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**THE EMERGENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA**

Raúl L. Madrid

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# THE EMERGENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA

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## ABSTRACT

Although Colombia had many important democratic achievements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this paper argues that democracy first took root there at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several key developments enabled democratic practices and institutions to take hold. First, the savage Thousand Days War (1899–1902) and the ensuing professionalization of the Colombian military helped bring an end to the cycle of rebellion in Colombia. In their wake, the opposition abandoned the armed struggle and began to focus on the electoral path to power, thereby reducing the government's inclination to engage in repression. Second, the rise of strong parties also contributed to the emergence of democracy in Colombia. Two powerful parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, arose in Colombia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From 1886 until 1930, the Liberal Party was in the opposition, and Liberals pushed for reforms to guarantee minority representation and reduce electoral fraud and intimidation. Third and finally, a split within the ruling Conservative Party made the enactment of these reforms feasible. The Liberals did not have sufficient strength or influence to pass the key democratic reforms, but in the early 1900s, some Conservative dissidents broke with their party and allied with Liberals to form the Republican Union party. The Republican Union pushed through the key constitutional reforms in 1910, and it, along with the Liberal Party, helped ensure their implementation in the years that followed.

## RESUME

Aunque Colombia tuvo muchos logros democráticos importantes en el siglo XIX, este ensayo sostiene que la democracia se arraigó allí a principios del siglo XX. Varios desarrollos claves permitieron que las prácticas e instituciones democráticas se afianzaran. Primero, la brutal Guerra de los Mil Días (1899-1902) y la consiguiente profesionalización del ejército colombiano ayudaron a poner fin al ciclo de rebelión en Colombia. A su paso, la oposición abandonó la lucha armada y comenzó a enfocarse en la vía electoral hacia el poder, reduciendo así la inclinación del gobierno a implementar medidas de represión. En segundo lugar, el surgimiento de dos partidos fuertes, el Partido Liberal y el Partido Conservador, también contribuyó a la emergencia de la democracia en Colombia. Desde 1886 hasta 1930, el Partido Liberal estuvo en la oposición, y los Liberales presionaron por reformas para garantizar la representación de las minorías y reducir el fraude electoral y la intimidación. Finalmente, una división dentro del gobernante Partido Conservador hizo factible la promulgación de estas reformas. Los Liberales no tenían suficiente fuerza para aprobar las reformas democráticas claves por sí mismos, pero a principios del siglo XX, algunos disidentes Conservadores rompieron con su partido y se aliaron con los Liberales para formar el partido Unión Republicana. La Unión Republicana impulsó reformas constitucionales claves en 1910 y, junto con el Partido Liberal, ayudó a asegurar su implementación en los años siguientes.

Much of the historical literature on Colombia traces the origins of democracy in the country to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the country was a democratic pioneer in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, registering many important achievements. Nevertheless, throughout the century various authoritarian practices and institutions coexisted with democratic norms and institutions in the country. Moreover, many of Colombia's 19<sup>th</sup>-century democratic achievements did not endure. Democracy in Colombia, as elsewhere in Latin America, pursued a zigzag path, with movements toward democracy often quickly followed by periods authoritarian regression (Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a, 3, Sabato 2001, 19). Indeed, towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the country took a decided turn in an authoritarian direction.

Any effort to trace the origins of democracy to a single historical moment is fraught with difficulty, given that democracy not a linear path. As Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010, 941) argue:

Democratization is not only the passing of singular momentous thresholds of democratic transition as the “transitions” literature sometimes presumes but instead is itself a long-term process that can usefully be thought of as a *chain of big and small events*, not always moving unidirectionally toward full democracy.

Nevertheless, as these same authors emphasize, it is possible to identify key democratizing moments that have long-lasting effects (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010, 940). These democratizing episodes often involve the adoption of institutional reforms that expanded the franchise or helped create free and fair elections, but they may also consist of shifts in the informal norms that undergird democracy.

