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A Tale of Two Neighbors: A Comparative Analysis of the Processes of State Creation and Regime Formation in Colombia and Venezuela

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A TALE OF TWO NEIGHBORS:
A Comparative Analysis of State Creation and Regime Formation in Colombia and Venezuela

An Honors Thesis
Presented By

Alexander Mintz

To the Department of Government and International Relations
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Honors in the Major Field

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, democracy has expanded noticeably both internationally and in Latin America.¹ From 1990 to 2012, the number of democratic regimes in the world increased from 69 to 117. Of no less significance, in Latin America, by 2008, freely elected governments existed everywhere except in Cuba, and polls consistently showed strong support throughout the region for democratic governments. Although substantial progress has been made, serious problems do remain.

Three interrelated objectives guide my comparative study of Colombia and Venezuela. My first objective is to identify the myriad of obstacles and setbacks that Colombia and Venezuela faced throughout their histories, and explain how those factors affected each nation's processes of state and regime creation. To complete such task, I conduct two separate but interrelated analyses of each country's political history. I begin with an examination of each nation's relevant topographical attributes and pre-Columbian societies. I complete this part of the analysis at present day. After documenting the political trajectory of each nation from the moment the Spaniards arrive until the present, I explain the way colonialism; the development of distinct competing regions with correspondingly disparate regional identities; the presence or absence of natural resources; adverse political subcultures; clientelism; and international factors hindered the capacity of each nation to create stable democratic regimes.

My second interrelated objective is to evaluate the explanatory value of existing theories of state creation and democratization, and to propose alternative arguments. The Colombian case is unique in that the nation possesses a long history of regularly held and successful electoral contests that should have led to the creation of a stable democratic regime. And yet, democracy

in Colombia is severely undermined by a relatively weak state unable to enforce the rule of law and to protect essential freedoms, and by the prolonged presence of internal armed conflict. In regards to the Venezuelan case, I attribute the regime's recent reversion to authoritarianism to the fact that throughout much of its contemporary history, the nation retained an overbearing and highly centralized state that facilitated the creation of a paternalistic political culture. As a result, in times of economic or political crisis, the desire for security and stability has led to the condemnation and collapse of the whole regime, rather than to widespread social and political reconciliation. In the absence of institutional mechanisms that seek to resolve differences and accommodate the interests of all factions in society, democracy will falter.

My last objective is to briefly assess the current state of democracy in Latin America. Although most countries in the region have successfully traveled from dictatorship to electoral democracy, save for Cuba and for the most part, Venezuela, the consolidation of democracy has yet to be achieved. The comparative analysis of the aforementioned nations serves to provide important insights into the nature of democracy, as well as about the factors that continue to inhibit its establishment in the region. The conclusions reached by this study could help lay the foundation for the analysis of other Latin American cases, as well as contribute to the existing literature that seeks to explain the process of democratization throughout Latin America.

Literature Review

Democracy is not inevitable and it is revocable -- it is a choice, not a necessity.² A substantial amount of conceptual and theoretical work on the processes of state creation and democratization exists in the realm of political science. Scholars have relied on much of this work to try to explain the ways democracies have been constructed throughout the various Latin America states. Democracy has generally been defined as a political system of that meets three conditions: 1) *competition* among individuals and organized groups for all positions of government, determined at regular intervals and without the use of force; 2) a highly inclusive level of *political participation* in the selection of leaders and policies through regular and fair elections; 3) and a level of *civil and political liberties* sufficient enough to guarantee the integrity of political competition and participation.³ Additionally, in order for a democracy to be stable it must possess political legitimacy. Political legitimacy is attained only when all significant political actors (elites and organizations) along with the public, "...believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine."⁴ However, the process of regime legitimization can only occur within the boundaries of a well-structured state. As a result, although the processes of state creation and democratization may differ, they are inextricably bound to one another in myriad ways.

As a result, there exists a wide array of theories that tend to explain why democracies emerge, mature, consolidate, break down, and reemerge, as well as why some countries have enjoyed greater success in the construction of stable democratic regimes than others. In order to provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature that analyzes the processes of state-building and democratization, I have separated this chapter into two parts. In the first section, I

begin by discussing general theories surrounding the processes of state creation and democratization. I then focus on the literature that directly pertain to Latin America, and pay particular attention to the factors that have generally affected the consolidation of democracy in the region.

All relevant theories of state creation and democratization retain an analytical framework that is based upon a few fundamental principles. First, it is essential to note that a stable democracy will not emerge in a state that has failed to consolidate its power. Moreover, the processes of state consolidation and legitimization are never fully complete. These processes are constantly changing in tandem with socioeconomic, cultural and political shifts experienced within the confines of a specific territory. Additionally, external conditions dictated by the international environment have a profound impact on the processes of state creation and democratization. As a result, changes in both the climate of the international arena as well as the existing social, economic and political conditions of a given territory have the ability to either hinder or facilitate the process of democratization.

Lastly, it is important to emphasize that most Latin American nations emerged from their respective wars of independence retaining different political, economic and social institutions. Due to the lack of administrative uniformity exerted by the Spanish empire upon its colonies, the strength, efficacy and legitimacy of these institutions varied drastically. After achieving independence in the 1820s (with the exception of Cuba who gained independence from Spain in 1898), these newly formed nations were challenged by a host of internal disputes and domestic troubles ranging from: lengthy periods of civil war and instability that destroyed the wealth and infrastructure of the colonial period, mounting public debt, economic hardship as trade had come to a complete standstill, and the subsequent rise of ‘strong-men’, or *caudillos* to political

prominence among other setbacks.⁵ In the cases of Colombia and Venezuela these internal complications would subsequently serve as preliminary obstacles to the consolidation of democracy; they would also make both nations particularly susceptible to disruptive economic, military and political pressures emanating from the international arena.

The Contemporary State and Theories of State Creation

The state of the past few centuries differs tremendously from the modern state. Samuel E. Finer proposes that the contemporary state has acquired five salient characteristics over the duration of several centuries. First, each state encompasses a particular territory that is inhabited by a population that acknowledges the legitimacy of a central organ of government. Second, the organ of government consists of a civil service that carries out decisions, and a military service that backs the decisions by force when necessary and protects the association from other similarly constituted associations. Third, each state recognizes the sovereignty of other similarly constituted states. Fourth, each state strives to create a sense of community based on a common nationality. And fifth, members of the internal community mutually distribute and share duties and benefits.⁶

Most importantly, Finer posits that the contemporary state can be differentiated from the state of the Middle Ages along two major variables: territoriality and function. During the medieval period, a vassal may have had to make up his own mind as to where his allegiances lay in times of conflict since political allegiance was a, “man-to-man relationship, and obedience might be due, in different circumstances, to several overlords.”⁷ By contrast, in modern times, political obedience is a function of territorial location, whereby allegiance is owed to a single authority of a specified territory – usually a government, dictator, prince and so forth. The

second distinction between the medieval and modern state that Finer emphasizes is functionality. As Gaetano Mosca puts it, “by ‘feudal state’ we mean that type of political organization in which all the executive functions of society – the economic, the judicial, the administrative, the military – are exercised simultaneously by the same individuals...”⁸ Finer contends that within the contemporary state the aforementioned functions are not consolidated in one office or individual, but are differentiated among various state apparatuses. Thus, Finer comes to conclude that the, “...twin process – from consolidated service to differentiated service and from differentiated territory to consolidated territory – is what constitutes the development of the modern state.”⁹

Finer’s distinction between medieval and contemporary state serves as a foundational definition that Charles Tilly builds upon via his assertion that a territory is a state in so far as it is differentiated from other organizations operating in the same territory; it is autonomous; it is centralized; and its divisions are formally coordinated with one another.¹⁰ Tilly posits seven distinct conditions that contributed to Europe’s success in satisfying the aforementioned requirements. According to Tilly, the probability that a European territory would be able to engage in the state creation process relied upon its:

- (1) Access to extractable resources;
- (2) A relatively protected position from military conquest for substantial periods of time;
- (3) A continuous supply of capable political leaders;
- (4) A powerful military and success in war;
- (5) A homogenous population;
- (6) Strong coalitions of the central power with a unified landed elite; and
- (7) An advantageous position within the international system¹¹

Among these seven conditions, a few are of particular relevance to the processes of state building and regime creation in Latin America. They are: the abundance of fertile land, mineral wealth and in some cases oil (condition one); the ascension and subsequent proliferation of local strongmen or *caudillos* to head of government (condition three); varying degrees of heterogeneity in ethnicity, class, and religious beliefs (condition 5); and the ability of economic and political elites to unify and subject themselves to the authority of a centralized organization (condition 6). While the remaining conditions are also significant, those just mentioned have had the greatest effect on shaping the political landscape of the region.

Similar to Tilly, Stein Rokkan constructs a state-building paradigm with the goal of performing two tasks. The model must focus upon crucial dimensions of variation across political systems and discuss alternative time sequences in the interaction of such dimensions; and must serve as a conceptual mapping of variations within and between regions. Rokkan adds that the initial state-building process can be divided into four phases.

The first phase relates back to Tilly's sixth condition, which is the period of political, economic, and cultural unification at the elite level. During that time the elites strike a series of bargains and establish a variety of cultural bonds across networks of local power-holders. They also build institutions for the purpose of extracting the resources necessary to create a common defense, to maintain internal order and adjudicate disputes, to protect established rights and privileges, and to protect and advance the economy and the polity."¹² The second phase entails the creation of channels of direct contact between the central elite and peripheral populations as a means of establishing widespread feelings of identity with the political system. In the third phase, the new channels of contact engender the active participation of the masses via political parties, opposition groups and additional organs of representation. In the fourth phase, the

growth of agencies of redistribution allows for the building of public welfare services and the equalization of economic conditions among other administrative services.¹³

Jorge Dominguez's conception of state creation is similar to both Tilly's and Rokkan's. Dominguez asserts that a state is a set of institutions that retains a legitimate monopoly of force over a given territory, and has the authority to exercise said force.¹⁴ Therefore, a state must have the capacity to both exert its authority over a given population, as well as be clearly distinguishable from other organizations present within the same territory. While both Tilly and Rokkan would agree that these conditions are essential, Dominguez goes further and emphasizes that state control over a population is a "function of the state's claim to the monopoly of force."¹⁵ This assertion relates to the idea of the territorial consolidation posited by Finer, which remains an integral distinction between medieval and contemporary states.

Before I move on to discuss theories of democracy, there are two other theories that are pertinent to the present analysis. The dependency theory is of particular relevance to Venezuela as well as Colombia. The theory is constructed on the premise that the sovereign states of the Southern hemisphere have long been dependent for advanced technology, financing, markets, and basic imports on an international economic system dominated by northern capitalist powers. As a result, less developed countries cannot exist as independent nations for they are economically and politically constrained by their dependence. Furthermore, the structure of the international system ostensibly confines the economies of countries such Colombia and Venezuela to either agricultural or extractive industries – industries that inherently provide for less dynamic forms of growth.¹⁶ This asymmetrical relationship undermines the authority and legitimacy of the weaker state, because it impairs its ability to generate sufficient funds. As a result, external forces are increasingly able to dictate and influence the development of state

institutions. In the words of Andre Gunder Frank, “under-development was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself.”¹⁷ The second relevant theory is the resource curse, or paradox of plenty theory. According to this theory, states rich in minerals and petroleum are predisposed to generate high levels of corruption, ineffective governance and violence. This theory is particularly useful when analyzing the impact petroleum has had on the Venezuelan state.¹⁸

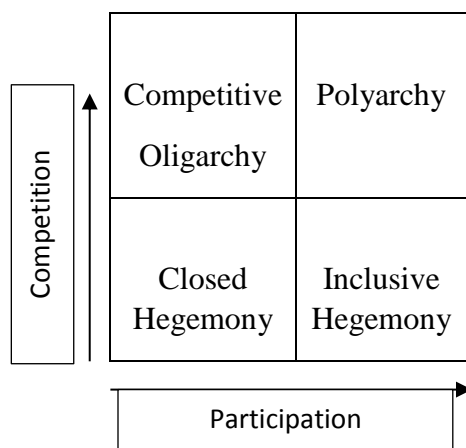
Theories of Democratization

Robert Dahl, Wolfgang Merkel, Juan Linz, and Alfred Stepan have advanced the most comprehensive and salient scholarship on the process of democratization in Europe and Latin America. In his work *Regimes and Opposition*, Dahl asserts that democratic governments are fundamentally characterized by their ability to respond to citizens’ preferences without establishing differences between them. In order for this to transpire, all citizens must have an equal opportunity to formulate their preferences; publicly manifest their preferences among their fellow partisans and before the government, both individually and collectively; and be treated equally by the government. For those three basic conditions to be met, they must be accompanied by eight essential guarantees:

1. Freedom of association;
2. Freedom of expression;
3. The right to vote;
4. Eligibility for public office;
5. The right of political leaders to compete for votes;

6. Diverse sources of information;
7. Free and fair elections;
8. Government policies that depend on the vote and other forms of preference expression.¹⁹

For Dahl, the extent to which any number of those guarantees is present in a contemporary political regime can be represented along two dimensions: public contestation and participation. Four types of regimes are derived from those dimensions: polyarchy, competitive oligarchy, inclusive hegemony, and closed hegemony. The regime classifications are absolutes – the extremes of both dimensions. Thus, it is possible and probable that a majority of political regimes fall somewhere in between these classifications. Dahl's theoretical framework can be clearly illustrated by the diagram below:



In the upper right corner of the diagram are polyarchies. These regimes are considered by Dahl to be the most democratic since they impose the fewest restrictions on essential freedoms. Moreover, polyarchies provide various ways for political parties, opposition groups and other organizations to participate through representative government. Diagonally across from polyarchy on the diagram are closed hegemonic regimes. In this type of regime all forms of expression and organization are banned; dissent and opposition are prohibited. Although public

contestation is nonexistent in both closed and inclusive hegemonic regimes, in the latter, participation is unconstrained. In Inclusive hegemonies, although there exist hardly any institutional barriers to participation, the participants lack access to organizations with the authority to voice their dissent and oppose the government. Finally, located in the upper left corner of the diagram are competitive oligarchies. Those regimes possess high levels of public contestation, but restrict participation.²⁰

The scholarship of Wolfgang Merkel differs from Dahl's. Merkel proposes that a liberal democracy must consist of five partial regimes. It must have an electoral regime that permits free, fair, and regular elections; a second one that protects freedoms of speech and association; a third one that guards civil rights and liberties; a fourth one that ensures the separation of powers between executive, legislative and judicial branches; and a fifth one that shields elected officials from attempts by nonelected groups to overrule or overthrow them. Merkel also contends that for a political regime to be considered democratic, the aforementioned requirements must be mutually embedded. Simply put, partial conditions are contingently interconnected.²¹

In turn, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan assert that in addition to a well-functioning state, five other interconnected and mutually reinforcing conditions must be present, or be crafted, in order for a democracy to be consolidated. The prerequisites are the existence of a free and lively civil society; of a relatively autonomous political society; of an established rule of law that protects individual freedoms and associational life; of an effective state bureaucracy; and of an institutionalized economic society.²² Linz and Stepan go a step further and identify two major obstacles to democratic consolidation. They are the dangers posed by ethnic conflict in multinational states, and by disappointed popular hopes for economic improvement in states undergoing simultaneous political and economic reform. Although Linz and Stepan label those

photos as “surmountable obstacles”, they are nevertheless, potentially inhibiting factors to the consolidation of democracy.

Lastly, it is imperative to draw a clear boundary between democratic and non- democratic regimes. It is counterproductive to claim that some democracies are more or less democratic than others, for democracy is directly related to the presence of all of the aforementioned conditions. For instance, it is false to consider a regime that prohibits competitive elections to be democratic even if it satisfies other conditions of democracy. Thus, terms such as “illiberal democracy” or “partial democracy” are useless as they are counterintuitive.²³

Latin American Theories of State Creation and Democratization

To present a comprehensive review of the variety of theories related to state creation and democratization in Latin America, I will separate this section into two, with one focusing on factors that have affected the process of state creation, and the second one on the elements that have impacted the process of democratization.

In addition to the state-creation theories posited by Tilly and Rokkan, there are several salient theories of state-creation specific to Latin America. Frank Safford and Fernando Lopez-Alvez have posited two of the most comprehensive arguments. According to Frank Safford, an assemblage of seven factors has either enabled or inhibited state development in nineteenth-century Latin America. They are:

1. Economic geography, including topography, resources, and relative economic integration;

2. Political geography, including geographic and transportation conditions affecting political integration;
3. Relative economic and fiscal strength;
4. Public acceptance of the political systems, whether framed in constitutions or not;
5. The degree to which the military was under the control of civil authorities;
6. The role of the Catholic Church; and
7. The nation's vulnerability to external attack or pressure.

Safford emphasizes that the relative importance and effects of each variable differs from case to case.²⁴ For example, whereas the Catholic Church was not a significant source of division in Venezuela, it was a major source of conflict and armed struggle in Colombia. Control over the military was also a very important factor that if achieved, enhanced the ability of a state to consolidate its power. Lastly, Safford concludes that vulnerability to external pressure appears to have been a relatively unimportant variable in the grand scheme of state creation.

Lopez-Alvez posits an argument that diverges from the one advanced by Safford. Lopez-Alvez asserts that feudal characteristics of rural life in several Latin American countries are not accurate predictors of state-creation. Rather, more relevant to the process, are conflict and concomitant collective action. For Lopez-Alvez, those two factors together have determined access to the means of production, altered property relations, created new classes, and displaced old land and trade monopolies in Latin American states. In relation to conflict, those who strive to consolidate the power of the state relied principally on the support of members of the nobility during wars. The degree to which they were successful, in turn, affected the timing and character

of class alliances and the development of state bureaucracies. Lastly, Lopez-Alvez postulates that the state creation process was less cumbersome when the members of the rebellious upper class were unable to unite against the elites at the center; when the landed gentry were defeated in their own domains; and when battles took place in distant regions not controlled by the government.²⁵

Conditions of Democratic Consolidation

There are a number of conditions that have affected the consolidation, or lack thereof, of democracy throughout Latin America. For Jeff Haynes they are the political culture and legitimacy of the post-authoritarian regime; the nature of political participation and institutions; and the economic and international conditions under which the drive to consolidate the democratic regime ensued. Haynes also asserts that the development of a strong civic culture imbued with high levels of mutual trust, tolerance of diversity and a propensity to compromise, is essential to the stability of a democratic regime. Larry Diamond builds upon this idea with his contention that, “these elements [moderation, cooperation, bargaining, and accommodation] of political culture were necessary...to cope with one of the central dilemmas of democracy: to balance cleavage and conflict with the need for consensus.”²⁶ The way in which such a culture is created and maintained is through the healthy functioning of democratic institutions and structures over a long duration of time. Due to the cyclical resurgence of authoritarian rule generally experienced throughout Latin America however, these institutions remain relatively weak. As a result, a strong civic culture imbued with the aforementioned qualities remains particularly elusive in most nations throughout Latin America.

Moreover, Hayes argues that political leaders in developing states are rarely willing to relinquish their power. This obstacle to democratic consolidation is quite common amongst most Latin American countries, not only because public participation is routinely sidestepped, but also because military intervention is frequently relied upon to either retain power or to topple those in power.²⁷ Regarding Haynes' second condition, John Peeler asserts that from 1900-1975 liberal democracies were able to persist when regimes proved able to absorb and co-opt substantial forms of political participation without altering the balance of political power. As such, the successful establishment of liberal democracy in Latin America was contingent upon the regime's ability to include major interests in the decision-making process, as to avoid rebellion. In his study of five early democratic regimes (Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela) Peeler concluded that all of the regimes remained politically stable for decades because each was structured to maintain social and economic stability. Simply put, while most Latin American countries dealt with expanding political participation either through populist authoritarianism and electoral manipulation, repression, or revolution, the five aforementioned regimes were able to remain democratic due to a highly institutionalized political system as well as by political pacts formed at the elite levels.²⁸

Lastly, Haynes, relies on the works of Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Chibub, and Fernando Limongi, to contend that for democracy to survive, a country must already have a democracy in place, must be affluent, must generate economic growth, allow moderate inflation and reduce income inequality, must have parliamentary institutions and be positioned in an amicable international environment.²⁹ By looking at the relationship between economic performance and democratic stability, Przeworski and his three co-authors conclude that while there is a strong correlation between economic performance and the consolidation and

persistence of democratic regimes in Latin America, a country's level of economic development alone could not predict whether a regime will become democratic.³⁰ Many of Haynes' arguments are expanded in Larry Diamond, Jonathan Hartlyn, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset's, *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*.³¹

With this brief discussion of a number of theories of state creation and democratization and their applications to Latin America, I have established a base upon which I will conduct my analysis. In the following chapters, I discuss the processes of state-building and regime formation that transpired in Colombia and Venezuela, and posit a theoretical argument for each as to why both nations have problems creating solid democratic regimes.

CHAPTER 1
Colombia: An Unconsolidated Democracy

Introduction

Today state authority in Colombia is formally exercised in accordance with the 1991 constitution, which defines Colombia as a “decentralized, unitary Republic, with autonomous territorial entities, democratic, participatory, and pluralist”. Although the ‘state-of-siege’ powers that Colombian presidents have repeatedly relied on to exercise legislative as well as judicial power have been significantly curtailed, the executive continues to be the key political office in Colombia. Moreover, in 2015 a series of constitutional amendments known as the Balance of Power reform eliminated immediate presidential reelection to further deter executive concentration of power. Elections have been relatively peaceful, although the 2014 legislative elections were marred by accusations of fraud, vote buying, and connections with criminals. This latest incident of perceived electoral tampering has engendered a flurry of debate primarily amongst intellectuals and government officials surrounding the strengthening of financing and political contribution laws, as well as the implementation of more efficient vote-counting mechanisms.

Ever since the constitutional reform of 1991, the traditional Liberal-Conservative partisan duopoly in Congress has been on the decline. The new system is comprised of the traditional parties as well as regional movements, ideological groups (both from the right and left), and technocratic or issue-oriented parties. Corruption still occurs at multiple levels of public administration, albeit to a lesser degree than in previous years. Civil liberties, associational and organizational rights, and rule of law all remain weakly enforced by the state. The inability of the

state to protect civil liberties and ensure the rule of law greatly inhibits liberal democratic governance in Colombia.

In this chapter I justify the aforementioned contentions. To do so, I divide Colombia's history into distinct periods. Following the section that focuses on the era of independence, I identify and analyze the political, economic, social, cultural and geographical factors that affected the state creation process. At the end of this historical overview, I briefly discuss the current state of democracy in Colombia.

Pre-Colonial and Colonial Times

Ever since pre-colonial times, the twin aspects of geography and climate have had a decisive impact on the social, political and economic development of Colombia. In order to comprehend the processes of state-creation and democratization that have transpired in Colombia, it is essential to develop a better understanding of the natural and human environments that existed within the region.

Located in the northwest corner of South America, Colombia shares its borders with Venezuela and Brazil to the east, Ecuador to the south, while the Panamanian isthmus provides a land route into Central America. On either side of the isthmus there is a coastline – a Caribbean Sea coastline and a Pacific Ocean one. Primarily dominated by three Andean mountain ranges separated by two broad river valleys (that of the Magdalena and Cauca rivers), Colombia's topographical attributes also include the tropical rain forest of the Amazon jungle, the grasslands of the Orinoco River, and other tropical rain forests located on both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts.

The fourth largest country in Latin America covering approximately 440,829 square miles in area, Colombia can be separated into three distinct regions: 1) the mountainous region of the west, where three principal ranges of the Andes (the Western, Eastern and Central Cordilleras) cut the country and provide for its climatic variations; 2) the eastern region, which consists of low-lying flat lands to the north composed of extensive plains (*llanos*) and the Amazonian Jungle to the south; and 3) the area shaped by the Pacific and Caribbean coasts.³² The Andean region covers around 30 percent of the country's surface area but retains upwards of 75 percent of the population. The eastern region constitutes approximately 58 percent of the territory, but only 5.5 percent of the population lives there. The Caribbean coast, which encompasses around 12 percent of the territory, holds close to 20 percent of the population.³³

Colombia is imbued with a climate that is tropical not only in the relative constancy of local temperatures, but also in the abundance of rainfall experienced throughout most of the national territory.³⁴ The combination of constant temperature and ample rain allows for the vigorous growth of a wide variety of vegetation both in the hot lowland areas and in the Andes. The Andes, which range from 500 meters at their lowest point to more than 5700 meters at their highest, make the existence of three main climatic regions possible. Since temperature changes at varying altitudes, these regions can be separated into: the cold highlands, the temperate slopes, and the hot valleys. Historically, the most inhabited regions have been the highlands, for the moderate climate provides an escape from the heat and the tropical diseases associated with the lower territories. Additionally, fertile intermountain valleys offer favorable conditions for agriculture.³⁵ The valleys, troughs, and basins among the ranges, at altitudes varying between 2,500 and 4,000 meters, have presented and continue to present living conditions favorable enough to attract and support large populations.³⁶ It is within these intermountain valleys where

the most complex Amerindian societies developed. Settlement on the warmer slopes and hot plains occurred solely because of the pressures generated by land concentration and population growth in the 19th century.

Pre-Columbian Societies

Pre-Columbian peoples of many different tongues and cultural attributes were dispersed throughout Colombia. The three most dominant linguistic families were: the Chibcha, the Carib, and the Arawak.³⁷ These dialects were mutually unintelligible, which resulted in political fragmentation as well as the presence of cultural dissimilarities that served to further isolate them from one another. Moreover, the complexity of sociopolitical organization, levels of economic development, and settlement patterns of these indigenous populations varied substantially. The largest and most developed indigenous groups were the Muisca, the Tairona, and the Cenu.³⁸ The Muisca, or Chibcha, lived in the Cordillera Oriental east of the upper Magdalena River in east-central Colombia. The Tairona were located in what now is part of northern Colombia – between the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the coast, and the Cenu occupied an area to the south-west of the Tairona.³⁹

Upon their arrival, the Spanish encountered both large, socially stratified, indigenous kingdoms such as the Muisca, the Tairona and the Cenu, as well as a variety of smaller, less hierarchical chiefdoms. The larger more complex societies generally relied upon a firm economic base in intensive, and often irrigated, agriculture, supplemented by hunting and fishing. Commerce between chiefdoms flourished, although fierce antagonisms and chronic conflict between some groups persisted due to cultural and linguistic differences. The establishment of trading centers within the more economically advanced chiefdoms facilitated

the frequent exchange of goods such as: gold, sea salt, fish, cotton textiles, peccaries and slaves, over longer distances primarily along the Magdalena river as well as other river routes. The construction of elaborate agricultural works, temples, roads, stairways, plazas and bridges found in the settlements of the Tairona and the Cenu, implied the development of elaborately hierarchical societies. As for sociopolitical organization, most of the developed chiefdoms of the West (specifically in the Cauca region), as well as in the lowlands of northern Colombia, were divided into territorial or state-like political organizations each under the jurisdiction of a local chief, albeit federated under a paramount chieftain. The aristocratic class within these states included warrior leaders, chiefs and other prominent members of society who received tribute from commoners, enjoyed the privilege of polygyny, wore golden plates and other ornaments of gold, and were given special burial at death.⁴⁰

Political fragmentation and chronic warfare within chiefdoms as well as between rivaling indigenous groups enabled the Spaniards to conquer with little difficulty even the largest of the indigenous chiefdoms. Once the Spaniards had achieved their intended objective, they essentially imposed their own sociopolitical hierarchies atop those already in existence. In areas where there was a more permanently and densely settled indigenous population, such as in the Eastern highlands, the Spaniards began to extract wealth through a system of indirect rule in which native leaders were charged with collecting tribute in gold from their vassals.⁴¹ Alternatively, indigenous groups such as the Tairona, who were able to escape from the European onslaught by retreating into swamps, mountains or other nearby undesirable regions, deprived the Spaniards of an easily subdued native labor force. The presence of a dense and docile indigenous labor force in some regions and the absence of one in others resulted in salient demographic distinctions that would subsequently affect the economic, social and political development of each region

throughout the colonial period. In the decades directly following the arrival of the Spaniards, the indigenous population of the Colombian territory declined rapidly under the pressure of warfare, disease, miscegenation, and abortion.⁴² Between 1537, when the Spaniards first passed through the greater part of the Cauca Valley, and the 1570s, the indigenous populations along the Cauca River diminished in many places between 80 and 95 percent.⁴³

Spanish Conquest and the Colonial Period

The Spaniards created their largest posts in areas that had a dense and subdued indigenous population, whom they exploited to supply food, cheap and reliable labor force, and revenue. The absence of a large docile indigenous population, as was the case in the Eastern Cordillera, would have generally precluded the successful establishment of early Spanish settlements. However, the presence of precious minerals – such as gold, and occasionally silver – and the temptation striking it rich swiftly, compelled many Spaniards to settle. As gold deposits became scarce and the indigenous labor supply died out, mining towns disappeared.

The first Europeans arrived in present day Colombia at the 15th century and soon began to establish trade relations with local indigenous groups. In 1508 the Crown authorized two projects for permanent settlement. One of the projects entailed the establishment of permanent settlements along the mainland shores of New Andalucía – a domain originally stretching from the Gulf of Uraba east to Cabo de la Vela on the Guajira Peninsula. Two years later, the assigned leader started the first colony in Colombian territory at San Sebastian de Uraba.⁴⁴ After fighting and enslaving several members of the native population, the colonizers were forced to abandon the settlement due to increasing indigenous hostilities. Subsequently, the Spaniards established a

new base at Santa Maria de la Antigua. Lacking the support of the indigenous peoples, who had been decimated by disease, the Spaniards abandoned Santa Maria de la Antigua in 1524.⁴⁵

As they moved westward, the colonizers settled near the Gulf of Urabá, in the Darien region. The settlement became the foundation of the Spanish colony of Castilla del Oro on the Isthmus of Panama. Providing a base from which the Spanish would extend their influence and establish more permanent control over the Gulf of Urabá, the colony also became a jumping-off point for Francisco Pizarro's expedition into Peru. In 1526, another important settlement was constructed at the eastern end of the Caribbean coast – Santa Marta. The territorial limits associated with this settlement came to be Cabo de la Vela to the east and the Magdalena River to the west. Soon thereafter, Coro, located east of Santa Marta on the coast of Venezuela, was founded, providing for another strategic base of operations. In 1533, the founding of the town of Cartagena de Indias supplied the Spaniards with yet another permanent foothold on the Caribbean coast. The settlement attracted hundreds of adventurers and covered a large swath of land located between the Gulf of Uraba and the Magdalena River. Gold discovered in the tombs of the Cenu further attracted the Spanish to plunder the area at the expense of indigenous populations. In both Santa Marta and Cartagena de Indias, the governing practices of the Spanish resulted in the drastic depopulation of these areas as well as the exploitation of indigenous communities. Natives were often looted for gold, provisions, and were enslaved; if the Spaniards encountered any form of indigenous resistance, they set fire to their homes and fields. Eventually, Spanish looting engendered a more systematic exploitation of the land and its peoples. In the 1540s those indigenous peoples who had survived the initial plundering of the Spanish in Cartagena, were gathered into *encomiendas* to provide the tribute required to sustain

the Spanish settlement. Santa Marta and Cartagena both served as permanent bases from which the Spanish conquered and colonized the Colombian interior.⁴⁶

By 1535, native tombs not far inland revealed gold almost on the scale found in Peru or Mexico. This discovery provided the impetus for the organization of numerous expeditions into the surrounding area. By 1538, three separate expeditionary forces had emerged onto the mountain plains inhabited by the Muisca. Within a year, using the well-tried combination of intimidation, warfare, and politics, most of the Muisca territory had been conquered.⁴⁷ Given the ambitions of the conquistadores to accumulate wealth and consolidate their power, the three leaders of each expedition agreed to an arrangement that gave the authorities in Spain the power to decide to whom the newly founded territory should belong. Ultimately, the conquistadores bestowed the title of “el Nuevo Reino de Granada” (the New Kingdom of Granada) on the new territory and founded the present capital of Colombia, Santafe de Bogotá.⁴⁸

With the establishment of Santafe de Bogota, the Spanish were able to easily consolidate their control over the eastern highlands as well as to use the settlement as a base for further conquest and colonization. Fanning out into neighboring territories, the Spanish ventured to the north, extending to Velez, Tunja, and Pamplona; and to the west, crossing the Magdalena River and founding towns at Ibague, Mariquita, and Honda. They also spread eastward, moving down the slopes of the Andes to the edge of the *llanos*, establishing bases at Medina de las Torres, Santiago de las Atalyas, and San Juan de los Llanos. Finally, to the South, they traversed the Quindio Mountains, opening up contact with the fledgling settlements of the Cauca region; which had already established communication with the conquered zones in Quito.⁴⁹

By the end of the 16th century it had become evident that these nascent cities from which the Spanish sought to dominate the surrounding countryside did not immediately constitute a coherent colonial dominion.⁵⁰ The two chief regional centers of Spanish control in the interior were the eastern highlands and the upper Cauca region. These two regions were physically separated from each other by the Central Cordillera, which was often impassable by mule, as well as particularly vulnerable to sporadic attacks orchestrated by the native peoples living in the mountains. The physical separation created a considerable barrier to transportation as well as to communication, which in turn resulted in the relative isolation of these regions from one another. Not only were these two regions physically disconnected from one another, but they were also separated administratively. This divide was primarily due to the patterns of conquest carried out by different conquistadores. As a result, Popayan and much of the rest of the Cauca region remained under the authority of Quito until 1549 when Santafe de Bogota became the seat of an audiencia. However, much of the western region was then returned to the jurisdiction of Quito when it became an audiencia in 1563. Physically and administratively separated, these two regions had become economically self-sufficient by the start of the 17th century.⁵¹

In the eastern highlands, the production of grains and the weaving of textiles became the principal economic activities, while in the west the extraction of gold became the motor of the economy. By the 1580s, gold dust from the West was paying for the textiles woven by Indians in the Eastern Cordillera, while grains, textiles, and easily preserved foods (hardtack, cheese, and hams) from the Eastern region were being sent to some mining centers on the western side of the Magdalena River. However, due to high transportation costs, the volume of this trade between the two regions was not substantial.⁵² The third major region of Spanish settlement, the Caribbean coast and the lower Magdalena River Valley, retained its own special functions. It

nearly developed a monopoly on all external commerce – namely the legal imports of European luxury products and African slaves. Being situated on the Caribbean, Cartagena became the New Kingdom of Granada's leading port, for it allowed the Spanish to easily deliver goods to and extract gold from the interior. Cartagena also had a complementary relationship with the two major interior regions. It sent most of its imported luxury goods to Santafe de Bogota – the chief consumption and distribution center in the eastern highlands, and imported slaves to the mining towns of the west. In return, the Caribbean coastal region received agricultural and manufactured consumer goods from the East, and gold from the West.

During the early colonial period, the amount of gold produced by the Kingdom of New Granada far surpassed that of the other colonial regions of the Spanish empire, and continued to do so into the 16th century and beyond.⁵³ Production began at Popayan (located in the southern area of the Western Cordillera) before 1540, and at Antioquia (located in the northern area of the Western Cordillera) in 1546. Though by the 17th century gold production in the existing mining towns had diminished measurably, it regained momentum in the next century as new deposits were discovered. The discovery of the new gold deposits resulted in the founding of new mining frontiers in two regions – the Pacific lowlands of Western Colombia, specifically in the Choco, and in the province of Antioquia located in the highlands of the Central Cordillera.⁵⁴

The Spaniards placed great value on gold for it was Colombia's only significant export as well as their principal means for the payment of imported European luxuries.⁵⁵ Although the Kingdom of New Granada (becoming New Granada in 1717) assumed the role as the single largest producer of gold in colonial Spanish America, the wealth generated by this industry paled in comparison to the wealth generated by the silver mining industries in Mexico and Peru: “Between 1735 and 1800, the gold registered in New Granada's western mining regions

represented less than one-thirteenth of the value of Mexican bullion mined in the same years.”⁵⁶

The lure of gold may first have drawn Spain and the conquistadores to America, however it was the presence of silver that prolonged their stay.

