from Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity," (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2003). While Marcella quotes Colombia as having 17.1 judges per capita, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Centre for International Crime Prevention) claims that Colombia has 3,995 judges and magistrates, which figure to approximately 9.9 judges per 100,000 citizens. Regardless, even this figure is extremely high when compared with other countries in Latin America, such as Venezuela (630 judges; 2.5 per 100,000) and Chile (544 judges; 3.6 per 100,000). Of the 45 countries surveyed by the United Nations, Colombia possesses the sixth most magistrates.

seem to indicate that its inability to address the civil conflict must stem from some other source. In fact, most of the design problems should lead to greater prosecutorial power and not less, such as the use of "blind justice" (where judges are protected from threats by remaining anonymous to defendants) and the trial of civilians in military tribunals. As such the source of incapacitation must be due to the sheer volume of crimes that are committed each year, and the inability of the legal system to prosecute such a volume of crimes. Perhaps the most telling proof of this is that while violent crimes increased by 400% between the 1970s to the 1990s, the rate of prosecution decreased by 500%.³¹

Increased Violence Amid Institutional Reform

It is not self evident that the widely acknowledged failures of Colombia's institutional reforms is directly attributable to the intrinsic qualities of the institutions, in and of themselves. With the seeming inability of political reform to achieve significant improvements in the degree of violent conflict within Colombia, many different explanations have been offered regarding the causes of this weakness. However, none of these consider the conflict in sufficient historical and theoretical detail to provide adequate explanations.

One possibility is that the institutional reforms have merely been superficial exercises that have not significantly altered the major political structures. However, as the previous section has clearly demonstrated, the scale and quality of institutional reform since 1982 is rather remarkable, covering all areas of the political system. Thus any claims that political reforms have not gone far enough are simply untenable.

Another possibility is that the social and political are largely unrelated, implying that the violence is merely criminal in nature and the political conflict has a relatively small effect on the

³⁰ Ana María Bejarno, "The Constitution of 1991," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

³¹ Mauricio Rubio, "La justicia en una sociedad violenta," in Maria Victoria Llorente and Malcolm Deas eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogota: Cerec, 1999).

overall levels of violence. The most common claims along this line have argued that the conflict is largely derived from the illegal drug trade and that without the drug revenue the internal conflict would be drastically reduced.³² But while there can be little doubt that drug revenues greatly contribute to the continuation of the conflict, this does not explain how and why the Colombian state has been unable to prevent the expansion of the drug trade as well as other states in Latin America that similarly began cultivating cocaine for export in the 1980s, such as Peru and Bolivia. This perspective also overemphasizes the dislocation of the explicitly political violence from expressions of violence that may superficially appear to have little relation to the political conflict, whereas top analysts of the violence have clearly demonstrated that the political violence drives the production of other types of violence.³³ Finally, Colombia has been host to one of the most violent histories in Latin America since its independence in 1821, and yet the drug trade has only existed in any substantial quantity since the 1970s.

Another possibility is that the reforms have not addressed many of the more pressing social issues, such as agrarian reform, social welfare, or regional development, and that the neglect of these issues has harmed the legitimacy of the political regime and fosters legitimate political revolt. Such analyses typically emphasize the struggles for land ownership as being central to the conflict, whether defined in terms of peasants versus landowners³⁴ or as struggles of smallholding coffee farmers to escape the sharecropping system and other processes of land concentration.³⁵ But these analyses do not explain the relationship between state capacity, the

³² This is largely the argument of those who focus upon the economic resources of the armed groups as being the primary cause behind the continuation of the violence. See, for example, Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (New York: State University Press, 2002). Also Mauricio Reina, "Drug Trafficking and the national Economy," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

³³ For example, Gonzalo Sanchez shows that the relationship between the level of criminal violence is a direct product of the increases in political violence. See Sanchez (2001), pp. 12-14. Also see Bergquist (1992).

³⁴ See Catherine Legrand (2003).

³⁵ See Charles Bergquist, "The Labor Movement (1930-1946) and the Origins of the Violence," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia – the Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Washington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992).

development of coercive organizations within and outside of the state apparatus, and their relationship to periods of varying rural *and* urban violence. Accordingly, their invaluable historical analyses of land conflicts need to be situated within the contemporary literature on the state, considering the state's role in both mitigating and perpetuating the violence. Thus while such analyses are in no way incorrect, they also fail to explain why a significant portion of Colombia's major guerrilla groups, including all of the so-called "second wave" groups that arose in the 1970s (EPL, Quintín Lame, M-19, and PRT) considered the reforms of the early 1990s to be sufficient cause to disarm. In addition, there are several other countries coffee exporting countries in Latin America in which agrarian reform was equally poorly implemented, such as Mexico and Brazil, which do not possess levels of internal conflict as severe as Colombia. It has also been demonstrated that countries like Bolivia fare much worse than Colombia in almost every social indicator, including overall poverty and income distribution, yet possess only a fraction of the internal conflict that Colombia possesses.³⁶ Finally, much of the violence in Colombia that contains varying degrees of political orientation occurs in both the cities and countryside and transcends both the spatial and temporal bounds of both agrarian and sectoral analyses of its origins. Therefore, this analysis suggests that the lack of socioeconomic reform, especially agrarian reform and rural development, should be viewed increasingly as both the *cause* and the *consequence* of the continued internal conflict and the weak state rather than merely the cause of it.

The final possibility is that the inability of the reforms to limit the level of internal conflict is due to the inability of the state to impose the rule of law, which stems from the sheer volume of private armed actors on the ground relative to those of the government. This inequity between the government's forces and those in "civil" society stems from the political divisions

³⁶ Rodrigo Uprimmy Yepes, "Violence, Power, and Collective Action – A Comparison Between Bolivia and Colombia," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Penaranda, and Gonzalo Sanchez G, *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000* –

created in the early state-formation years, with a remarkable continuity witnessed in the weakness of the central government amid the widespread expansion, privatization, and decentralization of the means of coercion. From the early state-formation years until the late-1950s, the country was divided between the two political parties, which formed their own private militias to protect partisan interests. This bloody partisan division was more intense and prolonged than in any other Latin American country. After 1958, the political elites coalesced, but due to the threats of a subversive military and the increasingly agitated peasantry, they maintained relatively weak central armed forces and developed an exclusionary, repressive state apparatus in order to maintain their positions of relative privilege. This exclusion and repression resulted in the coalescence of non-state groups on both the right and left, in the competitive vacuum created by a state that was unable to meet the groups' multifarious demands or to physically eliminate them, as other Latin American authoritarian regimes were able to achieve between the 1960s and early 1990s. By the time that the first truly conciliatory and reformist government was able to gain executive office in 1982, the expansion of violence throughout the countryside and the cities had gained an incredible amount of momentum. This expansion of various forms of internal strife and the commensurate expansion and diffusion of arms rendered all formal institutional reforms impotent without a prior establishment of a monopoly of legitimate force by the government. The massive expansion of the armed groups during the 1990s has resulted more from their ability to procure economic resources, adapt, and prevent the state from establishing a monopoly of coercion over the Colombian territory. The armed groups use their coercive capabilities to manipulate any institutional environment to perpetuate their existence and undermine democratic reforms aimed at eliminating them. Their military capabilities have resulted from escalating conflict with one another for control over

land and populations in a time of expanded economic resources, due in large part to the drug trade.

Accordingly, if a single claim can be made to describe the relationship between state capacity and the armed groups, it is that the historical weakness and exclusionary nature of the state facilitated the rise of armed actors outside of the control of the state. But in the present period rather than describing the weak state as the *cause* of the armed groups, it is more accurate to view the continued weakness of the state as the *product* of the armed groups. This shift in causal logic is exceedingly important to the understanding of the relationship between armed groups and state strength, and indeed if Colombia is to ever escape this trap, this logic will need to be more clearly understood. The next task thus becomes explaining the factors that have led to the weakness of the state and its inability to enforce the rule of law.

Chapter 3: Theorizing Civil Conflicts within Weak States

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that will be employed to explain how the Colombian state has arrived at a situation in which it attempts to implement seemingly beneficial institutional reforms, but is prevented by a series of anti-system actors that contest for control of the state. It argues that two elements of Charles Tilly's theory on state formation provide insight into this phenomenon. The first is what Tilly describes as the "capital-intensive state formation process," in which private actors dominate the production of coercive capabilities at the expense of the state. The second is Tilly's notion of "competitive emulation," in which groups that attempt to establish a monopoly over coercion within a delimited territory are forced to adjust their strategies to compete with contenders for control, with heightened levels of competition generally leading toward more intensive mobilization of populations and coercive extraction of war rents. It concludes by considering the theoretical contributions of two prominent theorists on the Latin American state who have adapted Tilly's general framework to the Latin American context: Fernando López-Alves and Miguel Centeno.

In order to explain why the Colombian state has been incapable of co-opting or pacifying armed rivals to its power and the complex relationship between its capacity and those of its competitors, one must analyse the historical forces that have suppressed its capacity since the original (successful) formation of the state in 1821. For the purposes of this analysis, Migdal's definition of "state capacity" is employed, which is centred on the ability of the state to mobilize its population: "governments acquire the tools of political influence through the mobilization of human and material resources for state action."³⁷ This mobilization requires several elements, including the ability of the state to demonstrate its legitimacy and compel the participation of its

³⁷ Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 22. Migdal derives this definition from Jacek Kugler and William Domke, "Comparing the Strength of Nations," *Comparative Political Studies* 19 (April 1986), p. 123.

citizens in establishing a monopoly over the development of enforceable rules of law – the famous Weberian “monopoly over legitimate coercion.”

There have thus far been few attempts to systematically incorporate the multiple expressions of violence in Colombia, especially those of the 1800s and the post-1982 period, within a broader theoretical framework that explains the relationship between the historical weakness of the Colombian state and the production of organized violence. By examining how the disciplinary institutions of the state (the armed forces, police, and judiciary) evolved relative to private coercive entrepreneurs throughout the historical process of state building – a process that is still occurring in Colombia – the present conflict becomes much more intelligible. Such an analysis is best undertaken by assessing the theoretical contributions of one of the foremost scholars on the relationship between conflict and state building: Charles Tilly. This perspective assesses how groups in society interact to extract resources, establish legitimate agendas of social control, and develop the coercive capabilities necessary to establish this control.

In a country where armed coercion in its myriad forms has played such a central role in the shaping of political institutions, collective action, and the daily interactions of individuals, a theory that is centered on the production of systems of violence seems particularly appropriate. Considering the multitude of claims that can be made regarding the origins and identities of the various armed groups in Colombia, it makes a great deal of analytical sense to seek underlying logics for their existence and methods, and to consider them along the same theoretical continuum. A quick typology of Colombia's armed groups identifies an extremely diverse collection of organizations, including the governmental armed forces, the police, peasant soldiers (*soldados campesinos*), rural self-defense groups (*autodefensas*), urban self-defense groups (*vigilancia barriales*), paramilitaries loosely connected to the armed forces, rural militias, narcotics militias, hired mercenaries (*sicarios*), right-wing “land sharks” (*pajaros*), ordinary criminals gangs, “social” bandits, *foquista* guerrillas, and communist-agrarian

guerrillas.³⁸ With such a central role played by the above-mentioned groups in the evolution of the Colombian state and its social relations, it becomes readily apparent that they need to be examined together. Indeed recent research into the role of armed groups in state formation has concluded that "irregular armed forces have been central protagonists in processes of state formation and political development in a wide variety of countries, modern or not, democratic or otherwise."³⁹

While this analysis does not presuppose that these groups all have the same *raison d'état* or similar degrees of legitimacy, it maintains that their relative abilities to survive, expand, and influence society are primarily dependent upon their abilities to extract economic resources and conscript individuals to engage in armed conflict.⁴⁰ After all, in Colombia "war is business,"⁴¹ in which guns, dollars, and combatants form the unholy trinity that dictates political power and the "right" to rule. This right does not only stem from military superiority, but also involves a normative element that is derived from the ability of a coercive organization, be it a political party, self-defense militias, guerrilla group, or the state, to achieve legitimacy by providing minimal levels of existential security and/or convince its members they are fighting for a just cause. As both Tilly and Gramsci have convincingly argued, direct coercion is much less effective than coercion that involves the co-optation and partial cooperation of those being ruled.⁴²

³⁸ These will be defined with more precision when they are directly addressed in the ensuing analysis.

³⁹ Diane E. Davis, "Contemporary Challenges and Historical Reflections on the Study of Militaries, States, and Politics," in Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds., *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴⁰ This is the central argument made by Tilly in his first work that addresses the economic imperatives that drive the formation of certain types of coercive organizations. See Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back in* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴¹ Legrand (2003), p. 179. Mauricio Romero also claims that Colombian armed groups should not be viewed as social movements so much as "empresarios de coercion" (coercive businesses). See Mauricio Romero, "Negotiations with the Self-defense and Paramilitary Groups and Trajectories of State Consolidation in Contemporary Colombia" (Javeriana University, Bogotá: 2003).

⁴² For an excellent condensation of Gramsci's writings on domination and cooperation in state building, see Robert Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: an Essay in Method," *Millenium* 12 (2), 1983, pp. 162-175.

Charles Tilly and State Development

Perhaps the most important theoretical contribution of Tilly's collective works is the questioning of the liberal notion of social contracts and state formation, wherein individuals collectively and intentionally accept the necessity of abandoning their absolute liberty under an all-powerful sovereign in order to receive guarantees of security from internal and external belligerents, and to receive certain rights and privileges as subjects. For Tilly, the modern state is simply the most effective social arrangement for providing both a stable existence for permanent populations and for extracting the resources required for large scale war-making, including money, food, armaments, and soldiers. In this bellicose and materialist conception of state formation, Tilly's research possesses many affinities with rationalist economic theories that posit the state as a "stationary bandit" whose rational self-interest in maintaining optimal levels of production force it to not beggar its subjects via excessive extortion (i.e., taxation).⁴³ It also reflects some of the logic of class struggles and domination described by neo-Marxian analyses, especially Cardoso's notion of dominant powers within dependent states and Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony'.⁴⁴ The value of such an analytical perspective is that it allows one to abandon idealistic notions of state makers as enlightened and benevolent leaders while all other aspirants to power are viewed as operating on more inauspicious principles of profit and domination.⁴⁵ Indeed, according to Tilly, all operate upon similar racketeering premises of generating dangers and extracting resources from subject populations in order to provide protection from those very dangers.⁴⁶

⁴³ See Mancur Olson, *Power and Prosperity: Outgrowing Capitalist and Communist Dictatorships* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

⁴⁴ See Fernando H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). In fact, Tilly claims that the Marxist model of collective action is superior to other theories on collective action, as will be discussed later.

⁴⁵ For an application of this problematic to the close relationship between and difficulty in objectively assessing the difference between "freedom fighters" and "terrorists," see Stathis Kalyvas, "New and Old Civil Wars," *World Politics* 54 (1), 2001.

⁴⁶ Tilly (1985).

Tilly explains that the remarkable ubiquity of nation-states throughout the world is not a mere chance occurrence, but rather that the nation-state is the logical product of a competitive war-making system in which it has emerged as the most effective organizational structure for extracting capital from domestic populations and crafting war-making organizations. Other organizational forms, such as empires and city-states, were simply not as adept at war-making as the nation-state, and thus have mostly been forced into the annals of political extinction. Thus the contemporary state system emerged in Europe during the 1500s and 1600s, with the mid-level (state-level) centralization of power resulting from competition for land and control over populations. Though Tilly does not actually use the term, this process was centred around *competitive emulation*, in which economic and political elites could join with nearby elites under a common banner and emulate the war-making organizations of their enemies, or be conquered by the increasingly powerful war-making machines of Brandenburg Prussia, Valois France, or Tudor England. Tilly describes the process as follows:

[T]he increasing scale of war and the knitting together of the European state system through commercial, military, and diplomatic interaction eventually gave the war-making advantage to those states that could field standing armies; states having access to a combination of large rural populations, capitalists, and relatively commercialized economies won out. They set the *terms of war*, and their form of state became the predominant one in Europe.⁴⁷

This process of competitive emulation, in which groups adopt the most effective strategies related to resource extraction and war-making within the semi-anarchic condition of inter-state competition, is one of the two central components of Tilly's works that are adopted in this paper. This process of competitive emulation is particularly central to the analysis of the Colombian *race to the bottom*, as it demonstrates how in a condition where there is no clear monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, groups are relatively unconstrained in adapting war-making strategies in order to achieve their goals. And while all groups possess some

⁴⁷ Tilly (1992), p. 15 (emphasis added).

constraints in their abilities to adopt more effective war-making strategies, due to their need to retain some degree of legitimacy to mobilize supporters, the coercive organization that faces the most severe normative constraints on its actions is the state, itself.

The other element of Tilly's works that explains the evolution of Colombia's weak state infrastructure concerns the different processes involved in the original formation of a state. The Colombian experience reflects what Tilly terms the *capital-intensive* state formation process, which provides considerable insight into the connection between the country's almost continuous process of the expansion, privatization, and decentralization of military capacity and the relative weakness of state infrastructure.

State Formation – Combining Capital and Coercion

According to Tilly, the composition of a state's political infrastructure depends upon the manner in which political and economic elites organize relations of production, extraction, and war-making in the face of existing threats – both internal and external. Tilly claimed that there are essentially three manners in which state power can be consolidated and state institutions developed: the coercion intensive, capital intensive, and capitalized coercion processes.

In the coercion intensive model, the high presence of external security threats and isolation from major economic centres (especially ocean ports) place considerable pressures upon the ruling elites to develop more intensive and coercive rent extraction processes from subject populations, producing large standing armies to levy the maximum possible taxes from landowners and merchants. Where coercion is abundantly accumulated and concentrated, large and influential state bureaucracies are produced. Put even more simply, those with the guns are able to dominate and extort those with the dollars. In this process, the development of coercive capabilities occurs centrally, and consequently results in the development of larger, more comprehensive, and more penetrating state structures, such as Brandenburg Prussia and Russia.

This was clearly not the process of state formation in Colombia, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

On the other end of the spectrum is capital-intensive state formation. In this process, coercive capabilities are developed by private capital, in the interests of protecting the investments of landowners and merchants. This results in the privatization and decentralization (diffusion) of coercive means, with landowners and industrialists developing private defense groups in order to protect their investments and property from internal subversion and external belligerents. There is little development of a central army, and it is certainly not used to enforce taxation and property rights. The minimal military apparatus that *does* exist is co-opted by the economic elites, which limits the military's functions to pacifying rural populations, quelling industrial revolt, and ensuring sufficient national security to maintain secure economic transactions. Whereas in the coercion intensive process the accumulation and concentration of coercion constructed *states*, in the capital-intensive process the accumulation and concentration of capital constructed *cities*. Where geographical boundaries make central control of these cities more difficult, regional economies develop that acquire greater independence from the political centre. Rather than relying upon the state to establish a permanent security force via public taxation, wealthy merchants, traders, and landowning elites found it to be more efficient to merely purchase their own security forces when needed.

The prototypical European example of such coercive entrepreneurs were the Venetian *condottiere*, who were hired by silk, spice, and slave merchants in the 14th-16th Century Italian city-states. Another example was in the Dutch Republics of the 14th through 16th Centuries, where private security forces were developed rather than central armies. The availability of capital in both cases permitted the Dutch Republics and Italian city states to finance their war-making militias with their revenues, by borrowing, and nominally taxing their subjects, without creating bulky, durable national administrations. However, this process of war financing only

survived until such a time that European nation-states created war-making machines whose economies of scale forced their smaller military competitors into extinction. Such were the fates of the city-states of both Italy and the independent Dutch Republics.

Accordingly this paper argues that Colombia, which has been described as a "nation of cities,"⁴⁸ fits into this category despite some seeming incongruence with the label that will be discussed later. This process of capital-intensive state development severely hindered the state's development until the mid-1990s, in terms of establishing either a coercive monopoly, or in terms of its ability to remain independent from dominant sectors of society and establish permanent, continuous institutions between alternating executives. Colombia has never been forced to develop a strong military capacity in its history, with only one brief and relatively inconsequential border dispute in its history (with Peru from 1930-1932). The entire country was divided into two divisive partisan groups that fought almost constant civil wars from 1821 to 1958, hindering the development of autonomous state capacity or the consistent rule of law. After the coalition of political elites in 1958, the development of a significant portion of military capacity was undertaken by landowners, ranchers, and the organized narcotics cartels on one hand, and by peasant organizations on the other. Since 1958 the state has been either unable or unwilling to expand military capabilities in order to establish the rule of law in rural regions, due to the threat of military subversion, anti-militarist sentiment in public opinion, and the willingness of landowners and narcotics cartels to continue funding their own private militias. On the other hand it has been unable to make sufficient concessions to quell popular sector unrest, due to constraints imposed by anti-reformist landowners, military officials, narcotics cartels, and corrupted members of Congress. The end result has been a state that has variously been unable and/or unwilling to either enhance its military capacity to defeat the insurgents and replace the paramilitaries, or provide incentives for the insurgents to disarm (most notably land

reform). These have further eroded the legitimacy of the state and its ability to enforce the rule of law – processes that reinforce one another.