This study conceptualizes the emergence of democracy as a period in which there are no major violations of minimal democratic standards for at least ten years. I stipulate a ten-year period in order to assess whether democratic institutions and practices have taken root. The aim is to ensure that democracy, and especially free and fair elections, have become an enduring norm, and not just a short-lived blip. In measuring democracy, I follow the minimalist definition of democracy developed by Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñan (2001), which requires: 1) fair and competitive elections; 2) the protection of civil and political rights; and 3) elected-

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, I will refer to the country as Colombia throughout this paper even though the country went by various names during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including *Gran Colombia* from independence until 1831, *Nueva Granada* from 1831 to 1858, and the *Estados Unidos de Colombia* from 1858 to 1886, before settling on the *República de Colombia* beginning in 1886.

government control of major policy decisions and civilian control of the military.<sup>2</sup> I count countries with no major violations of any of these criteria during a ten-year period as satisfying the minimal requirement for the emergence of democracy, even though they may have partial violations.<sup>3</sup>

This paper dates the emergence of democracy in Colombia to 1910. Beginning in 1910, the country enacted a series of reforms that strengthened horizontal accountability, guaranteed minority representation, and made elections more inclusive. In the wake of these reforms, free and fair elections became the rule, rather than the exception. The government largely respected civil liberties and political rights in the years that followed, and the opposition abandoned the armed struggle, accepted electoral results, and even participated in some of the governments of this period. Colombia did not become a full democracy in 1910 because some electoral manipulation continued, and some restrictions on the franchise remained, but 1910 marked the beginning of an important democratizing episode in the country that had lasting effects.

What led to the move toward democracy in Colombia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? Why did the country enact reforms that significantly reduced the electoral exclusion, manipulation, and violence that had intermittently plagued it for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

The existing literature on the origins of democracy in Colombia emphasizes class-based explanations. Some scholars have focused on subaltern actors, especially artisans, whom they argue were a democratizing force in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Colombian politics (Sowell 1992, Ch. 2, Sanders 2004, Molina 1987, 112–113, López-Alves 2000, 109–110). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, artisans formed so-called “Democratic Societies” to participate in elections, lobby for protection against foreign imports, and to educate fellow members of their social class. In 1849, artisans played an important role in the election of the liberal General José Hilario López, who enacted some short-lived democratic reforms. Artisans and other subaltern actors played little role in the democratization processes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however. Artisan influence in politics diminished significantly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it remained quite low in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, owing to the repression experienced during the 1904–1910 dictatorship of

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<sup>2</sup> Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñan (2001) make universal suffrage an additional requirement for countries after 1950, but they relax this requirement for regimes prior to 1950. See also Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñan (2013, 65–66).

<sup>3</sup> Mainwaring, Brinks and Pérez-Liñan (2001) classify countries with partial violations of these criteria, such as Colombia from 1910 to 1948, as semi-democratic. Thus, using their terminology, I date the emergence of democracy to the first ten-year period in which a country was democratic *or* semi-democratic.

Rafael Reyes (Sowell 1992, 166–168, Long 1995, 102–04). Workers participated in the March 1909 mass protests that helped lead to the downfall of his dictatorship, but they did not play the lead role in these protests, which originated among students and elites (Sowell 1992, 136, Bushnell 1993, 161). Nor did the working classes play an important part in the Republican Union party that enacted the key democratic reforms in 1910, although the new party did seek support from some of the emerging labor organizations (Sowell 1992, 136–141). The Colombian labor movement was still quite weak at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it was much more focused on social and economic demands than on democracy (Sowell 1992, 137 and 143–144). It was not until 1918–19 that the Colombian labor movement began to demonstrate some political muscle, carrying out a wave of strikes and protests.

Other scholars have argued that middle-class actors, especially small coffee farmers, fostered democracy in Colombia. Some scholars, for example, have suggested that the proliferation of small coffee farmers in Colombia had a democratizing effect by limiting the influence of large landowners (Bergquist 1978, Colmenares 1968, Kalmanovitz 1984, Leal Buitrago 1984, López-Alves 2000, 111–114). Middle-class actors, including students and intellectuals, participated in the protests against the Reyes administration that led to its downfall. Some members of the middle classes, including small coffee farmers, also supported the Republican Union. Nevertheless, the middle classes played at best a secondary role in the party and in the enactment of the 1910 constitutional reforms. Indeed, the leadership of the Republican Union consisted mostly of traditional political elites from the Conservative and Liberal parties. Thus, neither the working classes nor the middle classes were the driving force behind the emergence of democracy in Colombia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This paper instead focuses on the role that the military and parties played in the emergence of democracy in Colombia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although this is not the first study to argue that parties and the military played an important role in the emergence of democracy in Colombia, I emphasize the importance of these actors to a much greater extent than previous studies. Moreover, I identify the specific pathways through which these actors exerted influence.