Because the extraction of silver took precedence over the extraction of gold, the large fixed investments, and complex or expensive technology that was present in the silver mining colonies of Mexico and Peru was absent in New Granada. This difference had an important impact on the development of New Granada’s elite. Since the wealth produced in New Granada was less substantial relative to the other colonies, it did not develop an elite as wealthy as the elites of either Mexico or Peru. Nevertheless, by the end of the colonial period, the gold mine boom in both Popayan and Antioquia had helped generate a large commercial bourgeoisie.⁵⁷

The regions in Colombia also developed distinct ethnic features. In the agrarian eastern highlands, the dense indigenous population did not die as fast as it did in the mining regions. Thus, by the eighteenth century, miscegenation in the eastern highlands between Spaniards and the indigenous peoples had become a common occurrence, imbuing the region with a largely *mestizo* population. In the West and on the Caribbean coast, however, the natives died at a much higher rate, facilitating the introduction of African slaves as a method to replenish a declining indigenous labor force. Soon thereafter, African slaves came to provide much of the demographic base in these two regions.

Differing population profiles compounded by distinctive regional economic roles led to the development of a variety of institutions designed to enforce colonial socio-economic hierarchies and to organize indigenous labor according to specific regional attributes. In the eastern highlands, the exploitation and Christianization of the large indigenous population was a central theme. Questions of how and how much the natives should work for the Spaniards

became the focus of imperial governance in the sixteenth century. Faced with a rapidly shrinking indigenous population, the Spaniards were also preoccupied with the ethical dilemmas generated by their imposition of forced labor on those who survived and the obligation dictated by the Catholic Church to convert them, civilize them, and treat them well.⁵⁸ The *encomienda* was created to resolve the dilemma. The system's rules dictated that the native peoples would provide the *encomenderos* goods and labor, and in return, would receive spiritual guidance, protection and stability. The outcome proved to be very different. As the steadily accumulated great wealth and frequently contested the authority of the crown, the *encomenderos* exploited the natives, and neglected to 'enlighten' and fully convert them.⁵⁹

The continuous decline of the native population made the *encomienda* system obsolete. Religious acculturation and political control of the native population presented additional concerns. Since *encomiendas* constituted large expanses of land, in the later part of the sixteenth century, native peasants lived relatively dispersed on individual plots or in small communities. This arrangement, in turn, enabled them to preserve many of their own cultural and religious practices despite their formal conversion to Christianity.⁶⁰ Convinced that the natural dispersion of the indigenous population inhibited indigenous religious acculturation, and thus Spanish political control, between 1590 and 1620 Spanish administrators implemented a policy that facilitated the concentration of indigenous peoples into large towns.

The creation of collective communities, called *resguardos*, effectively removed the indigenous peoples from the plots of land that they had previously occupied. The transferal of native peasants to smaller plots of land generated a large supply of indigenous labor for the Spanish *haciendas*. Moreover, the larger indigenous labor force also served to increase the ability of the Spaniards to engage members of the native population in a wider variety of labor

obligations, such as providing designated terms of service to residents in cities, to mines, and to Spanish farmers.⁶¹ Finally, the forced consolidation of the native population into *resguardos* opened up large areas of fertile land for acquisition by Spaniards, who in turn used their landholdings to grow European crops and to raise livestock for sale in city markets and mining zones. Soon thereafter, landholdings of this kind began to replace the *encomienda* as a major source of wealth.⁶² Similarly to what had occurred in the East Cordillera, in the West, wherever there was a large indigenous population – such as in the Cauca region – the Spaniards initially relied upon the *encomienda* to generate a labor force. As the indigenous population declined, however, the Spaniards began to establish large landholdings where they raised cattle and grew food crops.

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the production of gold remained the dominant economic activity of the Colombian region. In the sixteenth century, the labor force of most gold-mining towns was composed of black slaves and free prospectors, known as *mazamorreros*. In the Pacific lowland mining zones, slavery was the dominant form of labor, and mine ownership was concentrated amongst few individuals. Conversely, in Antioquia, ownership was less concentrated, and although slaves constituted a large portion of the labor force, the free labor provided by these *mazamorreros* played an essential role in gold production.⁶³ One of the reasons the *mazamorreros* played a central role was because it costs more to transport legally African slaves than it did to rely on the indigenous peoples of the region. However, as the native population declined, African slaves began to constitute most of the labor force in the mines. The Caribbean region followed a similar path. However, instead of using African slaves to work on the gold mines, they were used primarily to cultivate beans, cassava, and plantains on plots near Cartagena, and maize in the Cenu region.⁶⁴

Spanish colonial society after conquest was highly complex and extremely stratified. On top of the social hierarchy were the original conquistadores, who for the most part were members of Spain's manual trades or lower professions. Some were *hidalgos* with noble backgrounds, but they typically came from Spain's lowest social strata. By taking part in major conquests, however, these men constructed a socio-economic hierarchy in which they assumed the dominant position. Their elevated social status was closely intertwined with their ability to extract and amass large quantities of wealth at the expense of the existing indigenous population. Post-conquest settlers – the *primeros pobladores* – also enjoyed a high socio-economic status, as many of them became *encomenderos*. In general, *encomenderos* tended to surround themselves with the material comforts associated with Spanish nobility - large houses set on broad estates, and a retinue of relatives and vassals. Occupying the lower rungs of Spanish colonial society in descending socio-economic order were *mestizos* – the progeny of Spanish and native miscegenation among other racial intermixtures including mulattoes, zambos etc., the indigenous population, and lastly black slaves. Although these populations were primarily relegated to the lower social and economic positions in society, fluidity, rather than rigidity within certain limits, was the essence of being *mestizo* in colonial Spanish America.⁶⁵

By the 18th century, with its population growing and changing, New Granada had become a largely *mestizo* society. This process had started in the late 16th century, with the implementation of the *resguardos*. Despite strict legal proscriptions against intrusion into the *resguardos* by non-Indians, demand for land generated by a growing colonial population, combined with the natives' need to obtain money as to meet their tributary obligations, resulted in the illegal leasing of *resguardo* lands to small numbers of white and mestizo farmers. By 1778, invasion of indigenous lands and racial mixing was so advanced that the government's

“Protector of Indians” no longer found it feasible to distinguish between the native and *mestizo* elements of the rural population.⁶⁶ According to the 1778-1780 censuses, the population was divided into the four basic racial categories: whites, blacks, Indians, and “free people of all colors”.

The census showed that people of mixed race made up 46 percent of New Granada’s population, whites constituted 26 percent, Indians 20 percent, and black slaves 8 percent.⁶⁷ As exemplified by the census, the native population had drastically declined, being displaced by *mestizos* and whites. The process of miscegenation, or *mestizaje*, that drew natives into *mestizo* society, was the driving force behind the growth of the population. Either through marriage or cohabitation with *mestizos*, members of the indigenous populations became part of the *mestizo* population and thus reduced the reproductive base of their original communities. The growth in the white population on the other hand, stemmed from a natural increase amongst American-born Spaniards who constituted an emerging social class: the creoles. Although the creole class enjoyed a higher socio-economic status, the Spaniards - especially those among the higher social classes – stood above them. However, among the majority of whites who were not included within the ranks of the elites, marriage or cohabitation with members of other racial groups resulted in an increase in the population of those who may have passed as white.

The white ruling class viewed the substantial increase in the size of the *mestizo* population with fear. They perceived the rapid expansion of this demographic to be a potential threat to their socio-economic dominance. As a result, claims to ‘*limpieza de sangre*’ (pure Spanish decent) were fiercely contested during the eighteenth century, as whites fought to distinguish themselves from the expanding *mestizo* and *mulatto* groups in order to reinforce the

existing colonial socio-economic hierarchies. Notwithstanding these developments, as the number of *mestizos* increased they assumed a wider array of roles in colonial society.⁶⁸

Despite the socially divisive measures implemented by members of the white class, colonial society in New Granada became less rigid than those where native cultures had remained strong, and indigenous populations remained segregated from the white populations - such as was the case in the southern Andean regions of Peru, or southern Mexico.⁶⁹ Simply put, since colonial society in New Granada was more of an ethnic hybrid, racial divisions tended to be less important in social and political life. Moreover, without alternative native languages and cultures, lower social classes were more thoroughly hispanicized.⁷⁰ That being said, it would be a mistake to infer that society in New Granada had achieved greater integration than other colonial regions of the Spanish empire, or that the colonial elites had attained greater control. Rather, without a strong sense of ethnic separateness, the *mestizo* and poor white populations tended to identify with their localities. Thus, as white and *mestizo* villages grew, they generally cultivated local rights and privileges and sought official recognition as autonomous municipalities able to manage their own affairs.

As the highly specialized development of regional economies engendered substantial differences between the racial compositions of regional populations as well as regional social structures, the fragmentation of political authority within the territory did much to exacerbate an incipient sense of regional autonomy. Initially, under the jurisdiction of the Audiencia of Santafe de Bogota from 1546-1717, the centralized authority over New Granada was fragmented and generally weak. Moreover, throughout much of the 16th and 17th centuries, the Audiencia lacked formal authority over much of what is now western Colombia, which was governed by the Audiencia of Quito after its inception in 1563. Due to Colombia's divisive topological features,

transportation and communication difficulties also restricted the ability of the Audiencia of Santafe to assert control over its designated territory. As a result, provincial governors remained independent of the authority of the Audiencia, while internecine conflict between the Church authorities and the Audiencia further inhibited the governing capacity of the colonial state.⁷¹

At the beginning of the 18th century, the Spanish Monarchs acknowledged that its colonies were being governed inefficiently and that they lacked formal authoritative powers. Moved partly by the exigencies of war (due to multiple military engagements with England and France over the duration of the 18th century), Spain's rulers understood that greater military power required increased governmental revenues, which depended on their capacity to increase administrative efficiency and economic production. This realization facilitated the promulgation of various reforms designed to augment military strength, collect more revenues, achieve greater administrative effectiveness, as well as solidify Spanish authority within its colonies. Under the stewardship of the Bourbons, Spain created the Viceroyalty of New Granada in 1717 and designated Santafe de Bogota as its capital. The new viceroyalty consisted of present-day Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, and much of Venezuela. Due to the lack of sufficient revenues to sustain an efficient bureaucracy, the viceroyalty was disbanded in 1723. The renewed threat of war with England in 1738 compelled Spain to reinstitute the viceroyalty to protect the port of Cartagena from mounting English hostilities within the region. This time, the viceroyalty encompassed a larger swath of colonial territory, including what is now Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, most of Venezuela, and the islands of Trinidad and Margarita. From its reinstatement all the way through the second half of the 18th century, the Viceroyalty of New Granada underwent a wide array of administrative, economic and social reforms. Ironically, these reforms set the stages for rebellion rather than for the further consolidation of Spanish colonial rule.

In the vice-royal government, the Spaniards dominated the highest administrative positions in society, primarily due to the Spanish Monarchs' beliefs that men governing outside of their homelands would be more loyal to the Crown and less entangled in local interests. Additionally, Spanish royal administrators, both in Spain and the Viceroyalty, were naturally more inclined to trust men born in Spain than those born in the colonial territory. Generally denied the highest political positions, creoles of higher socio-economic status were primarily relegated to the middle or lower levels of the colonial administration. Frequently serving as provincial administrators (corregidores), lieutenant governors, or lawyers practicing before the Audiencia, the creole elite were often highly educated aspirants for government office. By the end of the 18th century, the rapidly emerging cadre of creole lawyers began to voice openly their resentment, which led to a series of tense and hostile confrontations between the two administrative groups preceding independence.

Of the plethora of concerns that preoccupied those who governed the viceroyalty of New Granada, the need to produce more gold and deliver it back to Spain, along with maintaining the defenses of Cartagena - the port through which all commerce flowed back to the mother country – were of utmost importance. In a drive to combat contraband and thus increase the amount of gold that would reach Spain, the Bourbons established more avenues of legal trade and attempted to diversify colonial exports. In New Granada, however, illicit commerce continued despite the creation of the new trading avenues. Moreover, the diversification of colonial exports generally conflicted with the production of bullion. Continued defense of bullion shipments also entailed massive investment in the fortification of the Caribbean coast, particularly the port of Cartagena. As a result the Spanish crown was unable to finance basic development projects, as well as improve overland transportation. While legal trade routes were generally infringed upon due to

Spain's armed engagement with England for most of the eighteenth century, most cities in New Granada – primarily the coastal cities of Santa Marta and Riohacha - had no alternative but to engage in illegal trading to export their crops and animal products. Moreover, Spanish authorities tended to extend the benefits of neutral trade as well as eliminate export taxes to Cuba and Venezuela, while denying these same advantages to New Granada. These seemingly unfair conditions of trade became a significant source of irritation to creole elites determined to expand their exports. From around 1790 onward, educated creoles began to point out the ineptitudes of the Spanish regime. They primarily focused their criticisms on the lack of efficient means of internal communication and the obstruction of unrestricted external trade.⁷²

Although tackling the dilemma of smuggling and fostering economic development were two primary objectives of the Bourbon reforms, the crown's chief preoccupation was to increase revenue. As already noted, additional revenues were needed to cover the costs associated with war, pay for the elaborate administrative establishment of a vice-regal government, and help to finance and sustain frontier missions.⁷³ Therefore, in the 1750s, vice-regal administrators began to advocate for more efficacious revenue collection methods, which included the monopolization of tobacco and cane liquor, a rise in the prices of goods, and an increase in sales tax. While these innovations increased revenues, and enabled the viceroyalty to become less dependent upon the wealthier viceroalties for military expenditures, in general, it was unable to entirely support the costs of its own administration and defense.⁷⁴

By the late 18th century, patterns of war-induced tax exactions, accompanied by riots and protests, had become a common occurrence. This cycle was exacerbated by the diffusion of the North American and French revolutionary ideals amongst the creole elite.⁷⁵ According to Michael Taussig, the appearance of slave rebellions and flights in the late eighteenth century

represented, “a major social factor alongside the growing restlessness of free blacks and a general wave of discontent in the colony as a whole.”⁷⁶ The most striking manifestation of this discontent in New Granada was the Comunero movement of 1780-1781, in which the imposition of a new tax on tobacco and cane liquor provoked the eruption of riots in the province of Socorro. Initially, a protest generated by the masses rather than orchestrated by the local elites, the Comuneros demanded that in all future administrative appointments, creoles, not Spaniards, should be extended preferential treatment. As the movement subsided, it was later revealed that most of the creole elite were frightened by the mass rioting of the Comunero rebellion, and either acquiesced or supported its repression.⁷⁷ While many scholars who have studied the Comunero rebellion have disagreed upon its significance, it is most prudent to consider the movement as a foreshadowing event to independence. The public display of anger toward Spanish administrators as well as the overwhelming desire for local governance on the part of the masses indicated a growing resentment towards the continuation of foreign colonial domination. Although the drive for independence had yet to gain extensive backing, the events that transpired in 1781 represented a step toward the formation of a nationalist sentiment.

In summary, the patterns of conquest that originally divided the territory into three relatively disconnected regions, communication and transportation problems caused by harsh topographical attributes, as well as the initial fragmentation of authority within the region, gradually resulted in a pervasive sense of regional autonomy that would have significant implications upon the subsequent development of Kingdom of New Granada. Additionally, while a large, compliant indigenous population located primarily in the eastern highlands allowed for the rapid transformation of numerous Spanish settlements into commercial hubs, much of the western region, imbued with gold deposits, generally lacked a consistent and readily

accessible labor force. However, the importation and transportation of African slaves to the mining towns in the West gradually yielded an increase in regional population that in turn generated an overall surge in gold productivity. As a Spanish colonial possession, New Granada's economic significance was primarily as a producer of gold, and quickly assumed the role as the principal source of gold in the Spanish Empire.⁷⁸

As already noted, although the Comunero rebellion was not orchestrated by the creole elite, many of its members became incredibly critical of the Spanish regime, especially regarding the ability of Spanish administrators to govern effectively. This nascent skepticism surrounding the efficacy of Spanish colonial administration was influenced by the French Revolution of 1789, and by Haiti's independence from France in 1804. However, creole discontent in New Granada tended to remain hidden, because many creoles enjoyed the socio-economic advantages associated with being members of the dominant class. Generally, creoles did not agree with the notions of inherent human freedom and equality, nor did they accept that government should be representative of the popular will.

Independence and its Aftermath

In 1808, the Spanish monarchs were forced to abdicate the throne to Napoleon, thrusting Spain as well as its colonies into political disarray. Those loyal to the Crown quickly established a Central Junta tasked with the unification of the provinces (and the colonies) under a central authority. Over time it became clear that the Junta was unable to organize resistance efforts against the French and maintain the unity of provincial Juntas under its authority. As the legitimacy of the Junta waned, uncertainty and insecurity regarding the future administration of the colonies pervaded the colonial elite. Creole notables became increasingly concerned with,

and even skeptical of how colonial society would be changed if the last surviving Spanish Junta were to be eliminated. They were especially preoccupied with whether their colonial governors would recognize the French regime, just as they had recognized the Spanish Junta, so that they could protect their superior vice-regal and administrative positions.

As Spain staggered through successive crises, the accumulated resentments and developing aspirations of New Granada's educated elites were rapidly transmuted into antagonism toward the vice-regal government and demands for political autonomy.⁷⁹ Moreover, as Spanish control over Spain diminished, the importance of Spanish America within the empire increased significantly. Cognizant of their growing importance, the creole class further embedded themselves within the colonial administration and in other significant positions, thus augmenting their own influence within the colonial structure.

The disappearance of legitimate authority in Spain, the uncertainty about the political future of Spain, and the insecurity of colonial officials, led to the growth of a mutual distrust between Spaniards and the creole elite. As tensions intensified between Spanish governors and resident Spaniards, on the one hand, and creole notables on the other, major conflict between the two factions gripped Quito in 1809. In August, the creole elite of Quito deposed the president of the Quito Audiencia and established an autonomous Junta that declared loyalty to Ferdinand VII. The new Junta also denounced peninsular officials as the creatures of a corrupt, pro-French regime, and urged other cities within the viceroyalty to follow Quito's example. Viceroy Amar y Borbon, upon receiving word of the coup, assembled a cohort of government officials, the Bogota Cabildo, members from the upper echelons of the clergy and military, as well as leading citizens, to counter the apparent threat to his authority and the existing political order. Because the action did not lead to a formal resolution, the Viceroy sent a diplomat to negotiate with the

Quito Junta, and dispatched troops to restore royal authority should conciliation fail. Far from drawing the elites together, the meetings simply exacerbated the mistrust that existed between Spanish governors and creole notables.

The clear political division that had been established within the first decade of the 19th century between creoles and *peninsulares* in Spanish America was further intensified by the collapse of the last remnants of monarchical authority in Spain. In February 1810, a newly formed Council of Regency, which governed little more than the port of Cadiz, issued a proclamation designed both to stabilize the Spanish empire and to sway the creole elite to not to break away from Spain. The new edict stated:

From this moment, American Spaniards, you see yourselves elevated to the dignity of free men; you are no longer the same men bent under a yoke made...heavier by being...distant from the center of power; looked upon with indifference, harassed by greed, and destroyed by ignorance...[Y]our destinies now depend neither upon ministers nor viceroys, nor governors; they are in your hands.⁸⁰

Instead of bolstering the Regency's authority in Spanish America by conceding political rights to colonial subjects, the explicit repudiation of the old regime, with the overt recognition of colonial claims to self-government, gave the viceroy's opponents the opportunity to mobilize against the colonial government.

Beginning on June 14, 1810, local notables began to exercise their newly ratified right to political autonomy by ejecting royal governors throughout New Granada. Creole notables in Cartagena mobilized to displace the Spanish governor, which occurred shortly after their counterparts in Caracas blocked the captain-general of Venezuela from entering the city council,

established a Junta, and proclaimed it to be the political authority within the region.⁸¹ The coup in Cartagena unfolded in a similar fashion, with creoles removing their local governor, and then establishing a self-governing Junta. Playing a decisive role in the coup in Cartagena were creole military officers who commanded largely American-born units, as well as a group of common folk from the relatively poor barrio of Getsemani. In November 1811, Cartagena established a Supreme Junta, and declared its complete independence from Spain.⁸²

As news regarding the establishment of autonomous juntas in both Caracas and Cartagena spread from region to region, creoles in other towns within New Granada began to take similar steps. As a result, the deposition of the governor of Cartagena in mid-June was followed by Cabildo-led revolts against local officials in Cali, Pamplona, and Socorro. In most cases, the creole elite influenced the masses to revolt against the viceregal government in order to establish an autonomous junta free of peninsular influence. Once the new governing apparatus was erected, the creole elite pledged their allegiance to the Ferdinand VII. This step was taken to avoid the internal conflict that would most likely ensue if they were to completely break with Spanish authority. The creole elite relied on the support of the masses to overthrow the viceregal government in Santafe de Bogota on July 20, 1810. However, as was to occur in Cartagena, a faction of creole agitators rallied the masses in Santafe de Bogotá to insist on a more definitive break with the past. Under the pressure of popular will, the Bogotá Junta disavowed the authority of the Spanish Regency, and broke with the colonial government entirely.

Unlike the Comunero rebellion of 1781, the movement towards rebellion in New Granada did not originate from popular discontent among the masses; instead it was engineered by a faction of the creole elite upon seeing the dissipation of the royal authority within the surrounding provinces. The willingness of crowds composed of urban lower classes to support

the revolt, as well as the creoles' success in neutralizing military forces in the capital, also contributed to the successful transition of power from colonial officials to creole elite.

At its first session on July 21, the newly established Junta in Bogota declared itself to be the provisional supreme government of New Granada, calling upon Cabildos throughout the territory to send delegates to the capital to form a federal government, "on the bases of the freedom and respective independence" of the provinces.⁸³ Many provincial capitals were reluctant to cooperate with the Bogota Junta. Wherever a Junta in a provincial capital thrust aside colonial authorities, it proclaimed its province to be a sovereign state and its unwillingness to forfeit its absolute sovereignty. Cartagena espoused the most vehement opposition to Bogota's scheme to organize a new central government in the viceregal capital. The provinces of Tunja, Socorro, Pamplona, and Antioquia also expressed their determination to retain their sovereignty.

In addition to the construction of autonomous governing bodies in provincial capitals, further fragmentation occurred as secondary towns sought to split away from provincial capitals and to establish themselves as the head of new provinces. In most instances, enduring regional and local rivalries deeply rooted in the colonial period fueled the desire to secede and assert a 'natural right' to sovereignty. Creole ambitions to imbue their towns with power and prestige became additional objectives behind the attempted separations. In short, once New Granada was released from the yoke of Spanish colonial rule, the regional economic differences as well as highly localized factional politics that had been suppressed within the framework of the colonial apparatus surfaced, splintered the country into autonomous units.⁸⁴

As the territory succumbed to regional and local fragmentation, it became apparent almost immediately that there was no central entity powerful enough to unify the existing factions and that there was a profound division amongst regional elites as to the type of system

of governance they should adopt. Of no less significance, the provinces, preoccupied with local and regional affairs, neglected to organize to defend themselves against royalist forces. Those who chose to remain loyal to the Crown still controlled substantial parts of the country and posed a significant threat to the nascent independent regions. The years between 1810-1816 in Colombia, which is generally referred to as the *Patria Boba* (Foolish Fatherland) period, was accentuated primarily by conflicting regional political aspirations.

During this period, two dominant regional confederations emerged, each attempting to consolidate its own authority and subjugate the other. Struggling against one another were Cundinamarca (previously Santafe de Bogota), which encompassed present-day Colombia east of the Magdalena River, and the provincial coalition of Cartagena, Antioquia, Tunja, Pamplona, and Neiva, later represented by the Congress of New Granada. By 1811, Bogotá had formed the new state of Cundinamarca, and sought to reassert the city's authority over much of the former viceroyalty. Convinced that a federal system would be too weak, Antonio Nariño, the first leader of Cundinamarca, began to consolidate his power in order to establish a centralist government.⁸⁵

As royalist forces began to threaten the nascent confederations, the government of Cundinamarca declared absolute independence from Ferdinand VII in July 1813. Antioquia took the same steps in August, but Popayan, Panama, and Santa Marta did not. Napoleon's abdication in April 1814 strengthened the likelihood that Ferdinand VII would return to power and that Spain would deploy its forces to suppress the creole governments. Apprehensive of this impending threat, the Congress of New Granada, which had been formerly committed to a weak federalist structure, gradually began to exert more centralized authority, particularly over its finances and military operations.

The Congress of Granada also sought to incorporate Cundinamarca into a more united system as to engender a cohesive military front to royalist forces. However, the governor of Cundinamarca refused to cooperate. In December 1814, the forces of the Congress of Granada, under the command of Simon Bolivar, forced Bogotá to accept a general union. However, soon after Bolivar's victory, Spanish forces arrived in Santa Marta from Venezuela, and by July 1815, Cartagena was under siege. After Cartagena had succumbed to Spain's army, the conquest of the remaining sovereign territories in New Granada was achieved quite rapidly. Due to profound regional fragmentation, lack of a unified military front, and the presence of a pervasive weariness at both the elite and popular levels, Spain re-conquered New Granada in 1816. Spain's re-conquest, however, was short-lived.

From 1816-1819, Spanish military officers and royalist collaborators almost completely controlled New Granada as well as Venezuela and Ecuador, while rebel forces offered sporadic resistance from the lowland plains of Casanare.⁸⁶ Over the following three years, the harshness of Spanish colonial rule in the wake of the initial movements for independence rekindled popular opposition and once again augmented creole resentment toward the imperial order.⁸⁷ The thrust of the rebellion gained momentum in the last quarter of the 19th century. In August 1819, Bolivar and his forces crossed the Andes and defeated the Spanish handily at the battle of Boyacá. Bolivar's victory changed the course of the independence struggle in New Granada, as well as in Venezuela and Ecuador.

Prior to the battle of Boyacá, Spanish authorities had commanded the more populated regions within Venezuela and New Granada, and remained unchallenged in Ecuador. After their defeat at Boyacá, Spanish authorities panicked and fled from the vice-regal capital. Their action enabled Bolivar and his forces to assume control over a large expanse of the territory that

included the eastern highlands from Bogotá to Pamplona, the gold-mining regions of Antioquia and the Choco, and the Upper Magdalena Valley. Using New Granada as his base of operations, Bolivar proceeded to defeat royalist forces in Venezuela, Ecuador and ultimately Peru and Bolivia. However, significant contingencies of royalist forces remained on the Caribbean coast through 1821, and in southwestern Colombia until 1825. Nevertheless, between 1819 and 1822, the creole elite who had constituted the leadership of the rebel forces began the task of constructing an independent republic.⁸⁸

The Confederation of Gran Colombia was formally proclaimed in 1821. It consisted of the territories of Venezuela, and New Granada. Ecuador was incorporated after it was liberated from Spanish control in 1822. In May 1821, delegates from Venezuela and New Granada convened in the border town of Rosario de Cucuta to determine the form of government the fledgling republic would adopt. The constituent assembly, known as the Congress of Cucuta, promulgated a constitution that closely resembled that of the U.S. model. The document provided for the strict separation of powers in which a president and vice president would both serve four-year terms. It also stipulated that legislative authority would be held by a bicameral congress and that a judiciary, whose members were to be determined jointly by the executive and the legislature, was charged with enforcing the law. However, the Colombian constitution's emphasis on centralized authority differed tremendously from the federalist nature of the U.S. constitution. The Colombian president was granted the power to appoint intendants, who retained legal jurisdiction over expansive regions as well as their subordinate provincial governors. The U.S. president was never extended such power.

Participation in the political process was essentially relegated to the educated elite. The Congress instituted a plethora of voting restrictions as well as requirements to hold office

specifically designed to disenfranchise the masses. As a result, political participation was limited to males who were either twenty-one years of age or married, owned property worth a hundred pesos or independently exercised a craft or profession, and who were literate. The impediments limited political participation to ten percent of free adult males.⁸⁹ Notwithstanding the political restrictions, the Congress adopted several broad-minded measures. It enforced a nationwide free-birth principle designed to gradually abolish slavery and it passed a provision that relieved the remaining indigenous population of any obligation to pay tribute or provide involuntary labor. The objective of these laws was to end the colonial period's legal distinctions among racial *castas* through the gradual incorporation of historically marginalized factions of society into the general body of citizens. And yet, despite the adopted measures, the dominant class remained unwilling to consider blacks and natives as their equals.⁹⁰

Amongst some of the first acts of legislature produced by the Congress of Cucuta were mandates designed to bolster economic growth and development. Mostly, the laws entailed the removal of institutional obstacles to private initiatives, promoted foreign trade, and encouraged the construction of free land and labor markets. Many of New Granada's elite adhered to the belief that direct access to foreign markets and capital, state involvement in the economy, and participation by local entrepreneurs in external commerce, would help generate economic growth and lay the foundation for future prosperity.⁹¹ The Congress of Cucuta made Bogota the capital of the republic, partly because of the centrality of its location, as well as due to its previous role as the vice-regal capital. The Congress elected Bolivar as president, and General Francisco de Paula Santander, a Venezuelan soldier, as vice-president. An issue that Congress purposefully avoided was whether or not it would tolerate religious diversity.

Since the constitution proposed by the Congress of Cucuta increased greater civilian role in governance, political leaders coming from relatively high-status families and having attained university educations, began to contest the authority that the military held in government. To the emerging civilian elite, it was important to bring the military under the rule of law since Bolivar's army constituted a centralizing force that conflicted with their respective localized and regional ambitions.⁹² The military on the other hand, asserted it had claims to authority by virtue of having liberated the country. In February 1826, Vice President Francisco de Paula Santander, who often allied himself with liberal lawyers, summed up the situation as follows:

The discontent of the military is spreading because everywhere they are treated with distrust, and even with scorn, the effect on the one hand of the bad conduct and worse manners of some of our officers, and on the other of the fact that the ambitious lawyers want to destroy anyone that can oppose them.⁹³

The tension between the civilians and the military in New Granada was exacerbated by two developments. It started when the Congress decided to place the national capital in Bogota rather than in Caracas. To Caracas's elites and military officers, the establishment of the national capital in Bogota reaffirmed their belief that Venezuelans would be relegated to a subservient role as a provincial dependent under the ultimate jurisdiction of Bogota, and that New Granadans intended to monopolize government positions in Bogota, making Venezuelans semi-colonists. Enraged by their apparent loss of sovereignty, the Caracas elite questioned the legitimacy of the 1821 constitution on the grounds that Caracas had not been adequately represented at the Congressional convocation, and thus that the constitution had not been properly ratified. The fact that many of the military officers were Venezuelans, while the lawyers who dominated the

judiciary, legislative, and central executive positions were natives of New Granada served to increase their mutual distrust.

Relations between New Granadan civilian elite and Venezuelan military officers worsened in 1826, when the Congress in New Granada accused General Jose Antonio Paez - a *llanero* chieftain from Venezuela who had played a leading role in the military liberation of Venezuela - of abuse of power. Determined to demonstrate civilian authority over the military, and despite Santander's pleas not to act, the Congress pressed ahead. As a result of the congressional accusation, Paez called for Venezuela's independence from Colombia. Encouraged by both civilian and military dissidents in Venezuela, Paez led a separatist movement that began in Valencia at the end of April 1826, and quickly spread throughout Caracas and other cities in central Venezuela.⁹⁴

Upon learning about Paez's separatist movement, Bolivar responded by encouraging military pronouncements that favored martial law with himself in power. The pronouncements were to be followed by the implementation of a newly drafted constitution. The document was dubbed the Bolivarian constitution. With the new constitution, Bolivar believed he had found the ideal remedy for the prevailing political ills of Spanish America. The perceived ills included but were not limited to insufficient government revenues, an excess amount of government employees, a complex administration of justice, and the existence of too many laws few of which were understood by the public.⁹⁵ The general persistence of the problems left many dissatisfied within the fledgling republic and often led to the rise of independence movements – as evidenced by Paez's rebellion. Concerned about the growing divisiveness, Bolivar sought to achieve a balance by strengthening the authority of the executive, and providing greater representation to local interests. He believed that greater executive power to a president serving for life would help

engender stability and security to the nascent republic, and that the creation of legislative bodies that consisted of local representatives hailing from various states would help quell the internal movements of independence.

Santander, however, disliked several aspects of Bolivar's suggested solution. The vice president asserted that there was no legal avenue for constitutional reform until ten years after the ratification of the constitution, as stipulated by the document itself. Furthermore, the vice president condemned the military-organized pronouncements as unconstitutional. Lastly, New Granadan liberals, along with Santander, objected to the Bolivarian constitution for it would effectively violate the fundamental republican principle of alternation in power.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Bolivar, rather than bringing Paez and Venezuela under the control of constitutional processes and the authority of the national government as Santander believed he would do, granted Paez complete amnesty and confirmed him as the ruling chief in Venezuela. It was this action taken by Bolivar that ruptured his relations with Santander. As a result, two rivaling camps emerged within the political sphere, providing an additional confrontational nuance to the existing political order - on one side stood Santander and his supporters and on the other stood Bolivar and his followers.

By 1827 the tensions between Venezuelans and New Granadans, the military and civilian elites, and the Santanderistas and Bolivarians had pushed Gran Colombia to its breaking point. Of no lesser consequence was the external debt crisis. The collapse of the British bond market imposed on the federation an external debt that raised it to approximately five times its annual revenues. Prior to the crisis, Gran Colombia's debt had been caused primarily by its intensive borrowing to finance the prolonged wars of independence, the bankrolling of large governmental and military apparatuses, and by its nearly moribund foreign trade. As a result of the financial

crisis of 1825-1826, Gran Colombia's fiscal problems intensified, subsequently resulting in a crisis of authority.

In an attempt to preserve the fragile union and consolidate his authority, Bolivar used the military in 1828 to impose an authoritarian constitution, with himself at the helm. However, shortly after his death two years later, the authoritarian regime was dismantled and the power of the military, the apparatus that had been most loyal to Bolivar, was drastically reduced. By 1831, the liberals (Santanderistas) had eclipsed the power of the Bolivarians, and two rival parties began to form.

Venezuela and Ecuador broke away from Gran Colombia and established their own sovereign states, while Santander gave the new Republic of New Granada a new constitution. Santander's 1832-1837 tenure as president was defined by conflict between two liberal factions that had opposed Bolivar's authoritarian rule. Liberal *exaltados* ("extremists" or "purists") opted for the permanent exclusion of Bolivarians from political office, whereas moderate liberals advocated their reincorporation into the political arena to curtail political tension. Although conflict between the two nascent political factions intensified as time went by, ideologically they differed little. Moderates, however, considered the approach generally utilized by the *exaltados* imprudent and counterproductive. An issue that divided the two groups substantially was the role the Catholic Church should play in society. *Exaltados* were determined to break the political power held by the Catholic Church; moderates on the other hand did not want to address the issue because they believed that the Church could help maintain social order.