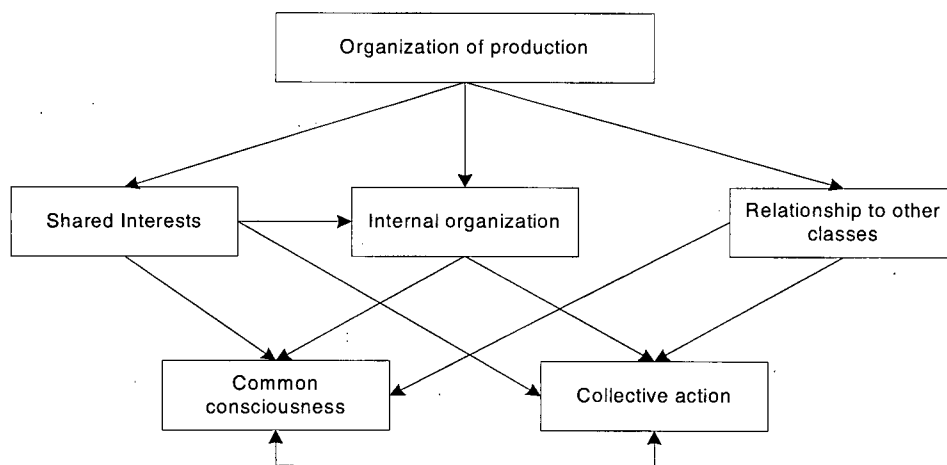
In between these two poles lies the “capitalized coercion” process, in which both coercion and capital are used to centralize power. Capital is used to mobilize for war and war is used to generate capital. Neither the holders of capital nor the war-makers were ever able to gain an absolute advantage over the other, in a co-dependent relationship that kept each other in check. This process mobilized large parts of society into the state making process, creating relatively vital states, both economically and culturally. According to Tilly, this process was undertaken by France and England, whereas in Latin America, López-Alves claims that all states except Paraguay fall into this category.⁴⁹

One final note on Tilly’s theoretical model is required prior to analysing its application to Colombia within the Latin American context, more generally. Tilly’s model can easily be misconstrued as a relatively narrow version of rational materialism, in which military power dictates all social relations, and shared norms and identities assume minimal importance. Such a conclusion is erroneous. At its core, Tilly’s theory on state making is a social theory on the many factors that contribute to the mobilization of the popular sectors, however such mobilization is centred on the availability of capital to fund coercion and repress contending factions. It is not merely a theory that war matters and that those with material powers will rule, but is a complex understanding of the manner in which groups align around the organization of production and establish collective bargaining positions to capture and transform state infrastructure. This occurs within the context of an international system of military competition, which makes certain outcomes and alignments more likely to succeed than others. For Tilly, rulers who dominate the production of coercion are constantly forced to bargain with the

⁴⁹ Safford and Palacios, *op. cit.*, pp. 297-344.

popular sectors of society, who present almost constant resistance. However, Tilly self-consciously employs the term “bargaining,” as he describes it as employing the use of negotiation and compromise, but more importantly the employment of the most brutal means of coercion.⁵⁰ This is certainly a useful postulation for examining the evolution of Colombian bargaining and institution building. This “bargaining” also operates within a normative framework, as masses can be more easily co-opted and enlisted when they believe that the coercive entrepreneurs possess some degree of legitimacy. Tilly thus describes states as passing through successive stages of formation and consolidation, in which higher expectations are placed upon rulers by the ruled. He describes how the peasant and the bourgeois sectors of Europe “took advantage of the permitted means to press for expanded rights and direct representation.”⁵¹ The following model demonstrates with greater precision the Tillean conception of collective action processes of major state building revolutions.⁵²

Figure 1: Tillean Collective Action Model



⁴⁹ López-Alves, op. cit. López-Alves claims that Paraguay, due to its numerous wars with Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, its lack of sea ports, and its largely rural population, developed in a coercion-intensive manner.

⁵⁰ Tilly (1992), pp. 99-103.

⁵¹ Tilly (1992), p. 102.

⁵² Tilly (1978), p. 43. In this work, Tilly contrasts this model of collective action with those centred around the integration and disintegration of societies (the Durkheimian model), or belief systems that are legitimized via their routinization within specific bureaucratic systems and by specific leaders (the Weberian model), and those of collective action as the mere collection of the rational calculations of individuals (the Millian / public choice model).

War-making and the Latin American State

One of the recurring questions in contemporary research on Latin America has been the question of why such a wide variation in state capacity has developed throughout the region. One of the most influential recent works on this topic is Miguel Centeno's *Blood and Debt*, implicitly follows a Tillyan logic of war making and state making (though he dismisses the applicability of Tilly's model on state-building in Latin America). Centeno's theory postulates that because many Latin American states fought only a limited number of international wars, and because these were comparatively less intensive than the European wars, weaker state infrastructure was produced.⁵³ The existence of relatively few external security threats in many countries thus provided little need for conscription, and as such the masses were not materially or normatively united behind a common state-building project. In effect, a national *zeitgeist*, or state spirit, was not created due to the absence of external enemies against whom to define their national identities. In many ways Colombia seems to fit Centeno's case quite well, insofar as Colombia fought fewer international wars than any other state in Latin America, possesses one of the weakest, least integrated state infrastructures in the Americas, and has the lowest degree of political integration in the Americas, measured in terms of territory not directly controlled by the state.

However, there are some problems with Centeno's model of state development, both theoretically and empirically, when applied to Colombia. At the theoretical level, Centeno does not provide a sufficient theory on the origins of intra-state conflict; he merely claims that intra-state warfare is the logical default for states that did not possess sufficient organizational capacity to undertake major wars (a premise that will also be refuted in the next section). Intra-state conflicts in Colombia are described as being "defined racially, along class lines, and by

⁵³ One immediately notices that this is merely the converse logic of the Tillyan model, wherein the presence of many intense periods of conflicts result in the development of large and powerful state bureaucracies.

critical ideological struggles.”⁵⁴ Consequently for Centeno Colombia’s major civil wars, such as *La Guerra de los Supremos* (1839-1841), *La Guerra de los Mil Dias* (1899-1902), and *La Violencia* (1948-1958) are merely reduced to “ideological” or “partisan” conflicts, without an explanation of the origins of the ideologies or parties. More importantly, it does not provide a theory on how and why the parties were able to dominate social and political life, raising capital and mobilizing the peasantry to monopolize the development of coercion in such a persistent and brutal manner for more than 100 years. Retreating into explanations of wars as the products of ideological differences or as partisan conflict offers little explanatory value. It will be argued later that these conflicts possessed primarily rational economic origins at their core, and that the resultant ideologies were not merely *a priori* manifestations of ideological conviction, but also reflected the social and economic composition of the parties, and their desires to expand their own powers at the expense of the contending party.

On the other hand, Fernando López-Alves undertakes a research program that remains closer to the Tillean framework of state-building, examining the central role of the development of coercive capabilities by the two dominant organizations in 19th Century Latin America: the state and the political parties.⁵⁵ The absence of external wars and the relative strength of regional versus central actors in both Colombia and Uruguay created systems in which regional economic elites (*gamonales*) combined to form political parties, developed their own coercive organizations, and co-opted members of the military for partisan purposes, repressing the development and independence of the central state. In Argentina, the frequency and intensity of 19th Century wars, especially with Brazil, the concentration of power in Buenos Aires, and the relative ease with which regional elites could be coerced explains the development of a strong state, relatively weak parties, and a relatively weak democratic tradition. As a result, the

⁵⁴ Centeno, op. cit., p. 66.

⁵⁵ López-Alves (2000).

dependent variables in his analysis, state strength and party strength, rest primarily upon the manner in which either political parties or the state's armed forces mobilized and integrated the rural sectors.

This model is a very compelling and powerful account of how the Colombian state has continually been eroded throughout the country's history, and provides insight into processes in the 20th Century regarding the perpetuation of state weakness and the struggle of the state to undertake reform and to regain control from regional political and economic powerbrokers. Thus by examining these processes during the period of partisan division and state suppression between 1821 and 1958, one gains a greater understanding of how powerful political parties were an important factor that limited the consolidation of the state, undermining national reforms in order to promote their own parochial interests. The analysis of López -Alves also provides the greatest analytical justification for extending the use of a Tillean lens for analyzing the contemporary period in Colombia, claiming that the Tillean logic can be applied to situations of fragmented sovereignty such as El Salvador in the 1990s, in which "the state can't efficiently deal with contenders or undermine their support base."⁵⁶ Such a conclusion would almost certainly apply equally well in Colombia, where until 2002 the state monopolized control over only 60% of the national territory.⁵⁷

Prior to moving forward with a detailed description of state suppression and the impotence of political reform amid the proliferation of armed agents, greater analytical clarification is required in defining "parties" and "the state." In order to provide both clarity and simplicity to the analysis, minimalist definitions have been employed. Accordingly, "parties" are defined according to Sartori's definition, as "any political group that presents at elections,

⁵⁶ López -Alves (2000), pp. 162-163

⁵⁷ Julia Sweig, "What Kind of War for Colombia?" *Foreign Affairs* 81 (5), Sep/Oct 2002.

and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office.”⁵⁸ For the “state” the Weberian definition is employed, as it provides the best clarity, parsimony, and analytical insight into Colombia. According to Weber, the state is the entity that possesses a “monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory.”⁵⁹ However, other common definitions of the state can also be employed for this analysis, without affecting the conclusions. For example, the state can be defined as “the set of organizations involved in making and implementing binding collective decisions, if necessary by force... in varying degrees set off from and independent of other power centers.”⁶⁰ Both definitions can be employed to explain how contenders to the state have arisen, and how they have reduced the ability of the state to mobilize and integrate populations, and eliminate rivals in its attempt to enforce the indiscriminate rule of law.

With clearer definitions of the state and political parties, not only is greater analytical separation of the two elements facilitated, but we also witness another revelation that helps explain the expansion of violence amid political reform since 1982. This revelation is that the Colombian state has largely been nonexistent throughout the country’s history. Between 1821 and 1958 there did not exist any single state but rather two proto-states centred on the parties, which irrevocably hampered the development of both a Colombian nation and a central state apparatus. From roughly 1958 to 1982 we witness the consolidation of these formerly divisive proto-states under one banner, at the exclusion of a broad portion of the masses and with the progressive alienation of economic elites, which created new divisions, suppressed the rise of other potential aspirants to power (especially a central military), and undermined the “legitimate” component that is so central to the Weberian definition of the state. Thus from

⁵⁸ See Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, eds., *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

⁵⁹ In H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 78.

⁶⁰ Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 6.

1982 onward, we witness a process of radical political reform that has thus far been unable to undo the damage caused by the first 160 years of socio-political division amid the expansion, privatization, and diffusion of coercive entrepreneurs external from independent state control. Consequently rather than classifying Colombia as a semi-democracy it would be better to classify it as a strong democracy within a weak state. For Tilly, states are built when the means of coercion are expanded and concentrated. In Colombia the production of violence has expanded far more than would be required to construct a viable state, but it has been diffused throughout society, with effects that are still being felt today.

Accordingly, utilizing a Tillean model in the manner of López-Alves provides considerable explanatory power for describing how the Colombian state was unable to penetrate and mobilize rural communities between 1821 and 1958 – a central feature of Tilly's model of "capital-intensive" state formation. Between 1958 and the late-1990s, the capital-intensive process continued, with an autonomous state equally unable to mobilize rural citizens. However, the inability of the state to monopolize the legitimate use of coercion during this period was not due to partisan conflict, but from a combination of forces that resulted in its inability and reluctance to develop its security apparatus. These factors included executive fear of military subversion, popular opposition of the electorate to military expansion, and the willingness of landowners (and later narcotics cartels) to establish their own counter-insurgency militias. The result was the expansion of organization of coercion via private capital, further leading to the loss of state control over much of the country's rural regions.

From such a perspective we can better understand how the process of state building in Colombia has been arduous and contrary to many of the tendencies within Latin America. Foremost here is how the limited coercive capabilities of the state has allowed, and even contributed to the process in which non-state groups competitively emulated the organizational structure and practices of one another, resulting in the devastating race to the bottom that has

emasculated political reforms, eroded civil and political liberties, and created a more militarized, violent society. By examining the manner in which Colombia has witnessed the expansion, privatization, and diffusion of coercive capabilities throughout the past 183 years, one gains a much clearer understanding of the impediments and potential avenues for escaping this persistent trap of violence.

Chapter 4: Pre-Independence and Formation of Colombian State (1750 – 1958)

Many of the present forms of state weakness in Colombia have direct antecedents in the initial years of state formation, yet these connections have not been adequately drawn out and linked to the present weakness of the Colombian state in the existing literature. While the country has undergone radical economic and socio-cultural change over the past 183 years, it has displayed a remarkable degree of continuity with regard to the cohesion, penetration, and influence of the two main political parties, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, amid the perpetual weakness of an independent state apparatus. The Colombian state retains this inauspicious reputation of weakness due to its inability to independently arbitrate the various interests of the various social classes and develop an integrated national consciousness. As this section demonstrates, this inability dates back to the initial fragmentation of the polity immediately after independence, which led to a greater net militarization of society, created deeply entrenched clientelist networks rather than formal institutions, and provide mechanisms for political inclusion of both economic elites and rural labourers. The severity of the division peaked in the highly destructive civil war of 1948-1958 called *La Violencia*, leading the agreement among party elites to equally share power during the National Front regime of 1958 to 1982. It is in the 1821 to 1958 period that the precedent is set for the expansion, privatization, and diffusion of coercive organizations throughout the country. This process of “capital-intensive state formation” persisted during the 137-year period with remarkable continuity, and was the central component of state incapacity. This chapter outlines how this process occurred, via the division of the majority of the country’s political elites, economic elites, and working classes into two contesting groups, resulting in the creation of local and regional centres of power rather than integrating these groups into a cohesive state-building process.

Pre-Independence and *La Patria Boba*

Colombia's long history with collective bargaining via armed insurrection finds its origins in the 1750s, when the Spanish viceroyalty began imposing increasingly severe taxes on the production of Colombia's major export products of tobacco and aguardiente (a type of cane liquor) in order "to pay for the more elaborate administrative establishment of a viceregal government, as well as to help sustain the frontier missions."⁶¹ This provoked a variety of riots and rebellions within individuals regions, most notably the *Comunero* revolt of 1781, in which the collective arousal of anti-imperial sentiment and subsequent armed revolts in other regions led to the abandonment of the imperial taxes on the major export products. The precedent was thus set for armed revolt as an effective means of achieving political goals.

After the success of the *Comunero* revolt, the seed for independence was planted. In the early years of the 19th Century, the Spanish Imperial forces were engulfed in a series of long and bloody battles with Napoleon's forces – battles made famous for their intensity and brutality in the famous *Disaster of War* collection by Spanish artist Goya. However, the overextended Spanish forces would not be able to withstand the mighty war-making machine of Napoleon, which captured the Spanish throne in 1808. This made the Spanish regime vulnerable to additional attacks, enabling the creole elites of Nueva Grenada (Colombia) to successfully drive the Spanish viceroyalty from Santa Fe de Bogotá. Colombian independence was gained for the first time in 1810. However, due to the inability of the newly-independent republics to integrate the vast territory and disparate regional centers under a common banner, constant in-fighting occurred, allowing the Spaniards to easily regain control of Santa Fe de Bogotá in 1816.⁶² The brief period of independence, known as *La Patria Boba* (The Foolish Fatherland), imploded upon itself due to the reluctance of the regional elites, especially in Antioquia and Cartagena, to

⁶¹ Safford and Palacios, *ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶² Fernando López-Alves (2000), p. 96.

cede power to a central administrative body located in Bogotá, creating a fragmented, disorganized state that was weakened by its nearly constant infighting after gaining independence. Tilly himself could not have written a more fitting example of the military imperatives regarding state structure.

Early Independence

After five more years of Spanish rule, independence was regained in 1821, with the Spanish Empire facing severe military pressures in all of its American colonies. The regional elites of the independent Nueva Granada thus faced a dilemma: either they could remain internally divided and decentralized, creating another poorly defensible alliance, or they could cede power to a unitary regime that would be stronger in the face of external threats. The former was chosen for the short-lived *Patria Boba* of 1810 to 1816, and the latter, driven by necessity, despite its inevitable social and political antagonisms caused by centralization, was chosen for the post-1821 period. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of power centralization would be that a government in Bogotá, the logical choice for a national capital due to its size, centrality, and existing infrastructure, was separated from the other major urban centres of Medellin, Cali, and Cartagena by great distance and mountain chains, making overland travel and integration extremely difficult. Consequently, attempts at power centralization would have severe geographic obstacles to overcome, as well as the reticence of self-sufficient regional elites to cede their sovereignty to yet another seemingly “foreign” power.

Geography is an important, though not necessarily dominant component of Tilly’s theory on state formation, and as such deserves mentioning here. According to Tilly, access to commercial ports, the arability of land, the relative size, the degree of geographical divisions (such as impassable mountain ranges or jungle), and proximity to threatening neighbours all play an important factor in the consolidation of national states. Large states, for example, in which the centralization of power was inherently more difficult, displayed tendencies to

establish various forms of indirect rule, co-opting local power holders and confirming their privileges without directly incorporating them into the state apparatus.⁶³ This is precisely the process that occurred in Colombia, wherein the regional economic elites, normally landowners or gold and gem industrialists in the departments (provinces) of Antioquia and Cauca, dominated local politics with infrequent abeyances made to the government in Bogotá.

Despite explicitly discussing Tilly's theory on the different manners in which capital and coercion combined to make states in Latin America, neither Centeno nor López-Alves describe the Colombian state formation process as being "capital-intensive." One can only surmise that this is because of the apparent incongruence between the capital-intensive process and Colombian state formation. Colombian economic elites of the 19th Century were relatively poor and few in numbers in comparison with the elites from other Latin American colonies.⁶⁴ In addition, considering the myriad manifestations of coercion that occurred during the period, it would seem erroneous to classify Colombia as not being coercion intensive.

However, for state building to occur in a capital-intensive manner does not necessarily require that massive quantities of capital be mobilized, nor that coercion is relatively minimal, but rather that the available capital is used to privatize and decentralize military capabilities to serve the interests of economic elites rather than the political class. Thus while historians agree that Colombia was rather poor in comparison with other former Spanish-American colonies, this was not a limiting factor in the development of the central military or central state infrastructure. This is an exceedingly important fact to consider with regard to Colombian state formation as it demonstrates the manner in which rural labour was organized by the local party elites in consort with the *gamonales* (regional economic elites, normally landowners) rather than the state. Thus when Centeno claims that the army was not developed because the state could not "squeeze"

⁶³ Tilly (1992), p. 104.

these relatively poor elites of more money results in a categorical error, ignoring the fact that the “squeezers” were also the “squeezed” – in other words, the economic elites were often the early Colombian political elites, via their connections with the emerging political parties. It also does not consider the improbability that Colombian state officials located in Bogotá would have been able to enforce higher rates of taxation of landowners, considering their lack of coercive capabilities relative to the landowners who were increasingly developing their own private security forces to protect their investments.

This connection between the ability to extract the financial resources necessary to field large armies is central to explaining how Tilly’s model of capital-intensive state formation began in Colombia. Colombia did not lack the financial resources and organizational capacity to fight more international wars, resulting in a weakly integrated, poorly organized states. Indeed, Colombia was able to field large standing armies that would have rivaled the best of European armies of the 19th Century, however these armies were under the control of regional economic and political elites who were organized by the political parties. The War of 1000 Days (1899-1902) between members of the Liberal and Conservative parties involved more than 75,000 soldiers. As a reference point, Napoleon’s army of 100,000 defeated the combined forces of Prussia and Russia (150,000 soldiers) in the famous battle of Dresden in 1813. In comparison, during the war against Peru (1930-1932) the Colombian army numbered a mere 5,000 soldiers.⁶⁵ Thus while it may be true that the *state* lacked the resources to finance or organize wars, it does not mean that other political actors were unable to finance and organize wars.

Accordingly, the reluctance of the Colombian government to undertake war campaigns against its neighbours should not be viewed as the result of lack of resources or coordination.

⁶⁴ Cristina Rojas, *Civilization and Violence – Regimes of Representation in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 62.

Rather, I would suggest that in order for states to conquer lands outside their borders, there must first be some semblance of monopoly achieved within their own national borders. Thus while Colombia was one of the most highly militarized societies in Latin America during the 19th and 20th Centuries, the central army was continually neglected and was only weakly established at the end of the 1800s. The following table demonstrates the lagging growth of the Colombian army when compared with other Latin American states throughout the second half of the 19th Century, demonstrating that it was the only country that developed no semblance of a national army during the 1800s.

Table 6: Percentage of Population in Armed Forces⁶⁶

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
Colombia	0.0	0.1	0	0	0	1.0	0	0.1	0.1
Argentina	0.8	1.1	0	0.3	0.4	0	0.3	0.3	0.3
Chile	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.9	0.2	0.5	0	0.5	0.3
Uruguay	1.4	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.4
Peru	0.3	0.7	0.3	1.5	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2

While other countries were occupied fighting one another, developing state capacity (taxing and mobilizing citizens), and building national cohesion, Colombia was busy fighting with itself. Even the massive conscription around 1900 should not be considered a part of the national army, as it was undertaken at the hands of the Conservative party in the midst of its attempts to eliminate the rival Liberals, as indicated by its demobilization after the war. Thus militarization in Colombia did result in what Centeno describes as “the worst of all possible worlds: [private] armies fought without being able to dominate and they coerced without extracting.”⁶⁷

The difficulty in distinguishing the parties from the state in the above example raises classification problems that are not easily overcome, for in Colombia, “the party became the

⁶⁵ Centeno, op. cit., p. 228.