As we shall see, the professionalization of the military, combined with the savage Thousand Days War (1899–1902), helped bring an end to the cycle of rebellion in Colombia, creating a climate that was more propitious for democracy. The high costs of the war, in which

an estimated 100,000 people died, helped deter the opposition from carrying out further revolts. It also contributed to the decision of the Colombian government to professionalize its military, which reduced the probability that such rebellions would succeed in the future. As a result, the opposition abandoned the armed struggle and began to focus on the electoral path to power, thereby reducing the government's inclination to engage in repression. The opposition's renunciation of violence also helped make possible an alliance between sectors of the ruling Conservative Party and the opposition Liberal Party, which culminated in the formation of the Republican Union.

The rise of a strong opposition party, combined with a split within the ruling Conservative Party, also played an important role in the emergence of democracy in Colombia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two powerful parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, arose in Colombia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century based in large part on religious differences. From 1886 until 1930, the Liberal Party was in the opposition, and it pushed for reforms to guarantee minority representation and reduce electoral fraud and intimidation in order to level the electoral playing field. On their own, Liberals did not have sufficient strength or influence to pass the key democratic reforms, but in the early 1900s some Conservative dissidents broke with their party and allied with sectors of the Liberal Party to form the Republican Union. This alliance pushed through the key constitutional reforms in 1910 and it, along with the Liberal Party, helped ensure their implementation in the years that followed. Thus, pressure from a relatively strong opposition party and a split within the ruling Conservative Party helped democracy take root in Colombia.

As I discuss elsewhere, these factors also played a key role in the emergence of democracy in other South American nations (Madrid 2019a, 2020, 2019b). Throughout the region, the professionalization of the military strengthened the coercive capacity of the state, leading the opposition to eschew revolts and focus on the electoral path to power. Opposition parties promoted democratic reforms to level the electoral playing field, but even strong opposition parties were typically unable to enact democratic reforms on their own. Democratization typically only took place where the ruling parties split and a faction of the ruling party joined up with the opposition to push through the reforms. The Colombian case thus exemplifies the general causal processes at work in the emergence of democracy in South America.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section discusses democratic practices in Colombia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, arguing that democracy first took root beginning in 1910. The second section examines why and how strong parties emerged in Colombia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The third section shows how the Thousand Days War helped lead to the professionalization of the military in Colombia and brought an end to the cycle of rebellions that had plagued the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The fourth section discusses the various splits that occurred within the ruling Conservative Party in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and describes how one of those splits led to the formation of the Republican Union, which enacted the key democratic reforms. The conclusion analyzes the long-term impact of the 1910 constitutional reforms in Colombia.

### **THE EMERGENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA**

As various scholars have shown, Colombia was a democratic pioneer during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at times providing its citizens with democratic rights that exceeded not only those in most other Latin American countries, but also those in Europe and the United States (Bushnell 1971, Monsalvo 2005, Posada-Carbó 2012, forthcoming-a). These democratic practices and institutions, however, existed uneasily alongside numerous authoritarian institutions and practices. Moreover, many of the democratic achievements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not endure. It was not until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that a lasting democratic regime emerged in Colombia.

For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colombians enjoyed significant civil and political liberties. A vigorous opposition existed, citizens regularly exercised free speech, and a vibrant media often published articles critical of the government. The Colombian government held elections at regular intervals to choose its leaders and many of these elections were competitive.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the preferred candidates of the president did not always win: opposition presidential candidates, for example, triumphed in the 1837 and 1849 presidential elections, an occurrence that was rare in

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<sup>4</sup> Elections for the Colombian Chamber of Representatives were direct after 1853, but they remained indirect for the Senate throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, except for a brief period between 1853 and 1859 (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil 2017). Presidents were elected indirectly through a college of electors before 1853 and again between 1892 and 1904 (Bushnell 1993, 288, República de Colombia 1988). From 1863 to 1892 the Colombian states held direct elections for the presidency, but the winner was the candidate who captured the most states, rather than the winner of the popular vote (Bushnell 1993, 288, República de Colombia 1988).