These differences were magnified and accentuated by personal rivalries and hostilities amongst the leaders of the two groups as they competed for public office. The extent personal rivalries that pervaded the political system and polarized Colombian society was exemplified by

the election of 1836, in which Jose Ignacio de Marquez captured the majority vote and assumed the presidency. Although there was little that differentiated Marquez's administration from Santander's in terms of policy, the ideological difference about the proper role of the Catholic Church in society once again became the focal point. Whereas both liberal factions viewed religious orders as outdated, unproductive, and a waste of land, the Santanderistas accused Marquez and his supporters of attempting to enhance the authority of the Catholic Church in society. This accusation was intended to incite political as well as popular disapproval against the Marquez regime. As a result, tensions between the *exaltados*, represented by Santander, and moderates who were more closely aligned with Marquez, erupted into a civil war.⁹⁷ Lasting from 1840 until 1842, the war involved the more populated areas of the country, and brought about economic devastation and substantial losses of life. The political loyalties and animosities cemented during this civil war came to define the relationship between the *exaltados* (Liberals) and the *moderates* (Conservatives) for a long time to come.⁹⁸

The Conservatives, as the advocates of administrative centralization, Church privileges, religious intolerance, and limited suffrage, dominated the political arena until 1849. Thereafter, until around 1880, the Liberals, as the promoters of federalism, the separation of Church and state, secularization, religious tolerance, and universal suffrage, ostensibly controlled the political system. They were out of power during two brief periods - the first one in 1854 when the military took over, and the second one between 1855-1861 when the Conservatives regained control of the government.⁹⁹ During the Liberals' political dominance, they took certain powers away from the central government and passed them on to the provincial governments. Moreover, they continued to reduce the power of the military as well as the Catholic Church, and authorized the people of the various regions to elect their own governors.¹⁰⁰ This process of decentralization

was bolstered by the promulgation of the constitutional reform of 1853, which extended suffrage to all adult males without any property or literacy restriction. Additional constitutional reforms instituted in 1858 and 1863, which focused on resolving the question of state sovereignty, imbued New Granada as one of the most federalist systems in the world.

The 1863 constitution, often referred to as the Rionegro Constitution, ambiguously stipulated that the duty of the national executive was to ‘watch over, ‘guard’, ‘or protect’ the general order of the sovereign federated states.¹⁰¹ However, the constitution did not specify conditions under which the national government may have the right to intervene in the affairs of the states. Moreover, the nearly absolute sovereignty extended to the states by the newly ratified constitution did not impose any limits upon individual liberties, and granted states the authority to establish regional armies. Such measures spawned an era defined by rampant civil wars and violence. Between 1863 and 1885, the country was afflicted by more than fifty insurrections, as well as forty-two constitutions in the nine states.¹⁰² Federalism and free trade also helped bring the country to the brink of economic ruin, destroying its incipient industrial base, and impeding national integration.¹⁰³ National economic stability and integration were partly achieved in the late 19th and early 20th centuries solely due to a coffee boom.

During the Liberal era, from 1845 to 1880, economic policies designed to enhance free trade were implemented based on the assumption that an increase in foreign trade as well as greater external economic integration would yield substantial growth. New Granada’s elites understood that their state was composed of a relatively impoverished cluster of unevenly developed regions loosely connected by a primitive network of transport by river and mountain trains. As such, they began to experiment with a few export commodities in the hopes of generating profit.

The first commodity they focused on was tobacco, which had experienced an externally motivated boom in the 1850s and 1860s, but then took a sharp decline. Next was Chinchona bark, also a significant export from the 1850s until its bust in the 1880s.¹⁰⁴ It was not until 1870 when coffee became one of Colombia's primary export commodities that elites began to generate substantial profits. As noted by Dugas, "coffee accounted for less than 2 percent of export earnings during the early 1840s but grew to nearly 50 percent of export earnings by 1898."¹⁰⁵ Those earnings enhanced the ability of the state to consolidate its power and allowed the government to meet its debt obligations, maintain a large standing army, and claim credit for the economic revival.¹⁰⁶

Extreme federalism was abandoned in 1885 after Conservative forces, in one of the many regional conflict-turned civil wars that came to characterize 19th century Colombia, had defeated Liberal radicals. In the wake of the war, Conservatives and independent Liberals formed a coalition to support President Rafael Nuñez Moledo, who promoted the creation of a new constitution. The coalition, known as *La Regeneracion*, led to the formation of a new political organization called the National Party. The promulgation of the Constitution of 1886 marked the end of a quarter century of Liberal party leadership and set the stage for an era of Conservative rule lasting until 1930.

The new constitution gave way to a centralized structure in which the president appointed the governors of the departments and elected legislative assemblies replaced sovereign states. Additionally, the president and senators were elected indirectly for six-year terms, representatives for four-year terms, and civil rights were subject to restriction. Suffrage for elections of national scope was limited to all literate men over the age of 21. Under the new charter, the government possessed the sole right to import, manufacture, and obtain arms and

munitions of war. Finally, the constitution branded Catholicism as Colombia's official religion and empowered civil authorities to enforce respect for the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁷ A concordat with the Vatican in 1887 further consolidated the role of the Church. In short, the 1886 alliance between Rafael Nuñez, the Independents and the Conservative resulted in the promulgation of a constitution that symbolized the triumph of a clear set of principles – centralism, strong institutional authority, and close church-state cooperation.¹⁰⁸ The new constitution would remain in place until 1991.

Initial Considerations of Colombia's State Creation Process

The period extending from post-independence until the end of the nineteenth century was characterized by regional fragmentation, political instability, pervasive violence, economic stagnation, intense partisan socialization of the masses and institutionalized decentralization. By 1849, the Liberal and Conservative parties had become organized and advanced different programs. The Liberals were federalists, who advocated free trade, universal suffrage and religious toleration. The Conservatives on the other hand, favored a unitary government, protectionist policies, religious intolerance and limited suffrage. While party officials on both sides could generally tolerate various aspects of opposition party's platform, the two factions vehemently disagreed about the proper role in society of the Catholic Church. Conservatives sought to preserve the social order engendered by the Catholic Church, and often used their pro-clerical position to mobilize the masses. Conversely, the Liberals opposed clerical activism outside of the religious sphere.¹⁰⁹ Plagued by a multitude of violent civil wars and inter-regional conflicts throughout most of the 19th century, the ratification of the 1886 Constitution effectively enabled the Colombian state to consolidate its power and provide relative peace and stability for

a significant period. Nevertheless, civil conflict would continue into the early 20th century, resulting in enormous loss of life as well as the loss of Panama in 1903.

By the turn of the century, Colombia had already chartered a path that differed from that followed by most other Latin American nations. Generally, the experience of most other Latin American countries throughout the 19th century showed that armies and police forces led by regional *caudillos* tended to usurp civilian power to gain control over a politically and economically important region or entity.¹¹⁰ Nineteenth century Colombia was also marked by several hard-fought, and particularly violent civil wars led by elites as well as the existence of fierce regional antagonisms. However, the ability of civilian-led political parties to retain substantial autonomy over the authority of the state; mobilize and polarize the Colombian polity to the extent that internal conflict was primarily a function of party identification; and hinder the development of strong centralized military imbued Colombia with a powerful and domineering party system not seen in most other Latin American states during this time. The establishment of such a polarizing and sectarian system came to constitute a major barrier towards the establishment of a legitimate state as well as a stable democratic regime.

The Twentieth Century until the Present

Following the War of the Thousand Days and the loss of Panama, a spirit of interparty collaboration came to characterize political life. Under the purview of the Conservative administration of Rafael Reyes (1904-1909), Liberals were permitted some representation in government at the national level. Moreover, a new system of voting for Congress was introduced, in which two-thirds of the seats within an electoral district would be allotted to the party receiving the most votes, while the other third of the seats would go to the losing party. With these electoral

reforms, Reyes hoped to reduce the intensity of the liberal opposition and bring about peace.¹¹¹ Liberals, for the most part, also rejected violence as a means of promoting their aims or of seeking political office. As a result, consociational practices were employed in an attempt to prevent renewed violence. Although Reyes was forced from power in 1909, coalition governments steeped in bipartisan consensus and political demobilization began to characterize the political landscape. In addition to a profound transition towards bipartisanship, the ability for minority parties to participate in the national government was confirmed by a constituent assembly immediately following Reyes' removal from office in 1909. Moreover, this assembly decreed direct presidential elections for a four-year term with no immediate reelection.¹¹²

From 1910 until around 1949, Colombia had, as Alexander Wilde has argued, an oligarchical democracy “of notable stability, openness, and competitiveness.”¹¹³ This political stability was in part derived from several factors, the most influential being a sustained coffee boom beginning in 1870 and lasting until the mid-twentieth century. Despite the loss of Panama at the turn of the century, the expansion of the coffee export sector gave life to Colombia's struggling economy. From 1910 – 1940, the volume of exports increased by an average of 7.4 percent per year. By the mid-1920s, earnings from coffee exports facilitated economic modernization in Colombia, as the nation became the second-largest producer in the world and the leading producer of mild coffees.¹¹⁴ In addition to the coffee bonanza, the sustained rise of banana exports, the promising takeoff of oil, along with a payment of 25 million U.S. dollars by the United States as an indemnity for the seizure of Panama, attracted the interest of lenders in New York.¹¹⁵ By 1929, U.S. investments in Colombia had tripled, reaching six percent of its Latin American total. The wave of foreign investment that occurred in the late 1920s has been

referred to as the ‘dance of millions’, due to the fact that millions of dollars in U.S. loans had been injected into the nation at all levels of government.

Although foreign investment and the U.S. indemnity contributed to Colombia’s economic growth in the 1920s, the income generated by coffee exports was three times higher than the amount of the indemnity and the loans put together.¹¹⁶ As a result, the larger producers and those who processed as well as exported the coffee came to constitute the most dynamic and powerful economic group in Colombia. This group consisted of factions of both Liberals and Conservatives who were significantly involved the export trade. Throughout this period, coffee production in the *latifundia* of primarily Liberal landowners came into competition with the small, predominantly Conservative family-owned farms established in the western highlands.¹¹⁷ Although these two factions competed with one another, no major conflicts between the two sectors emerged. Ultimately, both groups owned land and controlled the means of production, placing them within an oligarchical elite that became focused on the consolidation of political power as a means of preserving their own economic dominance. The most notable of these groups is the *Federation of Coffee Growers*. Founded in 1927, the group consisted primarily of small, politically Conservative coffee growers in western Colombia, who had practically monopolized control over the entire stock of Colombian coffee. By 1940 they had become the sole administrators of international coffee pacts with large multinational firms.¹¹⁸ By assuming a central role in the state’s most important export commodity, this group tended to have a substantial influence over politics in Colombia. This oligarchy actively inhibited the development of nationalist radical political movements who opposed the increase in international economic integration.¹¹⁹

The coffee boom, along with the large-scale infusion of foreign capital, helped the emerging elites to solo the Colombian state.¹²⁰ Managing to utilize the export income generated

from coffee and greatly aided by foreign loans, the Colombian government rapidly developed its transportation industry, established a market for the trade of other consumer goods, and founded a national bank - the *Banco de la Republica* in 1923. Improvements in road and rail transport to facilitate coffee exports were crucial developments leading to enhanced international integration as well as the creation of a national market. By 1950, 13,125 miles of highway integrated the country in a way that would have been unimaginable at the end of the nineteenth century.¹²¹ Moreover, as total income derived from coffee exports improved, wages, profits and rents also increased, leading to a corresponding rise in disposable income. With a general increase in disposable income, consumption naturally followed, generating a market for other goods and services. As a result, industrial production took off and a wide range of basic consumer goods began to be produced, albeit on a small scale. In Medellin, Barranquilla and Bogota, some tobacco, beer, soft drinks and textile firms employed as many as 250 workers.¹²² Finally, the creation of the *Banco de la Republica* facilitated the organization of Colombia's monetary system through the creation of a single monetary unit and credit regulation.

With an expanding economy, the legitimization of federal financial institutions to regulate credit, greater regional integration with advancements in transportation, and a seemingly endless influx of dollars, by the second half of the 20th century Colombia had achieved greater levels of industrialization and diversification of its economic output. As a result, industries associated with the production of nontraditional exports and the mining and production of coal, nickel and oil expanded exponentially.¹²³ Nevertheless, while the state had been strengthened during this period of economic change, it remained fragile and under-resourced. From very early on, the coffee bourgeoisie controlled its own affairs, remaining autonomous from the state apparatus and more invested in regional or local development. Adhering to the doctrine of economic liberalism

enforced by prominent capitalist economies (primarily the United States, to which Colombia was significantly indebted), the bourgeoisie utilized the two-party system to protect their power in their respective regions and keep the Colombian state weak.¹²⁴

The Great Depression slowed down the period of rapid industrialization and urbanization and forced Colombians to question the free market policies and political liberalism of the early decades. The election of moderate Liberal Enrique Olaya Herrera to the presidency in 1930 marked the definitive end to almost 45 years of Conservative hegemony. His election also engendered the emergence of a 'Liberal Republic' that would last until 1946. All four Liberal administrations active during the 1930-1946 period tended to enforce policies that heavily favored unionization, systems of financial controls, deficit spending and greater executive power within the government. The peaceful constitutional transfer of power between political parties was unprecedented in the history of the nation. It was made possible by several conditions. First, the political faction called Concentracion Nacional, spearheaded by Olaya Herrera included moderates from both parties. Second, internal divisions within the Conservative sphere allowed for a degree of bipartisan support for a moderate president. The Conservatives who dominated the Congress, the courts, the departmental legislatures, and city councils, believed Olaya Herrera would maintain the political order of the last few decades long enough for them to reconcile their differences within the Conservative Party and return to the presidency in four years. Third, the Catholic Church also accepted the election result. Lastly, the military, despite its Conservative roots, had acted as the country's electoral police since 1910, and for the previous two decades it had become committed to ending the election-prompted civil wars of the nineteenth century.¹²⁵

With the Liberals now at the head of the government, significant change regarding the relations between the state and workers became a primary political objective. Aiming to capture

the support of a growing urban working class, the Olaya government formulated legislation that guaranteed the basic rights of workers. The new legislation recognized labor unions and their right to unionize, established the eight-hour day and the forty-eight-hour working week, and clearly outlined the legal responsibilities of employers. Those measures helped Liberals capture popular support. The labor reforms enacted under the Olaya government were made effective by the incoming administration headed by Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo, whose presidency is commonly referred to as the “Revolution on the March”. During his tenure in office, the state was given a constitutionally guaranteed role in economic development and diversification of exports.¹²⁶ Legal measures were enacted to protect domestic industry, strengthen credit institutions and levy a graduated income tax as well as taxes on excess profits and patrimony. Tax reforms enabled the state to break from its exclusive dependence on external trade as the primary source of income, although the powerful coffee bourgeoisie limited the scope of governmental intervention in economic and social life. In this way, the state did not actively promote industrialization, but provided conditions under which entrepreneurs could take initiatives.¹²⁷

Between 1933 and 1938, industry grew at an average annual rate of 10.8 percent. As industrialization occurred, urbanization gave rise to a cheap and cooperative labor force. The Lopez administration was limited in its ability to be involved in the affairs of the industrialized sectors of society, however, it viewed labor as “social obligation” and sought protect it. During this time, the number of unions, union members, and labor demands increased. Suffrage was extended to all adult males aged 21 or over by eliminating the literacy requirement established by the 1886 constitution. In 1936, the left (Liberals, Socialists, and Communists) came to dominate an important segment of the unions through the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Colombia (CTC). As such, the CTC ostensibly came under the purview of the Liberal Party, with its main

base of support being workers who depended directly or indirectly on the state.¹²⁸As a result, union organization, labor rights, and Liberal electoral support were all intertwined.

Ironically, Lopez's labor program had a devastating impact on the workers' movement. Rather than augmenting the strength and autonomy of the unions, workers increasingly relied on state intervention to resolve their disputes. This arrangement resulted in the virtual subservience of the unions to the state.¹²⁹ In addition, issues regarding the peasantry and their access to land also formed part of the Liberal-left platform. Culturally diverse, geographically dispersed, and working within various agrarian labor systems, the peasantry, although discontented, was unable to successfully mobilize. Moreover, agrarian reforms that guaranteed the provision of public land to individuals working on it went largely unenforced. Eventually, these reforms were altered in a way that strengthened the juridical position of large landowners at the expense of the peasantry.

By 1937, the *Lopez Revolution on the March* had aggravated factional divisions within the president's party. As such, by the 1937 congressional elections, the Liberal party was irreparably split. Following the elections, Lopez threatened to resign under intense opposition from landowners, merchants, industrialists, the Catholic Church, and leaders from both parties. Although a moderate liberal captured the presidency in 1938, Lopez would return to the executive position in 1942 to resume his March. However, by this time powerful private associations of landowners and businessmen called, *gremios*, had begun to insert themselves into the political sphere. The *gremios* - the most influential being the National Federation of Coffee Growers - served to augment the private sector's ability to monitor and direct state intervention within acceptable limits. The proliferation of the associations effectively restricted the autonomy of the state and ensured its commitment to economic liberalism. Opposing Lopez and his March, the factions along with an uncompromising congress worked to block his liberal agenda. In 1944,

Lopez was seized by a military garrison in Pasto as part of an attempted coup. The insurrection was carried out by an isolated group of officers without the support of the military establishment. After its failure, Lopez resigned from the presidency in 1945, convinced that a bipartisan government would unify the nation. Alberto Lleras Camargo acted as the interim-President until new elections were held in 1946.

The 1946 elections represented the second transfer of power between the two parties in the 20th century. Due to the profound split within the Liberal party, two candidates, Gabriel Turbay, a moderate, and Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a populist, competed against one another for party control. Ultimately, the last-minute candidacy of conservative Mariano Ospina Perez led to his election, although he did not receive a majority of the popular vote.¹³⁰ Politicization, polarization and violence accelerated after the elections, with Liberals fearing a resurgent Conservative party and Conservatives apprehensive of Liberal domination. Moreover, the social and economic changes of the previous two decades had facilitated the emergence of more economically integrated and politically mobilized groups. As a result, party control over the state became critical, not only for patronage and regional favoritism, but also for economic and political security for favorable administrative and judicial decisions.¹³¹ Local violence erupted in the elections leading to the death of some 14,000 people in 1947 alone.¹³²

From 1946 until 1948, Gaitan headed a popular movement that focused on urban growth and inflation. He condemned the Liberal Republic and the oligarchy for 'betraying' the nation. Based on his claim that the oligarchy had monopolized the wealth and political power under the guise of advancements in social justice and economic equality, Gaitan called for their demise and the empowerment of historically marginalized groups. His message resonated with a substantial portion of the Colombian electorate and with elements of the middle classes. On April 9, 1948,

Gaitan was assassinated in the streets of Bogota, leading to a massive urban insurrection dubbed the *Bogotazo* in which, “mobs burned commercial buildings, destroyed churches, and attacked government buildings in the capital city; riots spread to other cities”.¹³³

By 1949, the Conservative Ospina regime was on the verge of collapse, as both Liberal and Conservative leaders refused to negotiate in good faith. Following the failure to reach a bipartisan accord, the Liberals decided to withdraw entirely from the upcoming presidential election, which had been moved up as a means of restoring political order, and began impeachment proceedings against Ospina. The result was regime breakdown. Responding to the Liberals, Ospina declared a state of siege, closed Congress, banned public meetings and censored the press. Running unopposed, Laureano Gomez – a radical conservative obsessed with erecting a corporatist state in Colombia along the lines of Franco’s Spain – was elected to the presidency in 1949.

The period encompassing Gomez’s tenure in office is referred to as *La Violencia*. Primarily a rural phenomenon, *La Violencia* was an amalgamation of social, economic, and political factors, reinforced by partisan conflict. According to the Colombian social scientist, F. Leal Buitrago, “the strength of the parties was such that they were essentially acting as a channel for a culmination of small social and economic processes originating in the provinces; the parties managed to convert isolated problems into a great political aggregation of national character, which came, at a given moment to endanger the very stability of the regime.”¹³⁴ *La Violencia*, which lasted from 1949 until 1953, was characterized first by terror and then by resistance. Under the Gomez regime, the government adopted a widespread policy of overt terrorism, primarily organized by local political bosses and landowners. Those groups supported the government and its crusade against communism and liberalism in the wake of the destruction caused by the

Bogotazo.¹³⁵ In addition, the regime tightened censorship, increased repression against labor, and intensified violence against Liberals and Protestants – sometimes with the cooperation of the local clergy. Though Gomez’s repressive policies claimed the lives of an estimated 145,000 people, the country also experienced healthy economic growth as export crops reached the ports and urban industrial areas were relatively unaffected.¹³⁶

As the reign of terror against the liberal peasantry progressed, many guerrilla groups formed to resist the state-sponsored persecution. Openly confronting government forces, the guerrilla groups were primarily composed of a militarized peasant class and Communists. Clashes between the guerrillas and the military significantly augmented the level of violence occurring in the countryside. By 1953, virtually all factions of both parties supported the removal of Gomez from power. Opting to find a way to facilitate an end to the violence, leaders from both parties supported a military coup d’état, and installed the commander in chief of the army, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla to the presidency. The military takeover was expected to be solely a transitional phase until rule of law could be restored. Although the Rojas government took immediate steps to bring an end to *La Violencia*, it became clear that Rojas intended to prolong his stay at the helm of the government. By 1957, Rojas had begun to construct his own popularly based political movement to permanently supplant the traditional parties by taking away their mass support.¹³⁷ Cognizant of Rojas’s play for power, many prominent Liberal and Conservative leaders came together and negotiated the basis of a pact between the two traditional parties. The pact called for the establishment of a consociational arrangement in which the two traditional parties would alternate in power every four years for a minimum period of 16 years.¹³⁸ A ‘civic front’ was also formed to oppose Rojas and his administration. The front included the Church, trade associations, labor unions, banks and other institutions that actively pressured Rojas to

resign in favor of a military junta. Finally, in 1958, the junta held a plebiscite that resulted in the ratification of the party pact and the establishment of the *National Front*.

Founded on the tenets of parity of power and presidential alternation, the National Front attempted to synthesize the Liberal Republic and the neoconservative regime in order to bring about an end to party-based violence. The National Front was a political arrangement steeped in the concept of consociationalism, in which national power was to be divided equally between the two parties in order to provide for a period of political stability.¹³⁹ Over the duration of 16 years, the National Front brought about a substantial increase in presidential authority, specifically the use of state-of-siege powers with the constitutional reform of 1968. Because they feared that leftist would jeopardize the alternation of political power from Liberals to Conservatives, members of both parties agreed to exclude third parties from direct participation in the political system. The pact allowed for the entrenchment of clientelism as the primary method of interaction between elected officials and civilians, and led to elections that had no real effect on the composition of elected bodies since parity within the government had already been predetermined.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the arrangement made it easier for private sector interests to influence disproportionately political decisions. As a result, state intervention in various sectors of the economy as a means of reducing inequality or providing sufficient benefits and wages to the poor was kept to a minimum. This development ultimately enabled the private sector to block reforms that may have given the state the ability to provide for broader social welfare.¹⁴¹

From the 1960s until the 1980s, Colombia underwent massive economic, social, and demographic changes. Between 1960 and 1980, the total population increased by approximately 13.5 million, and became concentrated in several cities – mostly the regional capitals of Bogota, Medellin, Cali, and Barranquilla.¹⁴² Between 1973 and 1985, younger workers, who increasingly

had access to educational facilities, previously only accessible by workers in the formal sector of the economy, entered the labor market. By 1988, 72 out of every 100 people looking for work in the four main cities (Bogota, Medellin, Cali and Barranquilla) were under thirty. Of that group, 70 percent had at least some secondary education. Unable to find employment in the formal economy due to privatization and state retrenchment programs that were being uniformly adopted in most Latin American countries during that period, the informal sector of the Colombian economy, which covered a wide range of both legal and illegal activities, experienced rapid and unregulated growth.¹⁴³ The growth in the informal sector often occurred within or on the periphery of cities, leading to record levels of rural migration to urban centers. By 1980, 64 percent of the total population was urban, whereas in 1960 only 48 percent of the population lived in cities. Due to this drastic population shift towards urban centers, Colombia rapidly became ‘a nation of cities’, and agriculture ceased to be the principal source of economic growth.

As the urban labor force expanded, the demand for food to sustain the growing urban population as well as the need to generate export earnings for industrial expansion, facilitated the proliferation of large-scale commercial farms. As a result, during the 1960s and 1970s, the traditional *latifundia* were transformed into highly mechanized modern enterprises. This transformation significantly disadvantaged the rural peasantry. Pushed off the land to accommodate the commercial farms, widespread unrest amongst the rural peasantry incited extensive debates regarding agrarian reform and rural modernization. In an attempt to address the unrest, the first two National Front administrations enacted agrarian reforms. Led by the Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute (INCORA), the reforms were designed to eliminate and prevent the inequitable concentration of land, give small tenants and share-croppers greater guarantees of security of tenure and ownership, and elevate the level of living of the rural

population amongst other guarantees. This program was eventually supported, and in part financed, by the United States with its Alliance for Progress.¹⁴⁴

The reforms largely failed to achieve the aforementioned objectives, resulting in high levels of popular discontent, and a narrowly averted national strike in 1965.¹⁴⁵ Liberal president Carlos Lleras Restrepo once again considered agrarian reforms in 1966. This time, his government made an attempt to accelerate the pace of land distribution by eliminating the legal and financial restrictions that had slowed or prevented the application of provisions of the previous administrations. In addition, Lleras established a mass movement, the Asociación Nacional de Usurarios Campesinos (ANUC), to apply pressure from below. However, the renewed effort did not have its desired redistributive effects. It failed primarily because of the presence of internal divisions within the ANUC, as because of poorly designed land tenure policies. The failure of the land reforms led thousands of peasants to mobilize in order to halt the expansion of cattle ranchers and commercial farmers during this period.¹⁴⁶

In addition to the growing pains associated with industrialization, coffee exports stagnated from around 1940 to 1975, and economic growth that was largely dependent on coffee earnings slowed down tremendously. This slowdown was caused by the fluctuation of world prices in a period of free or only partly regulated markets (1948-1963), by competition from emerging producers in Africa, by restrictions imposed by international coffee accords, and by the deterioration and destruction of coffee farms during *La Violencia* in key production areas.¹⁴⁷ The reduction in coffee exports led to a fall in real wages, which generated a wave of labor agitation between 1957 and 1966. Attempting to address the drop in real wages as well as the labor movement, the government enacted Decree-Law 444 in 1967, which marked the commencement of a growth strategy based on dependent development with an emphasis on export diversification.

Simply put, diversified exports, rather than either coffee exports or import-substitution industrialization, which had reached its limits in Colombia due to the stagnation of intermediary goods and capital-goods sectors, were targeted to become the ‘motor’ for development.¹⁴⁸ Minor exports, such as bananas, cotton, sugar, tobacco, gold, paper and cardboard, meat, wood, shoes, seafood, glass, oilseed cakes, chemicals, furs, cement, hides, precious stones, tires, books, fresh-cut flowers, and dog toys grew rapidly, and by 1974, these goods had become more important than coffee. The new set of exports, along with coffee earnings, brought about higher levels of foreign exchange and allowed for the purchase of consumer, capital and intermediate goods.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Decree-Law 444 established a “crawling peg” exchange rate that sharply reduced political conflicts over devaluation and provided the means for a partial reorientation of the economy from an import-substitution model to one of export promotion.¹⁵⁰

Although the new reforms helped the overall state of Colombia’s economy, they did not do much to rectify real wages or decrease economic inequality. Moreover, during this period, the physical expansion of cities, the proliferation of regionally-based labor actions, a growing division between elite interests and popular interests, and self-censorship within the media, reduced the exposure and interest of the urban population to the conflicts emerging in the rural areas. As the government increasingly ignored the demands of the various labor movements as well as the leaders of the two established labor federations - the CTC and the Union de Trabajadores Colombianos – the UTC - regionally based independent confederations controlled by the left began to emerge. By the end of the 1960s, General Rojas, Colombia’s one-time 20th century dictator, had created a populist movement – Accion Nacional Popular (ANAPO) that nearly won the 1970 elections. Rojas ran on a platform of “socialism on Christian bases in the Colombian manner.” It called for free education, free medical and dental service for the poor,

bank credit for small entrepreneurs, the unification of the labor federations, a new plan for housing for the poor, and an exchange rate regime that pegged the peso to the dollar. Supported by urban and rural workers as well as politicians who had become disenfranchised with the National Front, ANAPO's rapid growth signified the erosion of the consociational coalition's popular support. Over time, many of the popular opposition groups would provide the foundations for revolutionary guerilla movements, drawing their support from the ranks of discontented laborers and union members situated in the rural regions of the country.¹⁵¹

In short, the National Front was a political and economic system designed to protect the interests of the elites at the expense of the rest of the country. By limiting political participation, bolstering the powers of the executive in the context of weak judicial and legislative bodies, allowing for unfair and predetermined elections, and advancing economic inequality, the National Front substantially inhibited the development of a democratic regime. According to Harvey F. Kline, by 1974, 16 years of coalition government produced: 1) a lack of political space for individuals unaffiliated with either the Liberal nor the Conservative parties; 2) a failure to resolve many economic problems associated with underdevelopment; 3) continued violence in the countryside, although no longer in the name of traditional parties; 4) a lack of sufficient resources to allow for the poor to earn a decent wage; 5) a relatively small group of political and economic leaders living lavishly in the cities; 6) a government even less able to enforce its laws than before; and 7) a weak and politically divided labor movement in which a majority of the urban and rural poor were not well organized.¹⁵²

In this context, voter participation in national elections decreased sharply, popular confidence in the ability of the government to provide for the Colombian people waned, and the centrality of the parties in the country's political life declined. Nevertheless, towards the end of

the National Front era, a new generation of provincial politicians emerged, providing electoral legitimacy to the state without having to adhere to social pressures or confront the mounting internal conflict within the nation.¹⁵³ The result was the proliferation of non-electoral opposition – namely labor confederations independent of the two parties and civic protest movements.

The end of the National Front era in 1974 had initially been characterized by optimism as a progressive administration dedicated to “Closing the Gap” (alluding to an agenda that prioritized addressing poverty and attacking inequality) was elected into office. However, an unanticipated influx of foreign currencies generated by a boom in coffee prices as well as the rapid expansion of illegal drug exports subjected the economy to intense inflationary pressure and made monetary control the primary concern of economic policy. Thus, plans to “close the gap” had to be delayed or cancelled.¹⁵⁴

In addition to record levels of inflation – the annual rate of price increases was 33.1 percent by 1977, the prevalence of leftist guerilla revolutionary movements such as the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (the National Liberation Army) within Colombia dramatically increased.¹⁵⁵ Having roots in the labor movements of the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, the guerilla movements drew on the support of an increasingly disgruntled peasantry, marginalized lower classes, and disenchanted middle income groups, who perceived the politically elite to be corrupt and unfit to govern. In the late 1970s, the government adopted a hardline approach against the violent non-state actors. Embarking on a campaign to eliminate them groups, President Julio Cesar Turbay (1978-1982), greatly expanded the power and authority of the military. In the following years, accusations of human rights violations by the armed forces proliferated, right-wing death squads, many with military ties, appeared, and in some rural areas large landowners resorted to violence in order to acquire land from the

peasantry.¹⁵⁶ After decades of fighting, a lack of oversight, and enduring weak state institutions, the military gradually disassociated itself from the two parties and became a more coherent institutional force.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the expanding influence of drug cartels became yet another obstacle that challenged the regime both directly via violent confrontation as well as through bribery and corruption. Both cartels and the military have been charged with colluding with right-wing paramilitary groups, who have primarily targeted the leftist guerilla organizations.

The 1980s brought about a comprehensive restructuring of the economy built on policies introduced by orthodoxy economists originating primarily from Western neo-classical theory. The policies aimed to reduce government inefficiency, bolster production and economic growth, augment the competitiveness of domestic industries, and reduce poverty and inequality, through the establishment of free markets.¹⁵⁸ The way in which those objectives were to be achieved was through a process of financial liberalization, deregulation of state-protected industries, and cutbacks in government expenditures.

The 1980s, a period popularly referred to as the “lost decade”, was also a time in which much of the global south – especially Latin America - suffered extensive debt crises that led to a global recession. President Belisario Betancur, who ruled between 1982 and 1986 sought to eliminate the government deficit via the drastic reductions in public expenditures and the gradual devaluation of its then-overvalued peso. The end result was that the poor disproportionately bore the burden of stabilization, as state employees were let go, and state funding for social programs was significantly curtailed.

In addition, the Betancur administration changed its anti-guerrilla tactics. Rather than supporting a campaign of unconditional extermination, the government sought political re-

accommodation and a negotiated peace with the country's major guerilla groups. Although the peace process achieved some early successes with the passing of an amnesty law in 1982, as well as negotiated peace agreements with the FARC, M-19, and the EPL, by the end of the Betancur administration in 1986, the M-19 had briefly taken over the country's Palace of Justice.

Additionally, most of these guerilla organizations were once again engaged in open conflict with the state.¹⁵⁹ Although his administration did not accomplish much in regards to political reform, Betancur amended the constitution to establish mayoral elections by popular vote beginning in 1988. This reform was supplemented by various fiscal measures aimed at increasing the flow of resources to the departmental and municipal levels. As such, a decade after the end of the National Front, politics were now partially open to the public.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by efforts to end the tradition of coalition government and by effect, establish a single-party government with the presence of opposition parties. This government-opposition scheme, however, proved to be a tedious endeavor since a legitimate opposition party simply did not exist. Aside from the Liberal and Conservative parties, which after decades of coalition rule were ideologically and politically similar and sought power by means of broker clientelism, the Union Patriótica (UP) was the only other legitimate opposition party. The UP, composed of former members of the FARC, the Communist Party and other leftist activists, advocated social change through participation in the political process. However, many critics perceived the UP to be a political extension of the FARC and as such, between 1985 and 1991, more than 1,000 of its members were assassinated.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the political system remained devoid of a legitimate opposition party. Moreover, factionalization and personalistic tensions left both traditional parties disorganized and in political disarray. The absence of more disciplined, and organized political parties with distinct programs, as well as the

lack of protection for opposition politicians, greatly undermined the legitimacy of the political system. Moreover, the proposition to establish government-opposition regime was ultimately rejected by Congress.

In 1989, the expansion of drug trafficking and the rapid growth of drug cartels resulted in a drastic increase in violence throughout the nation. Several prominent Colombian political figures, most notably, Luis Carlos Galan – a popular Liberal senator and the clear favorite to win the presidency in 1990 – were assassinated, prompting a massive state crackdown of the cartels. The Medellin cartel, under the leadership of Pablo Escobar, issued its own declaration of war and initiated a campaign of terror designed to destabilize the Colombian state and intimidate its society.¹⁶¹ Intense internal conflict combined with the profound reluctance of both political parties to transform the political regime, gave rise to a broad-based student movement, which demanded constitutional reform by means of a popularly elected National Constituent Assembly outside the bounds of Congress.¹⁶² The National Constituent Assembly, supported by a plebiscite, took place in 1990 as a new administration took office. The composition of this assembly varied, with the two traditional parties controlling less than half the seats. Many analysts have attributed the surprisingly low voter turnout for this assembly to the fact that most legislators chose not to run for a seat in the assembly and thus did not activate their broker clientele networks. Nevertheless, with the traditional two parties holding a minority stake in the constituent assembly, the coalition that came to dominate within the Assembly was composed of Liberals close to the president, the Movimiento de Salvacion Nacional (MSN), and the representatives of the Alianza Democratic M-19 (AD M-19).¹⁶³

The Constitution that was created removed all remnants of the coalition governance, and instituted electoral, participatory, and institutional reforms. In the electoral sphere, popular

elections of departmental governors and the vice-president were implemented, a runoff system for presidential elections was established, electoral ballots were distributed officially, non-resident voting was barred in municipal elections, the election of alternate delegates to public office was negated, and the provision of special seats for the election of indigenous and black representatives were instituted. In terms of bolstering participation, the new Constitution called for the implementation of a recall vote for governors and mayors, a mechanism for “popular consultation” at all levels of government, referendums to repeal national laws or amend the constitution, and the right to organize and participate in political parties and movements. Finally, it reduced presidential power, weakened veto power, placed limits on “extraordinary powers” to issue legal norms, curtailed state-of-siege emergency powers, significantly transformed the judicial branch to counter chronic problems of weakness, corruption and lack of resources, introduced an extensive bill of citizen rights, as well as a variety of judicial mechanisms that citizens can employ to protect these rights, and strengthened political and legislative powers of Congress.¹⁶⁴

Despite the dramatic changes promised by the 1991 constitution, the reformation of the armed forces and the party system was intentionally avoided. The existing military apparatus had been responsible for numerous human rights abuses and had become increasingly autonomous from the government. The Assembly chose not to enact reforms of the armed services out of fear of provoking them. Moreover, the existing electoral procedure in which seats in representative bodies were allocated by factional lists rather than by official party lists, had helped to foster the extreme factionalism and clientelism characteristic of the political party system. The unwillingness to adopt official party lists for the allocation of representatives ostensibly allowed for clientelism to continue, and thus to remain a significant method for the acquisition of political power.