⁶⁶ Centeno, ibid., p. 225.

⁶⁷ Centeno, ibid., p. 155. Though it would be more accurate to state “they coerced without extracting from neighboring countries.”

state.”⁶⁸ An important element of this fusion of the party and state rested in the fact that entire regions were almost entirely supportive of one of the dominant parties, with each rural community being controlled by a single party *caudillo* (political strong-man) with the cooperation of the regional *gamonal* (economic elite). Within each of these towns, regardless of which party was in power in Bogotá, the caudillo dominated local political decisions. This was clearly not the development of a pluralist system in which two opposing powers heterogeneously divided support throughout the national territory, but one of extreme fragmentation at the local and regional levels. Winning elections, which surprisingly often corresponded to more or less ballot-box victory and occasionally even the peaceful exchange of power, was more about physically controlling more land and rural communities than convincing heterogeneous populations of the party’s virtues. Only in the major urban centres, in which a minority of the population lived into the mid-20th Century, was there heterogeneity of support for the parties. The development of the party identities and governing capacity can thus be viewed in many ways as the similar process of extraction and mobilization that fosters the development of nations and states.

War-making and party-making

The process of state building in Colombia did not involve the development of a central military or policing capability, which greatly limited the ability of the state to arbitrate property disputes, tax economic elites, and mobilize the working classes. Colombia has been described as a “typical 19th Century situation in which at least two parallel armies dispute control over national territory.”⁶⁹ But whereas other countries that possessed deep partisan fragmentation in the 18th Century, such as Uruguay, were able to overcome these by the 19th Century, Colombia was unable to overcome the nascent partisan conflict until 1958.

⁶⁸ López-Alves (2000), p. 7.

⁶⁹ López-Alves (2000), p. 164.

After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, the liberation army of 24,000 soldiers was soon disbanded by its commander, Simon Bolivar, as the threat of Spanish re-conquest on the continent quickly dissipated. The few senior posts that remained were almost immediately abolished and replaced by civilian caudillos.⁷⁰ In the ensuing vacuum that emerged, two dominant groups emerged to contend for supremacy: the Liberals and the Conservatives. The frequent conflicts between these parties were important collective action events, shaping strong party identities and subcultures while limiting the penetration of the state into the rural communities.⁷¹ The Colombian armed forces were not permanently established until 1885, and even this was primarily with the purpose of disposing of radical Liberals.⁷² While this military apparatus was developed more rigorously into the 20th Century, the parties subordinated its autonomy by recruiting its members directly into their party bureaucracy, offering side payments for loyalty, and thus making entire branches of the military subservient to one of the two parties.⁷³

The establishment of the political parties was due to both ideological alignments as well as for strategic security purposes. By the end of the 1820s, regional economic elites remaining fragmented and only partially committed to the state-building project, and developed their own private militias in order to limit rebellions and to protect themselves from bandits and non-aligned militias. López-Alves claims that the elites collectively believed that “reliance on militias under the supervision of loyal leaders remained an often viable and cheaper administrative alternative to monopolize coercion and impose order.”⁷⁴ With the multiplication of these autonomous militias throughout the country and the ensuing threats that they posed upon one-another, the formerly loose coalitions of autonomous political and economic elites

⁷⁰ López-Alves (2000), p. 136.

⁷¹ López-Alves (2000), pp. 126-127.

⁷² Safford and Palacios, op. cit., p. 245.

⁷³ López-Alves (2000), p. 168.

⁷⁴ López-Alves (2000), p. 31.

realized the benefits of a collective label, and established the social bases for the two parties between 1821 and the late-1840s. Under such circumstances, family and personal networks began to assume increasing importance, with the state unable to provide security or access to channels of economic and political power.⁷⁵

With an independent central state assuming little control over the regional economies and governments, it was forced into an inferior bargaining position, further reducing its development in successive negotiations with the regions. Perhaps the most significant result of this was the inability of Bogotá to excise taxes from rural populations, ensuring that virtually no taxation occurred during the entirety of the 1800s. On the other hand, the *gamonales* exerted significant influence on the state via various organizations, such as the Coffee Growers' Association,⁷⁶ which forced the state to make considerable tax concessions. These regional elites then developed their own taxation systems, taxing their sharecroppers and local small landholding farmers, but these funds were merely pocketed rather than turned over to either Bogotá or the departmental (provincial) governments.

Colombia's vast terrain and physical barriers, poor communication infrastructure, as well as the large number of economically independent urban centres favoured the decentralization of coercive capabilities. The many powerful urban centers (Medellin, Cali, Santa Marta, and Cartagena) were economically self-reliant and the regional *gamonales* viewed Bogotá more as an impediment to their development than a developmental aid. López-Alves claims that "given the importance of several urban centers, the country more closely resembled Italy – where rival city-states controlled their hinterlands and clashed with one another – than Uruguay."⁷⁷ Thus Colombia developed as a loose federation of independent cities, where local elites were able to

⁷⁵ Ronald P. Archer, *The Transition from Traditional to Broker Clientelism in Colombia: Political Stability and Social Unrest* (Notre Dame: Kellogg Institute, 1990), p. 14.

⁷⁶ López-Alves, *ibid.*, p. 99.

⁷⁷ López-Alves, *ibid.*, p. 97.

regulate their own their own economic and security matters with limited aid from Bogotá.

While all states possess difficulties integrating disparate regions, none in Latin America experienced the degree of problems of Colombia. In many ways the diagnosis of Alberto Lleras Camargo, President of Colombia's National Front (1958-1962) and the first Secretary General of the Organization of American States (1948-1954), that Colombia's problems can be attributed to a lack of "social, economic and political integration" is as applicable today as it was in the 1950s.⁷⁸

Victor's Justice and Political Change

During the 19th Century in Colombia party elites were the primary drafters of constitutions, with the victors of conflicts normally drafting constitutions that favoured themselves over the opposing party. Thus the notion of a "victor's justice" is replete in Colombia's history, with the 42 constitutions of the 19th Century being written unilaterally and reflecting the wishes of the victorious party in the century's eight civil wars and countless other regional conflicts. Suffrage was limited to landowning, educated men, the rights of the church expanded, and abolition repealed after Conservative victories, with more modernizing reforms occurring after successive Liberal victories.⁷⁹ The eight civil wars of the 1800s and the bloody civil war of *La Violencia* (1948-1958) were generally characterized by the party in power levying directed taxes against members of the opposing party, or even brazenly appropriating land from members of the opposite party in the case of the *La guerra de los mil dias* (The war of one-thousand days) between 1899 and 1902. This repeated process continually "reinforced

⁷⁸ In Vernon Lee Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions – Military Rule and the Social Revolution in Colombia, 1930-1956* (Pittsburgh, PE: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957).

⁷⁹ Perhaps the most significant of 19th Century reforms were those of the only particularly successful Liberal revolt of 1859-1861, headed by General Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera, in which the power centralizing moves of the Conservatives were repealed, presidential terms were reduced, and states were given the right to possess armies (whereas the federal government was not).

party identities; it divided Colombians along party lines more than along those of socioeconomic classes.”⁸⁰

With the parties reflecting relatively distinct ideologies despite possessing members of relatively similar socioeconomic backgrounds, the role of ideology was certainly an important factor in shaping the policies that each party supported. However, defining the conflicts merely as the result of ideological differences only provides half of the story, as many of these ideologies had clear material foundations, which offer a more valuable analytical vantage.⁸¹ As mentioned earlier, most authors describe the almost incessant Colombian civil wars of the 1800s and *La Violencia* of 1948-1958 as “ideological” or “partisan” conflicts.⁸² And while these no doubt serve as useful labels on a superficial level, they offer little explanation as to the micro-foundations of these conflicts. For example, perhaps the most divisive political matter during the 19th Century concerned whether the Colombian polity should be organized around natural law or if it should eschew religious involvement in politics and join with the European Enlightenment in fostering a state predicated on modern principles of legal rationality. The Conservatives were, not surprisingly, strongly pro-clerical while the Liberals were resolutely anti-clerical. However, the entirety of the Colombian elite from both parties were highly religious during the 19th Century, and yet only the Conservatives supported a central role of the church in political matters. With the high degree of integration between the Catholic Church and the Conservative Party, and the relative ease with which the clergy could garner the support among the peasantry for its campaigns against the Liberals, it is difficult to separate whether members of the Conservative Party’s elite supported the church because they believed that

⁸⁰ Safford and Palacios, op. cit., p. 243.

⁸¹ This analysis especially takes issue with explanations of political outcomes based expressly on normative and theoretical alignments within societies, downplaying the role of explicit coercion and rational, strategic alignments as central organizing elements. For example, Cristina Rojas claims that “In mid-nineteenth-century Colombia, political economy was not centered on the accumulation of wealth; it was centered on the accumulation of words and civilizing capital.” In Cristina Rojas, *Civilization and Violence – Regimes of Representation in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

God's will should take precedent over the designs of man, or whether they supported the church because it provided them with strong leverage in their campaign to dominate the country. No doubt it was a combination of the two. Thus when the Conservative Party chose to limit suffrage and ignore the mounting pressures in favour of slavery abolition, these outcomes would be better explained as the product of complex relations among the elites within the parties that have vested interests in supporting such policies, the distribution of powers of these various stakeholders, the relative salience and popularity of such platforms within the populace, as well as the official party philosophy (and the ideology of individuals). Reverting simply to normative change and ideological conviction offers little explanatory power without an understanding of the contexts in which these convictions operate and are constrained.

Into the 20th Century - *La Violencia* and Beyond

The pattern of partisan conflict continued with only moderate changes until the late 1920s or early 1930s, in which there began to appear some fundamental changes in the organization of the Colombian working classes. In the context of expanding urbanization and industrialization, as well as the growing influence of major multinational export industries on the Caribbean coast and Magdalena regions, Colombian workers began to agitate for expanded citizens' rights. The Colombian Communist Party (PCC) was beginning to gain greater influence, and the popular sectors were beginning to realize their collective bargaining potential. Safford and Palacios refer to this era as one of "heroic unionism"⁸³ in which the absence of a judicial system to arbitrate strikes usually resulted in the massacres of union leaders, striking workers, and often even their families. It was in this period that the army began to develop its *raison d'état* of counter-insurgency, battling the "enemy within."⁸⁴ Unfortunately, one of the attempts of the armed forces to "bring order" to a major strike just outside of Santa Marta on the

⁸² See for example, Safford and Palacios, *op. cit.*, and Centeno, *op. cit.*

⁸³ Safford and Palacios, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

Caribbean coast irrevocably turned the tide of Colombian history, initiating a process of worker opposition to the political class and a general sentiment of anti-militarism that permeates Colombian society to this day.⁸⁵ Perhaps even more importantly, the event helped bring notoriety to a new leader of the organized left, and quite likely the most influential Colombian of 20th Century: Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.⁸⁶

Due to the changing demographics of Colombian society, including urbanization, expanded labour organization, and expanded literacy, Gaitán was able to articulate a moderate version of socialism that would introduce notions of social justice to Colombian mass politics for the first time. But his influence also irrevocably divided the Liberal Party and cost it the presidential election in 1946 that it otherwise would have won in a landslide. Nonetheless, Gaitán's grand oration and brilliant attacks on the political oligarchy helped create "a kind of historical compromise among a constellation of bourgeois elites and a combination of forces representing the popular and middle sectors of society."⁸⁷ Gaitán's legal training developed in him a belief in legal positivism, which expressed the possibility of political change via legal channels and democratic institutions, rather than merely through violence. This brought new hope to organized labour that had been losing the more violent forms of bargaining between the early 1920s and the late 1940s.⁸⁸ However, despite this message of peaceful change, when Gaitán was assassinated on April 9, 1958 the entire country instantly plunged into a chaos that it would not emerge from for at least ten years. Bogotá was razed, with all of the symbols of Conservative power, including churches, police stations, and newspapers – some 157 of the main buildings in the city – looted and burned. Without its leader, the organized left became

⁸⁴ Centeno, op. cit., pp. 148-149.

⁸⁵ Safford and Palacios, op. cit., pp. 282-283.

⁸⁶ Another Colombian who gained fame indirectly from the massacre of banana workers was the Nobel Prize winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose most famous novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* climaxed with the depiction of this massacre.

⁸⁷ Medina, op. cit., p. 157.

unorganized, dissolute, and reverted to its only possible recourse of continued violence and armed insurrection.⁸⁹

Despite being organized and orchestrated by the political parties, *La Violencia* cannot just be viewed as merely a partisan conflict. According to the leading historical source on the period, "*La Violencia* escapes understanding as a whole."⁹⁰ Its general moniker of "The Violence" is thus particularly telling, for once set in motion, the violence developed its own dimensions that truly defy categorization and coherent explanation. Consequently, rather than going into detail about the causes of *La Violencia*, an analysis of the resultant effects upon the military and other modes of coercive organization will be undertaken.

The immediate consequence of *La Violencia* was the expansion of the armed forces and the police under the Conservatives, and the consolidation of their functions as being primarily related to counter-insurgency, at the behest of the increasingly threatened Conservative elites. Under mounting pressure to combat the increasing number of Liberal *bandas* (armed insurrection groups), the army began a massive recruitment campaign.⁹¹ This expansion was met by an expansion of Liberal recruitment of peasants, and the whole process spiraled out of control from 1948 until 1953. Funding for the suppression of the organized peasantry were not difficult to extract, for during the period of 1948 to 1953 Colombia experienced unprecedented and unexpected economic growth, averaging around 7% per year.⁹² In fact the conflict and economic growth grew together, with the conflict giving industrialists greater ability to coerce workers and abolish union activity, dramatically increasing productivity and profits. In turn,

⁸⁸ Herbert Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitan – Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 46-47; 59.

⁸⁹ An interesting side-note that Braun mentions in his chilling account of the Bogotazo. Gaitan's assassination caused him to miss his meeting with a young law student from Cuba with whom he had a meeting later that afternoon: Fidel Castro.

⁹⁰ Pecaut, op. cit., p. 233.

⁹¹ Braun, op. cit., p. 119.

⁹² Medina, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

these greater profits fuelled the conflict, in a spiral that did not end until practically no corner of the country was unaffected.

The second product of *La Violencia* was the blurring of the various modes of coercion, obfuscating the boundary between civilian and military, state and party, and most importantly soldier and criminal. The army performed policing functions such as arresting and prosecuting criminals (who were normally members of the Liberal armed factions), while the police increasingly shared the army's duty of maintaining the national order. The army was subsequently expanded, but was completely subservient to the Conservative party, and was directed in not only defensive activities, but exceedingly brutal offensive attacks on Liberal communities. Conservatives labeled Liberal *caudillos* and members of Liberal communities as *bandoleros* (bandits), making them subject to criminal prosecution.⁹³ This criminalization of the combatants helped deepen the police force's plunge into the morass of violence, which resulted in their expansion and the strengthening of their partisan affiliation. The majority of new police recruits were from the Conservative town of Chuvalo, which gave the partisan police of this era the label of *chuvalitas*.⁹⁴ To this day, *chuvalita* is a pejorative term given to members of the armed forces by those critical of the continued manipulation of the police and armed forces by political elites.

The third effect of *La Violencia* was to facilitate the rise of Colombia's only 20th Century military dictatorship, between 1953 and 1958. With the country spiraling out of control, the increasingly divided Conservative Party beseeched its most influential member, Laureano Gómez, to return from his posting as Colombian Ambassador to Spain, where he was responsible for enhancing Colombia's ties to Spain. Upon returning to Colombia, the vitriolic and reactionary Gómez won the 1950 elections, in which the Liberals refused to field a

⁹³ Sanchez and Meertens, op. cit., pp. 22-23; 27; 147-160.

⁹⁴ Sanchez and Meertens, ibid., p. 199 (fn. 4).

candidate, and expanded the program of military expansion and repression. By 1953 he had lost the support of most moderates within his own party, who were engaged in discussions with members of the Liberals over finding a political solution to the conflict. When Gómez attempted to remove the military General, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla from his post in order to replace him with one of his own supporters, Rojas Pinilla overthrew the Gómez government in a coup d'état that had bipartisan support, excluding Gómez and his small band of supporters, of course. However, despite some initial successes at quelling the conflict and maintaining economic policies that benefited the party elites, Rojas became increasingly independent from the parties, causing fear in the ranks of the Liberal and Conservative Party elite. In addition, his hard-line tactics against the Liberal armed factions drew increasing opposition from the Colombian masses, and eventually academia and the media. In the face of deteriorating economic performance and a nation-wide strike against his leadership, Rojas Pinilla decided that peacefully conceding power would be wiser than attempting to repress the entire country.⁹⁵

This led to the most significant outcome of *La Violencia*, in terms of the production and organization of coercion: the unification of the Liberal and Conservative Parties under a common label: the *Frente Nacional* (National Front). With the gradual expansion of the violence and its increasingly apolitical nature, becoming more based upon personal and community revenge, the party leaders quickly realized that they were rapidly losing control over the regional *caudillos* and the rural peasants. Due to these pressures, the increasing independence and influence of Rojas Pinilla, and with the polarized Gaitánistas alienated from the Liberal Party, the *convivialistas* within both parties (moderates who favoured bipartisan cooperation) were able to arrive at agreement regarding an arrangement to share power between

⁹⁵ Safford and Palacios, *ibid.*, p. 324.

the two parties and exclude other parties. This agreement would have lasting effects upon Colombian society that are clearly witnessed to this day.

Summary

This admittedly terse scan of Colombian history during the state formation process over a period of nearly 200 years displays the manner in which the organization of coercion by the two dominant parties contributed to the erosion of autonomous state capacity – reflecting what Tilly describes as the capital-intensive state formation process. With the parochial interests of party members dominating the organization of labour and coercion, the consequence was an increase in the militarization of Colombian society, and the erosion of a central, independent state that could arbitrate disputes, provide stability and continuity, and integrate the divisive nation and state. Landowners used private capital to fund the private armies in concert with the regional political bosses, resulting in a period of intense partisan conflict throughout much of the period. This fratricidal era in which the popular sectors were integrated into political life via the political parties rather than via the armed forces and the state bureaucracy reinforced regional antagonisms and escalated the overall level of national conflict, emasculating the central state apparatus. The result was a process of land concentration by Conservative Party elites during *La Violencia* (or rather, peasants in the pay of Conservative elites), and forced expropriation and redistribution of the *latifundia* (large estates) by the armed masses. Within the context of a formal democratic polity, the parties remained by far the most powerful actors, thus making any possibility of military subversion a virtual impossibility, which explains the resilience of the strong parties, continued democracy, and nearly constant violence until 1953. At this point, the only manner in which to escape the conflict was to allow a populist strongman to gain power and independently pacify the countryside without causing further partisan antagonism. Thus we witness the end of major conflict organized around the political parties, the dominant phenomenon for the first 100 years of Colombia's history. However, the end of

this era signaled the beginning of yet another period of bifurcation, exclusion, and the perpetuation of privatized systems of organized violence outside of the direct control of the state.

Chapter 5: The National Front (1958-1982)

The period of the National Front (1958-1982)⁹⁶ laid the foundation for many of the forms of societal antagonism, political exclusion, and the expansion of non-state violence that undermined the ability of the Colombian state to implement socio-political reforms after 1982. During this period the balance of power between the powerful political elites, economic elites, the armed forces, and the working classes created the precondition for the present incapacity of the state in two manners. First, power hoarding under the exclusionary political agreement encouraged rural workers to oppose the political class and form numerous guerrilla movements. Second, the fear of military deliberation made the executive reticent to expand the size of the armed forces. Both processes resulted in the private expansion of coercive organizations, presenting variations on the general model defined by Tilly as the capital-intensive state formation process. In the pre-1958 period landowners organized through the political parties financed the expansion of coercive capabilities. After 1958 this process was undertaken by landowners in consort with recalcitrant members of the armed forces – with all three groups (peasants, landowners, military) becoming increasingly independent from the established political parties. Beginning in the mid-late 1970s, the incredibly wealthy narcotics cartels became the new merchant class of Colombia, privately financing the expansion of coercion, with rural guerrillas and the state being the focus of their attacks.

As this chapter and the following will demonstrate, the expansion of these non-state armed groups in competition with one another has been the biggest impediment to the development of state capacity since 1958. For Tilly, coercive organizations gain legitimacy by being able to defuse other potential power holders: "Legitimacy is the probability that other

⁹⁶ As mentioned earlier, while the consociational agreement was scheduled to end in 1974, the majority of its structures were not formally dismantled until the administration of Virgilio Barco in 1986. However, some elements of power sharing, such as the division of cabinet positions, were still maintained until 1991.

authorities will act to confirm the decisions of a given authority.”⁹⁷ At first glance this may appear to be tautological (How is a monopoly of force acquired? By being legitimate. How is legitimacy acquired? By achieving a monopoly of force). However, I would prefer to view this legitimacy as stemming from the ability of a coercive organization to establish some degree of physical security and guarantees against external aggressors. Thus we see guerrillas gaining power within certain regions because they have been able to eliminate other rivals to power. From 1958 to 1982, the state was unable to establish this legitimacy based upon its ability to monopolize coercion, nor was it able to provide significant economic opportunity. In fact, it was often the state that was responsible for existential threats to rural citizens and communities – in both its actions and its absence.