Latin America as well as in Europe before 1850.<sup>5</sup> Elections to the legislature were also frequently competitive, and the opposition typically won some seats in these elections. The opposition, sometimes in league with ruling-party dissidents, often resisted the president's agenda, and such resistance was occasionally successful. Indeed, there are various examples of the legislature blocking or modifying presidential legislative initiatives (Posada-Carbó 2017). It was also common throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the opposition to control some Colombian state and municipal offices and bodies.<sup>6</sup> For example, even during the periods of Liberal dominance during the 1860s and 1870s, the Conservatives typically controlled the states of Antioquia and Tolima (Bushnell 1993, 129–130). Similarly, the Radical Liberal faction continued to control some states during the period of Conservative/National dominance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bushnell 1993, 142).

Nevertheless, Colombia, like the United States and European countries at the time, fell short of democracy in important ways. To begin with, only a relatively small percentage of the population could vote for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The early constitutions of Gran Colombia (1820, 1821, and 1830) and Nueva Granada (1832 and 1843) granted the suffrage only to those free males who met certain income or property requirements and were not in dependency relationships, such as servants and day laborers (Bushnell 1963, 19, Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a).<sup>7</sup> As a result, no more than 5 percent of the adult male population typically voted prior to 1853 (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil 2017). The liberal 1853 constitution, however, eliminated the income, property, and literacy requirements, stipulating that all male citizens who were married or 21 years of age were eligible to vote. In the wake of these reforms, voter turnout expanded considerably, making Colombia one of the world's leaders in terms of electoral participation (Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a, 22). In the 1856 presidential elections, 210,690

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<sup>5</sup> In the 1837 elections, Dr. José Ignacio de Márquez won 616 electoral votes as opposed to 536 for General José María Obando, the candidate favored by the incumbent president, Francisco Paulo de Santander (Bushnell 1993, 288). Since neither candidate won a majority, however, the election had to be decided by Congress, which declared Márquez the winner, a result that Santander respected (Bushnell 1993, 89–90, Safford and Palacios 2002, 143–145). Similarly, in 1849, the incumbent Conservatives split their votes among several candidates, enabling a Liberal, José Hilario López, to be elected president in a closely fought election that had to be decided by Congress (Safford and Palacios 2002, 197, Bushnell 1993, 100). It is not clear to what extent the government supported the winning presidential candidates in the 1856 elections and the 1878 elections, although in both instances the winner came from the same party as the incumbent president.

<sup>6</sup> In 1853, for example, the Conservatives won nearly as many provincial governorships as did the ruling Liberal faction (Safford and Palacios 2002, 210).

<sup>7</sup> The early constitutions also imposed literacy requirements, but repeatedly postponed them until 1850 (Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a, 15).

people voted, which represented approximately 40 percent of eligible voters and 9.4 percent of the total Colombian population, an astounding democratic achievement for its time (Bushnell 1971, 241–242).

Unfortunately, the expansion of voting rights in Colombia proved relatively short-lived. The 1863 Rionegro Constitution federalized Colombia, allowing each state to set its own suffrage requirements, and five out of the nine states enacted literacy or income requirements in its wake (Bushnell 1971, 238, Posada-Carbó 2000, 216, Bushnell 1984, 45). In 1886, a new constitution restricted the franchise for the nation as a whole, granting suffrage rights only to male citizens of 21 years of age who had a profession or means of subsistence, who were literate, and who met certain income or property requirements (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil 2017).<sup>8</sup> National-level electoral data for late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Colombia is scarce, but the available state-level data suggest that there was a significant contraction in voter turnout after 1863 (Bushnell 1971, 1984).<sup>9</sup> Many of those people who were eligible to vote did not turn out on election day because of concerns about fraud and violence, but also because opposition parties sometimes recommended that their supporters abstain from elections (Delpar 1981, 107–108).

Fraud and intimidation was widespread in elections during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially after 1863 (Delpar 1981, 15). The forms of fraud were numerous and took place at all stages of the electoral process. In a speech to parliament in 1897, the Liberal leader Rafael Uribe Uribe summed up the elections in Antioquía as follows:

From the official promises with which people were attracted to the polls to the findings of the electoral authorities, from the formation of the voter registry to the casting of the ballots, and from the counting of the votes to the reporting of the proceedings to the issuing of the voting credentials, everything was fraudulent and false, intermingled with threats and accompanied with violence. (Cited in Posada-Carbó 2000, 223)

Electoral registries were frequently robbed or purged, and ballot boxes were often stuffed or stolen. Some people were allowed to vote numerous times, while other eligible voters were not allowed to vote at all. The property or literacy requirements were often selectively applied to the

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<sup>8</sup> Colombia retained universal male suffrage in departmental and municipal elections after 1886 (Posada-Carbó 2000, 211 and 217).