Despite the promulgation of a markedly liberal Constitution, throughout the 1990s the state remained unable to end the political violence that ravaged the nation. In addition, criminal violence became uncontrollable, and bribery and corruption continued to characterize Colombian politics as politicians at all levels were forced to either confront or acquiesce to narco traffickers.¹⁶⁵ For example, in 1995, the administration of President Andres Samper became mired in a serious drug scandal tied to the Cali cartel. This speculative collusion with the Cali cartel severely undermined the legitimacy of the regime, which in turn, complicated efforts to consolidate the country's democratic transformation.¹⁶⁶ Under mounting pressure from the United States to crack down on the drug trade, which by the late 1980s had become a major domestic industry, the Samper administration strengthened penalties for drug trafficking and reformed the 1991 constitution to allow for the extradition of Colombian citizens to stand trial abroad. Nevertheless, Samper's preoccupation with the drug scandal and the accompanying loss of credibility inhibited him from addressing the internal armed conflict. By then, both left-wing guerrilla movements and right-wing paramilitary organizations had expanded significantly, mostly due to their increased financial dependency upon the drug trade.¹⁶⁷

The implementation of *Plan Colombia* in 2000 signified an attempt by the Colombian and United States governments to bilaterally eradicate illicit crops, negotiate settlements with the guerilla movements, revive the stagnant Colombian economy, and provide aid for judicial institutions, human rights, and alternative development.¹⁶⁸ Once adopted however, Plan Colombia became mostly a means whereby the United States could supply the Colombian government with military and police assistance. Between 2000 and 2010, the United States provided \$7.3 billion in aid to Colombia, making it the largest recipient of U.S. aid outside the Middle East and Afghanistan.¹⁶⁹ Under this plan, the Uribe Administration (2002-2010) strengthened the state

security forces and deployed them aggressively against the FARC and ELN guerillas. Unwilling to negotiate with the various guerrilla organizations, by 2010, Uribe's aggressive tactics had produced significant results. There had been a considerable decline in most indicators of violence, including kidnappings, extrajudicial killings, and massacres, along with the extensive demobilization of right-wing paramilitary units across the country. In recent years, while there has been a surge in the number of paramilitary groups operating within Colombia, lengthy negotiations with the FARC beginning in 2012 have resulted in a historic cease-fire agreement enacted in 2016. This ceasefire marks the end of 50 years of internal armed conflict between the FARC and the Colombian government. However, attempts to establish a post-conflict transitory regime have been slightly setback due to the recent failure of a national peace agreement referendum.

Exploratory Conclusions: Democracy in Colombia

Although the Colombian constitution has bolstered political pluralism and inclusion in recent years, the establishment of liberal democracy in Colombia remains contingent upon the broader capacity of the state to ensure the protection of civil liberties, address corruption, engender the complete subservience of the military to civilian rule, and bring about an end to internal conflict and the proliferation of autonomous intrastate actors. Moreover, a politically insulated elite class that has perpetuated a culture of exclusion and non-representative democracy ever since the post-independence era has hindered democratic consolidation. These conclusions have been reinforced by recurrently low voter turn-out rates, as well as declining confidence in political parties and their ability to affect change. As mentioned before, Colombians overwhelmingly approve of democracy over any other form of government. However, liberal

democracy has been unable to flourish in Colombia, and will continue to be elusive so long as the aforementioned conditions endure both within the state and the political system.

CHAPTER II
Venezuela: Reversion to Authoritarianism in the Twenty-First Century

Introduction

On January 10, 2007, President Hugo Chavez began his inaugural speech by proclaiming: “Fatherland, socialism, or death – I swear it”. Promising to accelerate the march toward socialism, he announced the imminent nationalization of three foreign controlled economic sectors -- telecommunications, electricity, and “heavy oil” petroleum industries located around Venezuela’s Orinoco Tar Belt. A day later, Chavez invoked a 1999 constitutional provision that allows the executive to assume all legislative powers exercised by the National Assembly (Ley Habilitante). Determined to enlarge his power further, Chavez used an executive order to push through a constitutional amendment that repealed the two-term presidential limit. The new amendment authorized the indefinite reelection of the executive. Since then, the Venezuelan regime has become markedly more authoritarian in nature, as almost every aspect of political, economic, and civil life has come under the jurisdiction of an overbearing, executive-led bureaucracy.

With decision-making authority concentrated in the executive, the ability of citizens to shape government policies and proposals has been significantly curtailed. Economic crisis has exacerbated the political situation. Recent decreases in the international price of oil have engendered increases in inflation, unemployment, scarcity, and poverty. In response to the political and economic instability afflicting the country, the Venezuelan regime under president Nicolás Maduro has tightened its control over every aspect of society. Widespread protests have resulted, which have been met with state-sponsored violence. In the process, civil and associational rights have been repeatedly infringed upon. Through an analysis of the evolution

of Venezuela's political, economic and social systems, beginning with the pre-colonial period, I will explain in this chapter how and why Venezuela managed to create a democratic system, and how why said system reverted to authoritarian rule

Pre-Colonial and Colonial Times

Just like the Colombian case, in order to fully understand the processes of state-creation and democratization that have transpired in Venezuela, the analysis must begin with an overview of the nation's geography and original human population. With its mountains, valleys, plains, deserts, jungle, rivers and coastline, Venezuela is geographically and topographically similar to Colombia. Although it is smaller than Colombia (ranking seventh in size among Latin American nations), it can also be succinctly divided into various regions based upon distinctive physiography, climate, culture, populations, and economic systems.¹⁷⁰

Venezuela's landscape is dominated by a sweeping chain of Andean mountain ranges in the west (bordering Lake Maracaibo to the Northwest), highlands towards the east that give way to another mountain range which parallels the coast until it is broken up by the Orinoco Delta in the northeast, large expanses of plains (*llanos*) located east and south of the Andes as well as the Central Coastal Range, and the Guayana highlands – an area dominated by low mountains, rich grasslands and extensive tropical forests.¹⁷¹ Within this panorama, six major provinces have emerged in the context of three geographically distinguishable regions; the northern region, separated from the southern region by the Andes as well as the lesser range of mountains that run to the northeastern corner of the country. The southern region, consisting of the territory south of the Central Coastal Range - the *llanos*, that extend to both the east towards the Orinoco River and the west towards the Colombian border, and the Guayana highlands in the southernmost

region of the nation.¹⁷² Historically, the different geographical characteristics of these regions have facilitated uneven economic development across most provinces, which has in turn proved to be a considerable setback in achieving the consolidation of the power of the state.

Pre-Columbian Societies

The indigenous peoples of Venezuela created political, economic and social systems that differed immensely from the empires of the Inca on the continent's western region, or the Aztecs in the central valley of Mexico. Rather than hierarchical and centralized empires, native chiefdoms were found in much of Venezuela north of the Orinoco River, although enclaves of tropical-forest farmers occupied some of the lowlands adjoining Lake Maracaibo, while nomadic hunters and gatherers lived along the Orinoco River on the southern borders of the chiefdoms.¹⁷³ In western Venezuela, the chiefdoms primarily produced manioc, maize, and sweet potatoes, while in the east, the indigenous groups relied exclusively on bitter manioc. When harvests were poor, the native population subsisted on the rich game resources. Trade was considerable between the northern Venezuelan peoples with some groups bartering gold for pearls obtained from a distant coastal region. Most of the larger chiefdoms retained an elaborate political structure with a primary chieftain and lesser chieftains presiding over a class of nobles, distinguished warriors, and wealthy men whose status seems to have been hereditary. Occupying the lowest socioeconomic status were slaves who consisted of captive children.¹⁷⁴ Although there were many indigenous groups who lived in Venezuela, almost all of these peoples were vanquished by the Spaniards early in the colonial period, and the area was greatly depopulated. Those who survived were often enslaved under harsh conditions or "entrusted" by the Crown to the missionaries in the interior.¹⁷⁵

Spanish Conquest and the Colonial Period

The Spaniards arrived to Venezuela by around 1500, and had first attempted to extract wealth from the territory by forcing the natives to dive and retrieve pearls from the waters near the Island of Margarita off the northeast coast. Once the pearl beds had been exhausted, the absence of large mineral deposits on the scale of those found in Mexico, Peru or even New Granada compelled many settlers to move westward. Those who remained began to subjugate the native population by the means of the *encomienda* system; a system of forced labor based upon the concept of tribute, that was uniformly implemented in the Spanish colonies of the New World. The first area that the Spaniards colonized was Venezuela's northern region. Discovering gold in Yaracuy - located in Venezuela's northwestern region - the Spaniards attempted to utilize the indigenous population as a cheap and easily subdued labor force. However, the native population diminished rapidly due to exposure to disease, armed resistance against the Spanish interlopers, and horrendous working conditions. As a result, the colonizers sought to import African slaves as a way to augment their dwindling labor force. Soon thereafter, slave-trading became a major source of revenue.¹⁷⁶

Lacking substantial mineral wealth as well as a large, organized, and easily exploitable indigenous population (the importation of slave labor was costly), Venezuela quickly lapsed into the periphery of the Spanish Empire.¹⁷⁷ Considered to be a quiet and unimportant backwater of the empire, in 1528 the Spanish Crown rented Venezuela to the German commercial banking firm of Welser, which by 1546, also deemed Venezuela to be unprofitable. As such, the settlers primarily embraced agricultural production, which was primitive and largely intended for internal consumption. The colonizers cultivated a variety of crops in Venezuela's northern region ranging from tobacco, indigo, cotton, coffee, wheat and sugar cane. In short time, however,

cacao became the colony's most important crop. By the end of the 18th century, cacao production dominated the domestic economy as well as accounted for almost all of the colony's export earnings. In addition to these crops, the early economy was based upon the production of cattle on the southwestern *llanos*. Cattle ranchers primarily relied upon the meat from the herds to provide for the local market, while they also sold the hides they produced on both domestic and international markets.¹⁷⁸ Labor for the ranches as well as agricultural activities was supported using the *encomienda* system, and later, by the imported slave population. Since *encomiendas* typically occupied large swaths of land, wealth was highly concentrated in the hands of a few *encomenderos*. This proclivity for wealth consolidation would become a salient aspect of Venezuelan society well into the 20th century.

By 1620 cacao had gradually become Venezuela's principle export, and would remain so for the next two centuries. Its effects on Venezuelan colonial society were substantial. The production of cacao generated sizable profits, which attracted for the first time in Venezuela's history significant numbers of Spaniards, including relatively poor Canary Islanders. Moreover, seeing that there was little indigenous labor available, the crop's plantation culture facilitated a great demand for African slaves during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. As such, those who owned the means of production came to constitute a ruling class, occupying the highest strata of colonial society. These elites were subsequently divided into two factions: the *peninsulares*, who were associated with Spanish colonial rule and the *mantuanos*, who were the American-born progeny of the Spanish colonizers. They were followed by white Canary Islanders, who typically worked as wage laborers. Next came a large group of racially mixed *pardos*. As white Canary Islanders, African slaves, and the natives worked closely with one another either on plantations, or on small landholdings, miscegenation became commonplace. As

a result, by the late eighteenth century, *pardos* constituted more than half of the total population. Finally, occupying the lowest position in society were African slaves, who constituted about 20 percent of the population, and the native population, who constituted less than 10 percent of the total population by the time of independence.¹⁷⁹

By the mid-seventeenth century, Venezuela had been incorporated into New Granada. However, occupying a relatively marginal position in the empire, it retained considerable political autonomy.¹⁸⁰ As such, communication and commerce flowed relatively freely between the three primary regions. The northern region, with its access to the Caribbean Sea, became an important hub of commerce through which most of Venezuela's imports and exports, such as cacao, wheat, and tobacco, passed through. The southern and eastern regions, albeit not as important, supplied crucial linkages to New Granada, as well as access to both the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. These regions that relied primarily upon the production of cattle and related commodities (hides, and other livestock items) generally augmented the flow of trade.¹⁸¹ Spanish indifference to Venezuela was such that the colonies provided a larger market for Venezuelan cacao than did Spain. Moreover, the profits obtained from the triangular trade of African slaves for Venezuelan cacao, which was then shipped across the Caribbean and sold primarily in Veracruz (for consumption in New Spain), made the Venezuelan coast a frequent port of call for Dutch and British merchants.¹⁸² As a result, illegal intercolonial trade flourished, while Dutch and British merchants profited.

By the start of the 18th century, the Spanish crown took an active interest in regulating commerce as part of an attempt to stem imperial decline. Attempting to crack down on the level of contraband flowing through the Caribbean as well as to enhance profitability, the reformist Bourbon dynasty granted the *Compania Guipuzcoana*, or the Caracas Company, a complete

commercial monopoly on cacao in 1728.¹⁸³ In return for this monopoly, the Caracas Company agreed to suppress the contraband trade, defend the Venezuelan coast, stimulate the regional production of cacao, and provide slaves to the colony.¹⁸⁴

In addition to the reform that granted the Company monopoly rights on the cacao industry, the Spanish Crown had implemented four additional measures designed to augment revenues as well as strengthen its control over Venezuela in the late eighteenth century. The first of these reforms occurred in 1776 when the Bourbon Monarchs placed the six provinces of Venezuela under the fiscal jurisdiction of the *Intendencia de Venezuela*. A year later, the Captaincy General of Venezuela, corresponding roughly to the present national territory, was created with Caracas as its capital.¹⁸⁵ This institution was established to consolidate the defense of the Venezuelan provinces under the jurisdiction of a central office located in Caracas. Desiring greater centralization of judicial, political and administrative functions within Venezuela, the Crown created the *Audiencia de Caracas* in 1786 to regulate the activities of colonial authorities; these functions had previously been handled by the *audiencias* of Santo Domingo and Santa Fe de Bogota.¹⁸⁶ Finally, in 1793, Spain established the *Consulado Real de Caracas*. The *Consulado* was charged with the adjudication of mercantile cases and the promotion of economic growth in Venezuela.¹⁸⁷

Although the reforms were enacted primarily to bolster the administrative, social and economic authority of Caracas over the six provinces, Venezuela continued to be a two-tiered society divided along the self-reinforcing cleavages of wealth, ethnicity, and locality. At the top of the socio-economic hierarchy was a white elite composed of high-ranking Spanish officials, *mantuano hacendados* and *rancheros*, and a few wealthy merchants as well as professionals, all of whom primarily resided in Caracas. On the other hand, *pardo* agriculturalists, day laborers,

artisans, and slaves, who jointly constituted the lower strata of Venezuelan society, lived predominantly in the surrounding provinces. They enjoyed relative political autonomy and controlled their respective channels of commerce. As such, these regions became increasingly reluctant to accept the greater prominence of Caracas and its emergent elite.¹⁸⁸ By the end of the 18th century, regional antagonisms bolstered by sentiments of socio-economic autonomy would greatly intensify the chaos and violence experienced during the Wars of Independence, which lasted from 1810 to 1821.

Independence and its Aftermath

Napoleon's occupation of Spain in 1808 provided the impetus for independence that spread throughout Spanish America in the early 19th century. With Charles IV and his son Ferdinand VII forced to abdicate the throne in favor of Napoleon, Spanish authority in the colonies came under immense scrutiny from a relatively critical creole elite. Refusing to recognize the French usurper, the Caracas cabildo (a city council which was primarily composed of creole leaders) instead pledged their allegiance to the royal Spanish junta. However, this did not deter a faction of creoles from questioning the political legitimacy of the hastily-formulated Spanish junta. Moreover, for them, the immediate future of the colonial system was rife with insecurity, uncertainty and tension, especially within the upper echelons of society. In April 1810, the Caracas cabildo, meeting as a cabildo abierto (town meeting), ousted the governor of Caracas, the intendant, several Audiencia justices and the military forces. Shortly thereafter, the leaders of the rebellion formed a junta that repudiated the authority of the Council of Regency in Spain, albeit governed in the name of the deposed Ferdinand VII. The cabildos of three major

cities – Coro, Maracaibo, and Guayana – were the only regional elites to not join Caracas; instead, they vowed to remain loyal to Spain.¹⁸⁹

On July 5, 1811, a congress convoked by the junta declared Venezuelan independence from Spain, despite the lack of a completely unified central authority. Five months later, on December 21, 1811, the congress drafted a constitution, marking the official beginning of Venezuela's First Republic. Known by Venezuelan historians as *La Patria Boba*, or the Silly Republic, the First Republic of Venezuela lasted approximately six months. From the outset, it was clear that the constitution preserved the privileges of the elite as well as enhanced their control over the government and society by limiting suffrage to property owners. Moreover, it abolished slave trading and legal ethnic discrimination, but not slavery itself. Finally, the new republic suffered from an overwhelming unwillingness on the part of the surrounding localities to become subservient to the *caraqueno* elite, either because they still adhered to the authority of the Crown or because they thought themselves fully capable of self-government.¹⁹⁰ Ultimately, the *caraqueno* elite desired the political authority wielded by the Spanish Crown, with no change to the existing socio-economic order. As such, those who remained loyal to Spain utilized widespread social unrest among slaves and *pardos* to their advantage; these groups were more interested in freedom, or land, than in the grand political principles elaborated in proclamations and newspapers. Rallying these disenchanted factions of society with the promises of liberation and civil equality, Spanish authorities ruthlessly crushed the independence movement.¹⁹¹

By July 1812, royalist forces defeated the national forces led by Simon Bolivar, captured the leader of the new republic, Francisco Miranda, and reinstated the colonial government. However, once in power, the royalist government instituted an oppressive military occupation that rekindled creole resentment of the centralized, colonial system of authority.¹⁹² As such, the

rebels embraced a new strategy of military campaigns from the periphery to regain control over Caracas. Capturing Caracas in 1813 with the support of an eastern front as well as a second front from New Granada, Bolivar re-entered the city. However, as a member of the *Caraqueno* creole elite, he too desired the preservation of a system whereby blacks remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Writing in 1813 about the Royalist triumph over the nascent Republic in 1812, Bolivar primarily focuses upon blacks and the role they played in the destruction of the First Republic: "...a revolution of blacks, free and slave, broke out in the eastern coastal valleys, provoked, supplied, and supported by agents of Monteverde. These inhuman and vile people, feeding upon the blood and property of the patriots...committed the most horrible assassinations, thefts, assaults and devastation."¹⁹³ In addition to this proclamation, a year later, Bolivar openly supported a policy that ordered the capturing of escaped slaves to safeguard the supply of labor.

Making his intentions to keep blacks socially subjugated public, Bolivar essentially pushed blacks, whether they were freedmen, slaves or fugitive slaves to offer their services to royalist forces as to avoid remaining oppressed under a new system. The royalists, with a force of 10,000 to 12,000 troops, only 160 of whom were Spaniards, began to terrorize those in the *llanos* and eventually marched into Caracas in July 1814, defeating Bolivar's forces and restoring Venezuela to the Spanish Crown.¹⁹⁴ Ousted from Caracas, Bolivar came to realize that his intentions of maintaining a system that restricted blacks to the lower strata of society would have to change if he was to triumph over the royalist forces and free Venezuela. Moreover, from his defeat, it became clear that while control of Venezuela's political and economic center was imperative, dominance over the hinterland was also of vital importance.¹⁹⁵

Acting upon these two lessons, upon his return to Venezuela in 1816, Bolivar secured support from the *llaneros* – namely Jose Antonio Paez, while also promising to abolish slavery if

newly freed slaves aided in the effort for independence from Spanish Colonial rule.¹⁹⁶ Although the Venezuelan army effectively became a conglomeration of regional armies primarily fighting for the protection of their respective localities, from 1817 on, the leaders of the various regions were united by one common goal: to defeat the Spaniards. By 1819, although Caracas remained controlled by royalists, the Venezuelan army was gaining momentum. In the same year, the Congress of Angostura (present-day Ciudad Bolivar) established the Third Republic, naming Bolivar as its first President. Bolivar and his army then quickly marched across the *llanos* and into the Andes, where he managed a decisive victory in Boyacá. Soon thereafter, he marched triumphantly into Bogota – liberating New Granada from the yoke of Spanish imperial rule. Nearly two years later, in June 1821, Bolivar’s troops triumphed over royalist forces at Carabobo, resulting in the liberation of Caracas from Spanish rule. That August, delegates from Venezuela and Colombia met at Cucuta to formally sign the Constitution of the Republic of Gran Colombia. Bolivar was named the first provisional president of Gran Colombia, Francisco de Paula Santander was named Vice-President, and the capital was placed in Bogota.¹⁹⁷

The Republic of Colombia was formally proclaimed in 1819, consisting of the territories of Venezuela, New Granada and Ecuador (when it was eventually liberated from Spanish control in 1822). In addition to appointing Bolivar to the Presidency and Santander to the Vice-presidency, the Congress of Cucuta in 1821, duly reaffirmed the legitimacy of the fledgling republic, adopting a highly centralized system of government. The constituent nations were divided into provinces and departments whose head administrators were appointed Bogota officials. Furthermore, this document provided for strict separation of powers, allowing the executive to retain ultimate authority over the other branches of government in cases of emergency – adhering to the tendency of emerging Latin American countries to

disproportionately concentrate power in the executive. In terms of who would be able to participate in the political process, socioeconomic restrictions implemented by this constitution limited the right to vote to at most, 10 percent of free adult males - a fairly standard procedure at the time.¹⁹⁸ Citizens were also guaranteed a list of basic rights, albeit not included in this list was freedom of worship – leaving the issue of religious toleration to be decided upon at a later time. Surprisingly, the Congress also adopted a nationwide free-birth principle that was designed to gradually abolish slavery, as well as a provision that relieved natives of any obligation to pay tribute or provide involuntary labor.¹⁹⁹ This constitution generally reflected Bolivar's vision of an ideal republic; unified under the auspices of a quasi-monarchical centralized government, and headed by a powerful executive. However, almost immediately, the new government was hindered by disunity among various existing political factions and economic interests within the Republic. Over the duration of ten years, the Republic experienced gradual economic and political fragmentation, generating along with it, trans-national as well as internal conflict.

During the 1820s, Bolivar continued the fight for the liberation of Spanish America, leading his forces against the royalist troops that remained in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru. In his absence, tensions between various factions of the new Republic began to foster a sense of Venezuelan nationalism, as many of the *caraqueno* elite came to be resentful of the fact that they were being governed once again, by a distant power – this time located in Bogota. In addition to tensions between Venezuelan and New Granadan elites, confrontations between a predominantly Venezuelan military and New Granadan civilian leaders as well as between political factions that had consolidated around either Santander or Bolivar came to characterize the existing political order of the Republic. In 1826, these tensions culminated in a separatist movement lead by the *llanero* chieftain Antonio Paez, who desired Venezuela's independence from the Colombian

Confederation. Unable to defuse the separatist movement and quell tensions between rivaling factions, Gran Colombia disintegrated as regional military chieftains (such as Paez) took advantage of discontent to seize power.²⁰⁰ In 1830, Paez officially declared Venezuela's independence from Gran Colombia, and would subsequently dominate politics for the first twenty years of the new republic.

Beginning with Paez, the dissolution of the Republic engendered the rise of various regional leaders called *caudillos* to political and economic prominence. For the remainder of the 19th century, these leaders would construct a quasi-federal framework in which regional elites would wield substantial autonomy. However, Caracas would ultimately remain the economic and political seat of power. Robert Gilmore in his seminal study of *caudillismo* in Venezuela, defines it as, "...the union of personalism and violence for the conquest of power. It is a means for the selection and establishment of political leadership in the absence of a social structure and political groupings adequate to the functioning of representative government."²⁰¹ Simply put, these *caudillos* were local strongmen who relied on the backing of regional militias as well as the loyalty of local oligarchs to consolidate their own economic and political power within the context of a war-torn nation with a history of weak central institutions. As a result, Venezuela's post-independence era from 1830 to approximately 1920 can best be understood as a competition among various social and regional factions over the control of the Caracas-based bureaucracy, to consolidate the wealth derived from the coffee trade with North Atlantic and European nations.²⁰²

From 1830 – 1845, Paez would preside over an initially prosperous Venezuelan economy as coffee became the country's principal source of revenue. This was primarily due to high European demand for coffee, as well as the increased availability of international credit, that

spurred further investment into the coffee industry.²⁰³ As the demand for Venezuelan coffee increased, so did the need for more domestic labor. However, the Wars of Independence which had lasted for approximately two decades had substantially decimated Venezuela's working population. To address this lack of labor, coffee planters advocated to delay the liberation of slaves as well as forced the enactment of laws designed to reduce the mobility of rural workers from coffee plantations to subsistence agriculture.²⁰⁴ Additionally, under the leadership of Paez, a new constitution was ratified in 1830, which separated the government into three powers (judicial, executive, legislative) although the executive became inherently, and unsurprisingly, more powerful than the other branches. Eleven provinces also acquired legal status with the ability to retain their own governors and local assemblies. However, the provinces remained subservient to the central government by use of force as well as through the allocations of money derived from the state budget.²⁰⁵

Although Venezuela experienced rapid economic growth in the early years of post-independence, three factors limited the possibility of sustained economic development: staggering external debt accumulated during the wars of independence, the insecurity of land property, and competition from cheap manufactured imports, which debilitated the artisan sector.²⁰⁶ While public expenditure grew from 5 million bolivars (Bs.) to Bs. 18 million over Paez's fifteen-year presidential term, inherited debts and lack of an effective tax system served to undermine the fiscal viability of the central government. By 1839, the external debt had grown to ten times the value of exports and servicing it absorbed 40 percent of public expenditures. Moreover, fifty percent of the state budget was used by Paez to keep unruly local caudillos and their militias in line at the expense of a strong, central army.

The reluctance of Venezuela's economic elite to break with their coffee monoculture (by region) and their dependence upon imports of manufactured European goods made the economy highly vulnerable to the volatile commodity markets of the western metropolises. Therefore, when European and U.S. demand for Venezuelan goods contracted in the 1840s, peasants and landowners were driven further into debt, while merchants and financiers in the cities eagerly foreclosed on their properties.²⁰⁷ As a result, a lasting political division amongst two elite factions began to form.²⁰⁸ In one camp, controlled by Paez, were the Conservatives, or the *godos*, composed primarily of merchants, creditors and agents of foreign commerce. Opposing the *godos* were the Liberals – a group of largely indebted coffee planters, allies of Bolivar who regarded Paez as a traitor to Republican and Pan-American ideals, and rival *caudillos* who feared the economic power of the established commercial and financial elite. The liberals advocated for a more decentralized state, the expansion of suffrage, freedom of the press, and checks upon the power of the Church among other reforms. This faction coalesced around the leadership of Antonio Leocadio Guzman.

Perceiving Guzman as a threat to his continued Conservative rule, Paez imprisoned him, and in 1847 selected fellow *godo*, Jose Tadeo Monagas, to become Venezuela's next president. However, Jose Monagas began to gravitate towards the liberal party. After passing a series of debt-relief laws and granting protection against foreclosures to protect landowners, Paez sought to overthrow Monagas. By then, however, Paez had lost much of his political power and was soon exiled to the Caribbean and then the United States in 1849. After Monagas had exiled Paez, he and his brother Jose Gregorio initiated close to a century of dictatorial rule which centered around land and labor reforms. Unable to unify the country with these policies, a global economic crisis in 1857-1858 led to the ultimate demise of the Monagas dynasty. As the prices

of leather fell by 30 percent, coffee 20 percent, and cacao 50 percent, both Conservative and Liberal *caudillos* took advantage of growing discontent in the countryside to drive the ruling Monagas family from power. However, no new government emerged to fill the void.²⁰⁹

The period between 1858-1863 is commonly referred to as the Federal Wars. The result of intense ideological conflict amongst Venezuela's elites, this five-year military campaign claimed the lives of approximately 5 percent of the population.²¹⁰ These wars were primarily fought as a means of determining whether Venezuela should adopt a federalist or unitary system of governance. Coming to an end in 1863 when General Juan C. Falcon and his adviser, Antonio Guzman Blanco achieved control over Caracas, the Federal Wars had profoundly impacted Venezuelan society, while solving few of its problems.²¹¹ Falcon would eventually be replaced by Guzman in 1868, who would thus assume the singular role as Venezuela's provisional leader. Initiating approximately eighteen years of formal and informal dictatorial rule from 1870 to 1887, Guzman substantially altered Venezuela's state structure.

Determined to achieve "eternal peace," strengthen the Venezuelan economy, and provide for the construction of essential infrastructural works, Guzman embarked upon an agenda that would destroy the Conservative oligarchy and pacify his Liberal allies, revive the coffee trade and appease the financial and commercial elites, and induce foreign investment for the construction of various public works, transportation projects and national electrification. Guzman and his administration seemed to deliver on their promises. They concretely expanded coffee production, augmented the availability of foreign loans, established new contracts with foreign companies, amassed a Federal army to address potential sources of dissent, arranged for the construction of highways and transportation, and even established an educational system.²¹² Moreover, Guzman rebuilt the city of Caracas, developed a modern governmental bureaucracy

with the capacity for inter-regional communication and transportation (roads, railroads, telegraph lines etc.), and pushed for the approval of a constitution that reduced the number of states from twenty to nine in 1881.²¹³ This reform diminished the number of *caudillos* participating in government, making it substantially easier to exercise total control over the national territory. However, despite eighteen years of expensive, foreign-financed projects, the national income derived from export earnings had remained where it had been at the start of his rule.²¹⁴ Thus, by 1897-1898, the amount of foreign and domestic debt that Venezuela had accumulated was immense, while only 19 percent of the population was literate. As one *caudillo* took over the reins of the central government from the next, it was not until 1899, when a drop in the price of coffee again facilitated political and economic upheaval, that Cipriano Castro would assume the presidency - paving the way for his protégé Juan Vicente Gomez to facilitate the initial process of state creation.

With General Castro ousted by a coup supported by the United States in 1908, Gomez, assumed the presidency. Posthumously known as the “Tyrant of the Andes,” Gomez has been remembered for his particularly repressive regime and recognized as the founder of the modern Venezuelan state. He organized the first national army, built up a highly-centralized bureaucracy and established a government monopoly in the fiscal arena.²¹⁵ Remaining president for the next 27 years, he deployed his well-trained and well-armed troops to defeat regional *caudillos* and establish himself as the nation’s single, dominant *caudillo*.²¹⁶ More importantly, Gomez was fortunate enough to be in office when the petroleum industry came to Venezuela. As early as 1909, concessions for the right to explore large swaths of territory for oil were granted to foreign companies, with a representative of a British company being awarded concessions for twenty-seven million hectares – a little less than one-third of the national territory.²¹⁷

Following the end of World War I, U.S. corporations moved to battle for the concessions, influenced by a government policy designed to preserve domestic supplies through the exploitation of foreign oil. Aware of the potential profits to be made with increased competition, in 1918, the Gomez regime drafted an oil law that raised royalties to 15 percent and reduced the number of new concessions. Warned by the U.S. companies that they would not invest if the terms were to hold, President Gomez acquiesced, cognizant that he could not afford to alienate the companies. In 1922, the Venezuelan Congress legally gave the President sole authority to extend concessions, set royalties at 10 percent, confer titles for 40 years, and grant customs exemptions for industry-related imports.²¹⁸ Later that year, Shell's oil drillers struck the first enormous gusher and Venezuela was forever changed.²¹⁹

The development of the petroleum industry from the 1920s on made for radical discontinuities with the past.²²⁰ From 1922 to 1945, Venezuela became the world's first great exporter of petroleum and the world's second producer after the United States.²²¹ Between 1921 and 1925, petroleum exports rose from Bs. 5.26 million to Bs. 259.15 million, while by 1936, oil earnings were Bs. 676.77 million, more than twenty-one times coffee earnings – coffee being Venezuela's primary source of export income before the discovery of oil.²²² With these petroleum revenues Gomez was able to pay off the national debt by 1930, finance the construction of an extensive new highway system and other public works, provide subsidies to Venezuela's constituent states during the economic depression, support the expansion of the armed forces, government employees and benefit his political allies. Although the wealth generated from this initial petroleum boom facilitated many important structural changes, the greatest flow of wealth went to Gomez, his associates, and members of the armed forces.²²³

Oil expansion also engendered a massive rural-urban migration that crippled the agricultural sector as both agricultural workers and land-owning elite desired a piece of the nascent petroleum industry. While peasants fled brutal conditions and rural indolence for new opportunities in oil camps and cities and rural elites sold their land to oil companies to make a fortune, the result was the creation of both a new working class, as well as a small mercantile bourgeoisie.²²⁴ However, with the agricultural-led export sector now destroyed, these new socio-economic classes became increasingly dependent upon the investment decisions of the foreign oil companies for profit. Imports increased, the bolivar appreciated against the dollar resulting in an overvalued exchange rate which further promoted importation, inflation increased and real wages declined. Moreover, since oil production is a capital-intensive industry and does not require a large labor force, the initial expansion of the industry did not necessarily equate to an increase in employment; the resultant expansion of the service sector, however, captured some of the excess supply of labor. Alberto Adriani, a Venezuelan politician who served on the cabinet of Gomez's successor called the oil industry, "...a foreign, provincial enclave within the national economy... [one that] exercises a relatively insignificant influence over the prosperity of our people."²²⁵ Ultimately, if the revenue derived from petroleum had been invested in public education, health care, domestic industrialization and agricultural diversification, it is possible that the absolute dependence upon foreign investment and international oil prices could have been mitigated. However, this did not happen, and Venezuela's oil enclave economy would persist well into the 20th century.

Initial Considerations of Venezuela's State Creation Process

Like any other Latin American country, for Venezuela to become a modern state, its divisions had to be formerly coordinated with one another through a centralized administrative apparatus; this apparatus had to be autonomous and able to enforce its authority throughout its territory; and finally, it must have been able to mobilize and integrate the polity into national political life.²²⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Venezuela had been able to fulfill the first condition and part of the second, while the third remained elusive. As posited by Charles Tilly in his state-building paradigm, the probability that a territory would have success in satisfying the aforementioned requirements relied upon the presence of seven important factors. Of these seven, the most relevant to Venezuela have been related to the nation's absence of large quantities of mineral wealth as well as an extensive and easily subdued indigenous population (condition one), the proliferation of inexperienced *caudillos* to head of government (condition three), the varying degree of heterogeneity in ethnicity, religion and class (condition five), and the inability of economic and political elites to unify and subject themselves to the authority of a centralized entity (condition 6).

As a result of the oil expansion in the early 19th century, more rapid structural changes occurred in Venezuela between 1920 and 1960, than had been seen in the years between 1780 and 1920.²²⁷ Utilizing Venezuela's newly found oil wealth, Gomez bought weapons, built a permanent standing army, and laid the foundation for the first effective central state apparatus in Venezuelan history.²²⁸ Military and administrative power allowed Gomez to decimate his enemies and close the books on nineteenth-century political life.²²⁹ Moreover, oil revenues provided him with the monetary capability to centralize power, embark upon substantial public works and transportation projects, eliminate external debt, and retain the allegiance of the

military with decent salaries and sizable benefits. At this juncture, the power of the state had been fully consolidated, however the legitimacy of the state was yet to be achieved.