The defining elements of the National Front period were the coalescence of political elites, formal exclusion of new social movements from forming political parties, and the rise of guerrilla movements primarily as a result of this exclusion.⁹⁸ In this era we witness the consolidation of the state for the first time in Colombia’s history. Contending political elites united within the party system, and the increasingly disenfranchised masses were prevented from articulating and implementing a political agenda that reflected their interests. With no channels of interest articulation for the masses, and with rural workers viewing the state as being unable to provide economic security (or the state being the biggest threat to the very survival of agrarian communities), violent peasant uprisings began.⁹⁹ The expansion of the guerrilla movements since 1964 and the associated rise of private counter-insurgency groups has been the biggest impediment to the ability of the state to undertake political reforms in the period of institutional change after 1982.

⁹⁷ Tilly (1985), p. 171.

⁹⁸ Pecaut, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ This inability of the state to arbitrate property disputes and provide a minimal degree of economic security is the primary cause of peasant uprisings according to both James Scott (*op. cit.*) and Joel Migdal (*op. cit.*).

The second central feature of this period was the unwillingness of the Colombian state security apparatus to penetrate rural communities in order to provide fair and equal arbitration of property disputes between *campesinos* and landowners. This neglect of rural communities also helped foster the rise of organized guerrilla groups that attempted to redistribute income by expropriating land and excising forced rents from landowners. In response to these *campesino* reprisals, landowning elites constructed private counter-insurgency groups. The neglect of rural security issues also set the stage for highly antagonistic civil-military relations after 1982, due to the inability of the government to grant the military sufficient autonomy and capabilities to eliminate the expanding guerrilla movements. On the one hand, the National Front executives maintained small, ineffective, and marginalized militaries due to threats of the military gaining excessive power and independence. The military's sole purpose was the survival of the regime, with little consideration of the more long-term consequences of neglecting community security concerns.¹⁰⁰ Yet the regime's need for a powerful military increased throughout the period, with the expansion of the guerrilla groups and the threats that they posed to landowning elites and eventually the political class, itself. With the increasing need for the military, it began to gain more autonomy in establishing national security policy, progressively adopting a more hard-line attitude toward the guerrillas, independent from the executive. Yet the political elites continued to grant the military and national police little responsibility for rural stabilization and security, fearing their increasing independence and potential insubordination, as was increasingly occurring throughout Latin America during this period. This security vacuum provided the space for the guerrillas and private counter-insurgency groups to proliferate, with private capital again being used to fund the majority of coercive organization. Tilly's model of capital-intensive state formation would thus continue throughout this period, but now the private

¹⁰⁰ See Andrés Dávila Ladrón de Guevera, "Ejército regular, conflictos irregulares: la institución militar en los últimos quince años," in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la*

funding of coercion would be undertaken by economic elites who were increasingly divorced from the political apparatus, and by independent agrarian communities that were better able to mobilize bodies than arms or dollars.

The reticence of political elites to expand the physical size of the military encouraged the executive to grant the military and police reserve domains of power that operated at the margins of democratic accountability. Despite relaxing the democratic constraints upon the operational procedures of the military (and perhaps because of it) the armed forces were unable to pacify guerrilla movements. The harassment of peasants and repression of organized workers often created more guerrillas than it eliminated. Military neglect also began to foster a climate of uncooperation and resentment between civilians and military officials – an insalubrious relationship that became one of the central features of Colombian politics after 1982 and continues into the 21st Century.¹⁰¹

The overall legacy of the period was one of privately funded coercive organizations, and an exclusionary political class that was caught between the demands of peasants, landowners, military officials, and later drug cartels. As the former partisan conflict ended, a new set of socioeconomic and political antagonisms would arise, expanding coercion outside of the control of the state and progressively limiting its capacity to mobilize and integrate Colombia into either a nation or a state.

Elite Coalescence after *La Violencia*

The connection between the exclusionary nature of the National Front regime and the rise of the guerrillas and counter-insurgency groups has been extensively documented.¹⁰²

Paz (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999), pp. 288-289.

¹⁰¹ The most recent example of this is the retirement of General Jorge Enrique Mora in November, 2003, allegedly due to power struggles with the President, Alvaro Uribe Vélez and his Defense Minister, Martha Luisa Ramirez, who resigned a week later.

¹⁰² For the relationship between the exclusionary nature of the political regime and the rise of the guerrillas, see Daniel Pecaú, op. cit., and Eduardo Pizarro, "Revolutionary Guerrilla Groups in Colombia," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and*

Accordingly, this chapter will merely expand upon this literature where it is necessary to provide linkage between the initial period of capital-intensive state consolidation from the pre-1958 period, and the present period of formal political reform amid the expansion of violence (1982-present).

Beginning in 1958 Colombia's political elites from both major parties established the first-ever cohesive ruling class in the country's history. After months of meetings among the party elites to determine how to end the dictatorship of Rojas, Liberal and Conservative Party elites decided upon a power sharing agreement, the consociational *Frente Nacional* (National Front). The agreement stipulated that the presidency would alternate between the two parties every four years, there would be an equal sharing of cabinet positions and senior postings in the civil service, and no new political parties could be formed. In December 1957 the agreement was overwhelmingly passed in a national plebiscite, and the era of the National Front commenced.

With the conclusion of more than 100 years of Liberal-Conservative political violence, the state was able to begin developing desperately needed social infrastructure. It was in these years that an integrated national highway system, sewage and fresh water systems, and the public education system were expanded and standardized. The Agrarian Reform Law of 1961 also created the *Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria* (the Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute), which began the process of moderate agrarian reform, though this was ultimately abandoned due to opposition from landowning elites. Furthermore, the virtual assurances of regime continuity facilitated community penetration by the state, disrupting the traditional bonds of dependency that *gamonales* had with *campesinos*.¹⁰³

Negotiating Peace (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001). For the rise of the paramilitaries amid state weakness, see Mauricio Romero, "Changing Identities and Contested Settings: Regional Elites and the Paramilitaries in Colombia," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 14 (1), 2000.

¹⁰³ Archer's research provides meticulously detailed accounts of how the clientele networks evolved during the National Front era, including numerous interviews that demonstrate how the political elite were able to contain the

Bogotá also expanded its political powers by directly appointing departmental governors, top judicial posts, and municipal mayors. This concentration of power in Bogotá created a wave of backlash by local economic elites and landowners against the governing coalition, whom they viewed as ruling at arms-length without providing physical security, responding to regional concerns, or arbitrating property disputes.¹⁰⁴ Yet the governing regime was able to maintain its hold on power by co-opting many economic elites and by providing selective side payments to union leaders and local *caudillos* who were sympathetic to the organized peasantry.¹⁰⁵ Thus while the era resulted in the creation of some semblance of an autonomous state infrastructure for the first time in Colombia's history, it can not be defined as having resulted in the building of an integrated nation with a government that mobilized the support of either economic elites or the working classes. While Bogotá increasingly controlled regional administration, its inability to impartially arbitrate property disputes alienated both landowners and the rural *campesinos*. This disenchantment of the electorate was manifest in embarrassingly low electoral turnouts during the period. Voter turnouts for Congressional elections cascaded from 60% in 1958 to 31% in 1968, and presidential election turnouts declined from 50% in 1958 to 34% in 1966.¹⁰⁶ The environment of rapidly growing political apathy, in which peaceful political change was no longer viewed as a possibility is the most important factor in the birth and expansion of anti-system groups during this period.

interests of regional economic elites, and began to develop independent national development strategies. See Archer, op. cit., pp. 19-21. Safford and Palacios claim that the virtual guarantee of political office by established members of the coalition government resulted in "the nationalization of clientelism." Safford and Palacios, op. cit., pp. 324-325.

¹⁰⁴ Romero (2000).

¹⁰⁵ See Yepes, op. cit., p. 51. One of the biggest threats to the stability of the National Front was the Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal (MRL) which was created in 1959 under Alfonso López Michelsen. After realizing the futility of an electoral challenge to the National Front, members of the MRL, including Lopez Michelsen, were co-opted by the centrist Liberal Party.

¹⁰⁶ Harvey F. Kline, *Colombia – Portrait of Unity and Diversity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), p. 57. It should also be noted that political participation was extremely high at the end of La Violencia, with 73% of eligible voters casting ballots in the 1957 referendum that created the National Front.

Exclusion, Repression and Birth of Guerrilla Movements

The period of 1958 to 1982 witnessed the rise of several guerrilla organizations, including the Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), the M-19, Quintín Lame, and the only two major guerrilla groups that still exist in 2004: the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC-EP) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). The fragility of political institutions after *La Violencia* created an aperture for *bandolerismo* (banditry), the dominant form of violence in Colombia from 1953 to approximately 1965.¹⁰⁷ This period of seemingly chaotic violence cannot be defined as a “prepolitical” or simply “criminal” phenomenon, as its roots in peasant reactions to repression and political exclusion.¹⁰⁸ Sanchez and Meertens describe the majority of the bandits of the 1958-1964 period as “social” bandits, as opposed to mere criminal bandits, because they receive the support by the host communities that shelter them and from whom they fight. These predominantly Liberal guerrillas of the 1950s exploited the climate of insecurity and developed a strong allegiance with the local populations. However, with the coalition of the Liberals and the Conservatives in 1958, the Liberal militias were officially labeled *bandoleros* (bandits), and were systematically targeted by the military. This consolidation of the armed forces at such a late date and their orientation toward internal pacification (as opposed to protection from foreign aggressors) provides one of the most important clues as to why Colombia remains the only Latin American state to retain a high degree of internal fragmentation into the 21st Century.

Colombia’s largest and most successful guerrilla group, the FARC, came into existence in this environment, after failed attempts of peasant groups to establish political independence from regions of continuing rural violence, and increasing repression at the hands of the National

¹⁰⁷ Safford and Palacios, op. cit., p. 351; Sanchez and Meertens, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Sanchez and Meertens, op. cit. The authors refer to the work of Hobbsbawm, who has demonstrated that periods of identifiable organized banditry have seldom been non-political phenomena, but rather have their origins in social and political exclusion, as well as oppression by dominant classes.

Front's first two administrations. After several declarations of independence by these self-proclaimed "independent republics" in 1964, the administration of Guillermo León Valencia (1962-1966) ordered aerial attacks upon them, most notably upon the community of Marquetalia, 200 km southwest of Bogotá. Six months after this famous attack upon the peasants in Marquetalia, the FARC was born.¹⁰⁹

With the government unable to undertake land tenure reform, provide security from landowner militias and former Conservative bandits, and its manifestly exclusionary and repressive orientation, these republics became the breeding grounds for peasant discontent and organized opposition to the consociational regime. Between 1964 and 1968 the ELN and the EPL were born and gained vast support among *campesinos*. These guerrilla movements also received widespread support from moderate Liberals and even some members of the Colombian clergy,¹¹⁰ who provided alternative visions of social justice and wealth distribution that remain popular in anti-establishment discourses of the remaining guerrilla groups.

Military Neglect and the Birth of Paramilitarism

Another significant result of the changing social relations during this period was the relative neglect of the military, the deterioration of civil-military relations, and the resulting birth of numerous non-governmental counter-insurgency groups throughout Colombia's hinterlands. Whereas peasant exclusion and repression resulted in the rise of the guerrilla groups, military neglect and the threats to regional economic elites resulted in the rise of the paramilitary groups.

Beginning in 1958 the new governing coalition was not entirely assured of electoral victory, for while the consociational agreement did not allow the creation of new parties to

¹⁰⁹ An interesting historical fact that warrants consideration here is that the attacks upon government forces in 1998 by the FARC were deemed reprisals for the attacks upon Marquetalia by FARC leader, Manuel Marulanda.

¹¹⁰ One of the founding leaders of the ELN was Father Camilo Torres, a dissident member of the Catholic Church whose fame among scholars of the Colombian guerrilla movement is legendary.

contend for office, it did allow existing parties to compete in elections. In the 1960s and 1970s the biggest electoral threat to the National Front was the populist party headed by Rojas Pinilla, the *Alianza Nacional Popular* (National Popular Alliance, or ANAPO). With the historic ties of the former military dictator Rojas to the military, as well as ANAPO's platform of agrarian reform, the traditional political class and economic elite were gravely threatened. The electoral support of ANAPO during this period was remarkable, considering that the two traditional parties had dominated virtually every aspect of social, economic, and political relations for more than 100 years. Despite little economic support and a lack of clientele channels, ANAPO received only 1% fewer votes than the National Front in the 1970 presidential elections – and it is even quite likely that it handily won the election.¹¹¹

Thus with Rojas still politically active and senior members of the military developing independent agendas of social reform,¹¹² the political class began to view an insubordinate military as one of its biggest threats to its power, despite the military's anti-communist orientation and its ostensible opposition to peasant land rights. The result was a military that was under funded and increasingly given secondary status within the Colombian political hierarchy, but whose success in the counter-insurgency battle was ironically of paramount importance to the political class. Thus while other Latin American states were fortifying their militaries in attempts to establish control over subject populations and counter the rising tide of organized guerrilla activities, Colombia was reducing the size of its own military and once again abandoned landowners to develop their own private defense groups. Between 1960 and 1970,

¹¹¹ Members of ANAPO declared that the election was fraudulent immediately after the declaration was made. As Ruiz points out, the governmental ban on reporting preliminary electoral returns when nearly half the ballots were counted (which showed Rojas clearly in the lead) indicates a high probability of electoral fraud. Immediately following the apparently fraudulent election, the M-19 was born. See Ruiz, op. cit., pp. 122-127.

¹¹² Most notable among these is Valencia's Commander of the Armed Forces, Major General Alberto Ruiz Novoa, who embarked upon ambitious "hearts and minds" operations in rural communities, building roads, schools, hospitals, and ordering army dentists to fill cavities of rural workers. With his increasing support among peasants, he was viewed increasingly as a threat to the political class, and was dismissed. See Ruiz, op. cit., pp. 109, 111. It should be noted that the author is unrelated to General Ruiz.

amid growing peasant unrest and increasing rates of property disputes and homicides, the size of the Colombian armed forces actually decreased. The size of the national police also remained stable during the period, only marginally rising from 16 officers per 10,000 civilians in 1959 to 18 per 10,000 in 1982.¹¹³ The following chart compares the size of the armed forces in Colombia with other Latin American countries from the 1960s through the 1990s, demonstrating the substantial neglect of the military during this time of mounting guerrilla mobilization.

Table 7: Percentage of Population in Armed Forces¹¹⁴

	1960	1970	1980	1990
Colombia	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.4
Argentina	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.2
Chile	0.8	0.9	1.0	0.7
Uruguay	0.6	0.7	0.9	0.8
Peru	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.6

The only manner in which the National Front could achieve its security goals of pacifying the rising guerrilla opposition was to expand its coercive capabilities without giving excessive power to the armed forces commanders. The best way to achieve this was to allow the military more freedom to dictate its own codes of conduct and stretch the boundaries of democratic accountability. Such practices included constitutional amendments to permit the use of private militias, suspending civil liberties during periods of declared national emergency, expanding the jurisdiction of military tribunals, turning a blind eye toward the human rights violations of semi-private counter-insurgency groups, and even committing as many human rights violations as the armed forces could get away with – which in the absence of external human rights monitoring prior to the early-1990s was astonishingly high. Each of these tactics further eroded the legitimacy of the government and the armed forces, heightening the resolve

¹¹³ María Victoria Llorente, , “Perfil de la policia colombiana,” in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999),, p. 471.

¹¹⁴ From Miguel Centeno, op. cit., p. 215.

and the relative legitimacy of the various guerrilla groups that sought political representation and social justice.

The administration of Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) exemplifies the most egregious violation of democratic norms and the expansion of military jurisdiction in the period of 1958 to 1982. This administration is considered by many Colombian analysts to be the most repressive and counter-productive regime of the National Front era.¹¹⁵ During these four years, an almost endless *estado de conmoción* (state of unrest) was declared, giving responsibility for all public order to the military. States of unrest could be declared by the president with the simple approval of cabinet members (whom the president appointed), allowing the president to virtually rule by decree for up to six months.¹¹⁶ Legrand describes the Turbay Ayala administration as the “partial military occupation of the state, with a chronic paranoia of communism, and harassment of the left.”¹¹⁷ The armed forces heavily repressed supposed guerrilla sympathizers in the Middle Magdalena, issued mandatory identity cards to all citizens, and maintained regular military checkpoints that screened the passage of all civilians. These activities were evidently supported by many inhabitants of the region who were growing increasingly frustrated with the amount of tribute excised by the FARC in order to expand their war against the government.¹¹⁸ This expanded influence of the armed forces was clearly demonstrated prior to the Turbay Ayala administration, during the presidency of Lopez Michelsen (1974-1978), when the army blocked disarmament negotiations between the ELN and the Lopez Michelsen negotiating team. The army believed that it was beginning to win the battle against the insurgents and saw negotiations

¹¹⁵ See Ana María Bejarno, “Protracted Conflict, Multiple Protagonists and Staggered Negotiations: Colombia, 1982-2002”, *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28 (55-56), 2003. (2003). Also Bert Ruiz, op. cit., p. 163.

¹¹⁶ Kline, op. cit., p. 66.

¹¹⁷ Legrand, *ibid.*, p. 185.

¹¹⁸ Safford and Palacios, *ibid.*, pp. 365-366. This process greatly resembles the process that Mancur Olson describes as the “less encompassing interest,” in which “roving bandits” excise a larger percentage of a domestic population’s surplus product in order to gain as much as possible, as they are not concerned with the economic

as legitimizing guerrilla demands.¹¹⁹ This contradictory and inconsistent approach to conflict resolution by the military and elected officials represents one of the crucial elements to understanding the inability of political reforms to ameliorate internal disputes. Whereas with Tilly states were constructed in the process of extracting capital for fighting foreign enemies, in Colombia state building has involved the balancing of democratically-elected executives and legislatures with the demands of both military officials and economic elites. This exemplifies two different Colombias: one in which democratic principles are relatively unsuccessfully applied in an attempt to integrate and diffuse conflicts, and another in which the principles of capital and coercion continue to undermine these democratic processes.

The Onset of Paramilitarism

Despite the expanded jurisdiction and operational autonomy of the armed forces, the guerrilla groups all increased in size and strength between 1958 and 1982. This opened the path for perhaps the most insidious manifestation of the National Front era: the creation of organized paramilitary groups. Law 48 of 1968 permitted the state to distribute restricted weapons to civilians involved in counter-insurgency efforts. Until its repeal in 1989, this law provided the legal foundation for Colombia's most unsuccessful national security strategy of the late-20th Century.

According to Romero, four factors can generally be attributed to the growth of paramilitaries:

regional elites ready to support politically and to finance the paramilitary apparatuses; military advice, or at least cooperation from sectors of this organization; leadership of groups or individuals linked to drug trafficking; and sufficient political and military pressure of the guerrilla, or its allies, to maintain such a diverse group united.¹²⁰

viability of these groups. See Mancur Olson, *Power and Prosperity: Outgrowing Communist and Capitalist Dictatorships* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

¹¹⁹ Pizarro in Bergquist 1992, p. 185.

¹²⁰ Romero (2003c), p. 7.

The Colombian paramilitaries thus evolved into the central protagonists behind processes of “reverse agrarian reform”¹²¹ in which peasants were forcibly removed from their land, and the lands concentrated under the ownership of narcotics traffickers, cattle ranchers, or the paramilitary troops, themselves. This process of land conflict has its roots in the late years of *La Violencia*, when groups known as *pajaros* (literally, “the birds,” for their high degree of mobility) were hired by Conservative *caudillos* to displace non-Conservative peasants from their lands, forcing the small landholders into sharecropping arrangements or merely displacing them.¹²² With the end of partisan violence, similar processes continued, though organized more by landowners with fewer partisan affiliations. With the government progressively losing control over the hinterlands, the primary forms of land struggle were increasingly fought by these armed groups against peasant guerrilla groups, with the government’s armed forces either tacitly supporting the land sharks or else merely ignoring these struggles.

Summary

The most important question to ask for this period is “How did the National Front era contribute to the erosion of state power?” The answer is twofold. First, the exclusionary and repressive political regime fostered the growth of guerrilla organizations, whose sole purpose became the destruction of the existing political regime. With peasant groups completely unable to access channels of political decision-making, they resorted to less democratic forms of bargaining. Second, the government’s inability to protect the property “rights” of economic elites and the maintenance of a small and narrowly-focused military established antagonistic relations between the government and regional economic elites. Members of the military also became increasingly critical and insubordinate to executives in Bogotá, especially during

¹²¹ Legrand (2003), p. 184.