<sup>9</sup> Although voter turnout began to climb again in the 1870s, it did not approach the levels it had attained in 1856 under universal male suffrage (Bushnell 1971, Delpar 1981, 108, Bushnell 1984, Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a, 24). In 1891, for example, voter turnout ranged between 11 and 18 percent of the adult male population in four Colombian states, which was far below the 40 percent level achieved in 1856 (Posada-Carbó 1997, 260).

opposition. In 1897, government officials in the state of Tolima disqualified Liberals on the grounds that they could not spell words such as “particularísimamente”(particularly) (Bergquist 1978, 96). Fraud also took place when it came time to count the votes. A popular saying at the time was: “He who does the counting elects”(Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a, 30, Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 34).

Fraud was not the monopoly of the president or the ruling party, however. According to Posada-Carbó (2000, 226), the electoral process in Colombia was characterized by conflict rather than control, as mayors competed with electoral judges and governors fought with departmental assemblies for control of the electoral process. No party ever had a monopoly on power across all states or levels of government, which served to enhance electoral competition and conflict (Posada-Carbó 1997, 266). Each side used whatever resources they had at their disposal, including national, state, and municipal-level offices, to influence the results. Governors were quite powerful in Colombia, but they had no official role in setting up the electoral boards that oversaw elections, which prevented them from dominating the electoral process (Posada-Carbó 1997, 265).<sup>10</sup> Until 1888, municipal councils and assemblies typically appointed the local electoral authorities, and there was no national electoral authority—which meant that whoever controlled the local authorities was in a position to manipulate the elections (Posada-Carbó 2000, 225). Even after 1888, control of elections was decentralized since state assemblies gained responsibility for appointing the electoral authorities (Posada-Carbó 2000, 225).<sup>11</sup>

Although 19<sup>th</sup>-century Colombian governments usually respected civil liberties and tolerated the opposition, they clamped down on these liberties at times, especially during periods of internal rebellion. Colombian constitutions typically guaranteed the freedom of the press, but they provided for exceptions, and the government at times harassed the media and even shut down opposition newspapers (Posada-Carbó 2010, 943–944).<sup>12</sup> For example, in 1888, the government enacted a law restricting “subversive” publications and subsequently closed some opposition newspapers (Delpar 1981, 143, Posada-Carbó 2010, 944). That same year, the government also passed the so-called Law of the Horses, which enabled the president to

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<sup>10</sup> The Colombian states were called provinces, departments, and states at different periods in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The state-level executives were referred to as presidents or governors.

<sup>11</sup> State assemblies were also responsible for scrutinizing and certifying the electoral returns (Delpar 1981, 108).

<sup>12</sup> The 1863 constitution, for example, declared the press to be free, but held it responsible for injuries to personal honor and disturbances of public peace and social order (Delpar 1981, 135).

imprison, expel, and deprive of political rights anyone who was considered a threat to the public order (Delpar 1981, 144).

Thus, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Colombia represented a hybrid regime with democratic and authoritarian elements. To be sure, Colombia had some important democratic achievements during the century, but these high points did not endure. The expansion of the franchise in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century gave way to the reimposition of suffrage restrictions in later in the century. Reasonably fair and highly competitive elections were often followed by highly fraudulent elections, coups or revolts. The turn of the century, in particular, was a period of authoritarian backsliding in which the opposition was systematically excluded and harassed. Elections during this period were plagued by fraud and, partly as a result, only two opposition members served in the legislature between 1886 and 1904. Moreover, the country experienced a coup in 1900 and the establishment of a personalist dictatorship in 1904 that lasted until 1909.

As we shall see, it was not until 1910 that democracy emerged in Colombia. Colombia did not become fully democratic in 1910 since it retained some suffrage restrictions, and some elections continued to be marred by fraud. Nevertheless, the suffrage restrictions became less important over time since an increasing number of people met the income and literacy requirements. The constitutional reforms of 1910 helped establish democracy by weakening the president, strengthening horizontal accountability, expanding the suffrage, and guaranteeing the representation of minority parties. Equally importantly, political norms began to change. Opposition parties abandoned the armed struggle and began to focus on elections. Voter turnout rose considerably, and the media became reinvigorated (Posada-Carbó 2015, 64–65). Alternation in power occurred in 1910, 1914, and 1930, and presidents generally served out their terms. The inclusion of both parties in the cabinet became commonplace.