The Twentieth Century until the Present

As mentioned before, changes in the economy and the state had a profound impact upon the social structure of Venezuela. The new social groups and forces being created by the rise of the petroleum industry had little connection to older elites or to the social and political structures of the past. As such, they were effectively marginalized by the oligarchic political system perpetuated by Gomez, and could neither find legitimate avenues of organizational expression, nor reliable allies within the regime to represent their interests. Since agrarian elites had lost their base of support due to extensive rural-urban migration, it was incredibly difficult for them to establish powerful political organizations able to dominate the political arena, as was the case in neighboring Colombia. On the other hand, the peasantry that had migrated the cities became particularly receptive to the calls of politically-charged university students disenchanted with the Gomez regime. This was because these groups saw little hope for their own socio-economic advancement under the current system.²³⁰ After a series of protests in 1928 where university students were arrested and exiled, one member this “generation of 1928”, Romulo Betancourt, whose name would become synonymous with the struggle for electoral democracy, developed a plan to replace Gomez with a government broadly representative of Venezuelan society.²³¹ His strategy was eventually incorporated into the doctrine of the *Accion Democratica* (AD) party – as it was called upon its legalization in 1941 – and consisted of: 1) anti-imperialism whereby foreign oil companies would be challenged and a “just share” of profits accrued for the nation; 2) the utilization of those profits to modernize and diversify the economy as well as to provide

essential state-funded services such as healthcare, public education, subsidized housing etc; and 3) universal suffrage, and a direct vote for the president as to provide an opportunity for democratic governance.²³²

With Gomez's death in 1935, exiles were permitted reentry to Venezuela, and returned eager to expand politics and opposition beyond student protests. Gomez was succeeded in office by his minister of war General Eleazar Lopez Contreras, who sought to maintain the *gomestica* political structure, but also manage the revolutionary zeal engendered by Gomez's death and the return of the political exiles. After Lopez Contreras enacted a law in 1936 that formally sanctioned the right of works to create their own unions, The Movimiento de Organizacion Venezolana, formed by Betancourt, organized petroleum workers who then launched a national strike with support from the Communist Party, the Partido Democratico Nacional (the precursor to AD), and the Caracas middle classes.²³³ In response to the strike, Lopez Contreras banned political parties and incipient trade unions, forcing them underground; he prohibited open mass activities, and also retained many *gomecista* generals in the tops ranks of the military - to the consternation of many professionally trained officers.²³⁴ Moreover, he curtailed political participation by limiting suffrage to adult, literate males and by establishing indirect elections whereby the oligarchy continued to dominate local and state politics.²³⁵ In 1941, Lopez Contreras was succeeded by his minister of war, General Isaias Medina Angarita. Once in office, Medina began a process of liberalization. Seeking a base of support independent from Lopez, and perhaps influenced by the climate of democratic struggle in World War II, Medina gradually re-authorized the creation of political organizations and unions.²³⁶ In addition to legalizing AD in 1941, he forced the foreign oil companies to revise their contracts and to accept the right of the government to raise their taxes. Venezuela's share of oil profits increased from about one eighth

to over one half. Medina also pushed through an agrarian reform law designed to address economic and social discontent in Venezuela's rural areas.²³⁷

During the Medina period, the AD created a vigorous, effective, and close-knit political organization. Party organizers mobilized and established industrial as well as peasant unions – by 1945, the AD had out-expanded its political competitors (namely the Communist party) and generally had the upper hand in popular organization.²³⁸ Although the party had grown exponentially, power continued firmly in the hands of the *gomecista* military and state elites. Mass organization yielded no real power, elections remained indirect, and suffrage limited. At the end of his term in 1945, Medina reached an agreement with AD for a gradual transition to full democracy. However, the transitional, compromise candidate suffered a nervous breakdown. Under pressure to name a successor, Medina chose a civilian, which effectively ended decades of *gomecista* military rule; however, it did not guarantee a clear promise of free elections.²³⁹

Unknown to Medina during the time of his negotiations with AD, a group of young military officers - including future president Marcos Perez Jimenez – had approached AD party officials with a proposal for a coup. During the early years of the 20th century, the Gomez administration, like the Lopez Contreras and Medina administrations after him, maintained a large, highly-trained, standing army to neutralize the power wielded by the regional caudillos and various dissenting groups. As such, to augment the military's power as well as retain its allegiance to civilian authority based in Caracas, the Venezuelan state allocated a significant portion of its oil revenues to the military as to improve the standard of living of its officers, to purchase new and more sophisticated weapons, and to allow many young officers to gain technical skills and advanced training by studying abroad.²⁴⁰

Influenced by the professionalism and modernization of their Latin American counterparts, many of Venezuela's young officers were eager to cleanse the institution of the old, unprofessional Gomez hierarchy represented by both General Lopez and General Medina. Moreover, they believed that the military was the only domestic organization with the integrity and capability to protect the national interest – a common sentiment found among many military forces operating in Latin America at this time.²⁴¹ As a result, these officers formed the Union Patriotic Militar (UPM) and entered into an agreement with the AD. If successful, they would turn control over the government to AD, with the understanding that free elections would be held, control of the military would be depoliticized, and professional criteria would be used in promotions, assignments and other military affairs.²⁴² After Medina named his successor, the *adecos* (AD members) accepted. On October 18th, 1945, the military conspirators ousted Medina and transferred power to a provisional junta headed by four members from AD, two officers, and one independent civilian. The three years that followed, known in Venezuela as the *trienio*, marked the definitive introduction of mass politics into national life.²⁴³

Almost immediately, the provisional government passed laws that lowered barriers to participation, and guaranteed universal suffrage to all citizens over eighteen. Moreover, the government began to aggressively pursue the implementation of education reform, limited land reform, peasant and labor organizing, housing construction and public investment.²⁴⁴ In December 1947, AD won control of the new Congress and elected novelist Romulo Gallegos to the presidency with 70 percent of the vote. Whereas only 5 percent of the population voted before 1945, the electorate expanded to 36 percent immediately thereafter. Free, direct elections prevailed at all levels, from municipal councils and state legislatures to the national congress and the president. Although AD captured most governmental positions, new parties were formed, the

most significant being COPEI (a Christian Democratic group), and Union Republicana Democrática (URD), which was a non-Communist leftist faction that had supported Medina. Continuing the policies set forth by the provisional junta, AD leaders utilized the profits accrued by the oil bonanza to provide services such as education, health, water and communication to poor and peripheral groups and regions. Moreover, they sought to bring about a rapid democratic revolution, including: the full establishment of a liberal democracy; a significant increase in the state's royalties on petroleum products; the promulgation of labor laws favorable to unions, and the institution of secular educational reform.²⁴⁵ While the policies advanced by the government under the AD garnered massive and long-lasting popular support, they also systematically alienated a number of powerful groups. Opposition consolidated on the right, represented by the Catholic Church, by new political parties such as COPEI, and by conservative elements in the military, in business (foreign and domestic), and in the U.S. embassy.

Business interests – the oil industry in particular – contested policies favoring labor and restricting company profits. Rural elites resisted land reform and vehemently objected measures bolstering the participation of peasant unions in the implementation of rural policy. The Catholic Church was strongly averse to education reforms that promoted public schools and restricted the autonomy of Church-run institutions. Finally, the same military leaders who had orchestrated the coup against General Medina resented attempts by the civilian leaders to relegate them to subordinate, apolitical roles. Confident in its vast electoral majorities and its perceived alliance with the military, the AD largely ignored the opposition coalition that had begun to form. On November 24th, 1948, the AD government fell to a military coup. The three-year experiment with democracy would subsequently give way to a decade of bloody dictatorship.²⁴⁶

After the coup, a junta composed of three colonels – Marcos Perez Jimenez, Carlos Delgado Chalbaud (minister of defense during the *trienio*), and Felipe Llovera Paez – was installed as a provisional government. Of the three, Colonel Delgado was chosen president, albeit his tenure in that position only lasted until November 23, 1950 when he was assassinated. For two years, Perez Jimenez, who had been appointed the minister of defense under Delgado, consolidated control over the military. After leading a new military junta, Perez Jimenez declared himself provisional president in 1952. On November 30th of that year, Perez Jimenez manipulated a National Constituent Assembly to declare himself the constitutionally elected president for the period 1953 – 1958.²⁴⁷ Under the leadership of General Marcos Perez Jimenez, public policy was rolled back across the board. Educational, labor, and agrarian reforms were rescinded, the press was censored, and the labor syndicates and peasant unions that had formed the base of AD support were replaced with nonpartisan unions.²⁴⁸ Nuancing this heavy-handed authoritarianism with populist policies, Perez Jimenez launched a state initiative that allocated large amounts of money for the creation of major urban centers and massive housing projects. Money was also allocated for the transformation of transportation and communication infrastructure, and the development of basic industries such as iron and steel.²⁴⁹

By 1957, several factors converged to undermine military rule. First, the Catholic Church which had openly endorsed military rule in 1948 as “salvation”, turned against the regime, legitimizing opposition to the military. Second, a general economic downturn combined with notorious corruption – especially in public works- stimulated public criticism by professional societies (engineers, lawyers etc.).²⁵⁰ Moreover, the business community became increasingly alienated as the regime reneged its debts and contracts.²⁵¹ Third, exiled party elites from the major parties (AD, COPEI, URD, and the Communists) formed an opposition bloc, the Junta

Patriotica, that relied upon the underground activities of, and collaboration between, younger party cadres to oust the dictator, and create the conditions for a revolutionary transformation in Venezuela.²⁵² Finally, although many military officers benefited from the regime's lavish spending and rampant corruption, others had become concerned with the long-term viability and integrity of the institution. As such, on New Year's Eve 1957, a group of officers staged a coup against Perez Jimenez. This attempted insurrection disintegrated the façade of unity that had been enforced by the military regime. Although the coup failed, it prompted Perez Jimenez to unleash a wave of repression that resulted in the further alienation of the armed forces.²⁵³

As the weakness of the regime became more apparent, underground political forces, now united under the Junta Patriotica, orchestrated massive public demonstrations and street fighting. Unable to control the masses, the regime collapsed quickly and Perez Jimenez was forced to flee the country on January 23, 1958.²⁵⁴ Following the flight of Perez Jimenez, a junta, composed of five men (two military and three civilian) assumed provisional control over the government. The transition of power from the dictator to this provisional junta did not immediately generate an end to public demonstrations and violence. The demonstrations continued until the two military officers, who had been closely associated with the dictatorship, were discharged. In February, a new junta took firm control; it was composed of Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal, two other military officers, and two civilians. However, the political situation remained far from stable. Under pressure from more conservative officers as well as political parties, a brief period of political negotiation and maneuvering followed. Finally, the junta decided to call for elections by the end of the year to stabilize the political arena as well as to address Venezuela's economic woes - the petroleum market was contracting and the construction and financial sectors were in crisis. Cognizant of the various challenges facing Venezuela, the leaders of the nation's three

main political parties – AD, URD, and COPEI – signed a series of pacts that culminated with the promulgation of the *Punto Fijo* Pact.²⁵⁵

With this pact, key party leaders agreed to defend constitutional government against any possible coup d'état, to form a coalition government of national unity whereby no one party would dominate the president's cabinet, to establish a minimum common program to be enacted regardless of which party won office, to guarantee a financial subsidy and legal autonomy to the Church, and to enforce civilian oversight over the military as well as assure that officers would not be subject to prosecution for their past actions. Moreover, the signatories agreed to exclude the revolutionary left, namely the Communist Party, from participating in government.²⁵⁶ The power-sharing agreement was signed in October 1958, just before the December elections. The result of the elections propelled Romulo Betancourt, the leader of the AD, to the presidency. Moreover, his party won 73 of the 132 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and 32 of the 51 seats in the Senate, with voter turnout being above 92 percent.

The agreement reached by the main political forces and socioeconomic elites ensured that the vital interests of all major social interest groups (AD and COPEI, other political parties, socioeconomic elites, military officials, ecclesiastical groups, labor and peasant coalitions) were represented through the establishment of implicit concurrent majority rule. This “pacted democracy” significantly enhanced governability in Venezuela, as well as lowered political tensions through the deliberate toning down of partisan discourse. As such, citizens and social actors not affiliated with either party recognized the elections as legitimate, and accepted the results without conflict.²⁵⁷

Political change in 1958 was driven by the lessons that relevant social actors had chosen to learn from earlier experiences. Key members of the political class perceived the fall of Perez

Jimenez to be a second opportunity for democracy; a chance to avoid the political disasters of the *trienio*. These included: polarization, a sense of controlled conflict, and the alienation of powerful minorities. Relying upon these experiences, Venezuelan political leaders understood that substantive social and economic change could not occur solely through methods of mass mobilization. Moreover, they believed that through mass mobilization (as was seen during the *trienio*), either power became too concentrated in the dominant party – which led to a virtual dictatorship - or that conflict was so profound as to make governing impossible.²⁵⁸ As a result, the political class decided to act with caution in constructing the post-1958 settlement. Five points characterized the political system of the fledgling democratic regime over the next decade: (1) pacts and coalitions; (2) inter-elite consensus; (3) program limitation; (4) encouragement of participation, but controlled and channeled; and (5) exclusion of the revolutionary left.²⁵⁹ After 1958, barriers to participation dropped and active political involvement was not only encouraged but facilitated. Registration was easy and voting was obligatory.²⁶⁰ Moreover, a strong associational life bolstered political participation, while the highly-institutionalized party structure established by the *Punto Fijo* pact helped to legitimize electoral competitions and those who competed in them.

According to Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, since parties control access to policy-making positions, the way they function and are organized become central components to the performance and viability of Latin American democracy.²⁶¹ As such, Latin American countries that retain a highly-institutionalized party system – in that parties become well established, competition among them is universally accepted, and confidence that the system is legitimate and will prevail into the foreseeable future is unwavering - are often the ones with the longest traditions of stable democratic governance. In order to ascertain the degree to which a

democratic party system is either institutionalized or inchoate, the authors relied upon four essential criterion. The first is regularity of party competition as measured by Mogens N. Pedersen's index of electoral volatility, which gauges the net change in the seat or vote shares of all parties from one election to the next. The second criterion of institutionalization stresses that parties must develop somewhat stable roots in society. This dimension addresses linkages between parties, citizens and organized interests. A third criterion emphasizes, "that citizens and organized interests must perceive that parties and elections are the means of determine who governs, and that the electoral process and parties are accorded legitimacy."²⁶² Lacking relevant cross-national surveys, the authors offer survey data based upon rough estimates that assess key aspects of this criterion. The fourth and final criterion is that party organization in countries with institutionalized party systems must be solid. Aggregating these four dimensions to measure party system institutionalization in Latin America, Mainwaring and Scully place Venezuela among the top four countries in the region, only behind Costa Rica, Chile, and Uruguay.²⁶³ They go on to mention that:

Parties have been the central actors in Venezuelan democracy since its inception in 1958. Parties are institutionalized, disciplined, and centralized. They control the process of candidate selection, and they are the key actors in political campaigns. Organized groups in society have strong linkages to parties and are often dominated by them. Party voting and party identification are strong.²⁶⁴

Although a highly-institutionalized party system reduces the number of problems associated with inchoate or disorganized party systems – such as corruption and personalism - Mainwaring and Scully assert that a high level of institutionalization does not necessarily mean that stable

democratic governance will be achieved. It simply means that where a party system is more institutionalized, parties are key actors in structuring the political process. Thus, political actors in institutionalized systems usually control candidate selection for the head of government, are generally oriented toward winning electoral competitions and coming to power through peaceful means, facilitate governability while allowing for groups to express their interests, and attenuate conflict in ways that do not overwhelm the political system. Moreover, an institutionalized system also enhances electoral accountability and generally reduces the incidence of corruption, which makes for more effective government because, “corruption thrives on disorganization, the absence of stable relationships among groups and of recognized patterns of authority... Corruption is most prevalent in states which lack effective political parties... In a modernizing polity the weaker and less accepted the political parties, the greater the likelihood of corruption.”²⁶⁵ To summarize, although a high degree of party institutionalization does not necessarily lead to democratic governance, stable democracy is more likely to thrive when the party system is institutionalized, than when democratic institutions are weak and uncertainty is pervasive.²⁶⁶

In the post-1958 period, although stability and governability had been achieved through the institutionalization of Venezuela’s party system, the consociational or quasi-consociational experiment that emerged also imposed considerable constraints on the decision-making process. Due to the fact that most important sectors were given a virtual veto power on matters affecting their respective fundamental interests, policy making was rather lengthy and generated slow advances in terms of redistributive legislation.²⁶⁷ Moreover, until the 1980s, associational life was encapsulated and dominated by the major political parties, namely AD and COPEI (URD left the coalition in 1960). Therefore, in general, voter choice and participation in elections were

constrained by both electoral and legal systems, which also afforded leaders of the dominant parties significant influence over all stages of the electoral process.²⁶⁸ Finally, the Betancourt administration, as well as the administration of Raul Leoni that succeeded it, worked assiduously to isolate and exclude the Communist party and other leftist factions from government. In response to their marginalization, and inspired by the recent success of Fidel Castro in Cuba, the Communists and the leftist factions of AD and URD moved quickly to armed opposition in 1960. However, by the late 1960s, the insurgency had been defeated and many of the former guerillas accepted amnesty and integrated themselves into political life as members of peaceful political parties of the left – most notably the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) and the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR).²⁶⁹

From 1958 to 1973, gradual fragmentation of the party system due to doctrinal disputes, generational rivalries, and conflicting personal ambitions led to the steady decline of AD, the uninterrupted growth of COPEI – with Rafael Caldera, the first opposition candidate to win an election doing so in 1968 – and the rise and fall of various personalist vehicles that sought to gain legitimacy.²⁷⁰ During these years, the Venezuelan political system in some regards flourished, as elections became more competitive and political parties proliferated. However, this competition lacked coherence or enduring structure. It was not until the 1973 elections that fragmentation disappeared with the share of presidential votes going to “Other” (not to AD or COPEI) dropping from 42.6 percent in 1968 to 14.6 percent in 1973.²⁷¹ The significance of this transformation was the consolidation of the political system into a two-party-arrangement, as AD and COPEI successfully pushed their rivals to the margin. Although a growing number and variety of groups during this period sought official representation in government – with three candidates competing for the presidency in 1958 while twenty-three competed in 1988; and eight

parties presenting legislative slates in the first election compared to seventy-eight approximately thirty years later – AD and COPEI are the only parties to have enjoyed substantial time in power.²⁷²

John D. Martz in his study of the characteristics of party maturation in Venezuela from 1973 to 1983 posits eight reasons for the unwavering political dominance of these two-parties. These are: (1) the costs of campaign competition which hindered the potential success of minor or of personalistic challenges; (2) the ability of major parties to control internal conflict without leading to outright division due to prior extensive experience doing so; (3) the centrist proclivities of public opinion that forced the two dominant parties towards the middle of the political spectrum, effectively crowding out all competitors; (4) the diminished appeal of radical parties on either the right or the left due to the catch-all methods of AD and COPEI; (5) the solidification of the democratic system that underlined the commitments of the Punto Fijo pact in which AD and COPEI were the main beneficiaries; (6) party loyalties that took precedent over nonparty personalities; (7) centralized party organizations that functioned in democratic manner; and (8) the hegemonic turnover of governments between the two main parties.²⁷³ By the early 1980s, years of shared political dominance between these two parties had allowed them to essentially monopolize the political space at local, regional, and national levels. As a result, this *Partidocracia*, or rule by parties, became a major source of frustration in Venezuelan politics as well as a primary target of opposition and reform by the late 1980s. Dissatisfaction with the political system continued to mount during the 1980s and 1990s as the inability of the political parties to guarantee a better standard of living for Venezuela's growing population became increasingly apparent in the context of continued economic downturn.

The 1973 Middle East oil embargo and the correspondingly high prices for oil on the international markets greatly augmented the revenues of the Venezuelan government; in late 1973 oil prices quadrupled and by 1974, oil earnings had increased from \$2.6 billion in 1973 to \$8.9 billion.²⁷⁴ This dramatic increase in government income allowed newly-elected President Carlos Andres Perez to raise the minimum wage, eliminate unemployment entirely, create vast steel and aluminum industries, subsidize industries and agriculture, and expand social benefits. Moreover, inflation was controlled at a fixed exchange rate (Bs. 4.3 to the dollar), which made it relatively cheaper to obtain dollars as well as imported goods. Although the sustained petroleum boom had earned Venezuela over \$150 billion - which was augmented by the nationalization of the oil industry in 1976 - by 1978, the positive balance of payments generated by the boom had been overtaken by the export of capital abroad, by imports for consumption as well as by imports for the expansion of basic industries. To continue industrial expansion projects and cover the balance of payments deficit, the government contracted several large, short-term loans, which came due just as the price for petroleum on international markets experienced a drastic decrease.²⁷⁵

In the early 1980s, general overproduction, reduced demand resulting from a recession lasting from 1981-1982 and widespread conservation efforts facilitated serious decreases in petroleum prices, which subsequently affected the economies of the oil-exporting nations, including Venezuela.²⁷⁶ As prices fell, income from petroleum exports dropped from slightly below \$20 billion in 1981 to \$11 billion in 1983. Since petroleum still accounted for over 90 percent of export earnings, the government heavily depended upon those revenues to fund social programs, public works, construction and subsidize nascent domestic industries.²⁷⁷ Therefore, as petroleum prices decreased, wages and salaries stagnated in both public and private sectors, real

income decreased and government services experienced a significant decline in quality as well as accessibility. As real income from wages and salaries dropped, the proportion of households in poverty and extreme poverty grew significantly.²⁷⁸ Moreover, inflation, which had begun to rise incrementally during the Perez administration skyrocketed over the course of a few years.

As Robert Alexander points out, “On the basis of 1970 as 100, the index number for the general price level had risen from 119.7 in 1974, the first year of the Perez administration, to 153.0 in 1978, the last year Carlos Andres Perez was in office. It then rose from 184.2 in Herrera Campins’s first year to 303 in 1983, the last full year of the Herrera period.”²⁷⁹ Unable to effectively counter hyperinflationary pressures, on February 28, 1983, a day known to Venezuelans as “Black Friday”, the government was forced to devalue the Bolivar from Bs. 4.3 per U.S dollar to Bs. 8 per U.S dollar. With this devaluation, investment and employment in all industries that depended upon foreign exchange slowed or declined. Additionally, domestic consumers saw their ability to purchase imported goods cut in half over the course of six weeks.²⁸⁰ Unemployment and poverty reached record highs while purchasing power steadily plummeted (by the end of 1998, the exchange rate was around Bs.560 per U.S. dollar).²⁸¹ Between 1987 and 1989, oil exports earned only \$8.5 billion on average, and two additional devaluations took place in 1985 and 1987. This was problematic considering that in 1988, Venezuela’s income from oil exports accounted for over 80 percent of the total value of the country’s sales. Furthermore, the central government obtained around 60 percent of its resources from the state operation of the oilfields.²⁸² Overall, between 1981 and 1989, GDP fell by 3.8 percent – almost 25 percent in per capita terms. In 1989, the GDP contracted by more than 8 percent, inflation reached 81 percent, unemployment reached 50 percent, and foreign reserves had been severely depleted.²⁸³

Moreover, the massive amounts of revenue that had been acquired by Venezuelan government due to the oil bonanza had largely resulted in considerable waste and corruption. During both the administrations of Luis Herrera Campins (1978 – 1983) and Jaime Lusenchi (1983 – 1988) mismanagement, corruption and politically bloated bureaucracies significantly diminished the credibility and transparency of the transactions being made within all levels of government. The proliferation of these problems in the political sphere subsequently initiated the gradual decay of Punto Fijo system, which had been characterized by disciplined party organization and a general responsiveness to the interests of a variety of social groups.²⁸⁴ By the late 1980s, corruption was endemic as generals, senators, ministers, and business elites siphoned millions of dollars into their pockets and then safely abroad; while petty corruption became a way of life at the grassroots level.²⁸⁵ To make matters worse, by the time Hererra Campins left office in 1983, the foreign debt owed by the Venezuelan government, banks and other enterprises was officially estimated to be \$27 billion. By 1985, total foreign debt (private and public) was estimated to be about \$35 billion.²⁸⁶

As Venezuela was dealing with one crisis, another one emerged that would further debilitate the existing political system. For the first three decades after the 1958 Punto Fijo pact, national elections garnered unprecedentedly high rates of voter turnout. As such, parties and party leaders had been able to promote an agenda and implement policies that were reflective of the desires of a large majority of the population. However, despite the introduction of electoral reforms in 1978 that established separate municipal and state elections to diversify choice and spur voter interest, by 1988, voter abstention increased to over 18 percent and to almost 49 percent in the 1993 presidential elections.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, abstention in regional races was measured to be over 25 percent in 1979, increasing to over 50 percent in 1989.²⁸⁸ With voting

mandatory and a ballot that discourages ticket-splitting, such behavior on the part of the electorate is indicative of overwhelming discontent with the party system.²⁸⁹ Moreover, with less of the electorate performing their civic duty, the capacity of parties and leaders to channel conflict, control organizations, and mobilize votes suffered tremendously. Ultimately, party coherence decayed and new organizations emerged to challenge the dominant parties', "hitherto unquestioned role as the only legitimate vehicle for public voice and representation."²⁹⁰ These organizations – ranging from middle-class neighborhood associations, to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – no longer relied upon the parties to gain access to information and acquire means of political action. More significantly, they operated via networks of FAX and electronic mail and acquired independent access to radio, television, and print media.²⁹¹

In 1988, Carlos Andres Perez was re-elected president after campaigning as a populist who promised to restore Venezuela to the prosperity of the 1970s. To the surprise of the Venezuelan polity, Perez announced the implementation of an austerity program and structural adjustment agreement with the International Monetary Fund in exchange for a \$4.5 billion loan.²⁹² The implementation of neoliberal reforms in Venezuela immediately provoked public unrest, especially since the economic crisis in the 1980s, coupled with the end of the Cold War, left the government with no other choice but to embrace orthodox macroeconomic policies and dismantle the protectionist structures that had previously been in place.²⁹³ The confluence of both economic and political crises led to a sudden outbreak of violence on February 27th, 1989 when a rise in gasoline prices was to be absorbed by an increase in bus fares and the cost of basic goods.²⁹⁴ Known as the *Caracazo*, widespread demonstrations, rioting and extensive looting gripped Venezuela, and by the end of the day, twenty-two cities had experienced some kind of public demonstration. Unable to contain the protests with the traditional mechanisms of social

control (such as party or trade-union networks), Perez sent in the military to address the demonstrators. Ultimately, the situation took a turn for the worse, and it is estimated that almost a thousand Venezuelans – mostly civilians perished.²⁹⁵ Following the *Caracazo*, public support for the government decreased drastically, while demonstrations and protests continued on a daily basis.

In light of the government's use of the army as an 'urban shock force' during the uprising, a growing cadre of young military officials attempted to overthrow the Perez regime in 1992. Upon the failure of the attempted coup, massive demonstrations in support of the military insurrection propelled its leaders, Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez among them, to national fame. In November of the same year, there was another failed coup attempt led by military leaders who had formed an alliance with a collection of small leftist groups. The fact that these two coups occurred within such a short time of one another sent a clear signal that normalcy had not yet returned to Venezuela.²⁹⁶ Additionally, these coups served to undermine the legitimacy of the existing democratic regime. In 1993, Congress found Perez guilty of a relatively minor misuse of public funds and voted successfully to remove him from the presidency. Moreover, the political dominance of AD and COPEI came under considerable attack in the early 90s, as the whole democratic regime was portrayed and perceived to be corrupt and fraudulent.²⁹⁷

The hostility towards the political system – specifically AD and COPEI's hegemonic governance – allowed Rafael Caldera, running as an independent, to claim the presidency in 1993. Leaving COPEI, which he had founded 50 years earlier, Caldera had formed an alliance with several minor leftist parties to establish a movement called the National Convergence. Relying upon an anti-neoliberal and anti-party discourse, Caldera promised to return to the days of consultative consensus building as well as establish an interventionist state. However, from

the outset, his administration faced a financial crisis of enormous proportions. He thus accepted support from AD and implemented a second structural adjustment package based upon neoliberal policies, effectively renegeing on his campaign promises.²⁹⁸ In 1998, a sudden drop in oil prices in the international market engendered an economic and fiscal disaster in Venezuela. This economic downturn served to augment existing frustrations amongst the masses. In turn, this frustration was channeled into a repudiation of the traditional elites, the parties and neoliberal doctrine.

The opportunity to make dramatic changes in what most citizens considered to be an unresponsive political regime presented itself with the national elections of 1998. Hugo Chavez, who had been pardoned by the Caldera administration in 1994, surged to national prominence with an electoral movement called the Movimiento Quinta Republica (MVR). Garnering massive support amongst discontented factions of society, Chavez utilized a radical and polarizing anti-neoliberal discourse that offered to eliminate corruption and incompetence, as well as bring about profound social and political change.²⁹⁹ Winning 56 percent of the vote, Chavez assumed the presidency in 1999.

During his first two years in office, Chavez prioritized the dismemberment of the old institutions that supported the continued hegemony of the traditional parties. Convoking a Constituent assembly legitimized by a national referendum, Chavez and his supporters worked to neutralize the most important institutional checks upon the President's ability to construct a more robust 'democratic regime'. By 1999, a new Constitution had been ratified. It created two new branches of government – the Citizen Power and the Electoral Power – in addition to the Executive, the Judicial and the Legislative branches. This was done to promote direct and semi-direct participation by the people, and by doing so, enhance the efficacy of decision making and

the management of public policies. The constitutional text also incorporated four types of popular referenda and provided for legislative initiatives, assemblies and other participatory measures.³⁰⁰ Political parties were not specifically mentioned as vehicles for political organization and public financing of parties was prohibited.

Moreover, the Constitution significantly augmented the power of the Executive, who presides over the central government and is eligible for election to a second consecutive six-year term. The president also has complete authority over the armed forces, and can appoint and remove at any time the 25 ministers that comprise his cabinet, as well as the Vice-President. Furthermore, the Constitution substituted a unicameral National Assembly for the bicameral Congress mandated by the 1961 Constitution. In addition, the document significantly curtailed the autonomy and power of the legislative body, and granted the President the ability to dissolve the National Assembly and call for new elections if it proves recalcitrant. Finally, the Constitution does much to shield the entire judiciary from the influence of political parties as Justices are elected for terms of 12 years without the possibility of reelection and are forbidden to engage in partisan political activity during their time in office.³⁰¹ In 2004, the National Assembly expanded the Supreme Court from 20 to 32 members which ostensibly granted greater judicial authority to the Assembly and to the National Executive.³⁰²

The Constitution also reaffirmed the centrality of the state, the validity of the universal principle of social rights, and the inherent duty of the state to create the conditions to guarantee these rights.³⁰³ State ownership of oil resources was enforced, which reversed the tendency towards privatization that had occurred under the Caldera administration. Chavez's policies and programs were also primarily directed at the marginalized sectors of the population, which came to constitute his exclusive base of support.³⁰⁴ As a result, the political changes introduced by the

new Constitution along with the redistributive policies enshrined within the Bolivarian Revolution generated significant resistance from economic, political, media, religious, and trade union interests who were reluctant to lose their privileged positions in society. In prioritizing the interests of the poor over those of previously privileged groups, Chavez created a 'zero-sum' framework for governing, whereby one group's losses were the other's gains. Therefore, capturing and controlling the state became essential for contending social groups to ensure the protection of their interests. This contention between social interests whereby the middle and upper classes were pitted against the lower classes, mitigated any possibility of negotiation and compromise.³⁰⁵ The result was intense social polarization and political conflict that divided the country between supporters and opponents of the democratically elected government.

Between 2001 and 2003, the opposition attempted to either force the ouster or resignation of Chavez. The first of these attempts manifested as a coup in April 2002. This coup occurred after hundreds of thousands of disgruntled citizens marched in Caracas. Ending in bloodshed, the incident became an excuse for military officers to remove Chavez from office and install Pedro Carmona Estanga, the head executive of a prominent business confederation to the Presidency. Carmona presided over a short-lived administration in which he abolished the National Assembly and attempted to establish a right-wing dictatorship. Shortly thereafter, Diosdado Cabello was appointed to the presidency who in turn, reinstated Chavez. In December of that year, a general strike orchestrated by *Petroleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) – an organization that produced around 80 percent of Venezuela's export revenues – attempted to force Chavez to resign. In response, Chavez fired the workers on strike and replaced them with non-union employees loyal to the regime as well as foreign laborers supplied via international cooperation from the OPEC countries.³⁰⁶

Failing to remove Chavez from office, the influence wielded by these opposition groups significantly diminished. Conversely, Chavez consolidated power and attracted significant support from the poorer factions of society. A final effort to force Chavez from power occurred when the main *anti-chavista* organization, the Coordinadora Democratic (CD) comprised of both traditional parties, many smaller leftist parties of the Punto Fijo era, leaders of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV) and other less-influential middle-class parties and civic organizations, called for a recall referendum in 2004.³⁰⁷ Upon their defeat, the CD collapsed and Chavez was reelected to his third term in 2006.

Contributing to Chavez's re-election was vigorous and sustained economic growth beginning in 2004. After almost two decades of economic stagnation, an increase in international prices of oil as well as domestic oil reforms greatly augmented the state's fiscal resources. Greater oil rents allowed for increases in public expenditure through social programs which contributed to an overall decline in poverty and extreme poverty as well as official unemployment.³⁰⁸ At this juncture, the Bolivarian movement led by Chavez had clearly consolidated itself as the nation's most important political force, and was supported by a broad-based consensus driven by the lower-income and working class cleavages of society.³⁰⁹

Determined to further consolidate his power, Chavez proposed a Project for Constitutional Reform in 2007 that extended the presidential term from six to seven years as well as allowed for the indefinite re-election of the president among other reforms. In December 2007, the proposal was rejected in a national referendum by a slight margin – 50.65 percent of the votes being 'No' and 49.34 percent being 'Yes'. The abstention rate was around 44 percent. In a referendum held in February, 2009 however, a constitutional amendment was approved that removed the legal obstacles to the continuous reelection of the president and all other elected

positions. Chavez and his political alliance considered the passing of this amendment to be a victory and an indication of public support for the continuation of their socialist project.³¹⁰ Over the years, Chavez and his party utilized their control over the state, including the state media, to reward friends, quell dissent, and propagandize in favor of the regime during campaigns.³¹¹ Moreover, many scholars have noted the drastic departure from the participatory model of democracy proposed by Chavez upon his election to the presidency in 1998 and the socialist model advanced by his regime after the 2006 elections.³¹² According to Margarita Lopez Maya:

Until 2006 the government was guided – not without contradictions – by ideas of participatory democracy, which involved a mixed economic model. It was redistributive in the social sphere and combined liberal institutions of representation with mechanisms of direct democracy...after 2006 the government initiated a new phase, emphasizing its statist tendencies in the economy and maintaining its redistributive orientation.

Politically, there was a turn toward the construction of a highly centralized state apparatus, which concentrated power in the hands of Chavez and was characterized by growing authoritarian features.³¹³

The progressive centralization of political and economic power in the executive branch was also accompanied by a general weakening of liberal institutions. There ceased to be separation of powers, fully competitive elections, and boundaries dividing state, government, party and the participatory social organizations that operated from above.³¹⁴ The various channels of participation that characterized the first period were repealed and replaced by communal councils, while civil and political rights suffered.