¹²² Sanchez and Meertens, op. cit., pp. 105-108.

administrations that were more conciliatory toward peasant demands.¹²³ When considering all of these conflicting and antagonistic relations between the various political actors, one becomes immediately aware of the less than propitious sets of relations for building both an integrated nation and a strong state apparatus. This complex assemblage of actors helps explain why Colombia did not develop a powerful military to eliminate incipient guerrilla movements, such as occurred in the southern cone countries, Peru, Brazil, and most Central American countries. As Cardoso noted when writing during this period, Colombia was able to secure the interests of political elites, the military, and even domestic and international economic elites within the stable (semi) democratic system, amid various pressures from popular movements, without reverting to a military dictatorship.¹²⁴

Similar to the pre-1958 period, the end result of the National Front era was the expansion, privatization, and decentralization of coercive agents, and an independent, autonomous state that was unable to mobilize support of the masses, economic elites, and which was unable to establish a monopoly over coercion within its territory. However, unlike the period prior to 1958 in which the political parties organized the production of coercion, the National Front era witnessed the production of coercion outside of the parties' entrenched political networks. The semi-private counter-insurgency groups were organized by landowners, primarily via cattle ranchers' associations and later narcotics cartels, often with the assistance of the armed forces and the complicity of political elites within both the executive and Congress. This variant of the Tillean notion of capital-intensive state formation demonstrates how various trajectories of state consolidation and fragmentation can occur.

¹²³ This was most apparent during the first administration after the formal termination of the National Front, that of former radical Liberal dissident and leader of the MRL, Lopez Michelsen (1974-1978).

¹²⁴ Fernando H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 205-207.

The precarious balance of powers between political elites, the armed forces, economic elites, and the working classes prevented the political elites from being able to mitigate rural conflicts via democratic institutions. This inability of the state to foster a climate of political inclusion and negotiation is one of the most striking features of the period. Recent research on democratic breakdowns shows that strong party systems, especially the ability of states to facilitate the rise of viable, cohesive opposition parties, is one of the key ingredients to ensuring that Latin American democracies thrive.¹²⁵ Where formal democratic mechanisms do not exist to peacefully channel the demands of both economic elites and the working classes, non-democratic forms of political bargaining become the default outlet. "Where [parties] are oligarchic or cartel-like, channels of access and the scope of competition are reduced, and the gap between elites and mass publics tends to widen."¹²⁶ This is clearly the outcome of the National Front period. Whereas the pre-1958 period may be defined as a state-less party system, the 1958-1982 period may be described as the creation of a party-less state. The resulting lack of inclusion and competition created a socio-political environment in which "the political does not appear as an arena for mediation of social conflicts."¹²⁷

While some have described the National Front in very positive light, in which the partisan violence was aborted, a wide array of interests incorporated, and the local level penetrated with great effectiveness,¹²⁸ like Pecaut, I would argue that it was so exclusionary and incapable to arbitrate land disputes that it created more problems than it resolved. The former "inherited hatreds" of the partisan conflict from the 1840s to the 1950s were replaced by a more class-aligned conflict between landowners and the rural *campesinos*. Perhaps as destructive was that support for the very principles of democracy were critically undermined, as the regime

¹²⁵ Maxwell C. Cameron and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy without Parties?" *Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori's Peru*, *Latin American Politics and Society* 45 (3), 2003.

¹²⁶ Cameron and Levitsky, *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁷ Yepes, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹²⁸ See Jonathan Hartlyn, *Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

professed itself to be democratic, yet its actions could hardly be described as more than desperate attempts of a political oligarchy to maintain its position of privilege and power relative to economic elites, the military, and the working classes. The government's hoarding of power, exclusion of new political movements, outright repression of peasants, and tacit support of private militias violated democratic norms and created the preconditions for the inability of the state to mobilize rural populations and undertake political reforms in the present period.

Chapter 6: 1982 to present - Organizational Adaptation in a Time of Violence

The previous two chapters outlined the complex sets of relations between political elites, economic elites, the armed forces, and *campesinos*, laying the foundation for the present period of state weakness. This chapter attempts to explain the state's increasing weakness in terms of its inability to co-opt or eliminate rivals in its quest to establish a legitimate monopoly over coercion and enforce the rule of law. The primary manner in which the state loses the minimal capacity it had gained during the National Front period increasingly becomes the simple expansion of non-state armed groups, including the anti-system guerrillas, narcotics cartels, and the para-statal paramilitaries,¹²⁹ whose self-proclaimed legitimacy rest in the state's inability to eliminate the guerrillas. In addition to losing control over rural conflicts, the state also lost control over the military, which became increasingly insubordinate to administrations that were conciliatory toward the guerrillas. Regional economic elites also increasingly viewed the state with resentment, and continued to expand and centralize the activities of the country's many paramilitary groups. *Campesinos* increasing resented the state's inability and unwillingness to prevent human rights violations by the armed forces and increasingly by paramilitary groups, resulting in the mobilization of significant rural populations against the democratic regime. New social movements such as coca growers' associations in the Putumayo and Cauca began challenging the legitimacy of a regime that provided few employment opportunities and yet systematically dismantled the only seeming recourse for poor peasant communities: coca cultivation.¹³⁰ The involvement of both guerrillas and paramilitaries with narcotics trafficking greatly expanded their resources and bolstered their abilities to withstand disarmament pressures from the state and civil society. Meanwhile, the continued survival of both the guerrillas and the

¹²⁹ By "para-statal" it is meant that these groups view themselves as performing the normal roles of the state during the state's inability to fulfill its basic obligations, especially providing security to its citizens. See Romero (2003b).

¹³⁰ Maria Clemencia Ramirez, "The Politics of Recognition and Citizenship Rights in Putumayo and in the Baja Bota of Cauca: The Case of the 1996 Cocalero Movement," (Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal, 2000).

paramilitaries mutually reinforced one-another, enhancing the seeming justification for the survival of each group. In heightened competition with one another, these groups adjusted their military strategies in order to gain strategic advantage over each other, and over the state, further eroding the ability of the state to enforce the rule of law. With the expanded capabilities of these groups, especially the guerrillas, the state adopted tactics that violated democratic norms and further eroded its legitimacy amongst all sectors and classes in Colombia. The combination of all these factors demonstrates how the state gradually lost its grasp on power over the period of 1982 to 2002.

During this period the Colombian government attempted many reforms which were mostly considered failures, especially when viewed in light of their ability to integrate the country and stem the civil conflict – their ostensible aim. From 1982 to 2002 homicide rates increased by 300%, kidnapping rates increased by 400%, corruption was rampant, and the non-state armed groups grew exponentially in both size and influence. Thus Colombia fell into the trap of many other Latin American States, which despite their popular image as all-powerful and oppressive Leviathans, the *absence* of the state was actually responsible for more deaths than the state itself.¹³¹

There is one important discontinuity between the present period and the National Front with regard to state weakness. During the National Front, state infrastructure and some autonomy from other power centres was finally established, but at the expense of alienating peasants, economic elites, and eventually the senior brass of the armed forces. In the present period, the existence and perpetuation of these groups, often without any *raison d'état* other than their survival, has prevented the state from being able to implement reforms that would be required to integrate the nation and mobilize the citizenry. Put more simply, during the National

¹³¹ See Centeno, op. cit.

Front state weakness caused the rise of the armed groups, and in the present period the influence of these armed groups became the primary source of state weakness.

With the expansion of military confrontation and a virtual anarchic state of nature dictating political relations after 1982, Charles Tilly's model of state building continues to provide analytical clarity and explanatory power. The aspect of Tilly's theory that greatly helps clarify the present period is the concept of "competitive emulation,"¹³² in which the various aspirants to power, including the armed forces, paramilitaries, and guerrillas have strategically adapted their attempts to extract capital, mobilize supporters, and adapt their organizational structures in order to dictate the direction of state consolidation. The same logic of Tilly's competition among states can be applied to internal conflicts, though with drastically different consequences for state capacity. In Europe, the inter-state conflicts mobilized populations, integrated them into the state apparatus, and generated capital from conquered territories. But in Colombia, the intra-state conflict continued to divide its citizens, severely hampered economic growth, and eroded the perceived legitimacy of all of the major actors in the conflict.

During this period of heightened conflict, civil-military relations reached their worst point ever, especially during the conciliatory administrations of Betancur (1982-1986) and Pastrana (1988-2002). Leaders of the armed forces argued that they were tasked with a more difficult job without significant troop increases, were given less formal autonomy, and had greatly increased levels of accountability.¹³³

While the contemporary period possesses many novelties not previously seen in Colombia's past, it has tragically resulted in a similar expansion, privatization, and decentralization of the means of coercion, reducing the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of violence in order to limit the arbitrary expansion of more illegitimate violence. In many ways

¹³² Recall that Tilly does not actually provide a label for the process described herein. The label "competitive emulation" is the author's.

the private expansion of guerrilla and especially paramilitary forces demonstrates a similar process of capital-intensive state (de)formation as the National Front era, but with more drastic consequences, primarily due to the massive infusion of narcotics dollars.

Accordingly, this chapter sets out to explain how Colombia's coercive organizations (armed forces, paramilitaries, guerrillas) have adapted to environmental constraints in attempts to extract capital, mobilize populations, and organize coercion. This ability to survive and expand depends upon three factors: their abilities to procure the economic resources necessary to mobilize citizens, to convince subject populations of the legitimacy of their goals,¹³⁴ and adapt their tactics in order to gain military leverage. Where groups other than subservient armed forces in the service of a democratically elected government are expanded, the state's ability to implement a cohesive and consistent national development strategy is greatly limited.

Competitive Emulation and Organizational Structure: the Race to the Bottom

After the highly repressive and ultimately polarizing administration of Turbay Ayala (1978-1982), Colombians elected Conservative Belisario Betancur in 1982 on a platform of negotiation and reconciliation with the guerrillas. Betancur delivered on these promises, but in the presence of opposition from landowning elites and insubordinate military officials, its results were disastrous. Upon arrival in office, Betancur immediately negotiated a cease-fire with all of Colombia's guerrilla groups, offering them amnesty and agreeing to allow them to field political candidates. But this process of fielding candidates for public office exposed guerrilla supporters to attacks by paramilitaries and *sicarios* (hired assassins), with as many as 3,400 members of the newly-formed political party, the *Unión Patriótica* being assassinated between 1983 and 1991.

¹³³ Juan Salcedo Lora, op. cit.

¹³⁴ Recall from Chapter 3 that according to Tilly, the mobilization of citizens is as dependent upon the citizens' views of the legitimacy of the movement as well as the resources of the recruiters. According to the organizational theory of Panebianco (op. cit.), the organizational capacity of groups is also dependent upon their abilities to convince their members of the legitimacy of their goals.

Thus began the period in which political inclusion of the radical left became a virtual impossibility. Some subsequent peace negotiations with guerrillas were a success, especially after the inclusion of guerrilla organizations such as the M-19 and the Quintín Lame in the Constituent Assembly that re-drafted the Colombian Constitution in 1991. But the largest and oldest guerrilla organizations, the FARC and the ELN, remained after the re-drafting of the Constitution. In the face of their continued existence and expansion, the private paramilitary groups also expanded.

With the infusion of narcotics dollars into first the paramilitary organizations and then the guerrillas, both groups' numbers increased exponentially. During the 1990s, undeniably the most reformist period in Colombia's history, the FARC grew from around 6,000 troops to approximately 18,000. In the same period, the paramilitaries grew from only a few thousand to around 12,000 soldiers.¹³⁵ By the commencement of the Pastrana administration in 1998, the FARC began to deal the armed forces serious blows, raising the specter of a wholesale guerrilla victory over the armed forces for the first time in the country's history.¹³⁶

This increase in economic resources of all armed actors, especially during the late-1980s and the 1990s, significantly increased their military capabilities and resulted in substantial organizational transformations of the groups. The heightened competition and organizational re-structuring in many ways mirrors what political scientists have long-termed a "race to the bottom." In such circumstances the structural environment creates incentives for political entities to remove barriers to their competitiveness in order to give them competitive advantage

¹³⁵ It is difficult to accurately gauge the precise number of members, as the boundary between the organized national body of the AUC and loosely-affiliated self-defense groups or private militias is fluid and contentious. However, most experts agree that the figure is no lower than 9,000 and no higher than 15,000.

¹³⁶ Some of these battles include the March 1998 ambush of 150 elite troops by 500 FARC in Caquetá, in which 62 soldiers were killed and 43 taken prisoner during five days of fighting. In August, prior to Pastrana's inauguration, the FARC undertook 55 individual raids on the armed forces, including one in which they overtook the entire town of Miraflores, only 250 miles from Bogotá, in which 68 soldiers were killed and 87 wounded. Perhaps the most crushing blow was the attack upon an isolated army garrison of 120 soldiers in the eastern town of Mitú in November of 1998 by 1,000 FARC guerrillas under the command of Jorge Briceño (aka Mono Joyjoy). In this

over their competitors.¹³⁷ The armed forces, guerrillas and the paramilitary organizations all adopted strategies in this period that resemble a type of Clausewitzian "Total War,"¹³⁸ in which all possible means of establishing dominance over other groups is undertaken. When the capabilities of the armed forces relative to the guerrillas decreased, they adopted more egregious activities in order to compensate for this competitive disadvantage. This was most notable during the early years of the Samper administration (1994-1998), in which defense spending remained between 1.2% and 1.7% of GDP and human rights complaints against the armed forces reached an all-time high of more than 3,000 per year.¹³⁹ This was also the peak moment in which the armed forces and paramilitary troops were accused of collusion, demonstrating a clear connection between weak state military capabilities and the expansion of less accountable forms of counter-insurgency.

Consequently the three major groups, the paramilitaries, the guerrillas, and the armed forces have all attempted to expand their influence by mobilizing supporters. This has involved procuring financial resources and attempting to gain legitimacy. Such processes have involved the diversification of their resource bases, adjustment of ideologies, adoption of generally more or less violent tactics as required, alteration of command structures, and adjustments of levels of centralization and decentralization in order to achieve either greater battlefield cohesion or flexibility. Yet despite the mounting security crisis, successive administrations refused to grant the military and police sufficient powers to quell the rural violence and arbitrate property disputes, while ensuring sufficient degrees of subordination and accountability in order to

crushing offensive, 80 soldiers were killed and the remaining 40 taken hostage. For a detailed account of the army's struggles with the FARC in this period, see Bert Ruiz, op. cit., pp. 18-25.

¹³⁷ The term "race to the bottom" has typically been utilized by political economists and not security analysts, though the logic of the argument can be applied to any competitive environment. For the evolution and logic of the race to the bottom, see Jeffry Frieden and Ronald Rogowski, "The Impact of the International Economy on National Policies: An Analytical Overview," in Robert Keohane and Helen Milner, eds. *Internationalization and Domestic Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹³⁸ Karl Von Clausewitz, *On War*. Translated by J.J. Graham, 1874.

encourage greater public support for their practices. The only significant reduction in rates of homicides, kidnappings, and the regaining of state control over physical territory began with the decision to expand the military's capabilities, its accountability, and directly confront both the guerrillas and paramilitaries near the end of the Pastrana administration in early 2002.

Unfortunately the long-term effects of this strategy are too early to determine.

The next sections will provide more detail regarding the specific tactics that the paramilitaries, guerrillas, and state's security forces (military and police) adopted in order to gain influence, including both expanding their capabilities and enhancing their claims to legitimacy.

The Self-Defense and Paramilitary Groups

The history of the various self-defense organizations, private counter-insurgency militias and paramilitaries has been extensively documented and as such will not be repeated here, except to illuminate the discussion about how the groups have evolved and adapted to their competitive environments.¹⁴⁰ Consequently this analysis will focus upon the manner in which the paramilitary organizations reduce state capacity and strategically adapt to their competitive environments in order to strengthen their order of battle against the guerrillas.

Colombian paramilitary groups erode the state's capacity in several manners. First, their existence tends to escalate criminal violence more directly than that of the guerrillas. One of the most apparent is via the relationship between paramilitaries and *sicarios*, or hired assassins. In regions where the state's presence is chronically weak, often those controlled by the paramilitaries, these groups provide two functions. First, they attempt to solve social problems

¹³⁹ United States Embassy in Colombia, "Plan Colombia," 2004. www.colombiaemb.org. In comparison, Colombia's military expenditures in 2002 were 3.4%.

¹⁴⁰ For the relationship between the agrarian origins of the counter-insurgency groups among the cattle ranchers' associations and later the narcotics cartels, see International Crisis Group, "Latin America Report N° 5 – Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries" (ICG Press, Sep 16, 2003), pp. 4-11; Fernando Cubides C., "From Private to Public Violence – The Paramilitaries," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds.,

by eliminating so-called undesirables from society, in waves of vigilante-style murders known as “social cleansings.” Viewing the government and the police as being unable to address problems of social decay, these groups direct their attacks against prostitutes, homosexuals, the homeless, and drug addicts in an attempt to re-establish the purity of Colombian society.¹⁴¹ However, rather than resolving these “problems,” these activities merely reinforces the mindset of violence as a resolution to problems of social decay, perpetuating cycles of repression and retaliation.

Perhaps more damaging to the state is the manner in which the paramilitaries undermine democratic practices. The most problematic here is their attacks upon what they term “para-subversives:” individuals and groups whom they claim indirectly support the guerrillas by sheltering them or promoting their causes. These attacks attempt to undermine the support structures of the guerrillas, including academics, the media, union members, and other members of society who are desperately needed in struggling democracies. Rather than reducing the support of guerrilla groups, these attacks tend to bolster the resolve of their former supporters and create new guerrillas out of even non-aligned citizens, and polarize the ideological climate. These attacks further strengthen the guerrilla claims that the political system is closed to any form of leftist organization, for once leftist organizations are known to the paramilitaries, they are targeted for intimidation and sometimes assassination.

Structural Adaptation of the Paramilitaries

Reiterating the claims of both Mao and Guevara, AUC leader Carlos Castaño claims that the Colombian army would never be able to defeat the guerrillas, as no regular army has

Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

¹⁴¹ One of the most critically acclaimed and controversial films to come from Colombia in the past 20 years, *La Virgen de los Sicarios* (Our Lady of the Assassins), written by Colombian poet Fernando Vallejo, provides a powerful statement about the cheapness of life in Medellín, where social cleansings and homicides by *sicarios* are daily occurrences.

defeated a guerrilla movement in history.¹⁴² Consequently the AUC has adopted many of the FARC's guerrilla strategies and organizational techniques in order to recapture this strategic advantage, allegedly on behalf of the armed forces. Thus the AUC have adopted the community-based logistics, intelligence, and propaganda campaigns of the FARC.¹⁴³ This primarily involves the expanded use of civilians, including the financing of citizen informant networks, establishing a permanent presence and rapport with the communities in which they operate, and targeting alleged civilian supporters of the guerrillas in their attacks.

There are two important elements to the survival of the paramilitaries since the 1980s. The most important key to their early military successes over the guerrillas in the early-1980s and 1990s were their seemingly unlimited financial resources. This enabled them to enlist increased numbers of *campesinos*, former Colombian soldiers, and some former guerrillas, enabling them to expand their spheres of influence dislodge the guerrillas from their former strongholds. However, the continued survival of the paramilitaries beyond the late-1990s may be increasingly due to citizen dissatisfaction with the guerrillas and the expanded attempts of the paramilitaries to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Colombian people.

One of the most important shifts in the organization of the private counter-insurgency movement in Colombia was the increase in revenues associated with narcotics trafficking. In the late-1960s the cattle ranchers and other large estate owners of Córdoba and Urabá began financing counter-insurgency groups to combat the increasing incidences of guerrilla abductions of estate owners, and the forced taxation of the estates by guerrillas. The cattle ranchers and guerrillas were engaged in nearly constant confrontations from the late-1960s to the mid-1980s with neither side able to deal clear victories to the other. This changed with the expansion of the

¹⁴² For a detailed account of the seeming logic and necessity of Colombian paramilitarism, see the autobiography of AUC leader, Carlos Castaño. Mauricio Aranguren Molina, *Mi confesión: Carlos Castaño revela sus secretos* (Bogotá: Oveja Negra, 2001). Also Scott Wilson, "Interview with Carlos Castaño, Head of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia," *Washington Post*, March 12, 2001.

¹⁴³ Cubides, op. cit., pp. 130, 131.

drug trade and the infusion of massive drug profits to the counter-insurgency movement in the mid-1980s, dealing the guerrillas severe military setbacks and losses of territory.¹⁴⁴ The guerrillas were completely expunged from Cordoba, Urabá, and the Medio Magdalena by the end of the 1990s. Many of the cattle ranchers in these regions sold their properties to members of the drug cartels, whose vast fortunes enabled them to finance larger and more sophisticated counter-insurgency initiatives. With the military victories increasingly going in favour of the counter-insurgency groups, they began expanding and taking over lands of the guerrilla-supporting peasants and even non-aligned peasants. The growth of the narcotics industry, the expansion of the paramilitaries, and the concentration of land in the hands of fewer individuals are inter-related phenomena¹⁴⁵ that have damaged the legitimacy of all present self-defense groups, including those that are less territorially expansionist and not financed by narcotics dollars.

In many ways the land takeovers of the paramilitaries have direct antecedents in the land concentrations of the dreaded *pajaros* during *La Violencia*, where the hired guns of the Conservative landowners destabilized rural communities and took over lands that were then converted into sharecropping systems.¹⁴⁶ Like the *pajaros*, the paramilitaries enjoyed a degree of support from the upper classes of Colombian society, including some members of Congress and the business elite.