Moreover, the changes initiated in 1910 had lasting effects, as many scholars have emphasized. According to Posada-Carbó (2015, 50): “1910 was of enormous significance in inaugurating a new stage of national history marked by decades of stability and of social and political progress.” Mazzuca and Robinson (2009, 302) note that the 1910 constitutional reforms lasted eight decades, and they argue that the Republican Union “left an enduring legacy in Colombian politics.” Bergquist (1978: 247) similarly argues that 1910 was the beginning of a new era in which:

Public order was maintained and upper-class exercise of civil liberties generally respected. Elections were held in relative calm and freedom, their results accepted. Presidents (with the exception of one who resigned in 1921) served out their full terms.

Colombia's struggle for democracy did not end in 1910. Nevertheless, the reforms enacted that year initiated a new era of democratic politics that the country would build on in the years that followed.

### **THE ORIGINS OF STRONG PARTIES IN COLOMBIA**

Political parties played a central role in the emergence of democracy in Colombia. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colombia witnessed the development of two relatively strong parties with nationwide organizations and loyal constituencies. Although other parties also emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they generally did not survive for more than a decade or two. A religious cleavage was central to the development of the two main parties: the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party took consistently different positions on what role the Catholic Church should have in Colombian society, and these differences helped build loyal followings for both parties. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the parties fought each other not only in elections, but frequently on the battlefield as well. The oft-violent struggles between the parties helped strengthen partisan identities, creating hereditary hatreds that were passed down from generation to generation.

The Conservative and Liberal parties did not formally emerge until the late 1840s, but some scholars have traced the origins of the parties to a rift between the two independence leaders, Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander, that emerged in the late 1820s (Bushnell 1993, 65, Delpar 1981, 3–4, Safford and Palacios 2002, 134–43). Although the two parties did not develop strong national organizations until the 1880s, both parties established a variety of affiliated associations in the first few decades of their existence. For example, Democratic Societies, which consisted mostly of members of the lower classes such as artisans, sprang up throughout Colombia to advocate working-class interests beginning in the late 1840s, and these societies usually had close ties to the Liberal Party (Sowell 1992, Sanders 2004, 66–69). Around the same time, Conservatives founded similar mass organizations, such as the Popular Society for Mutual Instruction and Christian Fraternity in Bogotá, to support their cause (Safford and Palacios 2002, 201, Posada-Carbó 2012, 18). Each party also established elite clubs

and created newspapers to debate ideas, publicize their platforms, and attack the opposition (Posada-Carbó 2010). In 1850, young Liberal elites established the Republican School to advocate liberal policies and ideas, and Conservatives immediately responded by organizing a similar group, the Sociedad Filotémica, along with an elite women's auxiliary, the Society of the Christ Child (Safford and Palacios 2002, 202, Delpar 1981, 8–9).

Both parties gradually developed into national parties that had support in all regions of the country. To be sure, each party was stronger in certain regions than others. For example, in the 1856 elections, the Conservative Party fared best in Antioquia, Cundinamarca and Boyaca, whereas the Liberal Party performed better in Santander as well as in the coastal states of Bolívar and Magdalena (Delpar 1981, Ch. 2). Nevertheless, each party had a presence in all states, and neither party was dominated by leaders or supporters from a particular region.<sup>13</sup>

Both parties were multi-class and relatively diverse in terms of social composition, although they were led by and largely catered to the interests of the elites. The leaders of the parties did not differ significantly in terms of their occupations, although Conservatives were somewhat more likely than Liberals to have had distinguished social origins (Bushnell 1993, Delpar 1981, 56–58, Safford 1972, 356–57, 361–65, Safford and Palacios 2002, 152–53).<sup>14</sup> Safford (1972, 357) writes that “perhaps the liberals were slightly more numerous in commerce, the conservatives in landowning. But the division between the two, speaking purely in terms of occupation [was] not very great.” Nor did the two parties differ dramatically in terms of their base of support during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Liberal Party had greater support among the Afro-Colombian population, no doubt in part because of its advocacy of emancipation (Bushnell 1993, 106–07, Sanders 2004, 139–42, Delpar 1981, 18–25). Artisans mostly supported Liberals, at least initially, but the Conservatives also formed artisan societies and sought their support (Sowell 1992, 48–49, Sanders 2004, Delpar 1981, 28–31).