The global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and its impact on international oil prices generated a significant blow to the viability of Chavez's socialist project. Once again, the weakness of the Venezuelan economy was made evident as it suffered from the typical boom and bust cycle characteristic of mono-export oil economies.³¹⁵ As oil rent decreased, the state was increasingly unable to redirect the wealth derived from oil towards the poor - amplifying the regime's failure to decrease the nation's dependence upon oil. The consequence was mounting frustration among the masses, reflected in surveys that demonstrated social discontent and declining popularity of the president.³¹⁶ Ultimately, the global crisis revealed the institutional weaknesses of Chavez's political agenda as well as the regime's redistributive mechanisms.³¹⁷

Although ill and with re-election uncertain, Chavez ran again and won his fourth consecutive presidential term in 2012. Shortly thereafter, he died from cancer. His successor, Nicolas Maduro was elected by a small margin in April, 2013. Again, in 2014, as international oil prices declined and Venezuela's economy suffered, Maduro's popularity deteriorated rapidly. National Assembly elections in early December 2015 saw high voter turnout as well as a change in majority rule in the Assembly as the centrist-conservative opposition overtook Maduro's party for the first time in 16 years. In April 2016, the Supreme Court ratified a constitutional amendment proposed by Maduro's opponents designed to reduce the presidential term from six to four years. However, the court noted that since the amendment was ratified after Maduro's election, it could not be applied retroactively to his administration. Disregarding this caveat, the National Electoral Commission authorized Maduro's opponents to initiate the paperwork required to begin his recall. Soon thereafter, they had collected more than nine times the number of signatures they would need to initiate the recall process.

In response to these actions, Maduro decreed a state of emergency, claiming that right-wing elements working jointly with foreign powers were threatening the security of the state. The National Assembly however, rejected Maduro's decree who subsequently declared the Assembly illegitimate and disregarded its vote of approval. Ultimately, under Chavez and Maduro, authoritarian tendencies have come to characterize the current regime as the executive retains extensive control over the other branches of government. As such, democratic institutions have deteriorated, freedom of expression has been increasingly suppressed, and political polarization has intensified.³¹⁸ In 2016, Venezuela ranked next-to-last when compared to other Spanish American states in regards to the strength of its democracy – Cuba was last.³¹⁹

As of 2015, both the World Bank and the CIA cited that oil revenues accounted for almost all export earnings and nearly half of the government's revenue.³²⁰ As a result, due to the collapse in international oil prices in 2014, Venezuela faces major domestic restrictions, with a fiscal deficit estimated at 20 percent of GDP at the end of 2015 and external financing needs estimated to be between US\$25 billion and US\$35 billion.³²¹ Furthermore, a combination of price controls, limitations on access to foreign currency, and the collapse of the private sector in the provision of basic goods, led to drastic increases in inflation that had skyrocketed to 121.7 percent by the end of 2015 - one of the highest rates of inflation in the world. This inflationary pressure prompted the Venezuelan government to transition from a multiple exchange rate system with additional controls, to a dual system whereby the lowest official rate was devalued by 37 percent (from 6.3 bolivars per dollar to 10 bolivars per dollar) and the other rate was left floating. Due to this devaluation, Venezuela now faces major stagflation and importers are increasingly unable to obtain sufficient dollars to purchase goods.³²² The overall result of Venezuela's overdependence on the petroleum industry for revenues – complemented by

misguided macroeconomic stabilization policies – has been rampant inflation, widespread shortages of basic consumer goods, medicine and medical supplies, violent crime, high unemployment, and political instability.

Exploratory Conclusions: The ‘Deepening of Democracy’ in Venezuela

In Venezuela, democracy is treasured but not practiced. This is in part due to the culture of corruption that has encumbered the Venezuelan state ever since the discovery of oil in the 1920s. Becoming particularly apparent in the wake of the oil boom, the economic and political dominance of oil corroded the efficacy of the state as well as its political culture. The “get rich quick” mentality that came to characterize the Venezuelan political elite following the rapid influx of petrodollars normalized and expanded clientelistic behavior as well as augmented the levels of governmental corruption. Despite Hugo Chavez’s claim that he would eliminate corruption it remains widespread.³²³ In 2016, Venezuela was ranked as the tenth most corrupt state in the world, and the most corrupt nation in Latin American region.³²⁴

The extreme polarization of the electorate also continues to be a salient issue regarding the quality of democratic governance in Venezuela. Opposition to the social and political reforms entailed by the Bolivarian Revolution has emanated primarily from the middle and upper classes of society who vehemently contested the redistribution of their wealth and the undermining of their political and social influence. Ever since Chavez’s reelection in 2006, this opposition has faced political exclusion and the repression of civil liberties. On the other hand, support for the Bolivarian project has continued to be drawn from a large majority of the population in predominantly lower-class areas. This demographic has historically been the target of the various social and political reforms implemented by the government. Although these two camps

constitute a large portion of the population, there also exists a mass in the middle that either supports or opposes the government according its perception of its performance.³²⁵ In recent years, a growing majority of Venezuelans have come to be increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of the government. However, the high intensity to which Venezuelans either support the current regime or oppose it, remains a divisive reality whereby a culture of accommodation and moderation cannot thrive.

Finally, the quality of a nation's democracy is measured in part by the institutionalization of a system of checks and balances able to prevent the consolidation of power in a single governmental apparatus. In Venezuela, and in Latin America in general, the executive has historically wielded significant authority over the powers of the state – either to protect the social order or to direct social or economic transformation.³²⁶ Upon being elected President, Hugo Chavez played into promises of widespread social and political reform to strengthen his authority and retain control of the executive branch for a longer period than originally stipulated. While his push to further increase presidential longevity in 2007 was blocked by Congress, he was ultimately able to amend the constitution a few years later via executive decree. The apparent legislative and judicial subordination to presidential authority in the absence of effective institutional checks has in turn led to the uneven consolidation of power in the hands of the executive.

Although democratic governance in Venezuela continues to be inhibited by endemic corruption and clientelism, the intense polarization of civil society and the increasingly authoritarian characteristics of the Bolivarian regime, the democratic aspirations of the Venezuelan people remain. Until solutions to these problems are reached however, Venezuela will continue to be plagued by acute political and social instability.

CHAPTER III
A Comparative Analysis of Colombia and Venezuela

The Process of State Creation

The regimes presently operating in Colombia and Venezuela are far from being stable, liberal democracies. However, in both nations, experimentation with consociational regimes, pacted democracy, and partyarchy have signaled a desire at the elite level to create stable and inclusive governance, while grassroots mobilization, the proliferation of civil organizations, and public demonstrations (often in response to elite political arrangements) indicate a substantial yearning for democracy on the part of the masses. Both Colombia and Venezuela possess formal constitutions that express each nation's commitment to the establishment of participatory democracy, and incorporate extensive bills of citizen rights and judicial, and state mechanisms for the protection of those rights. Nevertheless, the absence of a clear connection between democratic governance and the democratic ethos of the existing constitutions is also very much apparent. Democracy is treasured, yet it remains unconsolidated or marginally practiced. In order to discern the reasons why the state-building and democratization experiences in Colombia and Venezuela have faltered, I will conduct a comparative analysis of their respective processes of state creation and democratization.

At this stage, it is important to reiterate that the consolidation and legitimization of the state is one of the critical requirements for the establishment of a stable democratic regime. Regarding the task of state-building in Latin America, David Eugene Blank asserts that in becoming a modern state, any Latin America country must deal successfully with the establishment of a stable boundary with the external world; and with the construction of an effective national administration able to enforce the authority and autonomy of the state

throughout its national territory.³²⁷ Frank Safford adds seven distinct factors to Blank's state-building paradigm. They are: 1) economic geography; 2) political geography, including geographic and transportation conditions affecting political integration; 3) relative economic and fiscal strength; 4) the degree to which the public accepts the political systems; 5) the subservience of the military to civilian rule; 6) the role of the Catholic Church; and 7) protection from external attack or pressure.³²⁸ The presence or absence of the aforementioned factors and their respective influence on state-building varies from case to case. As such, the ability of a centralized body to overcome the challenges presented by these conditions constitutes the task of state-building, or as Blank notes, "the creation of institutions and differentiated structures with sufficient authority to penetrate effectively, and integrate politically, the national territory."³²⁹

Colombia's substantial size, accentuated by its multiple topographical attributes and regional variances in climate, have consistently obstructed its drive to achieve economic and political integration and thus to consolidate and legitimize the power of the state. Upon their arrival, the Spaniards discovered a relatively large indigenous population dispersed throughout the country. The Spanish conquest of the various indigenous groups changed little from one region to the next one. The conquistadores only settled in the places where they could utilize the indigenous population as a workforce – or where they could mine gold. The result was the existence of a considerable amount of distance between each colonial settlement, which generated a collective sense of mutual isolation and autonomy. Moreover, as each region developed distinctive economic roles, demographic shifts corresponding to different regional specializations engendered noticeable social transformations that also varied from region to region. Augmenting this sense of regional economic and social differentiation was the existence

of pervasive transportation and communication difficulties due to the rugged terrain of the Andes.³³⁰

This sense of isolation and relative independence affected the drive to create the Republic of Colombia in 1820. Though the initial intent of the elites was to unify and strengthen the relatively susceptible and disorganized nations of Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia, the political differences and economic interests they inherited from the colonial period hindered their ability and willingness to consolidate the power of the state.

Throughout much of the 16th and 17th centuries, because the Venezuelan economy was based on ranching and plantation agriculture, and lacked mineral wealth and a large centrally-organized (and thus easily exploitable) indigenous population, the Spanish Crown paid limited attention to its development. The absence of close supervision enabled the northern, southern, and eastern regional elites to engage in unrestricted trade within the Atlantic and the Caribbean, as well as with New Spain, and for each to develop a strong sense of regional independence. Caracas, however, quickly became the dominant center of commerce. This development became increasingly evident to the Bourbon Monarchs, particularly during the cacao boom in the early 17th century.

As Spanish colonies, both Venezuelans and Colombians constructed their societies on the concept of *limpieza de sangre* - where white Spaniards and creole elites occupied the upper strata of society while *pardos*, African slaves and native peoples constituted the lower levels. Because Venezuela was considered to be an “unimportant backwater of the Spanish empire,” it did not attract as many Spaniards as did Nueva Granada. As a result, much of the wealth generated by the cacao industry in Venezuela was amassed by creole elites, most of whom resided in Caracas. Moreover, by the end of the 18th century, both nations retained a substantial *mestizo* population

due to centuries of miscegenation between different racial groups. Fearful of the potential destructiveness that the predominantly *mestizo* masses could have upon the existing social order if mobilized, the Spanish *peninsulares*, as well as the creole elite, favored the strict enforcement of the existing socio-economic hierarchies over the implementation of homogenizing reforms. By the time of independence, Venezuelan society remained divided along the lines of class, locality and ethnicity, while in Colombia, strong regional identities as well as a general proclivity to resist centralization at both the elite and grassroots levels emerged. These distinctions and differences would help obstruct the creation of a national identity shaped around collective ideals, which in turn, would hinder the consolidation of the power of the state.

The wars of independence had several relevant effects on the ability of Colombia and Venezuela to consolidate the power of the state. First, they spurred the destruction of what passed for a local aristocracy. Second, they wrecked the basis of colonial wealth, and third, they initiated a series of civil wars and armed conflicts that continued throughout the nineteenth century.³³¹ According to John Lombardi:

In the mature colonial society before the war, conflicts of interest at all levels were resolved through an elaborate, formal, and bureaucratized system. Disputes over land or authority, over precedence and honor, over concessions or profits – whatever the problem, a formal procedure existed to resolve it.... For all its failings and injustices, it did manage a complex society. With the wars of independence, this system disappeared during the clash of bandit armies and the confiscation and reallocation of property.³³²

In this context of political, economic and social instability, the creole elites in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador sought to construct a regime that would protect their respective interests. According to Stein Rokkan and Charles Tilly, who both advance their own state-building paradigms, an essential condition to the process of state creation is a period of political, economic and cultural collusion amongst elites in which, "...a series of bargains are struck and a variety of cultural bonds are established across networks of local power-holders and a number of institutions are built for the extraction of resources for common defense, for the maintenance of internal order and the adjudication of disputes, for the protection of established rights and privileges and for the elementary infrastructure requirements of the economy and the polity."³³³ The failure of the landed elite in the newly formed Confederation of Gran Colombia to establish these bonds can be attributed to: 1) the inability of new creole elite to govern effectively, or to design a political system capable of coping with regional fragmentation and administrative decay associated with gaining independence, and 2) the inability of the creoles to agree upon a stable political system that would satisfy their collective economic interests.

The absence of elite cohesion, mostly due to the Venezuelan and Ecuadorian elite's resentment towards the creole elite in Colombia, led to the subsequent dissolution of the Confederation of Gran Colombia, and set the stage for the rise of two dominant political parties in Colombia, which consolidated their power at the expense of the state. In Venezuela, for much of the 19th century, *caudillos* such as Paez, the Monagas brothers and Guzman Blanco, seized Caracas, enlarged their power, and each established a system whereby as the national *caudillo* each presided at different times over a quasi-federalist state. The success of these national *caudillos* remained contingent upon their personal political skills, their ability to retain a powerful militia, and a booming economy.

The wars of independence destroyed the cacao plantations of the colonial era. After independence, the coffee economy grew rapidly. This was primary because production expanded onto the mountain slopes of the relatively untouched Andean region. By controlling the ports of Caracas, its *caudillos* essentially monopolized trade with the North Atlantic and European powers, whose demand for Venezuelan coffee enticed regional elites to work with, rather than against Caracas. As foreign loans proliferated and credit became easily accessible, the expansion of the domestic coffee industry allowed Venezuela to recover part of its wealth that it had lost as a result of the wars for independence. However, when the demand for coffee had abated, Venezuela's inability to repay its debts and attract new investment undermined the stability of the Paez regime, which became increasingly unable to keep unruly regional *caudillos* in line. Furthermore, tensions between the *caraqueno* elite and the landowning regional elite due to the economic downturn engendered the creation of the nation's first political parties, although the differences between them were marginal. After the deposition of Paez, the Monagas brothers, who were equally reluctant to share political power or shy away from export-led growth based upon the production of a single commodity, suffered the same fate in 1858.

In Colombia, the dissolution of the confederation in 1830 was accompanied by a substantial reduction in the size of the national armed forces. An emerging liberal elite who strongly advocated for the decentralization of state power supported the action. Its immediate impact was the proliferation of regional militias. With its power further curtailed after a brief military dictatorship in 1854, the Colombian military was unable to function as an independent, authoritative political force for the rest of the nineteenth century. The relative weakness of a national military or a domineering military force led to a number of violent and highly-polarizing

civil wars.³³⁴ Ironically, the absence of an external enemy may have also helped slow down the development of a national consciousness and political consensus.³³⁵

The relative historical weakness of the Colombian military, combined with persistent regionalism and political instability, allowed for the installment and perpetuation of a violent two-party system that would fuel internal armed conflict as well as define the nature of the political struggles in the decades to come. As noted by Kline, other “cleavages, (such as social class and regionalism) became secondary to the party one. Although the elite of either party was often divided in terms of ideology, economic interests, personal loyalties, and even regional allegiances, in the face of a challenge from the other party, factional differences were set aside.”³³⁶ As a result, in the absence of substantive periods of stabilizing military rule, as was commonplace in most other nineteenth century Latin American countries – particularly Mexico and Peru, the Liberals and Conservatives were able to mobilize all factions of society to engage in numerous civil conflicts that only served to further polarize Colombian society along party lines.³³⁷

Contributing significantly to polarization throughout the nineteenth century was the status and occupation of the Catholic Church in society. Whereas Liberals generally advocated ecclesiastical reform as well as the diminished role of the Church in society, Conservatives portended that the Church was important for social stability and should hold influence in all areas of life. This profound division created by the religious question was apparent even within the lowest social classes, serving to intensify the various internal conflicts. According to the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda,

[The] religious struggle – emotional, bitter, and personal – made the consciousness of social class pass to a second level and eliminated the conflicts

based on popular self-identification. The Colombian political parties were converted to simple agglomerations in which there remained together both members of the elite and of the lower classes who had their inclinations.... For this reason, far from being an “element of national unity” and of “social order as the Constitution says, the Catholic religion has really been a source of conflict and a root of the bitter disunity among Colombians. ³³⁸

The role that the Catholic Church should play in society became the most salient distinction not only between the traditional parties, but also amongst the masses. By the mid-19th century, political participation (which had been extended to all men via the constitution of 1853) had become a function of party loyalty in which a majority of voters gave no heed to a specific party program, or to the image of their party’s candidate.³³⁹ In Venezuela, on the other hand, the ecclesiastical structures of the Catholic Church were largely absent. As such, issues regarding the role of the Catholic Church in society did not divide the nation to the degree that it did in Colombia.³⁴⁰

The instability generated in Venezuela by the Federal Wars of 1858-1865 did not end until Guzman Blanco seized power in 1870. During his tenure in office, his national campaigns to ‘modernize’ Venezuela helped strengthen the power of the state. However, by the end of his rule in 1888, the Venezuelan population was comparatively worse off. As Judith Ewell writes, “the Venezuelan population on the brink of the twentieth century was unhealthy, illiterate, unmarried, rural, concentrated on the coastal belt, and numbered just over 2 million.”³⁴¹ Ewell’s overview illuminates the conditions of life in a nation where the ability of the state to provide even basic health and public education services had been greatly curtailed. Although a centralized and autonomous administrative apparatus had been formed in Venezuela by the turn

of the century, the state remained unable to enforce its authority throughout its territory. Moreover, as evidenced by the frequent military campaigns throughout the 19th century, the state never garnered the capacity to mobilize and integrate the long-divided citizenry into national political life. As such, the process of state creation would not fully commence until after the discovery of oil in the early years of the 20th century.

Lastly, as a Spanish colonial possession, Colombia's economic significance had been primarily as a producer of gold. Additionally, the port of Cartagena served as a key base for the Spanish navy in the Caribbean as well as a major entry point for both African slaves and European imports destined for the interior of the country. However, Colombia's economic development was stagnant throughout the colonial period, and it never developed any significant exports outside of gold. In the post-independence era, Colombia's economy, devastated by the war, continued to be reliant upon gold as a primary export although it was seriously constrained by high transportation costs. It was not until the mid-1860s, however, when economic elites began to experiment with tropical commodities such as tobacco, that gold was surpassed as the primary export. Eventually, coffee would become Colombia's most important export commodity during the nineteenth century. From the end of the nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, a sustained coffee boom would provide the Colombian government with sufficient funds to cover its expenses as well as to begin to consolidate the power of the state.³⁴²

In Venezuela, on the other hand, to control the northern region, primarily Caracas, political leaders had to have access to most of the wealth generated within the colony as well as control over lucrative commercial ties. As such, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, while regional *caudillos* made it their objective to capture and control Caracas in order to consolidate their power and establish a quasi-federal system, in Colombia, civilian-led

political parties relied upon deep-seeded regional antagonisms to consolidate their power at the expense of the state.

It was not until the promulgation of the 1886 Constitution that the consolidation of the Colombian state began to occur. The victory by Rafael Nuñez Moledo, the Independents and their Conservative allies in 1886, signified the triumph of centralism, strengthened institutional authority, and close church-state cooperation. Nuñez and his followers utilized the greatly enhanced power of government to thwart opposition, create a strong executive as well as a more representative legislature to combat regionalism, and maintain a large standing army. This initial move towards consolidation coincided with the rapid expansion of the coffee economy, which bolstered customs revenues and allowed the government to meet its fiscal obligations.³⁴³ Nevertheless, although the power of the state had seemingly been consolidated, by the end of the nineteenth century, Colombia was thrust into one of the largest and bloodiest civil wars to ever occur in its history.

The Process of Democratization

The state provides the legal framework within which the exercise of citizenship and social conflicts are managed. A well-structured and legitimate state ensures the provision of basic services; monopolizes the use of legitimate force; defends its citizens from external and internal threats; finances public projects by collecting taxes, mobilizing savings and allocating resources, and preserves territorial integrity.³⁴⁴ Partially due to the early consolidation and power of the two traditional parties, the state in Colombia has been historically weak. During the 20th century, the role of the state in society became even more limited as the confluence between an

emerging economic elite, due to the coffee boom, and the existing political elite, created an elite social class that strived to retain control over the nation and its economy. As explained by Kline:

The social dimensions of the Colombian state before 1958 were built around two principles: (1) political power in the hands of one of the two traditional parties each of which, in turn, controlled vast numbers of dependent people, primarily through sectarian methods; and (2) a social-class system, with a small elite dominating both the economic and political structures.³⁴⁵

By the 1960s, increased international assistance, especially from the U.S. government, substantially augmented the state's economic and technical capabilities.³⁴⁶ However, the orientation of governmental agencies and policies were significantly tailored to serve the interests of private international and domestic businesses, the military, and the political parties. As a result, the state was charged with providing support for private businesses as well as creating a collegial investment climate for international interests. While fiscal conservatism, privatization and international investment allowed the Colombian government to mitigate the impacts of regional and international economic crises so common in most other Latin American nations, those policies also hindered the ability of the state to provide a strong, and comprehensive network of social programs (education, healthcare, social security) aimed at poverty alleviation, and inequality reduction that were more or less implemented in neighboring Latin American countries. The result was the proliferation of organizations on the left that demanded greater social equality as well as greater political participation.

Facing political exclusion and repression due to the restrictive political framework of the National Front, a number of groups radicalized and established the foundations of the guerrilla movements that have up until recently operated throughout much of the nation. In the 1990s, the

adherence to neoliberal doctrine further curtailed the size and power of the state, and its ability to address the underlying socio-economic factors contributing to internal conflict. Although poverty has declined markedly since the late 1990s -- from 50 percent in 2002 to 28.5 percent in 2014 -- currently, income inequality in Colombia remains amongst the highest in the world.³⁴⁷ The persistence of high-income inequality as well as the increased concentration of land in the hands of a small minority since the 1980s, have contributed to the longevity and the intensity of protracted civil conflict. The conflict itself, in turn, has had a profound impact upon the development of Colombian politics, economy, society and culture over the last 50 years. As such, although a peace deal has been recently ratified between the FARC and the Colombian government, and there now exists many leftist political parties that compete in elections, many analysts speculate that the possibility of continued internal conflict persists as long as this high degree of inequality remains unaddressed.³⁴⁸

One way to begin the analysis of the process of democratization in Venezuela is by examining the impact that petroleum has had on the formation and development of the state. As Terry Karl asserts, “in the Venezuelan case, petroleum is the single most important factor explaining the creation of the structural conditions for the breakdown of military authoritarianism and the subsequent persistence of a democratic system.”³⁴⁹ Once oil production and export got underway after 1920, oil propelled the expansion of the state.³⁵⁰ Revenues expanded tremendously under the Gomez regime, who utilized the oil earnings to pay off foreign debt, stabilize the currency, strengthen the military, underwrite an extensive bureaucracy and public-works program, destroy his regional enemies and provide his cadre of loyal caudillos with high salaries and benefits.³⁵¹ Since oil-mediated integration into the world market allowed for the continuous expansion of the nation’s capacity to import, the pressure to industrialize and the

tendency towards populism that other Latin American nations were experiencing during the great depression in the 1930s was conspicuously absent in Venezuela. Unlike most nations in the region - insulated by oil wealth and its strong import capacity - Venezuela did not embark on import substitution industrialization, nor did it witness the rise of populist elements in society until the end of World War II.

According to the resource curse theory, the leaders of a state rich in minerals often neglect to invest in the necessary infrastructure needed to develop alternative forms of production as well as invest in new industries. Rather than diversify, leaders opt to encourage isolated investment into and development of a specific resource or technology used to extract or process that resource. In the absence of basic industries as well as a more diverse economy, a state becomes dependent upon other states for the provision of goods and services. Not only does the state become dependent upon other states to supply essential goods, but the growth of its own economy increases its dependence on the external market demand for its product. Therefore, when the market for the product declines, or the resource is exhausted, the economy suffers.

More specifically, this problem emerges when a commodity, in this case petroleum, facilitates an increase in income and investment within one sector disproportionate to the rest of the economy. The increase in one particular sector engenders the distorted growth in services and other non-tradables, which cannot be imported, while simultaneously discouraging the production of tradables, which are then imported. As the demand for domestic services and imports increase, prices rise and the domestic currency appreciates. Thus, consumers find that foreign goods are now cheaper than the same domestic goods, and consumption becomes heavily reliant upon imported goods. This in turn, creates a cycle of importation and service-based growth that discourages the growth of other sectors of the economy as well as a strong domestic

consumer market. As a result, those nations that confront this problem are highly susceptible to price changes in one particular commodity – oil in the case of Venezuela - and are increasingly unable to diversify their economy.

Although the rapid growth of the oil industry paradoxically deterred domestic industrialization until after World War II, the timing of industrialization was of particular importance to the establishment of democracy in Venezuela. As already explained, before 1920 Venezuela's economy was almost entirely based upon agriculture. However, due to the lucrative opportunities that accompanied the advent of the oil industry after 1921, every line of agricultural production and export dropped sharply; both agricultural workers and rural elites moved into the primarily urbanized sectors of commerce, manufacturing and services. As a result, by 1950 the agricultural sector's share of GDP sank from one-third in the mid-1920s to less than one-tenth – the smallest contribution in all of Latin America.³⁵² While urban areas experienced profound growth and the proliferation of a younger and more educated electorate, the countryside practically emptied. The decline of agriculture in Venezuela had myriad social and political implications.

First, as the attractiveness of rural investment declined, Venezuelan landowners sold their property to the oil companies and came to constitute a commercial and financial urban bourgeoisie deeply invested in the importation of consumer goods. Bonds between foreign capital, domestic capital and the state – frequently enforced by clientelistic relationships – were established and strengthened with time. Second, without a rural base, the Venezuelan agricultural elite was unable to have a significant impact in the political realm. Although it would support the formation of a conservative Christian Democratic Party, this class did not wield nearly as much political influence as did the agrarian elites in other Latin American nations – namely Colombia.

Similarly, the ability of the Catholic Church to mobilize and politicize rural factions was also significantly curtailed by the oil-induced rural-urban migration. As such, Venezuela lacked a party organization that could, "...shift the political spectrum to the Right in a future electoral arena."³⁵³

Third, since oil production is a capital-intensive industry, the working class grew slowly as the number of jobs generated by the industry was minimal. Although they were militantly organized by the Communist party of Venezuela, this industrial working class was small as well as isolated in camps located far from urban centers. These factors subsequently hindered the ability of the working class to have a powerful political impact to a degree equivalent to that of the Socialist and Communist parties in Argentina or Chile.³⁵⁴ Finally, the introduction and consolidation of the oil enclave economy engendered the emergence of an urban middle class that grew in tandem with the rapid expansion of the service sector and the state bureaucracy. During the 1940s and 1950s, direct foreign investment in Venezuela increased from \$938 million to \$3.71 billion – the largest concentration in any Latin American nation. As the manufacturing industry grew, so did the number of small artisans and white-collar workers in the service sector. As a result, foreign and domestic economic and political forces became increasingly intertwined. Due to the weakness and small size of the leftist working class as well as of the traditionally conservative rural and ecclesiastical elites, the aspirations and demands of the nascent middle class dominated the political arena and led to the *trienio* period.

After a brief experiment with democracy that was centered upon "sowing the petroleum", or using petroleum revenues to diversify the economy and provide for basic social services, the military resumed control over the state and governed in authoritarian fashion for a period of 10 years. From then on, Venezuela's acute dependence on oil revenues to finance the rapidly

expanding functionalities of the state continued, contributing to its classification as a petro-state – a state built upon a mono-export petroleum economy that uses distributive strategies to sustain political order.³⁵⁵

Party Systems and Political Structures: Competition and Participation

The models of democratization advanced by Dahl as well as by Linz and Stepan, assert that the degree to which a ‘free and lively’ civil society as well as a ‘relatively autonomous and valued’ political society are allowed to flourish - in that citizens are granted the freedom to form and join organizations, to express their views, and are guaranteed access alternative sources of information - is crucial for the consolidation of democracy. As most theoreticians of democratic consolidation can agree, parties and competition among them are essential to the practice of liberal democracy since they present an institutional vehicle through which citizens can exercise their rights.³⁵⁶ While strong civil organizations are also essential to democracy in that they allow for a non-institutionalized medium of political expression, political parties process and structure the options to be made available to the electorate thereby combining a multitude of opinions and ideologies into a collective decision about who will govern.³⁵⁷ As such, the study of parties and party systems are central to understanding democracy.³⁵⁸

The two-party system in Colombia has remained its most dominant political feature since the late 1840s until the early 2000s. The consolidation of this hegemonic two-party configuration allowed the traditional parties to wield substantial influence over both political and civil societies. As a result, powerful partisan subcultures created by the traditional parties have divided the population, and in many instances, such as the *Bogotazo* in 1948, fueled violent conflict constituting serious threats to continued democratic governance.³⁵⁹ On the other hand,

strong party identification has historically facilitated national integration, impeded the emergence of a strong military able to contest civilian rule, and led to the expansion of the electorate in the 20th century.³⁶⁰ In Venezuela, although petroleum facilitated the socio-economic transformations that created the necessary conditions for a democratic regime in the second half of the 20th century, these changes by themselves do not explain the successful construction and institutionalization of a competitive party regime. Moreover, political parties are relatively new organizations compared to those in Colombia. For much of the 19th century and well into the early 20th century, Venezuela was primarily controlled by *caudillos*, or regional military strongmen, who sought to consolidate their own power in a dominantly authoritarian manner. As a result, it was not until the 1940s that political parties became legitimate vehicles of political competition and representation.

In Colombia, from 1849 until 1886, the political parties consolidated power at the expense of the state, preferring to augment regional autonomy rather than to acquiesce to a centralized authority. The Conservatives tended to favor strong, central government, protection of the Catholic Church and its social and economic prerogatives, and the defense of the interests of traditional landowners. Liberals, on the other hand, advocated for federalism, disestablishment of the Church, and the defense of commercial interests.³⁶¹ The Liberals dominated this period, however their federalist agenda was fiercely contested by Conservative opposition, which led to numerous bouts of internal conflict that obstructed stable governance. It was not until the promulgation of the 1886 Constitution, which aimed to consolidate the power of the state, that the maintenance of political hegemony became increasingly tethered to the domination of one party over the other within government. As Robert Dix has stated, "...[T]he rule of one party has frequently meant the almost total exclusion of members of the other from government. The

parties have treated government as an objective to be seized and, once won, as a bastion in which to entrench themselves like armies of occupation, subsisting on the bureaucratic booty of battle.”³⁶² Until 1946, interchange between the two parties based on sectarian politics characterized the political system, resulting in the establishment of weak state institutions, and intense confrontation in both the electoral arena and within the electorate.

During the years of the liberal republic and *la violencia*, both parties were intensely involved in the mobilization of their respective bases. The drive towards mass mobilization facilitated the expansion of civil participation, and the incorporation of a nascent urban working and middle classes into the traditional party structures. Attempting to fortify their respective organizations and provide representation for the new social classes, social conflict and violence emerged as competition between parties escalated. At the elite level, conflict was relatively contained, resulting in slander as well as the occasional duel; at the grass roots level, however, political polarization along the lines of acute ideological differences, especially surrounding the role of the Church in society, led to fratricidal violence.³⁶³ According to Dix, Colombia was among the few ‘continuous’ party systems in the region, ‘that simply have not evolved or changed much at all over time, despite...marked increases in social and political mobilization and the emergence of new social classes.’³⁶⁴ Rather than presenting a challenge to the traditional parties by means of forming opposition groups, the emerging working classes were effectively inculcated into the established two-party system, with the only significant opposition to the continuous character of the system emanating from Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in 1946.

Following Gaitan’s assassination in 1948, and the failed attempt to restore order by means of a military dictatorship, the consociational elements of the National Front were designed by the traditional party elite to both regain control over the country’s political life, as well as to,

“...consolidate their empire and to mold the society which interested them”.³⁶⁵ Driven by a general fear of mass mobilization especially by the left (evidenced by the rise of Gaitan), the National Front agreement practically assured governmental immobility, which in turn restricted the capacity to bring about political change and social reform.³⁶⁶ By the end of its constitutional charter in 1974, the National Front regime had achieved its designed purpose of ensuring political and social stability to Colombia. However, it did so at great cost.

A similar agreement between Venezuela’s two leading parties occurred in 1958 as they promulgated a series of pacts that culminated with the *Punto Fijo Pact*. The political and economic elites from both leading parties negotiated fundamental agreements concerning how major decisions would be made and who would be involved making them. The agreement led to a period of consensual and conciliatory politics in Venezuela.³⁶⁷ Agreeing that democracy was the best system of stable governance, the elites created what Terry Karl refers to as a “pacted democracy” and what Michael Coppedge calls “partyarchy”.³⁶⁸

Both Karl and Coppedge assert that while this variation of democracy promotes regime stability as well as a certain degree of predictability with regards to future reforms, it does so at the expense of the nature and quality of the democracy established. In a pacted democracy, collusion at the elite level is predicated upon inclusion as well as exclusion, and is an implicitly anti-democratic method of interest representation.³⁶⁹ The decision to exclude various interest groups can be exemplified by the fact that although Venezuela’s socialist and communist parties supported the overthrow of the Perez Jimenez regime in 1957-58, they were left out of the negotiations leading up the *Punto Fijo* pact as well as barred from the political process. The exclusion of these parties and other important societal actors in conjunction with the extension of substantial compromises to the military and economic elites, severely limited the scope and

possibility of reform. Although pact-making permits socioeconomic structures to change over time by providing political stability, it does so by freezing a set of relationships in place. Thus, when new politically relevant social actors emerge – products of the varied socioeconomic conditions facilitated by the pact – they find themselves unrepresented by the elite agreements of the past. In Venezuela, shortly after their isolation from the decision-making process, the socialist and communist parties turned to guerrilla warfare and waged a brief insurgency against the government in the 1960s. Although their action was most notably an expression of frustration with the exclusionary aspects of the new regime, by the 1980s, grassroots challenges to the old system began to proliferate as socioeconomic changes outpaced the ossified political institutions. As dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of pacted governance became widespread, alternative parties, business groups, unions and other organizations emerged to contest both the dominant parties and the party system.

Moreover, Karl notes that once the original negotiators of a pact have departed from the political arena, a new generation of leaders must be able to sustain a high degree of communication as well as a spirit of accommodation. This task is difficult to carry out since different generations may not be operating in the same political, social and economic context as their predecessors. In the Venezuelan case, the “spirit of Punto Fijo” and the conciliatory manner of politics that had characterized the first three administrations was markedly absent from the governments of Carlos Andres Perez (1974-79) and Luis Herrera Campins (1979-84).³⁷⁰ Due to the oil booms of the 1970s and 80s and the subsequent influx of petrodollars, the administrations during this period assumed that money would no longer be a problem as long as the state kept accumulating oil rent. As the political and economic elite adopted a ‘get rich quick’ mentality, the spoils system that had been established by the original political and economic elites gradually

gave way to a crisis of clientelism in Venezuela. This shift in political culture had a deeply corrosive influence upon the efficacy and productivity of the state, which became visible when the oil boom eventually ended.³⁷¹

Although the agreement between Liberals and Conservatives in Colombia accommodated many important societal actors, including the Catholic Church, which came to view itself as a force of conciliation; the military, which was promised autonomy and respect; and producer groups, which capitalized on promises of greater access to policy circles, it excluded many others, most notably leftist groups. Lacking an institutional channel for participation, the disillusioned factions within society radicalized and came to promote guerrilla activity as the only means of affecting political change. Gradually, the legitimacy of the political system began to suffer as these movements proliferated and came to control substantial portions of the Colombian territory. Furthermore, because of state-led industrialization, massive population growth, and high rates of rural-urban migration during the late 1980s, less than 50 percent of the Colombians under the age of thirty-five expressed identification with either of the traditional parties.³⁷² Declining party identification amongst an increasingly younger, less politically informed and less economically well-off electorate revealed the institutional weakness of the traditional parties, as they were increasingly unable to appeal to the changing demographics. Contributing to the decline in party identification was the inability of those who were civically engaged to differentiate between the policies and agendas of the two dominant parties. Years of sharing power had ostensibly erased ideological distinctions that had previously existed, and led to little variation in the parties' proposed social and economic policies. Moreover, the parties came to heavily rely upon patronage-based incentives for voter mobilization, which in turn facilitated the entrenchment of clientelism in Colombia.