Attempts at Legitimization

Since the mid-1990s, many of the AUC's tactical shifts have involved attempts to gain public legitimacy. Such activities have included taking over FARC-controlled land and reducing taxation rates of the local populations, consolidating and centralizing their command

¹⁴⁴ Romero (2000), op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ See Fernando Cubides, "From Public to Private Violence: the Paramilitaries," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), p. 132.

¹⁴⁶ Sanchez and Meertens, op. cit., pp. 104-119.

structure, formalizing standard operational procedures, regimenting the training for new recruits, and expanding their public relations campaigns.

One of the most successful manners in which the paramilitaries have undermined FARC authority is by entering into areas where the FARC have established a new presence and in which the local populations object to the high level of FARC taxation. As the AUC possesses much elaborate funding channels than the FARC, stemming from narcotics trafficking and the support of wealthy landowning elites, they are able to charge considerably lower levels of tribute from subject populations than the *vacunas* (immunization/extortion payments) excised by the FARC, which in turn may provide them with a somewhat higher level of support among populations in territories wrested from the FARC.¹⁴⁷

The AUC have also centralized their command structure in an attempt to better limit egregious violations of human rights violations created by their soldiers, which have already irrevocably damaged their reputation. They have abandoned the use of massacres as an intimidation technique, though due to the increased scale of its operations the total number of deaths has increased.¹⁴⁸ Fernnado Cubides, one of the leading Colombian analyst of the paramilitaries, describes the importance of public perception to the paramilitaries:

They have disassociated themselves from the most brutal actions, even at the price of giving up evidence that serves to advance judicial processes against old friends. The paramilitaries deliberately cultivate a self-critical tone toward actions that have received the greatest international condemnation, not only because there are judicial processes against them, but also because they have begun to discover psychological warfare and have flashes of understanding concerning the importance of international opinion.¹⁴⁹

During the Pastrana administration, the AUC began their public relations blitz, airing regular television spots, increased their frequency of contact with the media, developed a regularly

¹⁴⁷ Cubides, op. cit., p. 134.

¹⁴⁸ Scott Wilson, "Fewer Massacres in Colombia, but More Deaths," *Washington Post*, Mon. June 24, 2002, p. A15.

¹⁴⁹ Cubides, op. cit., p. 137.

updated web site,¹⁵⁰ and its leader, Carlos Castaño published his highly-publicized and controversial autobiography entitled *Mi Confesión* (My Confession).¹⁵¹ Prior to this, the Autodefensas Colombianas de Cordoba y Urabá (Self-defense Corps of Cordoba and Urabá, or ACCU), the predecessor of the AUC, undertook more tangible efforts to secure citizen support, such as land distribution programs. In the early 1990s, during the demobilization of the EPL and M-19, the ACCU redistributed 16,000 hectares of land to displaced peasants, and founded FUNPAZCOR, an association which offered technical and financial assistance to more than 2,500 peasant families. This greatly increased their respect and thus political clout among local residents, leading to the stabilization of their presence in the region.¹⁵² Cubides claims that AUC expansion during a period of decreasing revenues, due to the demise of organized narcotics cartels in the mid-1990s, is partly explained by increasing support among *campesinos*. He claims that the fact that many members of the present AUC are former guerrillas suggests that they are beating the guerrillas in the battle for public favour of subject populations.¹⁵³

The ability of the paramilitaries to thrive in Colombia is clearly dependent upon their abilities to procure economic resources. However, their continued existence may increasingly be dependent upon their ability to gain legitimacy among not only business elites and landowners, but also to a lesser extent upon their host communities. Where the government is unable to control the guerrillas, economic elites support paramilitarism as the security strategy. Where the excessive rents of the guerrillas have created a backlash, rural communities may become accepting or even supportive of AUC control versus guerrilla control. Impoverished

¹⁵⁰ All of the individual AUC "blocks" (units) have their own web sites as well. For the main AUC web site, see www.colombialibre.org.

¹⁵¹ Aranguren Molina, op. cit.

¹⁵² International Crisis Group (Sept. 2003), p. 7.

¹⁵³ Cubides, op. cit., pp. 138-139. It should be noted here that in 1996 more than 200 members of the former guerrilla group EPL joined the AUC. However, the reason for the guerrillas joining the group remain contentious, and could quite possibly be due to their lack of alternative employment opportunities and difficulty re-integrating into society.

campesinos may also be looking for employment opportunities with the group, or access to the narcotics trade.

Considering the overall low support for the paramilitaries in the country, it appears as though their legacy of narcotics trafficking, mass slaughters, political manipulation, and extortion of supposed guerrilla sympathizers has meant that they may never be able to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of most Colombians. According to Marcella, the paramilitaries enjoy less than 6% support among Colombians.¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, their increasing ties with political elites in Congress and their heightened consideration of public perception indicates that their popularity would likely increase without a more effective government resolution of the guerrilla insurgency.

Guerrilla Insurgency Groups

The manner in which guerrilla groups weaken state capacity is so obvious that it hardly warrants mentioning, as the *raison d'état* of the groups is to dismantle the state. They attack and destroy state infrastructure, such as power facilities and increasingly tourist centres. They damage the economy by extorting and attacking businesses, most notably the oil industry, and decrease foreign investment by increasing investor risk. Despite their proclamations to be struggling against the undemocratic Colombian oligarchy, the FARC's activities result in the undermining of the very democratic tradition that they proclaim to support, much the same as the paramilitaries. Electoral candidates are routinely assassinated, civilians are intimidated into electoral abstention, and their involvement in the production of narcotics undermines the quality of Colombian society and the democratic process. Attempts at political decentralization and the

¹⁵⁴ Marcella, *op. cit.*, p. 20. The case of paramilitary support is more difficult to ascertain with election results, for while Uribe was the officially endorsed candidate of the AUC, one of his main campaign platforms was the dismantling of the AUC. Consequently it is difficult to determine whether a vote for Uribe would constitute a condemnation of the AUC or an indication of support for them. That said, considering Uribe's historic ties to cattle ranchers in north-western Colombia and the AUC's explicit and very public backing of Uribe leading up to the election in its stronghold of Cordoba, the low percentage of voters in favour of Uribe's election (39% in Cordoba) would seem to indicate a vote against the AUC.

empowerment of communities have resulted in the assassination of local administrative officials, most notably candidates for mayoral office.¹⁵⁵ Their recruitment of child soldiers, often by force, robs these children of the right to a normal childhood and creates new generations of desensitized criminals.¹⁵⁶ They also indirectly limit state capacity by forcing the state to divert resources to counter-insurgency.

Like the paramilitaries, guerrilla groups undermine state capacity by their mere survival, which is dependent upon their abilities to mobilize new recruits. This ability to mobilize armed supporters is a product of their ability to procure financial resources, convince potential recruits of the legitimacy of the groups' goals, and successfully adapt to their competitive environment. This balancing act of procuring resources, gaining legitimacy, and effectively adapting their organizational structures has caused the guerrilla groups, especially the FARC, to become more coercive in its extracting rents from subject populations, while undertaking few activities to gain legitimacy. The overall result was their increase in size and power until roughly 1999, after which its numbers began to decline after reaching the apex of its extractive capabilities and their apparent loss of legitimacy in the eyes of even the most marginalized rural Colombians.

Financial Expansion and Structural Adaptation

Much like the paramilitaries, Colombia's guerrilla organizations have taken several steps to adapt to their competitive environments in order to expand in size and influence. After their first two waves of expansion in the 1960s, and 1980s, which were clearly the result of political exclusion and repression, latter expansion may be more associated with their increased revenue

¹⁵⁵ For example, 138 mayoral candidates were assassinated during the 1990s. In the leadup to the October 26, 2003 nation-wide mayoral elections, 26 candidates have been assassinated, eight kidnapped, and at least 160 have removed themselves from the running after being threatened by non-State armed groups, especially the FARC. See El Tiempo, "Álvaro Uribe asegura que las Farc ordenaron asesinar candidates," Oct. 24, 2003. <http://eltiempo.terra.com>.

¹⁵⁶ For example, new recruits are often paired together, and if one attempts to desert, the other must shoot him. If he fails to do so and the other recruit escapes, a military tribunal of local FARC officials will be held to determine whether the non-deserter merits to live. See Scott Wilson, "A Hard New Life Inside the Law: Colombian Ex-Rebel Fights to Forget Haunting Memories of Childhood," Washington Post, July 26, 2003.

base. Like the AUC, they have also undertaken significant structural reorganization in order to become more militarily effective.

The rapid expansion of the FARC between 1983 and 1986 was more directly related to processes of political exclusion and repression of the left than the expansion of their financial resources. In this period the FARC were not involved in narcotics trafficking, nor heavily involved in kidnapping or extortion, and yet their numbers more than doubled to almost 4,000 troops, increasing their number of military fronts from eighteen to thirty-two.¹⁵⁷

Since the initial periods of political assassinations against the Unión Patriótica in the mid-1980s, it appears as though the expansion of the FARC's forces has been more directly associated with their ability to procure resources. The only reliable data on FARC revenue expansion and troop expansion is for the period from 1991 to 1995, in which both revenue and troop numbers expanded rapidly. In this period, revenues increased by 87%, and the guerrilla numbers increased by 37%, from 7,673 members to 10,483.¹⁵⁸ FARC income appears to have stabilized in the late 1990s, at approximately \$400 million (US) per year, with roughly half of this attributed to narcotics trafficking, and the other half derived primarily from industrial extortion and kidnapping.¹⁵⁹ The FARC's newfound profits have enabled them to become both financially and politically independent from political movements such as the Colombian Communist Party (PCC), the Cuban government, and other former sources of international support such as the Soviet Union prior to its dissolution.¹⁶⁰ This degree of power has enabled them to become a political class in the departments of Arauca, Meta, Caqueta, and Guaviare, due to their ability to manipulate the increasing revenues that resulted from fiscal

¹⁵⁷ Ricardo Vargas Meza, "The Revolution Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)," (Netherlands, Transnational Institute: 1999). www.tni.org/drugs/pubs/farc.htm. Unfortunately, revenue data for this period is unavailable.

¹⁵⁸ Sanchez (2001), p. 18.

¹⁵⁹ Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (New York State University Press: 2002).

¹⁶⁰ Legrand (2003), p. 177.

decentralizations that occurred between 1985 and 1991.¹⁶¹ Taxes upon mining centres, such as in Western Boyacá, function in a similar manner as typical mafia extortion, where mining companies can pay “immunizations” to the FARC in order to continue operating without interruption by the guerrillas.¹⁶²

In addition to expanding its resource base, the 1990s witnessed a major re-vamping of the FARC’s organizational structure, which has made them a more formidable military opponent to the armed forces. Perhaps the most important organizational adaptation has been the granting of greater independence to individual fronts, allowing them to become more flexible and responsive to local military circumstances without requiring them to await direct orders from the FARC secretariat.¹⁶³ This independence may also be responsible for the increasing military aberrations that violate the FARC’s official military doctrines. Perhaps the most tragic deviation was the detonation of an indiscriminate gas cylinder bomb that killed 119 civilians who were seeking refugee from FARC and AUC conflict in Bojoyá, in May 2002. The FARC central command publicly expressed its regret over the incident, claiming it to be an accident.

The FARC have also established independent channels of arms suppliers, which has enabled them to continue receiving arms when one source has been eliminated.¹⁶⁴ They have begun enforcing stricter codes of conduct against delinquency in their organization, which has helped maintain their cohesion despite the decentralization of command that has occurred in the past five years.¹⁶⁵ Meritocratic practices are also being employed, with the FARC promoting troops to senior positions from within the rank-and-file soldiers, in order to encourage soldiers

¹⁶¹ Safford and Palacios, op. cit., p. 362.

¹⁶² Sanchez (2001), op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁶³ Roman D. Ortiz, *Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: the Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25 (2), 2002.

¹⁶⁴ Ortiz, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Sanchez (2001) p. 30.

to obey orders and enhance their military capabilities.¹⁶⁶ Their adoption of more complex strategies and communications systems has also enabled them to increase the sizes of attack battalions from 50 to over 400, allowing them to confront the government's forces in larger and more secure battle fronts.¹⁶⁷

The ELN's strategy for expansion has focused upon improving their military tactics and developing a coherent revolutionary doctrine.¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately for the ELN, its agenda of industrial sabotage and extortion has cost it support of the rural populations who primarily suffer from these actions, losing the ELN potential supporters in these regions.¹⁶⁹ Their assumption that peasants would logically identify with the movement despite these economic costs may be their most grave strategic miscalculation, with support level for the group presently at less than 4%.¹⁷⁰ Rather than waiting for the appropriate revolutionary moment to occur and recruiting troops at that time, like the FARC during the attacks upon the independent peasant republics of the 1960s and the Unión Patriótica in the 1980s, they attempted to create the revolutionary moment.¹⁷¹ This may explain why their numbers have remained practically unchanged throughout their nearly 40-year existence. Their only real increases in recruitment occurred between 1984 and 1986, when they were able to expand their resource base by extorting the massive oil industries at Caño Limón and the pipeline to Coveñas.¹⁷²

Attempts at Legitimization

An important element for the long-term survival of both communist-agrarian guerrillas such as the FARC, and *foquista* guerrillas like the ELN is their perception as being legitimate

¹⁶⁶ Ortiz, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Ruiz, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁸ Andrés Peñate, "El sendero estratégico del ELN: del idealismo guevarista al clientelismo armado," in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999), pp. 64, 66-67.

¹⁶⁹ Pizarro (1992), p. 178.

¹⁷⁰ Marcella, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁷¹ Pizarro (1992), *op. cit.*

¹⁷² Echandia, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

and the support of local populations. Foquista guerrillas are characterized by their use of small attack squadrons that undertake surprise attacks upon either armies or government infrastructure, and quickly disperse among local populations. They do not field standing armies, nor do they establish a permanent presence among a host population that they protect. *Foquistas* rely heavily upon domestic populations to hide and shelter them from the authorities after they undertake acts of sabotage. The biggest threat to the *foquista* guerrilla is not the massive power of the army battalion but rather the lone informant who does not view his or her cause to be legitimate. On the other hand, communist-agrarian guerrilla groups live among domestic populations, physically occupying territory and using this territory to their strategic advantage. The communist-agrarian guerrilla must provide infrastructure and security to domestic populations, or risk losing their support. On the other hand they must remain competitive with the government forces and other counter-insurgency groups, and thus are periodically required to extract greater resources. This process of expanding extraction levels to the maximum possible extent in order to maximize war-making capabilities makes the FARC domains of influence resemble the Tillyan *coercion-intensive* zones. According to Tilly, attempts to expand the war chest via increased levels of tribute produces the least support by subject populations, as direct taxation is more obtrusive than revenues from payments on flows (e.g., customs and duties), land rents, and payments on stocks.¹⁷³

This lack of support during times of increased tribute appears to hold true in the case of the FARC, as its overall popularity rating appears to be in decline. The only available sources cite support ratings for the FARC at below 5% and the other cites collective support of the FARC and AUC at 2%, but neither cites a polling source.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Tilly (1992), p. 86.

¹⁷⁴ The BBC News Corp. frequently cites the support rate of the FARC as being below 5%, whereas Eduardo Pizarro and Ana Maria Bejarno claim that the FARC and AUC collectively have the support of around 2% of the population. See Eduardo Pizarro and Ana Maria Bejarno, "Colombia: A Failing State?" *Revista - Harvard Review*

Assessing election support levels also supports the claim that support is decreasing for the FARC, even in their strongholds. In the 2002 elections, Álvaro Uribe was clearly the candidate with the most aggressive stance against the guerrillas, and yet he was the favoured candidate in some FARC-controlled areas. In the Putumayo, the heart of FARC-controlled area between 1998 and 2002, the candidate most conciliatory toward the guerrillas, Andrés Pastrana, easily won the election with 44% of the popular vote in 1998. However, in the 2002 elections, Uribe won the election, gaining 42% of the vote, suggesting that there was a general loss of support for the guerrillas in that period of time.

To summarize, the FARC appear to be expanding their resource base and military capabilities, but these activities are causing them to rapidly lose the battle for public legitimacy. While legitimacy is certainly important for the survival of the FARC, it may be less central than their ability to procure economic resources. Consequently this combination of expanded resources and decreased legitimacy may be catastrophic for future negotiation efforts, if the FARC remain unresponsive to public opinion and yet are able to maintain the strength of their forces.¹⁷⁵

Government Armed Forces

By examining the manner in which the non-state armed groups adjusted their methods of capital extraction and the organization of coercion, one gains a better understanding of the forces compelling the state to adjust its own security apparatus. This is one of the most significant contributions that a Tillean analysis makes to this thesis. For Tilly, state structure arises out of the process of preparing for warfare, including taxation, forming strategic alliances, and organizing coercion. Thus the alliances formed between state officials, economic elites, private paramilitary groups, and foreign counterparts provide an insight into how the preparation

of Latin America (Harvard University Press, Spring 2003), p. 12. Gabriel Marcella claims that FARC support is at an all-time low, between 2% and 4%. See Marcella, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

for internal warfare helped shape the present Colombian state. With the increase in the power of all the non-state groups since 1982, re-establishing governmental control over physical territory and ensuring the support of domestic populations will not merely be a matter of expanding the size of the armed forces, but re-aligning and adjusting them to become more militarily capable, publicly accountable, and responsive to civilian control. However, many of the strategic re-alignments and partnerships also served to delegitimize the state in the eyes of many citizens, bolstering opposition to the traditional political class.

The Colombian military contains significantly more troops than the guerrillas and paramilitaries, with perhaps 120,000 ground troops at the end of 2003, compared with approximately 32,000 to 35,000 in the combined ranks of the guerrillas and paramilitaries. They also possess substantial strategic advantages due to their aerial capabilities and surveillance technologies, primarily due to military assistance from the United States. However, they also face significantly greater strategic disadvantages due to their requirement of operating within a context of democratic accountability. No other Latin American country has ever defeated such a substantial guerrilla movement under these circumstances. Such a context places the following limitations upon the armed forces:

- The need to conform to higher standards of human rights practices, due to the higher degree of external monitoring applied by international human rights organizations;¹⁷⁵
- Certain fiscal disadvantages due to their lesser ability to engage in illegal activities such as narcotics trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping;
- The need to balance military operations with the provision of other public services, such as health and education;
- The need to protect civilians, and their legitimacy being based upon the ability to do so (whereas the civilian population is a target for the non-state groups, such as terrorist attacks, the use of human shields, and kidnappings); and,
- The need to adhere to other Geneva Convention regulations on the conduct of warfare, as opposed to conducting unlimited guerrilla warfare.

¹⁷⁵ Sanchez (2001), p. 29.

¹⁷⁶ It should be noted here that human rights groups, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have only focused their campaigns against the non-state groups since the early-1990s, whereas governments have been the focus of human rights monitoring since these groups' inception.

Thus the armed forces are faced with a considerably higher degree of organizational constraint versus freedom of action when compared with the guerrillas and paramilitaries.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, one of the most important disadvantages related to the military tactics is that the win-lose calculus is considerably different for the governmental forces, in that they are considered to lose the battle if they do not defeat the armed groups, whereas the armed groups win so long as they merely survive.¹⁷⁸

Perhaps the most crucial paradox that has confounded the ability of the state to counter the growing guerrilla and paramilitary groups since 1982 is that when military success becomes more integral to the political regime's survival, military leaders have tended to recognize their heightened bargaining power and have pressed for more autonomy from civilian control. When the security crisis mounted and created the preconditions for the more conciliatory administrations of Betancur (1982-1986) and Pastrana (1988-2002), the military reached its peak of insubordination. Both periods represented low points in civil-military relations in Colombia, with clear military insubordination and their refusal to obey civilian leaders, leading to the eventual dismissal or secession of military commanders. During the Pastrana administration, the demands and protestations of the military were satisfied only insofar as they were required to keep the military "contented"¹⁷⁹ and even this was not always possible. This complex relationship between the importance of the military and its insubordination was even worse than during the National Front era, and is one of the chief obstacles to political, military, and economic elites arriving at cohesive national security and development plans. Differences

¹⁷⁷ Panebianco, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

¹⁷⁸ Luis Alberto Restrepo M., "The Equivocal Dimensions of Human Rights in Colombia, in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sanchez G, *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

¹⁷⁹ Former Commander of the Colombian Armed Forces, General Juan Salcedo Lora, describes how Colombian executives have openly defined their relations with the military as one of necessitated contentment, and poses the question "¿Cuánto está costando al país este *contentamiento*" - What is the cost of this *contentment* to the country? (emphasis in original). See Mayor General (R) Juan Salcedo Lora, "Respuestas personalismos de un General de la

between political decision makers and military elites regarding the appropriate direction of a national security strategy has been one of the biggest impediments to Colombia's establishment of a cohesive and integrate approach to address its long-term security concerns.¹⁸⁰

Reform of the Armed Forces and Police

With the Colombian armed forces facing the above strategic disadvantages, successive administrations have been forced to either drastically alter the military's organizational structure or watch its ability to confront the guerrillas diminish. These reforms have involved several components: expansion of revenue and increases in troop numbers, decentralization and privatization of many security functions (including facilitating paramilitary groups), and periodic extensions of military jurisdiction during declared states of emergency. They have also been more made more accountable to judicial oversight, making them perhaps less militarily effective but more accountable and congruent with the security doctrine of the executive. While some of these reforms have allowed the armed forces and the police to limit the capabilities of the non-state armed groups, many of them have created new problems that actually result in the expansion of the conflict and a deterioration of the perceived legitimacy of the government's security forces. Considering that the total number of homicides and kidnappings increased every year between 1982 and 2002, with 2003 representing the only improvement in these figures, it would appear that the most successful approach to limiting the overall extent of violence has been in increasing the size of the Colombian armed forces relative to the non-state groups, while expanding their degree of civilian oversight and formal accountability.

república sobre cosas que casi todo el mundo sabe," in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999), p. 355.