Additionally, the party structure itself proved to be problematic in that it led to political fragmentation and factionalization within the regime. The electoral guidelines enforced by the National Front agreement stipulated that elites from both parties were charged with negotiating an official presidential candidate, whereby candidates for other positions would be linked to the list of the agreed-upon presidential candidate. This process greatly divided political elites, and subsequently reduced central party control. As such, factionalism and fragmentation came to characterize the National Front period, giving way to intense bargaining with regional elites for political support, the rise of intraparty competition, and the proliferation of insurgent lists at the presidential and congressional levels.³⁷³ As Francisco Leal in his *Estado y Política en Colombia* explains, “with the National Front great traumas were produced at the national level of bipartyism, at the same time as the regional level, which is the properly clientelist one, was being strengthened and modified. In effect, together with the process of bipartisan depoliticization, the role of national leadership as legitimizer of the party collectivities was being weakened.”³⁷⁴ In short, the existing regime structure itself engendered internal disorder within the parties, government immobility, the growth of clientelism and an increasingly disenfranchised electorate.

Furthermore, according to the concept of democracy advanced by Dahl, a principle tenet of democracy is participation, such that no substantial segment of the population is excluded from the effective pursuit of political power.³⁷⁵ During the National Front arrangement, many movements and organizations on the left were barred from participating in political contests, while the power-sharing mechanism ostensibly allowed the two parties to jointly co-opt elections. Although there did not exist any barrier to entry for alternative parties, evidenced by the participation of Gustavo Rojas’ populist party, ANAPO, it was not until 1974, after the end of coalition governance, that these parties were awarded seats proportional to their electoral

results.³⁷⁶ This act undermined the second tenet of democracy advanced by Dahl, which stipulates that there be free, fair, and regular contests for the support of the population.

While elections occurred frequently and were relatively free, the institutionalized power-sharing agreement among the traditional two-party political elites inhibited truly ‘fair’ elections. Furthermore, a constitutional amendment introduced in 1968 (Article 120 of the Constitution referred to as the “*desmonte*” of the National Front) extended bureaucratic parity for the presidential term of 1974 to 1978, while it also established that a “proper and equitable” share of representation in government be awarded to the party with the second-largest number of votes.³⁷⁷ Essentially, a power-sharing arrangement based upon the machine-oriented clientelism of the National Front period had been indefinitely established.³⁷⁸ At this juncture, the final principle of democracy, accountability such that political rulers and elected representatives serve as “agents” of their constituencies, was (and continues to be) blatantly ignored.

It is important to recognize that the primary objective of the agreement between the two parties was not to establish democratic governance. In fact, it was an arrangement that increasingly came to serve the bureaucratic and personal interests of national and regional party leaders. As a result, clientelism, secrecy, increased presidential authority, ad hoc decision forums and summit negotiations and government-sponsored mass organizations became the informal “rules of the game”.³⁷⁹

As mentioned earlier, Michael Coppedge classifies the system that existed during the Punto Fijo period as a partyarchy – or a dictatorship of parties. Relating Robert Dahl’s conception of polyarchy to partyarchy, Coppedge asserts that partyarchy is the degree to which political parties interfere with the fulfillment of the necessary requirements for polyarchy (these being: freedom of association, expression, the right to vote and the right of political leaders to

compete for votes, eligibility for public office, free and fair elections, alternative sources of information and policies that depend on the vote).³⁸⁰ He also posits that it is possible for a partyarchy to be considered fully polyarchic as long as 1) the parties themselves are internally democratic and 2) there are meaningful differences in the platforms of the major parties that offer voters a diversity of representation. Neither of these conditions were present in Venezuela.³⁸¹

To facilitate a high degree of control, the political parties permeated all facets of civil society, mobilizing and organizing both the peasantry and urban working class into, “officially sanctioned, non-competitive, and state-supervised interest associations linked to the traditional parties.”³⁸² The role of these associations was primarily to mediate as well as to contain civil society interests before the state. At first, party infiltration of these major civil society organizations resulted in the expansion of the electorate and massive mobilization of the polity whereby between 1958 and 1988, voter registration never dropped below 83% of the voting age population and of those registered to vote, 82% on average performed their civic duty.³⁸³ Moreover, party identification was very strong. Contributing to high rates of participation and party identification, were various reforms that aimed to lower barriers to participation, simplify voter registration, augment party identification through costly organizational campaigns, and revamp electoral procedures. While these reforms initially buffered stability, as well as enhanced the institutional strength of parties in Venezuela, over time, the closed nature of this partyarchical system led to pervasive disillusionment with the regime.

First, the corporatist structure constructed by the parties allowed them to monopolize political space through the domination of civil organizations. This imposed structure made joining autonomous groups almost impossible. Additionally, civil participation was hindered

under this institutional arrangement as the party leadership had complete control over candidate selection; they also fixed the place of each candidate on the party's slate. Moreover, the centralized nature of internal party decision-making made it so that party activism through primaries or caucuses was an ineffective avenue of influencing the future election of party officials. Since party elites had complete control over the nomination and election of legislators, members of Congress had no incentive to serve particular constituencies. Thus, rank-and-file party members gradually came to perceive their ability to influence the political sphere to be greatly diminished, while the dependence upon party elites for election and re-election rather than upon the electorate further entrenched clientelistic practices. A two-part study conducted by Enrique A. Baloyra that measured public opinion about military coups and democratic consolidation in Venezuela in 1973 and 1983 concluded that Venezuelans were increasingly dissatisfied with the performance of government, and desired an expansion of suffrage to correct governmental shortcomings in the future. The study also revealed that despite their frustration with ineffective governance, Venezuelans remained very supportive of democratic norms.³⁸⁴

Finally, as catchall parties aiming to benefit every sector of society, there was little programmatic divergence between the two dominant organizations. Additionally, partisan support depended upon effective economic management.³⁸⁵ In the absence of inherently different political, economic and societal agendas, the parties ceased to be vehicles of popular expression and became increasingly stratified along an elite-non-elite dimension. As the parties controlled both the administrative and judicial apparatuses, a dual system of clientelism and justice emerged that furthered the divide between the rich and the poor. As explained by Phillip:

By the 1990s, the Venezuelan administrative system could be characterized by operating at two levels. At the lowest level it provided a subsistence minimum of income to a significant number of people who owed their position and any prospects they might have had to political connections...this can be seen as a system of mass clientelism. At the highest level the state was run by an elite of several thousand people to whom the law did not really apply: one might call this elite clientelism.³⁸⁶

In the judiciary, a similar system materialized where the politically unconnected poor were subject to stricter judicial punishment, while the well-connected and wealthy elites were essentially immune from law enforcement.³⁸⁷ This division left much of the Venezuelan electorate demanding institutions that would represent the populous, not just a few elites. Although a 1973 survey showed that 66 percent of those polled agreed with the statement: "It matters a lot which party is going to win this presidential election," after more than a decade of economic stress and revelations of corruption the choice between the two parties had become less meaningful. This trend was reflected by increasing electoral abstention, with abstention rates jumping from 12.4 percent in 1978 to 18.1 percent in 1988, as well as by a dramatic decline in party identification. A survey showed that while 18 percent of those polled in 1988 did not identify with either party, by 1991 the percentage had increased to 45 percent.³⁸⁸

Financed by a steady stream of oil rents, the clientelistic political framework in which the two dominant parties stifled civic participation, excluded a growing number of influential societal actors, and exercised hegemonic control over the entire system started to lose legitimacy as the price of oil declined in the mid-1980s. By the 1990s, the failure of the regime to stabilize the economy and bring about viable social change led to periodic rioting and public

demonstrations. Ultimately, the regime collapsed, opening the door to an alternative experiment with direct democracy under the leadership of Hugo Chavez.

From the standpoint of achieving short-term political stability, partyarchy is an efficacious arrangement that could gradually facilitate a transition towards stable democratic rule. In the Venezuelan case this transition did not occur, because political and economic elites deprived citizens of the ability to influence internal party decisions, while both parties subordinated class, sectoral, and regional interests to partisan concerns. Along with pervasive corruption and financial mismanagement that intensified in the wake of the oil booms, inherent political exclusion, and a government that remained unresponsive to changing socioeconomic conditions also contributed to the repudiation of the regime and the political parties in the 1990s. As Michael Coppedge notes:

In these crises the only institutions with the power to propose immediate solutions were the parties, but because the parties were precisely the institutions whose leadership was unwelcome at that moment, the crises were much harder to solve. In the long run, therefore, partyarchy can tarnish the quality of democracy to the point where the regime's stability may be threatened.³⁸⁹

Similarly, although the National Front achieved its objective in that it provided political stability to a worn-torn nation, the quality of democracy in Colombia suffered – albeit not to the extent where there occurred a regime collapse. Numerous challenges to governmental authority emerged that undermined the legitimacy of the regime. First, as noted earlier, the institutionally restrictive nature of the National Front contributed to the growth of radical guerilla organizations that sought to overthrow the traditional political elite. These guerilla groups attracted support

from various factions of the Colombian polity that had become increasingly disenchanted with the traditional political order. As such, every President from 1982 to the present made a serious attempt to negotiate an end to the insurgencies, frequently resorting to military force. During the 1980s, greater political participation was granted to a few groups who had agreed to demilitarize (most notably the M-19 and the UP – a political faction of the FARC). However, these leftist parties were persecuted and excluded from participating in the political system, with the most extreme example being the systematic annihilation of the UP leadership in the 1980s and 1990s by right-wing death squads functioning with virtual impunity.³⁹⁰

The political system was plunged into a deeper crisis with the rise of the international drug trade during the 1980s, for which Colombia became a major center.³⁹¹ The growth of the drug trade – and the infamous Medellin and Cali cartels – augmented the severity and complexity of internal conflict, as the drug cartels successfully penetrated and corrupted every center of power in Colombian society including businesses, the police, the armed forces, the political elite, the guerilla organizations and the right-wing paramilitary groups. The Colombian political elite responded to these challenges with political reforms that encouraged the formation of new parties and devolved authority to elected local officials. The electoral institutions, mechanisms and rules established by the Constitution of 1991 and beyond were designed to enhance political democracy through, “ballot and electoral reform, approval of referenda and plebiscites as valid channels of lawmaking and constitutional amendment, restriction of presidential emergency powers, prohibition of presidential reelection...and the establishment of a Constitutional Court separate from the Supreme Court.”³⁹² More importantly, the constitution bolstered political pluralism and participation, significantly augmenting the number of parties

that now compete in fair elections. These measures have ostensibly prompted some analysts to label the regime as a liberal democracy.

While it is true that the Constitution of 1991 along with a subsequent array of democratizing reforms created a legal framework that has swept away most of the barriers to democratic governance experienced during the National Front agreement, a stable liberal democratic regime has yet to be constructed. Some scholars suggest that reforms such as political decentralization have further weakened and destabilized the central state, doing more harm than good to the Colombia's political regime. Furthermore, although political parties and organizations have proliferated in recent years, what remains unclear is the degree to which these parties have been successful in generating substantive change in the political system.³⁹³ Ultimately, many of these parties remain weak and unorganized; they tend to lack clear political agendas, and are usually consolidated around the personalities of a few individuals.³⁹⁴ As a result, the Colombian party system paradoxically remains both unstable and resistant to change.

This reality has been reflected by the voting patterns of the Colombian electorate. From 2002 through the 2016 referendum, voter turnouts in all governmental contests have remained below 50 percent of the registered voting-age population.³⁹⁵ Moreover, according to a measurement of voter turnout in Latin American Presidential Elections from 1997 – 2007 conducted by the International Institute for Democratic Electoral Assistance, Colombia had one of the lowest voter participation rates in the region.³⁹⁶ These statistics indicate an extreme loss of confidence in the ability of the current political parties to govern in a manner that is perceived to be beneficial to the Colombian electorate. However, the support for democracy as well as democratic practices has been unwavering. According to a Latinobarometro survey in 2015, close to 80 percent of those polled agreed that voting, in addition to protesting, were effective

methods that would lead to national progress. Moreover, 55 percent of those polled preferred democracy to any other kind of government.³⁹⁷ However, there remains a minority, around 24 percent, who responded ambivalently to the survey. For them it did not matter whether the regime was democratic or non-democratic. A possible explanation for this ambivalence may be rooted in the relative similarity of the political parties regarding their ideologies and policies, as well as the inability of the government – regardless of which political party is in charge – to generate comprehensive and enduring social, economic and political reforms. As most large parties advance similar agendas and platforms, many Colombians do not feel they are being accurately represented, have become dissatisfied with political governance due to their prior experiences with the National Front agreement, perceive politics to be too complicated to understand, or do not pay attention to politics whatsoever.³⁹⁸ As a result, voting and other forms of civic participation have steadily declined, albeit there remains a commitment to the democratic mechanisms as forces for change.

Although public opinion is not the sole determinant of the quality of a democratic regime, it is a crucial factor. According to Juan Linz, legitimacy depends largely on the public believing that existing institutions, despite their problems, are better than the alternatives.³⁹⁹ The case study of Colombia reinforces this assertion. Although dissatisfaction with the government and the political system are high, democracy seems to be the only game in town. However, the quality of democratic governance in Colombia will continue to be low so long as the party system remains unresponsive to voter and civil society interests, the parties in contention remain ideologically similar, and powerful intrastate actors such as paramilitary groups, drug trafficking organizations and guerilla forces are able to wield considerable influence over political actors.

In Venezuela, mounting discontent and disillusionment with the established system of representative democracy allowed Hugo Chavez to ascend to the presidency on a platform that promised to eliminate corruption and embark upon the construction of a more participatory democracy. The 1999 constitution established a number of institutional and political reforms that aimed to bolster popular participation in decision-making in order to close the substantial divide between the Venezuelan polity and the state. The constitution went further in that it mandated the participation of civil society in the selection of the judiciary and the appointment of the National Electoral Council, established as a separate branch of government, in addition to the three traditional branches. Most significant, the constitution reinforced the power and autonomy of the central government, the executive branch and the military. Presidential powers were enhanced as the presidential term was extended and immediate re-election was permitted. Moreover, the constitution strengthened the role of the central government in the economy and the military was given the right to vote; military promotions were doled out solely based upon presidential approval and the military was made to be subordinate only to the president.⁴⁰⁰

Over the years and especially from 2007-2009, Chavez's regime became more radical, resulting in the inequitable balance of the conditions of electoral competition, diminished freedoms of expression including the media and the press, the consolidation of power in the hands of the executive, the dependence of civil society upon a central leader, and the complete exclusion of the opposition in government.⁴⁰¹ These shortcomings indicate the existence and development of authoritarian traits that have damaged Venezuela's prospects of consolidating liberal democracy. Yet, based upon a 2007 Latinobarometro survey regarding confidence in democracy, Venezuelans considered their country to be a democracy. Moreover, 76 percent of Venezuelan citizens felt confident that democracy could create "conditions for prosperity". The

survey found that Venezuelans were only slightly behind Uruguayans in their evaluation of democracy in their country in the region of Latin America.⁴⁰²

The Role of the Military in Democratic Governance

One of the main pillars of a democratic state is the full, and absolute control over the armed forces exercised by a democratically elected civilian government. Unwavering control over all the defense and security-related institutions indicates a high level of political maturity in the government, as well as the willingness of the military to be subordinate to civilian rule and indifferent to changes in policies.⁴⁰³ The subordination of the military to democratic civilian rule bolsters the legitimacy and sovereignty of a democratic regime. In Colombia, the armed forces, having presided over the National Front negotiations, gradually became more professional and distanced themselves from the two traditional parties. With a mandate from the Colombian government to take aggressive measures against insurgent guerrilla groups, by the mid-1970s, the military had become increasingly autonomous, and had developed a strongly anti-communist discourse. Therefore, many within the military have been staunchly opposed to the various peace initiatives with guerilla organizations proposed over the years, including the peace negotiations with the FARC in 2016.

In 2008, dozens of senior army officers were fired after it was revealed that the systematic killing of civilians had been carried out to inflate guerrilla death tolls. As of mid-2015, more than 900 soldiers had been convicted of similar crimes while thousands of security personnel remained under investigation. Nevertheless, most high-ranking officers escaped punishment. In 2012, a constitutional amendment that expanded the jurisdiction of the military justice system to address this problem was passed, repealed a year later, and then reintroduced in

2015 with many of the most controversial provisions omitted.⁴⁰⁴ Instances such as these exemplify the degree to which the military in Colombia continues to operate with relative autonomy. Limited civilian oversight of the armed forces has thus gradually undermined the legitimacy of the democratically elected civilian-led government; less regulation has undoubtedly led to more violence and increased tensions between the military and civilian leaders. These tensions are troublesome for they indicate that the military is not completely subordinate to civilian rule, as well as that many top military officers maintain an independent political agenda which must be taken into consideration for the sake of regime stability.

Further undermining the legitimacy and efficacy of the state has been the continued presence of private paramilitary organizations. With the military being traditionally weak, in 1968 the government ratified legislation that permitted and encouraged the formation of privately armed civilian self-defense groups under the supervision of the armed forces. Gradually, these paramilitary forces proliferated and began to operate with virtual impunity. Neither the armed forces nor the politicians in charge were able to keep them in line, nor actively attempted to do so. Some analysts have suggested that the relationship between the state and these paramilitary actors was ambiguous so that the state could avoid the accusations of human rights violations that accompanied the brutal campaigns waged by these paramilitaries against the guerrillas.⁴⁰⁵

Over the years, the paramilitaries have viewed themselves as the only security force able to deal more effectively with the guerrilla organizations. From the 1990s until 2005, various paramilitary units coalesced under an umbrella organization called the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), but many continued to operate independently from this group. In 2000, it was estimated that the AUC committed approximately 70 percent of Colombia's political assassinations. The AUC financed itself by collecting rents from wealthy landowners,

narco-traffickers, and multinational corporations. It is estimated that at least 70 percent of these finances were derived from the drug trade.⁴⁰⁶ The AUC targeted not only the guerrillas, but also suspected civilian supporters of the guerrillas, including trade unionists, peasants, indigenous peoples, teachers and journalists. As a result, the AUC was considered to be the top perpetrator of human rights abuses in the country. Since 2005 several paramilitaries including the AUC have demobilized upon signing a ceasefire with the Uribe administration. Still, many units continue to operate with impunity in some regions. Responsibility for combatting these groups lies with the police. Because of the lack of support from the military or the state, members of the police force are frequently accused of collusion with criminals, and are largely absent from many rural areas.⁴⁰⁷

In Venezuela, ever since 1958, the military has been relatively subservient to civilian rule. Only in moments of intense political crisis, such as in the early 1990s, did the military attempt to intercede. As George Philip asserts, “military coups occurred when enough senior officers and civilian allies (the civilian aspect was important) decided that the current political situation was desirable and that change was necessary.”⁴⁰⁸ Even though the 1992 coups were orchestrated mainly by military officials, they were positively received by the public. It was this sentiment that helped bolster Hugo Chavez’s popularity as he headed into the 1998 elections. Since Chavez’s ascension to power, the power and size of the military has grown substantially, and has come under the complete jurisdiction of the executive. In 2010, General Henry Rangel’s announcement that the army would not accept an electoral defeat of the Bolivarian Revolution was met with harsh criticism by the secretary general of the OAS. In response to this criticism, Chavez appointed Rangel to General-in-Chief.⁴⁰⁹ Moreover, during his tenure in office, Chavez provided the military with a modern arsenal and economic enticements, which have contributed

to the military's unwavering support for the continuation of the Bolivarian Revolution under Nicolás Maduro.

The Impacts of Clientelism, Corruption, and the Drug Trade on Democracy

It has been underscored that “corruption in a democracy” is “corruption of democracy,” because “those who benefit from corrupt actions, decisions, or exchanges do so by excluding those who, under democratic norms, have a claim to inclusion.”⁴¹⁰ Although this contention is sound, democracy and some corruption can coexist. Luigi Manzetti in his study of corruption in Latin American differentiates between democratic systems that have low corruption, with functioning checks and balances, internal constraints, and an exigent civil society, and those with high corruption where institutional checks against corruption are weak or not used, there is no self-restraint when profiting from corruption, and corruption is so widespread that it has to be accepted and tolerated at any societal level.⁴¹¹

As explained earlier, a rentier state is one that obtains all or a substantial portion of its revenue from rent received from the sale of single natural resource to external actors.⁴¹² Since Venezuela had been one of the top producers of oil in the world, whenever the state needed more revenue, all it had to do was pressure the foreign-controlled oil industry (up until 1976) rather than its own population. Moreover, the distributive nature of the state, whereby resources would be transferred from the oil sector to other parts of the economy, ostensibly mitigated tensions that would have eventually required a reduction in wages and benefits for labor. Oil revenues allowed for the maintenance of political stability, as well as subsidized both business and popular sectors. Moreover, revenues protected the country from the inflation and balance-of-payments difficulties that plagued other party systems with similar economic projects. On the other hand, the massive

amount of rent accumulated via the oil industry deterred economic diversification and inhibited the independent economic development of Venezuela's constituent states.⁴¹³ Furthermore, petro-states are prone to administrative inefficiency and corruption due to the relative absence of institutional checks and balances.⁴¹⁴ This was especially apparent in the wake of the first and second oil booms in the 1970s and 1980s that flooded the state with petrodollars; much of this money, after being used to fund public sector services, was subsequently distributed to important societal actors to ensure the stability of the political regime.

Also as noted earlier, from 1958 until the end of the oil bonanza in the mid-1980s, clientelism flourished and politics became a positive-sum game whereby both patron and client were able to arrive at mutually beneficial arrangements.⁴¹⁵ However, the ability of the clientelistic political machine to endure, as well as the state's capacity to fund social programs and public projects, remained contingent upon the continued flow of oil revenues at a stable rate. When oil prices and revenues declined, as was the case in the mid-1980s and 1990s, the state's distributive capacity suffered and the clientelistic ties became strained. Moreover, from 1970 – 1994, Venezuela's foreign debt rose from 9 percent to 53 percent of the GNP, while from 1982 to 1989 poverty increased by 32 percent. In 1989, 22 percent of the population lacked the resources to meet basic needs,⁴¹⁶ and in 1996, Venezuela was one of the few countries in the world where per capita income was lower than it had been in 1960.⁴¹⁷ As oil rents decreased, the Venezuelan economy deteriorated, social conditions worsened, and the existing political system teetered on the verge of collapse.

In addition to the existence of guerilla groups, paramilitary organizations and an increasingly autonomous military, the growth of the drug trade in Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s and its enduring presence have further intensified the erosion of state autonomy. Since the

colonial period, the geographic location of the nation between two seas, in addition to its extensive network of tributary channels that have served as important transportation mediums, have provided the ideal environment for the growth and entrenchment of contraband. Flourishing in the absence of strong state institutions, the consumption of illegally sold goods and services became a socially accepted practice in Colombia, and in many cases, the only way to obtain certain goods. Between 1930 and 1990, high import tariffs and tight foreign exchange controls augmented the reliance upon black market items for much of the population. In addition to the reliance upon illegally imported goods, the smuggling of a wide variety of manufactured products, coffee, emeralds and even human beings became commonplace, facilitating the development of an export contraband culture. Together, these factors produced an environment in which the illegal drug trade could thrive.⁴¹⁸

The drug industry in Colombia has financed indirectly both the guerrilla organizations and the paramilitary groups, thus enhancing the capacity of both actors to actively resist state authority. Although the size and number of these groups have substantially declined in recent years, there still exists areas in Colombia that are highly insecure as well as areas considered to be drug-trafficking corridors. One lasting implication of drug-trafficking has been the presence of corruption within society – especially within the political arena. More prevalent during the 1990s, narco-traffickers have been effective in infiltrating the political system and establishing clientelistic relations with numerous politicians operating on both local and national levels. They have done this by financing election campaigns, influencing local level election outcomes, and by bribing, threatening and terrorizing elected officials. The most notorious case of corruption, as already stated, was the support the Cali cartel extended to President Ernesto Samper in 1994.

The impact of corruption on the quality of Colombian democracy has been two-fold. It has negated the ability of citizens to access and have a part in collective decisions and actions, and it has eroded the basic foundations of trust upon which democracy must rest. Due to public outrage over the levels of violence and corruption in Colombia, Alvaro Uribe, a former member of the Liberal Party won the presidency in 2002 on a platform that called for the reestablishment of state authority throughout the Colombian territory by reinforcing the military and working closely with the U.S. government. Under his administration, many paramilitary forces were demilitarized, while the guerrilla groups were increasingly pushed out of urban areas. With an approval rating of nearly 80 percent by the end of his term, President Uribe was elected to a second term in office after a constitutional amendment was passed that allowed the executive to serve for two consecutive terms. However, a 2008 scandal in which approximately 60 congressional representatives were arrested or investigated for alleged links to paramilitary forces tarnished the administration's reputation.⁴¹⁹ Similarly, the 2014 legislative elections were plagued by accusations of fraud, vote buying, and connections with criminals.

Although in 2011 the Colombian government promulgated anti-corruption legislation and established an anti-corruption office in the presidency - the nation still faces collusion between the public and private sectors, clientelism and policies dictated by organized crime, the lack of state control and weak service delivery in remote areas of the country, and the inefficiency of the criminal justice system.⁴²⁰ Furthermore, both the legislative efforts and the executive reforms aimed at combating corruption and improving transparency have yet to significantly reduce corruption. Instead, according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, the country went from being ranked 57th in the world in 2002 to 90th in 2016 with little to no change in ranking from 2012 to 2016.⁴²¹

Civil Liberties and Associational Rights

The freedoms of organization, assembly, expression as well as the right to alternative sources of information are essential to democracy. The degree to which these freedoms are respected and enforced is indicative of a regime's dedication to ensuring civilian participation in government as well as crucial for the equitable representation of the public in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, even in nations that possess markedly democratic constitutions, the ability of citizens to effectively exercise their freedoms without the fear of persecution, and with confidence that their interests will be heard, can be significantly curtailed by the presence of internal conflict, intra-state violence, corruption or even a highly institutionalized political system. As such, when these rights are upheld, the quality of democracy increases. Conversely, when they are infringed upon, the quality of democratic governance suffers.

The drug trade in Colombia has been a major source of intense violence. Between 1982-1991, Colombia's homicide rate reached 86 per 100,000 inhabitants - one of the highest murder rates in the world. In the early 1990s, violence between the government and the major drug cartels intensified after the implementation of extradition policies as well as the federal confiscation of property from known drug-traffickers. By the mid-1990s, a combination of effective negotiation and extermination policies had led to the demise of the drug cartels. However, Colombia's drug trade continues to thrive as several medium-sized trafficking organizations have taken over the decentralized industry.

The 1991 Colombian constitution guarantees freedom of expression. Opposition views have been commonly expressed since then via media outlets unaffiliated with the government.⁴²² And yet, freedom of the press in Colombia has declined. It is estimated that between 1990-2010, some 77 journalist have been killed, many for reporting on drug-related activities.⁴²³ This

number is one of the highest in the region, signaling that one of the most fundamental requirements for constitutional democracy is still severely infringed upon.

Ironically, the number of journalists killed between 1990-1999, when the cartels wielded the most influence in society, was lower than between 2000-2010, after the drug cartels had been dismembered. In 2015, a media watchdog organization recorded at least 144 threats and other abuses against the press, while three journalists – Luis Carlos Peralta, Edgar Quintero, and Flor Alba Nunez – were murdered after experiencing previous problems with local officials and criminals because of their reporting. The pressures placed upon the media have had significant implications on the quality and diversity of information available to citizens.⁴²⁴ Persistent violence has engendered a culture of censorship and self-censorship, which has negatively affected the quality of the electoral process.⁴²⁵ Moreover, most civil liberties, including associational and organizational rights, individual rights and personal autonomy, as well as freedom of expression and belief, are being undermined by the persistence of violence. The integrity of elections has also come under speculation, as the 2014 legislative elections were marred by rumors of corruption and collusion. Additionally, impunity for crime in general is rampant, with convictions achieved in only 10 percent of murders.⁴²⁶ As such, the failure on the part of the state to both ensure the protection of these fundamental rights, as well as to enforce the law if these rights are to be infringed upon, is exemplary of the low quality of democracy experienced within Colombia.

The 1999 Venezuelan constitution stipulates that the state is responsible for the protection and development of the individual. It also claims “respect for the dignity of the individual, [and] the democratic exercise of the will of the people...”⁴²⁷ These rights have been significantly undercut by presidents Hugo Chavez and Nicolás Maduro.

In 1999, the Bolivarian political project initiated by Chavez emphasized the regime's commitment to the enforcement of civil liberties, the exercise of political rights, as well as social justice and social equality.⁴²⁸ However, after consolidating his support in the 2006 elections, Chavez reformed the constitution to enhance the powers of the executive as well as to augment the size and scope of the state apparatus so to 'dictate the will of the people' from above. As Roberta Rice points out, participatory democracy is not something that can be legislated from above – it must come from below. Moreover, in Venezuela, since decision-making authority is concentrated in the executive branch, the absence of well-defined mechanisms for citizen input implicitly contradicts the concept of participatory democracy. Finally, a lack of autonomy of civil society groups from the state has resulted in the inability of self-constituted organizations to express their interests without the fear of repression.⁴²⁹ The validity of this assertion was enforced most clearly by Chavez's refusal to renew the broadcasting license of the Radio Caracas International Television network, one of his harshest political critics in 2007.

Since then, freedom of the press has steadily deteriorated in Venezuela as the government has gradually acquired most major sources of alternative information. Moreover, currency controls that prevent publishers from acquiring newsprint, rules requiring private media to air state promotional advertisements for free, and the risk of administrative and legal actions against private outlets that anger the government further threaten media independence.⁴³⁰ In 2014 and more recently, antigovernment demonstrations have been met with violence, which have augmented existing tensions between those who remain loyal to the regime and those who oppose it. Journalists covering the demonstration in 2014 were subject to arrests, harassment, and violence, while more than 40 people were killed and approximately 900 were injured.⁴³¹

Political Culture

Many theorists who advocate a cultural approach to democratic consolidation assert that to develop and maintain a democratic regime, a culture of moderation, cooperation, bargaining and accommodation amongst the elites as well as at the grassroots level, are necessary.

Furthermore, such theorists argue that together, those orientations facilitate the development of tolerance for opposing political beliefs and positions, pragmatism and flexibility in the political arena, trust in other political actors, an intrinsic willingness to compromise, and greater civil discourse. The degree to which those behavioral orientations are embedded in the culture of a particular society greatly affects the viability of stable democratic governance within a nation.⁴³²

This argument becomes more complex when one considers the ways in which culture takes root and changes within a society. According to social constructivists, actions initiated by agents are culturally constituted. As posited by Larry Diamond, political culture can be summarily defined as “distinctive predispositions or ‘orientations to action’.” The orientations that influence the actions taken by social agents can be: 1) cognitive – involving knowledge of and beliefs about the political system; 2) affective – consisting of feelings about the political system and 3) evaluational – including commitments to political values and judgments about the performance of the political system relative to those values. As such, political actors rely upon existing knowledge, feelings and commitments to reaffirm and deepen culture within the objective dimensions of political life: the political system, the political process, and policy.⁴³³ In some instances, this reaffirmation can transform these dimensions thereby altering its culture; this transformation, in turn, has the potential to influence the future actions of other agents in the system.⁴³⁴

Culture is not static. While cultural change depends in part on existing structural and material conditions, those conditions vary from one societal group to another. As a result, distinctive types of beliefs and norms may prevail in different socioeconomic and institutional settings. Thus, political subcultures greatly nuance the relationships that form and the transactions that occur between different social factions. In Colombia, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, popular resentment toward the National Front regime had intensified, because of the exclusive nature of the arrangement. Such an arrangement contributed to the proliferation of guerrilla movements within the nation; to the decline in party identification as the ideological distinctions between the two traditional parties became negligible and socio-economic changes produced an urban population increasingly disinterested in party politics; to the internal factionalization, and clientelization of the state; and to an increase in governmental inefficiencies.

Initially, it seemed as if the agreement between the two parties reflected the development of a political culture based upon the tenets of moderation, cooperation, bargaining and accommodation amongst the political elites.⁴³⁵ Although consensus amongst the elites had been reached, ultimately the exclusive nature of the regime with regards to other social groups, weakened the power of the two traditional parties. Moreover, the high degree of factionalization that occurred during this period is indicative of an elite culture steeped in sectarianism rather than one based upon moderation and accommodation. This form of governance, in fact, represented the continuation of the partisan political culture that was present during the 19th and early 20th centuries. As such, even under the National Front agreement the consolidation of a stable democratic regime in Colombia remained elusive.

Over the course of 70 years, Venezuela has experimented with democracy on three separate occasions. The lessons learned from the *trienio* period from 1945-1948 with regards to the destabilizing impact of political exclusion were, in turn, utilized to construct stable governance. From the promulgation of the Punto Fijo pact in 1958 until the *Caracazo* that followed the 1988 elections, the Venezuelan regime was accentuated by consensual and conciliatory politics founded upon a strong commitment to democracy above partisan interests.⁴³⁶ The spirit of the Punto Fijo pact was predicated upon elite moderation and accommodation, which allowed for the establishment of a regime built on democratic ideals, practices and institutions. Contributing to the stability of the regime was an impressive flow of financial resources generated by the export of oil that allowed for sustained economic growth over the course of three decades. Drastic material and social changes generated by the booming petroleum industry facilitated the reinforcement of a culture favorable to democracy. Moreover, this system was characterized by a particularly strong distributive and statist discourse that became widely socialized by Venezuelans, and an important component of their political culture.⁴³⁷ As a result, a significant portion of the wealth generated by oil exports was utilized by the state to provide jobs and social services, eradicate poverty, embark upon housing and construction projects, augment basic industries and import consumer goods. This configuration between the state and the Venezuelan citizenry gradually led to the solidification of a political culture and to the belief that democracy was *the* route to social justice.⁴³⁸ This sentiment towards democracy continues to be deeply engrained in Venezuela's political culture.⁴³⁹

Social, economic, and generational changes in Venezuela gave rise to two different sets of leaders – those who continued to maintain the rigid partyarchicial system and those who challenged it. Although elections were held regularly, and people voted, freely expressed their

views, and had access to alternative sources of information, the parties continued to monopolize nominations, to penetrate and politicize civil society organizations, to centralize authority in a small circle at the top, and to tightly control the legislative process.⁴⁴⁰ The rigidity of the political system led to the formation and consolidation of political subcultures along an elite-non-elite axis that intensified in the 1980s when the regime came under public scrutiny for widespread corruption. The revelation of endemic corruption eroded the regime's legitimacy, as well as public trust in the existing governmental institutions.

Although Chavez's Bolivarian revolution enjoyed substantial backing in its efforts to enhance participatory democracy and eliminate corruption in Venezuela, by 2012 popular support for his regime had begun to decline. By August 2015, President Nicolás Maduro had barely managed to retain control of the government, with his popularity falling to 24.3 percent.⁴⁴¹ Latinobarometro concluded that in 2015 around 64 percent of Venezuelans were dissatisfied with their government's performance, while about only half of those surveyed thought of their country as democratic. However, their commitment to democracy remained the highest in all Latin America.⁴⁴²

CHAPTER IV

Conclusions

Considering the various internal conflicts and violence between non-state actors that continues to plague Colombia, the fact that the political regime better fulfills some of the necessary conditions typically associated with democracy than the regime in Venezuela, allows me to formulate a few arguments about democracy. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, although state apparatuses had managed to emerge in both Colombia and Venezuela, they possessed limited authority over the national territory, and their autonomy was routinely contested by regional antagonisms and civil wars.⁴⁴³ This is important to emphasize since a consolidated and legitimate state is one of the critical requirements for the establishment of a stable democratic regime. While both nations' colonial experiences did much to establish national boundaries that solidified after the dissolution of Gran Colombia, institutions designed to facilitate the economic and political integration of autonomous regions into the national territory remained either non-existent or weak. This was primarily due to divisive topographical attributes, transportation and communication difficulties, and the development of distinct social and economic regions with correspondingly disparate regional identities.

In Colombia, the highly contentious role of the Catholic Church in society, the equally polarizing influence of a strong two-party system, strong regional affiliations, a weak and ineffective military and the absence of a profitable export-commodity able to provide the state with a degree of economic dominance collectively curtailed the process of state legitimization. In a markedly divided society, a powerful state was considered to be dangerous to the myriad competing interests within the nation. As such, from the 19th century onward, Colombia has been

imbued with a weak, and relatively ineffective state. In the absence of strong and efficacious state institutions, regional elites consolidated power primarily through the establishment of political parties. These parties engendered the intense polarization of Colombian society, as party loyalty came to constitute the basis of strong, competing civic nationalisms. By the turn of the 20th century, regional economic elites had become more or less unified by the profits generated by the cacao boom. The subsequent emergence of powerful producer associations, or *gremios*, nuanced the historically sectarian nature of the Colombian political elite. These *gremios* lobbied against the greater involvement of the state in society, and actively opposed any attempt by the government to enhance its jurisdiction over economic and social matters. Moreover, modernization and industrialization led to the development of new social classes that desired greater representation in government. As a result, political parties expanded suffrage and attempted to inculcate these emergent classes into their ranks. Further politicization and polarization of the masses led to intense and often violent confrontations within society. After *la violencia* and the brief dictatorship of General Rojas, collusion between the emergent economic elite, and the long-established political parties facilitated a virtual oligopoly of power under the consociational elements of the National Front. Despite the inherent flaws of the National Front regime, from the 19th century until the end of the twentieth century, the Liberal and Conservative parties elected every president of Colombia – even after the consociational arrangement had ended.⁴⁴⁴

Colombia possesses a long history of regularly held electoral contests through which the parties have alternated power. This tradition of regularly-held electoral contests signifies that Colombians view elections as being a critical component of the democratic process. The longevity of the electoral regime also suggests that political parties, despite their flaws, are

regarded by Colombia's citizens as being the most effective vehicles for the institutionalization of democratic governance. Thus, although the enduring duopoly between the traditional parties has by now run its course, the party system in Colombia, rather than collapsing has gradually become more pluralistic and competitive, albeit fragmented and weak. Furthermore, the demand that elections remain free and fair has been a focal point of the 1991 Constitution, and of subsequent electoral reforms. Though corruption and collusion continue to undermine the integrity of the process, they are generally brought to light and addressed. This assertion is exemplified by the revelation of a recent scandal that cast into question the legitimacy of the 2014 legislative elections. In summary, the longevity of the political system, the extensive number of successive and successful elections, and the recent trend toward electoral accountability, help explain why Colombia today has been able to consolidate democracy more effectively than Venezuela.⁴⁴⁵

According to Robert Dahl, whose theories are discussed in my literature review, for a political system to be considered a democracy, it must be responsive to its citizens. Moreover, it must allow them an equal opportunity to: (1) formulate their preferences; (2) publicly manifest these preferences among their fellow partisans and before the government, both individually and collectively; and (3) be treated equally by the government. In short, to ensure the integrity of democracy, political parties as well as the state must be responsive to the interests of those governed, while also able to act responsibly for the collective benefit of society. For these basic conditions to be met, they should be accompanied by eight essential guarantees: (1) freedom of association, (2) freedom of expression, (3) the right to vote, (4) the ability to run for public office barring reasonable restrictions, (5) the right of politicians to campaign and compete for votes, (6)

multiple sources of information, (7) free and fair elections, and (8) institutions to develop policy based on voter preference.⁴⁴⁶

Currently, Colombia meets all eight of Dahl's conditions, albeit freedom of association, and expression remain significantly curtailed by internal violence. Over the past few decades, internal political violence has resulted in the death of over 220,000 people, and has engendered the internal displacement of more than 6.7 million Colombians.⁴⁴⁷ Due to the persistence of armed conflict in Colombia, spaces for political expression and organization remain limited, and in some areas non-existent. Freedom of expression is further curtailed in Colombia, as journalists are frequently treated with hostility. Since the mid-1990s dozens of journalists have been murdered, primarily for reporting on cases involving drug trafficking and corruption. In 2015, the Foundation for Free Press (FLIP), a respected Colombian NGO that monitors press freedoms, reported the death of two journalists, while 60 in total received threats between January and October of that year. Moreover, from 2011 to 2015, the government reported the murders of 121 trade unionists. While abuses and threats towards certain groups have proliferated in recent years, the government has been invariably slow in regards to convictions and sentencing.⁴⁴⁸ As such, impunity for crime in Colombia remains rampant, while freedom of expression and association are routinely violated.

Utilizing Dahl's theoretic conditions of democracy, despite persisting internal violence and a widespread disregard for the protection of political expression and association, Colombia's regime would rank highly, since public participation is constitutionally unrestricted and party competition is markedly pluralistic as well as inclusive. When considering Wolfgang Merkel's contributions to democratic theory, this classification becomes considerably more nuanced. Merkel in his scholarship on democracy posits that liberal democracies consist of five partial

regimes which are: (1) electoral regimes that permit free, fair, and regular elections, (2) freedoms of speech and association, (3) protection of civil rights and liberties, (4) separation of powers between executive, legislative and judicial branches and (5) protection against nonelected groups that wish to overrule or overthrow the government.⁴⁴⁹ The first four of these regimes coincide with Dahl's prerequisites, while the fifth condition becomes especially relevant to my considerations regarding the existing instability of the Colombian regime.

As mentioned earlier, for the past fifty years or so, the Colombian government has been engaged in civil armed conflict with various leftist guerilla organizations. Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, right-wing paramilitaries initially introduced to neutralize these guerilla groups gained substantial autonomy from the state. Thereafter, these paramilitaries gradually relinquished themselves from state-control. The emergence of the drug trade and the rise of the various cartels further complicated situation. As the drug trade began to expand throughout the national territory, both the paramilitaries and the guerrilla groups came to be either directly or indirectly subsidized by the cartels. Within this increasingly complex overview of Colombian society, persistent violence caused by confrontations between the state and guerilla organizations threatened to destabilize the Colombian regime. Regime stability was further undermined by the bloodshed and endemic corruption associated with the drug cartels. Currently, with the cartels in disarray and a ceasefire in place between the largest guerilla organization and the government, the threats posed by these nonelected groups have significantly diminished. However, as long as violence perpetrated by intra-state actors continues, the regime can never fully be stable.

Despite the violence, Colombian civil society has flourished in recent years and opposition parties have been able to participate in the political system without fear of persecution. As such, the Colombian regime fulfills the first two conditions that Juan Linz and

Alfred Stepan consider to be essential for democratic consolidation, which are: (1) the development of a free and lively civil society, and (2) a relatively autonomous political society.⁴⁵⁰ In addition to these two prerequisites, Linz and Stepan assert that an established rule of law that protects individual freedoms and associational life, an effective state bureaucracy, and an institutionalized economic society are also significant requirements for democratic consolidation. In Colombia, while constitutional mechanisms designed to protect individual freedoms and rights exist, civilian rights are routinely infringed upon. While it is true that the state bureaucracy is relatively effective - in that it is coordinated throughout the national territory and provides for basic services - its functionality is inhibited by the presence of corruption which occurs at multiple levels of public administration. Since the judicial system also remains largely compromised by corruption and extortion, it lacks the capacity to hold those responsible for legal violations accountable for their actions.⁴⁵¹ As a result, individual freedoms are marginally protected by the state, and the rule of law in Colombia suffers.

Regarding Linz and Stepan's final condition, greater integration into the world economy and profound changes in economic and social structures throughout the region have prompted various authors to consider moving beyond defining democracy as a political regime, as to include economic and social dimensions.⁴⁵² Within the field of political science, it is commonly asserted that economic and social conditions are distinguishable from the intrinsic qualities or attributes of political democracy. As such, economic and social factors are particularly relevant when attempting to discern the quality of democratic governance within a nation. However, these factors alone are not considered to be prerequisite conditions for democratic consolidation. Nevertheless, socio-economic issues such as the persistence of poverty and income inequality have increasingly come to threaten the viability of democratic politics in Latin America.⁴⁵³ While

poverty has declined significantly since the late 1990s, income inequality in Colombia remains amongst the highest in the world.⁴⁵⁴ Since the 1980s, the persistence of income inequality as well as the increased concentration of wealth in the hands of a select few, has not only contributed to the longevity of the protracted civil conflict, but has also resulted in the steady declination of political participation and historically high abstention rates. Nevertheless, Colombia meets most, if not all of the conditions posited by the aforementioned theoreticians, and as such can be classified as a democracy. The stability of the current regime as well as the prospects for liberal democratic governance have, and will become increasingly tethered to the nation's ability to: enforce the protection of citizen freedoms and rights – including demands for accountability and freedom of the press -, strengthen the capacity of the state as to maintain law and order, protect citizens and punish criminals, bolster participation through extensive reformation of the party system, as well as implement initiatives that seek to address the sources of income inequality.

Similarly, Venezuela possesses several of the conditions that typically facilitate the formation of democracy. For example, the country retained a relatively stable and highly institutionalized party system, significant economic potential due to its vast petroleum reserves, and a particularly strong national identity that acted as a homogenizing force. However, due to rampant corruption, exclusionary policies, and long periods of economic downturn, the subsequent breakdown of the party system in the 1990s gave way to what can now only be described as an authoritarian regime. The authoritarian nature of the Venezuelan regime can be attributed to two primary factors: a highly centralized, largely ineffective, and clientelistic state – especially present during the Punto Fijo regime, as well as to the nation's historical dependence upon oil rents to facilitate economic development and political stability.

In Venezuela, although political parties emerged in the 19th century, they did not become entirely relevant until the mid-20th century. Rather, the desire of regional *caudillos* to consolidate their power through the conquest of and control over Caracas laid the foundation for the establishment of a central authority in the late 19th century. Regionalist sentiments persisted as the longevity of each *caudillo*'s regime remained contingent upon their ability to both economically subsidize regional caudillos as well as militarily dominant them. As a result, stable governance became a function of control over a central authority. By the 1920s, the discovery of petroleum would serve to legitimize the power of state, and engender the creation of strong state institutions. Unlike in Colombia, where the state has been historically weak, in Venezuela, democracy has come to be associated with the preservation of a large, redistributive state apparatus.

Venezuela's oil wealth has done much to bolster the redistributive ethos of the state, which has in turn, also served to reinforce the link between social justice, paternalism, and democracy that is so inculcated into Venezuelan political culture. From the 1920s onwards, oil rents have filled the coffers of the Venezuelan government. First utilized to legitimize the power of the state in the context of pervasive regionalism, the *caudillos* of the early 20th century also relied upon oil rents to fuel their personalist regimes. Economic stability due to the expansion of oil production and exportation facilitated the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the nation. Accompanying these processes were socio-economic developments that greatly contributed to the formation of a national identity, as well as a collective desire for increased representation in government. While the *trienio* represented Venezuela's first experiment with democracy, the regime isolated important elite interests and as such, suffered. The Punto Fijo pact was more cohesive in that it included the most prominent societal actors within its

conciliatory framework. Under this agreement, it seemed as though elite cooperation had finally led to the establishment of an inclusive, representative and responsive democratic regime.

As a petro-state, the Venezuelan political system was the most stable when oil rents were accumulated at a steady pace. This steady accumulation, in turn, depended upon the relative constancy of the prices of oil on international markets. Regime stability was also contingent upon the dominant parties' ability to sustain their clientelistic networks. Between 1958 and 1989, there were no elections for local governorships. These positions were distributed by executive decree, with the entire bureaucratic structure appointed from the center.⁴⁵⁵ This highly-centralized structure not only contributed to the problem of endemic corruption, it exacerbated bureaucratic ineptitude and inefficiency. Moreover, the system excluded the poor majority from meaningful participation.⁴⁵⁶ During the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s, while the party machines and the legal tenure of civil servants prevented any significant shrinkage of the state, the state could no longer prevent major declines in public sector pay.⁴⁵⁷ Maturing external loans, a decrease in international prices of oil and reformation of price and exchange controls further hindered the ability of the state to effectively support itself. Unable to subsidize social programs, and maintain the clientelistic networks established by the political elite, the regime imploded.

As the number of Venezuelans living in poverty and extreme poverty increased, inflation skyrocketed and unemployment rose substantially. Public castigation of the political parties followed, leading to the eventual collapse of the party system. In contrast to the Colombian experience, as soon as the Venezuelan electorate assessed the performance of the traditional political parties in government and pronounced it as dismal, the parties were ousted from power. Although Chavez was democratically elected to the presidency in 1998, since then, the regime in Venezuela has become more authoritarian – ostensibly reverting to the dictatorial regimes

characteristic of Venezuela's troubled past. Initially proposing to create a democracy rooted in the participation of the whole people, by the early 2000s, Chavez had begun to implement policies that further polarized Venezuelan society, as power increasingly became consolidated in the hands of the executive.⁴⁵⁸ Currently, Maduro has coopted political power, quelled dissent, and has attempted to maintain substantial control over civil and political society. As a result, Venezuela has experienced a radical departure from the participatory and democratic vision enshrined by the Bolivarian Revolution.⁴⁵⁹

In this way, Venezuela fails to meet most of Dahl's criteria for democratic regimes. While it is true that all Venezuelans have the right to vote (barring reasonable restrictions) and that voting is not restricted in practice, the integrity of the electoral process has come under intense scrutiny. The legitimacy of the electoral process has been most recently challenged by Maduro in 2015, after he utilized his executive authority to suspend a recall movement directed at removing him from power. Additionally, the gradual consolidation of authority in the hands of the executive has been accompanied by the redrawing of political and administrative boundaries to curb the influence of governors, mayors and local officials.⁴⁶⁰ In 2008, the creation of the Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) served to further curtail the power of obstinate leaders within the MVR, as well as other potential political opponents.⁴⁶¹ Essentially, a forced merger between all parties who supported the Bolivarian Revolution, the centralization of political power into a single entity granted Chavez greater authority in both political and electoral realms. As a result, although political leaders are constitutionally allowed to compete for votes, once elected, they are virtually powerless.

In recent years, the Venezuelan regime has been accused of violating fundamental freedoms and civil liberties such as: the freedom of association, the freedom of expression and

the freedom of the press. Beginning in 2014, the government responded to non-violent and relatively peaceful anti-government protests with excessive force. A year later, Maduro deployed more than 80,000 members of security forces nationwide in “Operation Peoples’ Liberation” (OLP) to address rising security concerns. Widespread allegations of abuse, extrajudicial killings, mass arbitrary detentions, maltreatment of detainees, forced evictions, the destruction of homes and arbitrary deportations in low-income and immigrant communities followed.⁴⁶² In 2016, the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) detained dozens of people based upon allegations of planning, fomenting, or participating in violent anti-government actions. However, many of these were peaceful protests.⁴⁶³ As public non-violent protestation continues to be met with state-sponsored violence, abuse and detainment, spaces for conflict resolution, compromise, and accommodation remain scarce. Without effective mechanisms to facilitate social reconciliation as well as to freely voice dissenting views, democracy in Venezuela cannot exist.

Additionally, although freedom of expression and the press are guaranteed by Article 57 of the Venezuelan constitution, they are not respected in practice. The continual violation of these freedoms has also contributed to the lack of democracy in Venezuela. Amended in 2010, the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television, and Electronic Media, contains vaguely worded restrictions that have been used to severely limit content that could “incite or promote hatred”, “foment citizens’ anxiety or alter public order”, “disrespect authorities”, “encourage assassinations”, or “constitute war propaganda”.⁴⁶⁴ Over the course of 2015, Maduro relied upon this law approximately 147 times to interrupt regular programming on television and radio stations. This was done to deliver propaganda on behalf of pro-government candidates for parliamentary elections, announce new presidential decrees, and direct attacks against political

opponents. With this law, the government effectively possesses the ability to censor what the public is able view, as well as monopolizes the media to advance the interests of the regime. Although Article 51 of the constitution guarantees the right of citizens to access public information, journalists are also frequently denied access to official documents. Faced with verbal threats and harassment, arbitrary arrests, physical attacks, dismissal by employers, fines and lawsuits, many journalists frequently engage in self-censorship. Moreover, the Maduro administration heavily regulates the spread of information that may reflect negatively on its policies.⁴⁶⁵ The government itself officially controls 13 television networks, dozens of radio outlets, a news agency, eight newspapers, and a magazine.⁴⁶⁶ The independent media platforms that are left have also softened their positions regarding Maduro and his administration in response to extensive governmental pressure to do so. As a result, access to alternative sources of information is severely restricted in Venezuela, violating Dahl's sixth prerequisite for the establishment of democracy.

Finally, government policies in Venezuela depend upon the decisions of the executive as well as a small cadre of appointed officials, rather than upon the vote and other forms of preference expression. This was first made apparent in 2007, by Chavez's request for a *Ley Habilitante* the day after his second inauguration. Upon its ratification by the National Assembly, this law enabled Chavez the authority to legislate by decree in 13 critical policy areas while Congress was sent into recess for 18 months.⁴⁶⁷ Ever since, Chavez's and Maduro's top-down governing and centralized decision-making style has given way to a "populist electoral autocracy" that concedes little to no political space to its opponents.⁴⁶⁸

Venezuela also fails to fulfill Merkel's five requirements for the establishment of liberal democracy, while the regime uses the fifth condition – protection against nonelected groups that

wish to overrule or overthrow the government – to justify its authoritarian policies. After taking office in 2007, Chavez contended that “oligarchic forces” had “infiltrated” their ideas into the 1999 constitution. As such, he promised to reform these sections of the constitution, paving the way for a constitutional amendment that would allow for the unlimited reelection of the executive.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, the regime has sought to identify external enemies such as the United States, as well as Colombia to rally support for the advancement of its populist agenda.⁴⁷⁰ The separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers in Venezuela has also come under intensive scrutiny, as the executive has retained substantial control over the judicial system ever since the Supreme Court was expanded from 20 to 32 members in 2004.⁴⁷¹ Moreover, the National Assembly has been historically weak and dominated by forces supportive of President Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution. Although the opposition garnered a majority in the elections of 2015, legislation aimed at curtailing or challenging the powers of the executive have largely floundered.

The presence of a vibrant civil society and a relatively autonomous political society, two important elements that factor into Linz and Stepan’s conditions of democratic consolidation, remain constrained by a large domineering state which seeks to monopolize and control all forms of political expression. Moreover, while the rule of law is strictly enforced, rather than protecting individual freedoms and associational rights, the regime frequently encroaches upon them. Lastly, despite Chavez’s vociferous condemnations regarding the injustices committed against Venezuela by an inherently unequal and exploitative international economic system, the Bolivarian regime has done little to reduce the nation’s dependence upon oil exports and to diversify the economy. As a result, economic stability and by extension, political stability,

remain largely contingent upon international oil prices as well as upon the ability of the regime to attract foreign investment.

According to the paradigm for democratic consolidation in Latin American advanced by Jeff Haynes in my literature review, an amicable international environment is of crucial importance for democratic consolidation in the region.⁴⁷² Throughout the 1990s until mid-2001, global factors and international forces assisted and promoted democratic change with unusual commitment and effectiveness. Therefore, the international environment was markedly supportive of democratization in Latin America. After the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that occurred in 2001, the initiation of the “global war on terror” facilitated a wave of changes in regional priorities for U.S. foreign policy.⁴⁷³ As such, efforts to support democratization in Latin America fell by the wayside, as the United States along with other prominent international powers, rather focused upon confronting terrorism and amplifying their control over Central and South Asia as well as the Middle East.⁴⁷⁴

In Colombia, however, by this time, the trans-national influence of the drug cartels had led to the implementation of Plan Colombia – a bilateral agreement brokered between the Colombian and U.S. governments with the objective of eradicating illicit crops, negotiating settlements with the guerilla movements, and providing aid for judicial institutions, human rights, and alternative development.⁴⁷⁵ After the September 11th attacks, the aid allocated to the Colombian government under Plan Colombia was utilized to not only battle the drug cartels, but also guerilla groups designated as terrorists or narco-terrorists.⁴⁷⁶ From 2002 until 2010, the Uribe administration was successful in significantly curtailing the power of these intra-state actors, which served to strengthen democratic governance in Colombia. Moreover, the aid supplied by the United States bolstered the ability of the regime to embark upon substantial

political and electoral reform. Currently, the United States remains the most influential foreign actor in Colombia. In 2015, it provided approximately US\$280 million in aid mostly towards the strengthening of military and police forces.⁴⁷⁷

Conversely, the rise of Hugo Chavez and his populist regime in Venezuela was received very critically by the United States and the international community. Working behind the scenes with the opposition in Venezuela to oust Chavez from office, the United States unintentionally contributed to the radicalization of the Bolivarian regime.⁴⁷⁸ Upon his reelection in 2006, Chavez further consolidated his power, and openly condemned the United States for infringing upon the sovereignty of the nation's electoral and political processes. Since then, Maduro has continued this discourse, vilifying the United States and other trans-national organizations for attempting to intervene in Venezuelan affairs. In response to the deteriorating economic and political situation in Venezuela, in 2015, President Obama issued an executive order imposing targeted sanctions against several Venezuelan government officials.⁴⁷⁹ Furthermore, in September 2015, four other Latin American nations - Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay - blocked Venezuela from assuming the presidency of the regional trading bloc, Mercosur.⁴⁸⁰ In addition to these sanctions, the Organization of American States has...As is made apparent by the disparate experiences of both Colombia and Venezuela in an increasingly globalized world, democratic governance in Latin America faces an international environment that is hostile at times and neutral at best.⁴⁸¹

The comparative analysis of these two cases reveals the significance of historical legacies. The Colombian case emphasizes the link between the early consolidation of a political system and the proclivity for prolonged oligarchic rule – especially in the absence of a strong and legitimate state. Conversely, the Venezuelan experience highlights how the over-bearing nature of a dominant state can just as easily contribute to the establishment of democracy as it can to its

deconsolidation. Moreover, the consociational experiments of both the National Front and the Punto Fijo regime, accentuate the difficulties that arise when attempting to develop a system that accommodates separate factions of society while also mitigating political deadlock. Finally, while Colombia functions within an amicable international environment that has significantly contributed to regime stability as well as the government's ability to combat violent intra-state actors, Venezuela has been forced to operate within a rather hostile environment. As a result, the regime in Venezuela has become more reactive and adverse to outside assistance, and has also sought to identify external actions, particularly those that are associated with the United States and a number of European actors, as threats to justify its authoritarian tendencies. In short, the international environment has had a decisive, and yet contradictory effects, on the quality of democracy experienced within both nations.

Over the past decade or so, the literature assessing the state of democracy in Latin America has generally focused upon the current wave of political stability within the region. As Ignacio Walker asserts, "...contrary to what has historically happened in Latin America, episodes of political instability have not been accompanied by democratic breakdown and coups d'etat".⁴⁸² Although the region has successfully traveled from dictatorship to electoral democracy, the consolidation of authentic liberal democracy remains elusive. Through this comparative study of Colombia and Venezuela, I attempted to show how a variety of factors ranging from: colonialism, the absence of an authoritative state as well as the overwhelming presence of a patrimonial state, paradoxically exclusionary political arrangements, competing political sub-cultures, clientelism, and international factors have and continue to hinder democratic consolidation and governance in Latin America. To provide a more in depth analysis of the factors that have historically inhibited the processes of state consolidation and

democratization in Latin America, it would be crucial to focus upon a country that routinely achieves high marks on democracy indexes, such as Uruguay or Costa Rica. An analysis of these two nations would greatly nuance the arguments about democracy that I have posited in this study.

Since the third wave of democratization, almost every nation in the region currently possesses a formal democratic regime – except for Cuba and as this study has shown, Venezuela. In an era characterized by market liberalization, increased international integration, and the massive trans-national movement of people, any future study of democracy in Latin America will need to consider the formidable challenges to democracy presented by globalization – namely the growth of income inequality and informality. These realities seek to threaten the viability of truly representative and responsive regimes not only in Latin America, but worldwide. The two case studies that I have considered here are pieces of a larger project crucial to the preservation and advancement of democracy.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Present-Day Map of Colombia 483



Appendix B: Present-Day Map of Venezuela 484



NOTES

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- ³ Diamond, Hartlyn, Linz, Lipset, 'Democracy in Developing Countries Latin America', pg.ix.
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- ¹⁷ Ibid. pg.30.
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- ²⁶ Diamond, Larry, 'Political Culture and Democracy in Developing countries', pg.10.
- ²⁷ Haynes, Jeff, 'Democracy in the Developing World: Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East'(Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), pg. 198-199.
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- ²⁹ Przeworski, Adam, Alvarez, Michael E., Cheibub, Jose Antonio, and Limongi, Fernando, 'What Makes Democracies Endure?' found in Diamond, Larry and Plattner, Marc F. 'The Global Divergence of Democracies', pg.177.
- ³⁰ Ibid. pg. 177.
- ³¹ Diamond et al. pg. xi.
- ³² Pearce, Sarah, 'Colombia inside the Labyrinth', pg. vii.
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- ³⁴ Ibid. pg.3.
- ³⁵ Safford, Frank, and Palacios, Marco, 'Fragmented Land, Divided Society', pg.1.
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- ⁴⁰ Steward, Julian, and Faron, Louis C., 'Native Peoples of South America', pg.217.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. pg. 461.
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- ⁴⁴ McFarlane, Anthony, 'Colombia before Independence, Economy, society, and politics under Bourbon rule', pg.7.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.7.
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- ⁵⁰ Ibid. Pg.10.
- ⁵¹ Safford and Palacios, pg.39.
- ⁵² Ibid. pg.39.
- ⁵³ Bakewell pg.184.
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- ⁵⁵ Safford and Palacios, pg.45.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. pg.45.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid. pg.47.
- ⁵⁸ Bakewell pg.201.
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- ⁶² McFarlane pg. 20.
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- ⁷⁹ McFarlane, pg. 327.
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- ⁸¹ Bakewell, pg. 389.
- ⁸² Safford and Palacios, pg. 86.
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- ⁸⁴ McFarlane, pg.346.

⁸⁵ Safford and Palacios, pg. 90.

⁸⁶ Hamnett, Brian R., 'Popular Insurrection and Royalist Reaction: Colombian Regions, 1810-1823', chapter in Archer, Christon I., 'The Wars of Independence in Spanish America', found in McFarlane pg. 324.

⁸⁷ Pinzon, Hermes Tovar, 'Guerras de Opinión y Represión en Colombia durante la Independencia,' ACHSC, vol. 11 (1983), pg. 187-233, found in McFarlane pg. 347.

⁸⁸ Safford and Palacios, pg. 89.

⁸⁹ Bushnell, David and Hudson, Rex A., 'The Society and the Environment' found in 'Colombia: A Country Study' edited by Hudson, Rex A., pg.114.

⁹⁰ Safford and Palacios, pg. 180.

⁹¹ McFarlane, pg. 348.

⁹² Pearce, pg. 16.

⁹³ Safford and Palacios, pg. 116.

⁹⁴ Despite his new effort, Bolívar failed to integrate fully the various Venezuelan regions and factions. The Venezuelan army became nothing more than "a conglomerate of parochial armies, each willing to fight primarily in its own region alone."⁹⁴ Nevertheless, from 1817 on, the leaders of the various regions shared at least one common goal: the defeat of the Spaniards. By 1819 they had turned the tide. That same year, the Venezuelan Congress created the Third Venezuelan Republic and named Bolívar as its president.

The Venezuelan leader's vision stretched beyond liberating Venezuela and other Spanish- American colonies. Convinced that the great powers of Europe would attempt to fill the vacuum left by Spain's departure and that the newly born Spanish-American states would be too weak to weather their assault, he crisscrossed large sections of South America helping other colonies achieve independence and advocating the formation of a large confederation. In late 1819, he defeated the royalist forces in Boyacá, and a few days later he marched triumphantly into the city of Bogotá. These victories prompted Bolívar to ask the Congress of Angostura to form a greater Colombia composed of Ecuador, New Granada and Venezuela. The Congress agreed and named Bolívar provisional president of Colombia. With his new authority, the Venezuelan general launched a campaign designed to defeat the Spaniards in northern and central South America.

Bolívar was partially successful. He helped liberate Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, but failed to persuade other Latin American leaders that the future of the newly born states was dependent on the formation of a Spanish-American confederation. As Bolívar roamed through South America's mid-section, promoting himself and his ideals, Venezuela began to express its unwillingness to acquiesce to the needs of a greater Colombia. Bolívar returned to Bogotá and Caracas in 1826 to try to defuse the separatist movements but failed. The regionalism and centrifugal elements that had been kept partially dormant during the colonial period surfaced during the wars of independence and brought about the collapse of the Colombian Confederation in 1829 and the creation of the Venezuelan federal republic the following year.

⁹⁵ Recounted to Bolívar by Jose Maria Pando, a Peruvian delegate to the Congress of Panama of 1825 upon his return from the isthmus in May 1826, Safford and Palacios, pg. 119.

⁹⁶ Safford and Palacios, pg. 122.

⁹⁷ Kline, pg. 31.

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¹⁰⁰ Safford and Palacios, pg.215. As noted earlier, initially the president was the one who chose the governors of the regions.

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¹⁰² Buitrago, Francisco Leal, 'Social Classes, International Trade, and Foreign Capital in Colombia: An Attempt at Historical Interpretations of the Formation of the State, 1819-1935', pg.112.

¹⁰³ Hartlyn, Jonathan and Dugas, John, 'The Politics of Violence and Democratic Transformation', found in Diamond, Larry et al, 'Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America' pg. 256.

¹⁰⁴ Ocampo, Jose Antonio, 'Colombia y la economía mundial, 1830-1910' found in Safford, Table 10.4 – Colombia's six most important exports, 1834-1891, pg. 230.

¹⁰⁵ Dugas, pg. 511.

¹⁰⁶ Park, James William., 'Rafael Nunez and the Politics of Colombian Regionalism, 1863-1886', pg. 273.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, pg. 265.

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- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid, pg. 269.
- ¹⁰⁹ Kline, pg. 32.
- ¹¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 38.
- ¹¹¹ Kline, pg. 37.
- ¹¹² Hartlyn and Dugas, pg. 257.
- ¹¹³ Wilde, Alexander, ‘Conversations among Gentlemen’, pg.29 found in Dugas pg. 257.
- ¹¹⁴ Safford and Palacios, pg. 274.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid, pg. 274 – It has also been suggested by both North American and Colombian scholars the indemnity was solely contingent upon Colombia giving U.S. petroleum companies access to the country’s oil reserves.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid. pg.274.
- ¹¹⁷ Hartlyn and Dugas, pg. 257.
- ¹¹⁸ Safford and Palacios, pg. 270.
- ¹¹⁹ Hartlyn and Dugas, pg. 257, see also Pearce pg.30.
- ¹²⁰ Pearce, pg. 29.
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- ¹²³ Dugas, C. John, found in Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost. ‘Politics of Latin America: The Power Game’, pg. 435
- ¹²⁴ Pearce, pg.33.
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- ¹²⁷ Pearce, pg.37.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid. pg.37.
- ¹²⁹ Kline, pg. 42.
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- ¹³⁶ Hartlyn and Dugas, pg. 262.
- ¹³⁷ Peeler, pg. 57.
- ¹³⁸ Pearce, pg. 61.
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- ¹⁴⁰ Dugas, C. John, found in Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost. ‘Politics of Latin America: The Power Game’ pg. 443
- ¹⁴¹ Pearce, pg. 72.
- ¹⁴² Safford and Palacios, pg. 302.
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- ¹⁵¹ Peeler, pg. 57.
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- ¹⁵³ Safford and Palacios, pg. 323.
- ¹⁵⁴ Kline pg. 102.
- ¹⁵⁵ Safford and Palacios, pg. 332.
- ¹⁵⁶ Hartlyn and Dugas, pg. 276.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid. pg. 273.

¹⁵⁸ Free markets, it is posited, allows for the reallocation of resources from one industry to the next solely based upon the market forces of supply and demand. In this way, efficiency is maximized. When efficiency is maximized, countries are able to produce more and the economy expands. As production increases, income in the form of wages, profit and rents increase and consumption increases. The economy continues to expand and unemployment goes down.

¹⁵⁹ Hartlyn and Dugas, pg. 277.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. pg. 278.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pg. 278.

¹⁶² Ibid. pg. 280.

¹⁶³ Ibid. pg.281.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. pg. 282.

¹⁶⁵ Frequently, Colombian police officers, soldiers, judges, and elected officials were faced with the choice of *plata* or *plomo* – this signified an offer to except *plata*, or silver, in the form of a bribe to look the other way, or be faced with certain death, *plomo*, or lead, if one was not to consent to bribery.

¹⁶⁶ Hartlyn and Dugas, pg. 284.

¹⁶⁷ Vanden E. Harry, and Prevost, Gary, 'Politics of Latin America: The Power Game' pg. 526.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. pg. 527.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. pg. 528.

¹⁷⁰ Ewell, Judith, 'Venezuela: A Century of Change', pg. 14.

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¹⁷² Ibid. pg.10.

¹⁷³ Steward and Faron, 'Native Peoples of South America: Ch. 8 Theocratic Chiefdoms of Venezuela and the Greater Antilles' pg. 239.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. pg. 242-243.

¹⁷⁵ Hellinger, C. Daniel, 'Venezuela: Tarnished Democracy', pg. 16.

¹⁷⁶ Lombardi, pg. 10-11.

¹⁷⁷ Hellinger, pg.16.

¹⁷⁸ Lombardi, pg. 33.

¹⁷⁹ U.S. Library of Congress, 'Spanish Colonial Life' accessed online at <http://countrystudies.us/venezuela/3.htm>

¹⁸⁰ Hellinger, pg.17.

¹⁸¹ Haggerty, Richard A., 'Venezuela: A Country Study', pg. 41.

¹⁸² U.S. Library of Congress.

¹⁸³ Hellinger, pg.17.

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The Caracas Company's monopoly over cacao forced its producers to sell their crops at a cheaper price. However, this price reduction did not translate into an equal decrease in the prices paid in Spain. As such, many Venezuelan cacao producers and merchants perceived this arrangement to be an attempt by Spain to impose upon them a tax to pay for unwanted governmental services. Frustrated with the unequal terms of trade, many among the Venezuelan elite began to protest. The Caracas Company was increasingly unable to supply the colony with sufficient numbers of black slaves or European goods, while contraband continued to be as prevalent as before. Due to these problems, which were exacerbated by an overall decline in profitability due to disrupted trading patterns caused by war, the Company lost its monopolistic privileges in 1784.

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¹⁹⁰ Lombardi, pg. 128.

¹⁹¹ Hellinger, pg.18.

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- ⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. pg. 320.
- ⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. pg. 320.
- ⁴⁷⁰ Perez and Holmes, pg. 353.
- ⁴⁷¹ Myers, pg. 315.
- ⁴⁷² Haynes, pgs. 198-199.
- ⁴⁷³ Smith, pg. 330.
- ⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. pg. 330.
- ⁴⁷⁵ Vanden and Prevost, pg. 526.
- ⁴⁷⁶ Cepeda Ulloa, in 'Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America' edited by Jorge I. Dominguez and Michael Shifter, pg. 214.
- ⁴⁷⁷ See Human Rights Watch, 'Colombia', 2016.
- ⁴⁷⁸ Rice, pgs. 242-43.
- ⁴⁷⁹ See Human Rights Watch, 'Venezuela', 2016.
- ⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸¹ Smith, pg. 332.
- ⁴⁸² Walker, pg. 218.

⁴⁸³ See https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/cia-maps-publications/map-downloads/colombia_physiography.jpg/image.jpg

⁴⁸⁴ See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/cia-maps-publications/map-downloads/venezuela-physiog.jpg/image.jpg>

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