¹⁸⁰ See Gregory Phillips, *Liberty and Order: Reintegration as Counter-Insurgency in Colombia* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002). Also Gabriel Marcella, op. cit.

Revenue Increases and Military Expansion

The international profile of the Colombian conflict reached its highest peak during the contemporary period, resulting in massive inflows of economic support and institutional assistance of the Colombian government, especially from the United States. During the Cold War, Colombia's internal crisis was significantly lower on the security radar of the United States, as it posed less threat to democracy and capitalism than Latin American countries where radical sentiment fomented with greater vigour, or where the countries were of strategic military importance. Thus American involvement was greatest in countries such as in Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, and Chile during the 1960s and 1970s. While U.S. involvement in Colombia's internal affairs remained significant, it was not a central factor that dictated the outcomes of struggles between landowners and *campesinos*.¹⁸¹

U.S. involvement in the Andean region in general began more earnestly with the commencement of the "War on Drugs" of the Reagan administration in the mid-1980, but the present level of nine-figure assistance to Colombia did not begin until the end of the Clinton administration, with the beginning of Plan Colombia. Between 1999 and 2003, (U.S.) \$3.4 billion in aid was given to Colombia, primarily directed at anti-narcotics efforts until 2002.¹⁸² After 2002, with the spread of the war on terrorism after the attacks upon the World Trade Center in 2001, restrictions on the use of these funds were removed, allowing them to be applied more directly to counter-insurgency efforts.

In his first year in office, Álvaro Uribe has also undertaken several fiscal measures expand finances that have been earmarked for the armed forces. Most significantly, his administration increased property taxes on Colombians listing more than (US) \$60,000 in assets,

¹⁸¹ Perhaps the greatest influence of the United States was in ensuring that the Colombian military retained a resolutely anti-communist stance. This was achieved by the training of army chiefs and senior military officials at the U.S. School of the Americas, where reactionary anti-communism was taught, and Colombia's armed forces consolidated their focus upon the counter-insurgency program.

¹⁸² U.S. Embassy in Colombia, op. cit.

and is presently attempting to pass legislation through the Colombian Congress that would limit the size of the Senate and cut pensions of civil servants. The goal of these fiscal measures is to double the size of the armed forces from roughly 80,000 ground troops in 2002 to 150,000 by the end of 2004, increase their technological capabilities, and finance programs for the peasant soldiers, guerrilla and paramilitary reintegration, crop substitution, and judicial modernization. Even if these are not passed, the increases in the size and strength of the Colombian armed forces by the end of Uribe's first year in office were substantial.

Privatization and Decentralization of Security

One of the most significant structural adaptations of the Colombian security apparatus between 1982 and 2003 has been the privatization and decentralization of both the armed forces and the police. Security privatization and decentralization has usually involved initiatives to establish armed citizen patrols and informant networks in both rural and urban settings, involving various degrees of command centralization, state organization, and integration with the official armed forces and national police. While the earlier programs were primarily directed at eliminating the presence of the guerrillas in both cities and rural communities, under the administration of Álvaro Uribe they have also been directed at limiting the expansion of paramilitaries in rural communities.

While some efforts to privatize and centralize security have been relatively successful in limiting incidences of violence, others have had precisely the opposite effect. The main criticism of these programs by human rights groups is that they perpetuate cycles of violence by arming citizens, blurring the boundary between "legitimate" self-defense communities and nascent, expansionary paramilitary organizations. Their lack of control and accountability tend to result in attacks upon academics and the media, and result in numerous accusations that are based more upon personal grievances and revenge than informing about illegal guerrilla or paramilitary activities.

In 1968 the administration of Carlos Lleras Restrepo passed Law 48, which legalized the organized arming of citizens for self-defense purposes. Since then, various attempts have been made to establish armed self-defense communities throughout the country, with 414 such organizations established by 1997.¹⁸³ The most notable of these developed in the mid-1990s under the presidency of Ernesto Samper, with the establishment of the CONVIVIR groups in the departments of Santander, Cundinamarca, Antioquia, and Boyacá.¹⁸⁴ However, due to increasing ties with paramilitary groups and organized criminal networks, the CONVIVIR were dismantled by the Pastrana administration in 1999. Pastrana established similar groups with more success in Bogotá between 1988 and 1990, when he was the first elected mayor of the nation's capital. These were called *El Buen Vecino* (The Good Neighbour), and more closely resemble the neighbourhood watch programs of North America and Europe.

The decentralization of the armed forces is a relatively new phenomenon in Colombia. The *soldados campesinos* (peasant soldiers) were initiated immediately after Álvaro Uribe's electoral victory in August of 2002. In the first year of implementation, more than 20,000 of these community-based soldiers were deployed to the communities from which they were recruited. Working in consort with citizen informants, they guard against the infiltration of guerrillas and paramilitaries in their communities. By the end of 2003, the dire predictions of corruption and alignment with illegal paramilitary organizations made by human rights organizations have largely not materialized. Nonetheless, opinion on the benefits of these groups remains divided.¹⁸⁵ This represents probably the most promising and at the same time the most dangerous element of Colombia's present national security strategy. A successful deployment of community-based soldiers would facilitate state penetration of communities,

¹⁸³ Romero (2003c), p. 10.

¹⁸⁴ Romero (2003c), p. 12.

¹⁸⁵ While most human rights groups and the international media generally oppose the deployment of *soldados campesinos*, some security agencies remain guardedly optimistic about their chances of success, including the

helping to integrate them into the state apparatus, while providing a bulwark against the expansion of both guerrillas and paramilitaries.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, the dangers of their acting independent of the government, the arming of yet more civilians, the potential linkage with other illegal organizations, and their misuse as avenues for personal revenge remain problems that must be closely scrutinized. Ensuring that these groups are closely monitored and transparent will be the most critical. These programs have been central elements of the counter-insurgency strategies of other countries that have implemented them, such as the Peruvian *rondas campesinas* (peasant patrols). With strict monitoring and accountability structures these programs hold considerable promise for ensuring that the state does not cede ground to the non-state armed groups.

Privatization and Specialization of Urban Policing

While the preceding chapters have not comprehensively addressed the independent role of the national police, such analysis warrants consideration in the present period for the increasingly central role that the police forces have played in the ongoing security crisis of the country. The Colombian police are charged with addressing elements of crime and violence that are not directly associated with issues of national security. Perhaps most importantly, the commercial elements of the drug trade are under the jurisdiction of the national police whereas the production side is largely considered the responsibility of the armed forces.

Considering the massive profits of the drug trade, estimated at approximately 50% of all exports, or 5% of GDP; (US) \$6.3 billion in 2002),¹⁸⁷ it is a safe assumption that normal policing methods would not be sufficient to address the problem. Consequently in this time period we witness a remarkable blending of public policing efforts and market forces; with

International Crisis Group. See International Crisis Group, "ICG Report N°5 – Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries" (ICG Press, Sep 16, 2003).

¹⁸⁶ Recall that according to López-Alves (2000), the historical source of Colombian State weakness has been the lack of incorporation of rural sectors via the state. For Migdal (op. cit.), state weakness hinges primarily upon the inability of the state to integrate and mobilize the popular sectors of society.

property owners increasingly reverting to private security arrangements in order to protect their property and investments. Between 1975 and 1995, the number of private armed guards increased by 1,138%, from 7,697 security guards to 95,292.¹⁸⁸ In the same period, the national police force increased more slowly but still at a considerable rate, from 54,958 in 1975 to 90,504 in 1995.¹⁸⁹ Although the latter increase is not particularly overwhelming, it has primarily involved the expansion of the more clearly needed ground troops, at the expense of management and administration, resulting in a perceived lack of oversight and an increase in levels of police corruption.¹⁹⁰

In this period the national police also began to develop increasingly specialized units, such as the *Grupos de Operaciones Especiales* (Special Operations Groups). These were created to address the increased rates of kidnapping and assault upon government officials. In 1986 the government of Virgilio Barco created the *Cuerpo Especial Armado* (Special Armed Body, or CEA), an elite force designed to confront the *sicarios* (hired assassins) and narcotics cartels.¹⁹¹ In addition, these bodies began adopting more proactive strategies that involved more intense monitoring and scrutiny of neighbourhoods, penetrating the lives of communities.¹⁹² One of the adverse effects of this has been the intense harassment of civilians, decreasing the already beleaguered public support for the state's security forces in some regions.

Shifting the Bounds of Democratic Accountability

Since 1982 there have been dramatic changes in the degree of independence that the government's security forces have had from civilian leaders, variously swaying between

¹⁸⁷ Safford and Palacios, *ibid.*, pp. 315-316.

¹⁸⁸ Llorente, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

¹⁸⁹ Llorente, *ibid.*, p. 453.

¹⁹⁰ Llorente, *ibid.*, p. 425. The most recent example of police corruption involved the forced resignation of the Director of the National Police amid financial scandals in the city of Medellin. See *Semana*, "Se posesionó nuevo director de la Policía," Nov 13, 2003.

¹⁹¹ Llorente, *ibid.*, p. 410. These were actually created immediately before this period, in 1979 under the Turbay administration

¹⁹² Llorente, *ibid.*, p. 413.

practices that have been more and less accountable. Successive administrations have continued to utilize extra-democratic means in order to enhance the powers of the government's disciplinary institutions. Many of these tactics have led to violations of civil liberties and human rights of Colombian citizens. However, the government forces have also become increasingly constrained in their actions due to enhanced mechanisms of horizontal accountability, especially judicial monitoring, which has limited their capabilities to violate human rights or break laws when confronting the guerrillas. This enhanced accountability has also increased their subservience to civilians, increased their levels of public support, and has significantly decreased the amount of human rights violations committed by members of the government's security forces. These shifts between more and less civilian oversight and accountability have resulted in tumultuous civil-military relations – relations that often perpetuate the internal conflict rather than ameliorating it.

Perhaps the most common form of extra-democratic action undertaken by the state has been the declaration of the *estado de conmoción* (state of unrest), which grants the executive reserve powers and allows for practices that would otherwise be illegal, such as wiretapping without warrant and arrest and detention of suspected criminals for 48 hours without due cause or process. The most pronounced usage of the state of unrest in this period was by the present administration of Álvaro Uribe, which immediately declared a state of unrest upon taking office in August 2002, and extended the period for two successive 90-day periods, the maximum allowed by the Colombian Constitution. These declarations enabled the government to undertake mass arrests of suspected guerrillas and paramilitaries. Human rights groups have been highly critical of the Uribe administration's decision to declare the states of siege, claiming that

[t]he security situation in Colombia is indeed very serious and has deteriorated over the last year, but it does not pose a new threat. It might thus be possible to argue that the nation is not facing a new or exceptional emergency.¹⁹³

While the legitimacy of the declaration of these states of siege is debatable, their immediate results are not. In Uribe's first year in office, 4,602 guerrillas and 1,986 paramilitary troops were arrested.¹⁹⁴ Homicides decreased by 20% between 2002 and 2003, from 28,837 to 20,960 in 2003, and kidnappings decreased by 32%, from 2,986 to 2,043.¹⁹⁵ In all, more than 16,000 guerrillas and paramilitaries, nearly half of their total troops, were arrested, killed, or surrendered during 2003. The state also re-established its presence in every municipality in the country before the end of 2003.

Human rights groups have argued that many of these seeming improvements have been at the expense of civil liberties, especially the ability of civil society leaders to act without fear of paramilitary reprisals. These omnipresent complaints suggest that the future of Uribe's *mano firme* (strong hand) policy will need to adopt increasingly less aggressive rhetoric against its opposition in order to help cultivate an environment of greater political openness and toleration. The election of former union leader and member of the Unión Patriótica, Luiz Garzón, as mayor of Bogotá demonstrates that peaceful political inclusion of the left may be increasingly possible.

While the use of extra-democratic methods under the command of the executive has been a central feature of the post-1982 period, there has also been a seemingly contradictory increase in levels of both horizontal and vertical accountability of the military. Horizontal accountability has been increased by expanded civilian oversight of military officials by the Minister of Defense, who has had increased abilities to directly intervene in military operations and ensure military subordination to civilian rule. Horizontal accountability has also been increased by the granting of greater judicial oversight of military activities, via the creation of an

¹⁹³ Amnesty International, "Colombia: Security at What Cost?" December 10, 2002. <http://web.amnesty.org>. It should be noted that Amnesty International is not the only group to criticize Uribe's declaration of a state of emergency.

independent Attorney General's Office (the Procuraduría General) with the 1991 Constitution. Since 1991, the Attorney General's Office has been actively prosecuting human rights violations by members of the armed forces for the first time in the country's history. This has resulted in a significant improvement in the human rights record of the armed forces between 1995 and 2004, and limited the degree of collusion between the armed forces and paramilitaries. In Uribe's first year in office, the Attorney General increased investigations of paramilitary members by 105%, and of armed forces members suspected of colluding with paramilitaries by 61.6% over the previous year.¹⁹⁶ Between October 2000 and June 2003 more than 400 members of the military were dismissed, and many incarcerated, for having committed human rights violations.¹⁹⁷ This increased monitoring has resulted in a rapid decrease in reports of human rights violations by the armed forces, which decreased from more than 3000 allegations in 1995 to 381 in 2002.¹⁹⁸

While many witnesses of the Colombian conflict remain pessimistic about the hope for an end to the insurgency and private counter-insurgency movements, the recent trends offer a glimmer of hope for the future. Military pressure upon the paramilitary groups and the government's commitment to reducing the impact of the guerrillas has resulted in the signing of a disarmament accord with the main umbrella organization of the paramilitaries, the AUC. Perhaps the continued approach at military expansion, expanded military accountability, and continuing openness to disarmament talks with the guerrillas will lead to their disarmament and reintegration in the near future.

¹⁹⁴ U.S. Embassy in Colombia, op. cit.

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Embassy in Colombia, op. cit.

¹⁹⁶ See International Crisis Group, "ICG Report N°5 – Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries" (ICG Press, Sep 16, 2003).

¹⁹⁷ U.S. Embassy in Colombia, op. cit.

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Embassy in Colombia, op. cit.

Summary

With the commencement of the presidential term of Belisario Betancur in 1982, the Colombian state began a series of political reforms with the immediate goal of ending the internal conflict, and the broader goal of establishing a cohesive socio-political system that would provide open access to avenues of political power and economic mobility, and peacefully arbitrate conflicts. Its inability to achieve any of these results is a testament to its weakness. Due to the continued presence of internal conflict, the state has been forced to drastically alter nearly every facet of governance, including re-writing the Constitution in 1991, enhancing mechanisms of governmental accountability, making the taxation system more progressive, and decentralizing the operations of the military. Tilly's claim that the preparation for warfare shapes state institutions certainly holds true for the post-1982 period in Colombia.

This chapter has argued that competition for power among rival groups, including the state, has involved three primary elements: procuring economic resources, convincing citizens of the group's legitimacy, and undertaking organizational adjustments. The competition for power placed downward pressures upon the tactics of all of the armed groups, resulting in their expanded economic resources, and the general adoption of more violent and less legitimate military practices. The state's combination of greater strategic and organizational constraints, its complex relationships with doggedly anti-leftist military leaders and economic elites, as well as the inconsistent application of a national security strategy between administrations have led to its inability to either co-opt or militarily defeat the rising guerrilla movements. With paramilitary and guerrilla groups constantly adjusting their methods and organizational structures, only an increase in the direct capabilities of the armed forces has enabled them to regain control over physical territory and limit the number of homicides attributed to the internal conflict. With powerful economic elites and their Congressional supporters willing to develop private militias to confront the guerrillas, the government could either expand the size and

accountability of its armed forces, or else allow market forces to do so via paramilitarism. The former has only been attempted since the retaking of the FARC's *despeje* (demilitarized zone) by the Pastrana administration in April 2002, with generally positive results. The latter has proven to be the most unsuccessful security strategy in the country's history, since its formal inception with Law 48 in 1968.

Other security policies of successive administrations have been met with varying levels of success. Some of the programs, such as the CONVIVIR groups of Antioquia during the mid-1990s, were veritable disasters, which eroded the legitimacy of the government, bolstered guerrilla opposition, and granted expanded powers to drug traffickers and organized criminal gangs. Others, such as the reorganization of policing efforts with the creation of the *Cuerpo Especial Armado*, and *Grupos de Operaciones Especiales*, were largely responsible for bringing an end to the narcotics cartels. However, the only tactic that has clearly expanded the capacity of the state has been the expansion of the size of the armed forces and police relative to the non-state groups, while increasing their degrees of civilian subordination and levels of both horizontal and vertical accountability. Accordingly, 2003 represented the first year in which homicide and kidnapping levels were significantly reduced since 1982.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

This research suggests that analyzing the history of Colombia's strategic actors in their capacities as capital generators, coercive entrepreneurs, and legitimacy seekers provides insight into how the Colombian state has historically been unable to develop the capacity to mobilize and unify its citizens behind a common state building project. While this may seem like a rather limited methodology for explaining such a broad political outcome, even the French sociologist Daniel Pecaution, hardly a military theorist or a harsh realist, claims that in Colombia "social relations are really just relations of force... calling for a recourse to force."¹⁹⁹ With direct coercion taking the forefront of Colombian social and political relations, the state-building model of Charles Tilly helps provide a great deal of clarity in the otherwise impenetrable morass of violence. Such a perspective demonstrates that all coercive organizations are constrained by the same requirements of generating capital, developing coercive capabilities, and seeking the legitimacy of subject populations.

Using a Tillyan framework helps to clarify many of the divisive arguments that permeate both academic and popular discussions regarding Colombia – debates that appear to become more polarized every day. Marxists, dependency theorists, and other critical theorists tend to view the Colombian state as being inherently repressive and culpable for the majority of the country's ailments. The United States, in all its imperialist ambitions, is the usual accomplice in such narratives. However, those familiar with the history of other Latin American states, especially in the southern cone, immediately notice that the Colombian state has never really been the all-powerful and repressive Leviathan like the bureaucratic authoritarian regimes of the southern cone. Likewise liberal institutionalists without a clear understanding of Colombia's history would merely point to the guerrillas and paramilitary groups as being the present cause of the country's ills. But these armed groups need to be situated within more precise historical

and sociological contexts, and their relationship to the state and civil society further explained in order to understand their origins and structures. They not only reproduce state weakness but also arose out of this weakness. Thus the Tillean argument allows for the deconstruction of all the strategic coercive organizations, and shows how their roots in civil society have evolved over the history of Colombian state formation. Such a perspective helps to defuse facile arguments that the government, the paramilitaries, or the guerrillas are to blame for the country's woes. Indeed, the prognosis of Luis Carlos Restrepo, former High Commissioner for Peace in Colombia, that all are guilty and will have central roles to play in escaping the violence, seems particularly cogent from this vantage.²⁰⁰

Perhaps most importantly, a Tillean perspective helps to discern two very different Colombias: one in which the formal institutions are crafted by the continued survival of a stubborn and resilient democratic process, and another in which the real powers lie behind groups that effectively expand and organize coercion according to their own agendas. Rather than viewing these processes as being entirely disjointed, Tilly helps to show how the effectiveness of the latter (formal institutions) is related to the former (the organization of coercion). From such a perspective, one immediately notices the connection between the fact that within the Americas, Colombia has experienced the fewest external wars, the most internal wars, and possesses the most weakly integrated national state. Understanding the connection between these three elements requires the observer to situate the Colombian people and their elected officials within the constant yet varying struggles between the country's many *empresarios de coercion* (coercive entrepreneurs), including the partisan armies, the state's armed forces, landowner militias, narcotics militias, paramilitaries, and guerrillas. Such a vantage points to the conspicuous absence of a strong state since the early years of

¹⁹⁹ Pecaut, op. cit., p. 226.

²⁰⁰ Restrepo, op. cit.

independence. This continued weakness of the state has meant that the remarkable efforts of Colombian citizens to reform their political institutions, including NGOs, the academic community, the media, and other citizen groups, have largely been ineffective because of the continued erosion of the rule of law by non-state armed groups.

Charles Tilly provides an important clue as to why these reforms have been largely unsuccessful. According to Tilly, the modern nation-state is largely the product of inter-state conflict. This is also the case in Colombia, which like most Latin American states, established itself in a war of independence from the Spanish Empire. However, unlike the rest of Latin America, Colombia has been involved in practically no international wars since that date, making the continued survival of such a large, bulky, and repressive bureaucratic apparatus much less "useful" from a Tillean perspective. Perhaps the suggestion of Centeno and López-Alves that Latin American states, including Colombia, are so weak and violent because they have had the wrong type of armed conflicts (and perhaps not enough) is not so oxymoronic or amoral after all.²⁰¹ The continued expansion and diffusion of coercive means via private capital has made the integration of the country within a single political entity highly problematic. In fact, some analysts may even object to the very notion of Colombia attempting to establish a single state, on the grounds that repeated failures to integrate the people and monopolize coercion indicates the improbability that such a process will ever occur. Unfortunately, the probability of either the successful balkanization or the peaceful coexistence of citizens within a state where coercive capabilities are divided among contending factions is even lower than that of establishing a monopoly over coercion.

Recall that for Tilly, states are built when the means of coercion are expanded and concentrated. Throughout Colombia's violent history there has been no lack of expansion of

²⁰¹ Centeno and Lopez-Alves, op. cit.

coercive means, but this expansion has largely been at the hands of private capital, and in the service of only small segments of society. From 1821 to 1958 Colombia's highly influential political parties monopolized nearly all aspects of economic, military, and political life, limiting the autonomous development of both the armed forces and the central state. Immediately following this period, most Latin American states developed military dictatorships, largely in response to the threats posed by mobilized popular sectors and guerrilla movements. However, during these years Colombian politicians were able to reassure economic elites and the decidedly anti-communist military that the incipient leftist revolution would not succeed, by undertaking more repressive tactics and facilitating the rise of private paramilitary groups. The country's deeply entrenched history of privatized coercion, with paramilitarism being its most prominent contemporary form, has been one of the keys to understanding the absence of leftist or right-wing dictatorships, and why a state monopoly over coercion has been so difficult to achieve. The various types of private armies, from the partisan militias of the 19th and 20th Centuries to the "land sharks" of the mid-20th Century, and now the paramilitaries groups of the late-20th and 21st Centuries, have continually limited the presence of the state's security forces in rural regions, often replacing their functions in a more biased and repressive manner. These groups were also primarily responsible for the birth and expansion of the guerrilla groups, and their existence remains one of the biggest impediments to the de-radicalization of the left and its integration into the formal political apparatus.

The role of Colombia's political parties provides an interesting and unexpected addition to the literature on the state. Strong political parties are usually considered to be an integral component in the incorporation of citizens into the political arena and for providing channels for interest articulation. However, in Colombia the parties may have been so strong as to exclude other actors from gaining access to power, hampering the development of an autonomous state and limiting the integration of the popular sectors within an open and competitive political

framework. The empirical evidence supports this, demonstrating that Colombia possesses one of the strongest party system in Latin America in terms of the stability (longevity) of its major parties, but has one of the weakest party systems with regard to their ideological cohesion.²⁰² This means that the two dominant parties have been able to withstand challenges from other aspirants to power, especially the popular sectors via labour associations and populist parties. On the other hand the parties have largely remained atomized and pragmatic, adapting to changing demands of the public and strategically co-opting individuals and groups rather than presenting coherent and contending ideological visions to the electorate. The result has been continued exclusion of the radical left and right from organized politics, resulting in their use of military contestation outside of the political arena. The electorate has been left to choose between one of these two parties, whose platforms almost randomly vacillated between half-hearted attempts at either conciliation or military repression of the guerrillas, with the inability to either defeat or appease them.²⁰³ Accordingly, there is no lack of tragic irony in the fact that the success of party elites in marginalizing the military from political decisions since independence of 1821 has been one of the central causes of the steady expansion of privatized modes of coercion since that time.

This analysis should also help to clarify why Colombia seems to be moving in the opposite direction as most other Latin American states regarding the expansion and organization of coercion. While most of the western hemisphere's states are reducing the size and influence of their militaries, Colombia is expanding the size and centrality of its own. This is because

²⁰² Mainwaring and Scully, *op. cit.*

²⁰³ We witness in Colombia's history a remarkable swing from the Turbay Ayala administration (1978-1982) to the Betancur administration (1982-1986). The Turbay Ayala administration has been defined by Legrand (2003) as the partial military occupation of the state, with expanded policing and judicial functions of the military and constant attacks upon unionists and leftist academics. The Betancur administration was the exact opposite, which attempted (and succeeded) in offering amnesty and reintegration for all guerrilla groups, and facilitated their inclusion in the political process. We witness this again but in the opposite direction from the Pastrana administration (1998-2002) to Uribe (2002-), though the Uribe administration is not nearly as repressive or unaccountable as the Barco administration.

Colombia has still not undertaken the process of what Tilly terms the stage of "nationalization," which in Europe occurred between 1700 and 1850,²⁰⁴ which involves the expansion and concentration of coercion by a single organization. If a relatively stable and permanent state is to be established, such a process may be inevitable. As Frederic Lane convincingly argues, "producing and controlling violence favored monopoly, because competition within that realm generally raised costs, instead of lowering them. The production of violence, enjoyed large economies of scale."²⁰⁵ The final determinant of how this process unfolds will ultimately be Colombia's popular sectors, especially its rural workers, who appear to be increasingly in support of a government monopoly of coercion. Being caught between the FARC's demands for immunization payments, state taxes, harassment by paramilitaries, and perpetual economic and physical insecurity is simply too unstable an arrangement to exist for any prolonged period.

Omissions and Future Research

With such a broad research topic and lengthy historical period to assess, many generalizations were made and various other elements were given less attention in order to sharpen the focus upon capital generation to fund coercion, the mobilization of supporters, and state capacity. While nothing was intentionally omitted that would negate the preceding analysis, there are many considerations that would improve future research on coercion, capital, and state capacity in Colombia.

Perhaps the biggest limitation has been the neglect of other actors and socio-political relations. For example, a more refined analysis of executive-legislative relations would be beneficial to understanding the impediments placed upon the executive by the Colombian Congress. In the post-1982 period and especially under more reformist administrations, the Colombian Congress has been relatively obstructionist toward initiatives to distribute land and

²⁰⁴ Tilly (1992), p. 29.

²⁰⁵ Tilly (1985), p. 175.

provide concessions toward guerrilla demands for social justice. The disaggregation of strategic actors who are responsible for the drafting and passage of legislation, especially regional economic elites and their Congressional representatives, has not been undertaken with as much detail as would be beneficial. Such analysis would likely support the conclusion of this research that the economic power and influence of regional elites has been a central factor in limiting the expansion of the state into rural regions.

Additionally, the proxies used to estimate state capacity (ability to implement legislation, which results from control over territory and the ability to mobilize and integrate citizens) is notoriously difficult to measure with any degree of precision. Likewise data on the total revenue of the guerrillas and paramilitaries remain largely guesswork, due to the clandestine nature of the two groups. The lack of precise data on many elements of Colombia's history with capital and coercion remains one of the biggest impediments to accurate historical work. Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez discusses the imprecision of data regarding Colombia's past wars in his autobiography, describing the continued debates over the precise number of banana workers massacred by state forces near his hometown in 1928: "The only discrepancy among everyone's memories concerned the number of dead, which in any event will not be the only unknown quantity in our history."²⁰⁶

Additionally, as more sophisticated theoretical models would suggest, individual preferences are not really exogenously given, but are constructed based upon not only economic and security considerations, but also precedent, intuition, emotion, and other intangibles that are less easily quantified. For example, the rise of left-labour organizations first with the *gaitanistas* in the 1930s and with the guerrillas in the 1960s would not have been possible without inspiration from first the Bolshevik revolution and the Cuban revolution, respectively.

²⁰⁶ Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Living to Tell the Tale*, Translated by Edith Grossman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003)

The present leaders of the three main coercive groups, Alvaro Uribe (President / Commander in Chief), Manuel Marulanda (FARC-EP / guerrillas), and Carlos Castaño (AUC / paramilitaries) have all witnessed their fathers assassinated by their declared enemies. However, while psychological factors have not been directly incorporated as such, they have been implicit in the analysis of how groups gain legitimacy and support among domestic populations. Enhanced discussion of psychological factors would only further stress the need to establish a state that can impose its legitimate authority and limit the rise of arbitrary violence that perpetuates cycles of animosity and revenge.

Finally, postmodernists and feminists would also decry the neglect of informal modes of repression and coercion, such as the informal exclusion of women from political and military decisions, the socializing role of family, and other implicit modes of repression associated with gender, ethnicity, and social class. Such criticism is more than welcome and its value is not lost on the author. However, considering the dearth of analysis regarding the more explicit forms of coercion and their effects upon state capacity, such a research agenda must also be established, and perhaps prior to the others.

The Road Ahead

The dilemma of needing to establish a peaceful political climate while simultaneously attempting to dismantle both of the country's main armed groups by force will remain the biggest difficulties for the Colombian government, but there are some positive signs that the process is working. In November 2003 the former Unión Patriótica member and union leader Luiz Garzón was elected mayor of Bogotá, the country's second most powerful political position. On the very day of concluding this analysis, the government had agreed to grant all guerrillas and paramilitaries the right to join and form political parties.²⁰⁷ While there remain

²⁰⁷ "Gobierno no objetaría que paramilitares conformen organizaciones políticas tras la desmovilización," *El Tiempo*, January 15, 2004.

many obstacles, the resolution of this 40-year conflict will be the strengthening of both the capacity and legitimacy of the state in order to move from a system of violent contestation to peaceful, democratic competition.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion to be arrived from this analysis is also the most intuitive: in order for Colombia to overcome this disjuncture between formal reform and actual improvement in the political system, the state apparatus must be developed to such an extent that rivals to the use of legitimate coercion are either eliminated or significantly reduced. While the state will likely be able to continue expanding and re-asserting its coercive capabilities in the short-term, such a strategy will eventually reach its fiscal limitations. Thus the most necessary element will be to affirm the legitimacy of the state – a process that is facilitated by continued widespread disapproval of both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas. Establishing legitimacy will mean enhancing civilian oversight of the military, ensuring that the Attorney General's Office punishes human rights violators, ending all elements of collusion between paramilitaries and the armed forces, and openly displaying its willingness to consider the demands of the peasant-based guerrillas – most significantly their demands for land tenure reform.

Unfortunately, two of the most central components of the present administration's security strategy, paramilitary demobilization with amnesty and the use of soldados campesinos (peasant soldiers) continue to bifurcate public opinion, especially among academics and the media. Establishing the legitimacy of a state whose mandate is centred upon violence will be a monumentally difficult task in such a polarized political climate.

Arguably the most important element needed to reverse the expansion of non-state political violence is the peaceful inclusion of the organized left within the political arena. Part of the stated reason for the guerrillas' reticence to sign a peace agreement with the Pastrana

administration was the threats posed to the newly demobilized guerrillas by paramilitaries.²⁰⁸

The socioeconomic reforms that the guerrillas have historically supported, such as the redistribution of land and greater support for regional development, will be better achieved via peaceful political competition than by armed insurrection, which has merely resulted in the further concentration of land over the past 20 years.²⁰⁹ With the end of political exclusion, the guerrillas lose their legitimacy in attempting to dismantle the alleged "oligarchy," and the Colombian government gains legitimacy in repressing all anti-democratic forms of political contestation.

Creating space for the radical left in Colombian politics will be exceedingly difficult to achieve, however, considering the polarization of the political environment and problems of timing. With regard to the latter, both the guerrillas and paramilitaries have claimed that they will not disarm until the threat posed by the other is eliminated, and as such the government is in a difficult position of having to consider where to focus its limited coercive capabilities in order to induce both groups to eventually disarm. Perhaps the only manner in which this can be resolved is to continue expanding these capabilities in the near future and address both groups equally, providing the same punitive measures and opportunities for amnesty to both groups. According to Romero, the disarming of non-state soldiers will be required prior to the implementation of social reforms, as "the reforms to improve political competition without peace created the conditions for a visible state dissolution over the past decade in Colombia."²¹⁰ In the heated debate between "peace-makers" who advocate amnesty for reintegration and "justice seekers" who insist upon criminal punishment for all human rights violators, this analysis would lean toward the "peace-making" side. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission

²⁰⁸ See Ruiz, op. cit., and Juan Guillermo Ferro M., "Las FARC: Aun Lejos de una Negociación en Firme," *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts Workshop* (Bogotá: Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University), 2003.

²⁰⁹ In Colombia, 0.4% of the country's landowners own 61.2% of the country's arable land. See International Crisis Group Report No. 5, op. cit., p. 11.

that names, shames, and prevents specific individuals from holding public office would be more effective at establishing peace than one that attempts to punish every actor that has committed human rights violations – a list that would likely include the majority of FARC and AUC members. With the public and their elected officials caught between the various coercive entrepreneurs, and in the context of such a polarized political climate, a delicate balance between realistic outcomes ideal aspirations will be needed. Before political reforms can be effective, rivals to the state's legitimate monopoly over coercion will need to be eliminated and the rule of law firmly established throughout the entire country.

²¹⁰ Mauricio Romero (2003c), p. 204.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Mauricio Aranguren Molina, *Mi confesión: Carlos Castaño revela sus secretos* (Bogotá: Oveja Negra, 2001).
- Ronald P. Archer, "The Transition from Traditional to Broker Clientelism in Colombia: Political Stability and Social Unrest" (Notre Dame: Kellogg Institute, 1990).
- Azcarate, C. "Psychosocial Dynamics of the Armed Conflict in Colombia" *On-line Journal of Peace and Dispute Resolution* 2(1), March 2001.
- Robert Bates, Avner Greif, and Amita Singh, "Organizing Violence," *Journal Of Conflict Resolution* 46 (5), Oct 2002,
- Ana María Bejarno, "The Constitution of 1991," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sanchez G, *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).
- _____, "Protracted Conflict, Multiple Protagonists and Staggered Negotiations: Colombia, 1982-2002", *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28 28 (55-56), 2003.
- Ana María Bejarno and Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez, "From 'Restricted' to 'Besieged': the Changing Nature of the Limits to Democracy in Colombia," (Notre Dame: Kellogg Working Paper #296, April 2002).
- Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia – the Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992).
- _____, *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).
- Herbert Braun, *The Assassination of Gaitan – Public Life and Urban Violence in Colombia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
- Maxwell C. Cameron and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy without Parties?" Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori's Peru," *Latin American Politics and Society* 45 (3), 2003.
- Juan Camilo Cardenas, "En Vos Confio: an experimental exploration on the micro-foundations of trust, reciprocity & social distance in Colombia," *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts Workshop* (Bogotá: Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University), 2003.
- Eduardo Posada Carbo, "Colombian Institutions," *Revista - Harvard Review of Latin America* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, Spring 2003), pp. 14-17.
- Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves, eds, *The Other Mirror – Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

Fernando Cepeda Ullola, "El Gobierno de Álvaro Uribe: Puntos de Vista desde Colombia," (Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) Policy Paper Series, 2002). www.focal.ca.

Russell Crandall, "Explicit Narcotization: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia During the Samper Administration," *Latin American Politics & Society* 43 (3), Fall 2001.

Fernando Cubides, "From Public to Private Violence: the Paramilitaries," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds., *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999).

Juan Guillermo Ferro M., "Las FARC: Aun Lejos de una Negociación en Firme," *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts Workshop* (Bogotá: Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University), 2003.

Vernon Lee Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions; Military Rule and Social Revolution in Colombia 1930-1956* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957).

Francisco Gutierrez and Ana Maria Jaramillo, "Paradoxical Pacts" (Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal, Centro de Estudos Sociais), 2000.

Janice Gross Stein, "Psychological Explanations of International Conflict," in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth Simmons (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations*. London: Sage Publishers, 2002, pp. 298-308

James D. Henderson, *Conservative Thought in Twentieth Century Latin America - the Ideas of Laureano Gómez*. Ohio University Press, 1998.

International Crisis Group, "Latin America Report N° 1 – Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace" (ICG Press, March 2002).

_____, "Latin America Report N° 5 – Colombia: Negotiating with the Paramilitaries" (ICG Press, September 2003).

_____, "Latin America Report N° 6 – President Uribe's Democratic Security Policy (ICG Press, November 2003).

Stathis Kalyvas, "New and Old Civil Wars," *World Politics* 54 (1), 2001.

Cristobal Kay, "Reflections on rural violence in Latin America." *Third World Quarterly* 22 (5), Oct 2001, pp. 742-3.

Harvey F. Kline, *Colombia – Portrait of Unity and Diversity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983).

Catherine Legrand, "Agrarian Antecedents of the Violence," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia – the Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Washington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992).

_____, "The Colombian Crisis in Historical Perspective," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28 (55, 56), 2003, pp. 165-209

Maria Victoria Llorente, "Perfil de la policía colombiana," in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999).

Fernando López-Alves, *State Formation and Democracy in Latin America, 1810-1900* (Duke University Press, 2000).

_____, "The Transatlantic Bridge: Mirrors, Charles Tilly, and State Formation in the River Plate," in Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves eds., *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 153-176.

Barry R. McCaffrey, "Challenges to US National Security," *Armed Forces Journal International* 140 (3), Oct 2002.

Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, eds., *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

Gabriel Marcella, "The United States and Colombia: the Journey from Ambiguity to Strategic Clarity," (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003).

Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 1988).

Mancur Olson, *Power and Prosperity: Outgrowing Communist and Capitalist Dictatorships* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Roman D. Ortiz, "Insurgent Strategies in the Post-Cold War: the Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25 (2), 2002.

Daniel Pecaute, "Guerrillas and Violence," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia – the Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992).

John A. Peeler, "Colombian Parties and Political Development: A Reassessment," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 2. (May, 1976), pp. 203-224.

Andrés Peñate, "El sendero estratégico del ELN: del idealismo guevarista al clientelismo armado," in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999).

Gregory Phillips, "Liberty and Order: Reintegration as Counter-Insurgency in Colombia" (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002).

Eduardo Pizarro and Ana Maria Bejarno, "Colombia: A Failing State?" *Revista - Harvard Review of Latin America* (Harvard University Press, Spring 2003).

Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *The Colombian Labyrinth: the Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability* (Rand Corporation, 2001).

Mauricio Reina, Drug Trafficking and the National Economy," in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).

Maria Clemencia Ramirez, "The Politics of Recognition and Citizenship Rights in Putumayo and in the Baja Bota of Cauca: The Case of the 1996 Cocalero Movement," (Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal, 2000). www.ces.fe.uc.pt/emancipa/research/en/texts.html

Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (New York: State University Press, 2002).

Cristina Rojas, *Civilization and Violence – Regimes of Representation in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Mauricio Romero, "Changing Identities and Contested Settings: Regional Elites and the Paramilitaries in Colombia," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 14 (1), 2000.

_____, "Negotiations with the Self-defense and Paramilitary Groups and Trajectories of State Consolidation in Contemporary Colombia." *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts Workshop* (Bogotá: Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University, 2003a).

_____, "Reform and Reaction: Paramilitary Groups in Contemporary Colombia," in *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation*, Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2003b).

_____, "The Talks Between Uribe's Government and Paramilitary Forces: A Mined Field" (unpublished manuscript, 2003c).

Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Manuel Salazar, "Colombia's Peace Process 1998-2002. Towards the understanding of its ultimate failure," *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts Workshop* (Bogotá: Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University), 2003.

Mayor General (R Juan Salcedo Lora, "Respuestas personalismos de un General de la república sobre cosas que casi todo el mundo sabe," in Malcolm Deas and María Victoria Llorente, eds., *Reconocer la Guerra para Construir la Paz* (Bogotá: Cerec, 1999).

Nicholas Sambanis, *External Intervention and Duration of Civil Wars: Lessons for Colombia, Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts Workshop* (Bogotá: Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University), 2003.

Gonzalo Sanchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandits, Peasants and Politics – the Case of 'La Violencia' in Colombia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

Julia Sweig, "What Kind of War for Colombia?" *Foreign Affairs* 81 (5), Sep/Oct 2002.

Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978).

_____, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1984).

_____, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol eds., *Bringing the State Back in* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

_____, *Capital, Coercion and European States, A.D. 990-1992* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

United States Department of Justice, "Attorney General and DEA Director Announce Indictments in AUC Drug Trafficking Case," September 2003.
www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/pressrel/pr092402.html

Ricardo Vargas Meza, "The Revolution Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)," (Netherlands, Transnational Institute: 1999). www.tni.org/drugs/pubs/farc.htm

_____, "The Anti-Drug Policy, Aerial Spraying of Illicit Crops and Their Social, Environmental and Political Impacts in Colombia," *Journal of Drug Issues* 32 (1), Winter 2002.

Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Eliza Willis, Stephan Haggard, and Christopher da C.B. Garman, "The Politics of Decentralization in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 34 (1), 1999.

Scott Wilson, "Interview with Carlos Castano, Head of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia," *Washington Post*, (March 12, 2001).

_____, "24 Dead but Alliance Endures," *Washington Post*, August 9, 2002.

_____, "Fewer Massacres in Colombia, but More Deaths," *Washington Post*, June 24, 2002.

Elisabeth J. Wood, "Forging an End to Civil War: Distributional Aspects of Robust Settlements." From Bogotá workshop, May 29-31, 2003: *Obstacles to Robust Negotiated Settlement of Civil Conflicts*, sponsored by Santa Fe Institute and the Javeriana University, Bogotá.

Rodrigo Uprimmy Yepes, Violence, Power, and Collective Action: A Comparison between Bolivia and Colombia, in Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez G., eds., *Violence in Colombia 1990-2000 – Waging War and Negotiating Peace* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001).