At various moments, the parties took different positions on a variety of issues, including federalism and democratic rights, but these differences tended not to be consistent over time. For example, whichever party was in the opposition tended to advocate democratic reforms and federalism, but their enthusiasm for such reforms typically waned once they gained control of

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<sup>13</sup> Some scholars have suggested that Conservatives were stronger in the cities that were major administrative centers under colonial rule, while Liberals tended to hail from towns that were marginal during the colonial period, but there are important exceptions to this general pattern (Safford and Palacios 2002, 152).

<sup>14</sup> For a somewhat contrary view, see Bergquist (1978, 7–10).

government. Their differences on economic issues also tended to be fleeting. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they both mostly supported liberal economic policies such as free trade, although they both occasionally supported and engaged in protectionism (Delpar 1981, 58, Safford and Palacios 2002, 155–56, López-Alves 2000, 123).

The most important and consistent difference between them was with regard to the treatment of the Catholic Church (Bushnell 1993, 110–11, Safford and Palacios 2002, 156). Conservatives strongly supported the interests of the Catholic Church, seeking to preserve an important role for it in the state and society. Liberals, by contrast, sought to strip the Church of its resources and its control over the education system, cemeteries, and the civil registry. Whereas Conservatives thought of the Church as a force for moral and social order, Liberals often viewed it as an obstacle to freedom, enlightenment, and economic growth (Safford and Palacios 2002, 156).

From the outset, Conservatives sought to identify their party with the Catholic Church and to play up the religious dimension of their conflict with the Liberals. In an 1852 letter, Mariano Ospina, a founder of the Conservative Party and subsequent president of Colombia, discussed the various banners that the party could use to rally supporters and discarded them all except for Catholicism, which he referred to as: “the only Conservative banner that is alive”(cited in Posada-Carbó 2012, 19). Conservatives viewed this as a winning issue, in part because the Catholic Church was very strong in Colombia, perhaps more so than in any other Latin American country (Mecham 1966, 115).<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, many Colombians had a critical view of the Church, and Liberals did not initially hesitate to highlight their religious differences with Conservatives. The first Liberal party platform stated its opposition to “religion as a means of governing,” noting that “absolutism is never more powerful than when temporal government adopts religion as an instrument”(Posada-Carbó 2012, 17, Jordan Flórez 2000, 125).

The Catholic Church played an important role in politics. Until 1863, clerics held elected office—on average priests occupied 5 (out of 25) positions in the senate and 2 (out of 60) positions in the lower chamber from the 1830s to the 1850s (Posada-Carbó 2012, 20). The Church also helped select the Conservative Party’s candidates, and it used its considerable

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<sup>15</sup> William Scruggs, the US Minister to Colombia in the 1870s and 1880s, suggested that “there is probably no city on this continent where the external forms of religion are more rigidly observed” than in Bogotá (cited in Delpar 1980, 272–73).

influence to support them in elections (Posada-Carbó 2012, 1–3, Abel 1987, 34).<sup>16</sup> Priests often denounced the Liberal Party and its candidates from the pulpit, and the Church even excommunicated some Liberal politicians. For example, in 1897, the Bishop of Pasto told the priests in his parish to teach “the faithful that they cannot vote for Liberals without offending God”(Posada-Carbó 2012, 29). In 1913, the parish priest in Pueblorrico told his congregation that “parricide, infanticide, robbery, assassination, adultery, incest, etc., etc., is less bad than being Liberal, especially as far as women are concerned”(cited in Abel 1974, 160). The Church also formed organizations to provide support for the Conservative Party in elections. In 1849, for example, the Catholic Church established 16 organizations throughout the country to educate artisans and to encourage them to vote for an approved lists of candidates (Posada-Carbó 2012, 18).<sup>17</sup>

Liberals countered by attacking the Catholic Church for intervening in politics. The Liberal leader, José María Samper, for example, referred to the priests as the “gangrene of the Granadan people” because of “the powerful influence” they wielded over the masses (cited in Posada-Carbó 2012, 9–10). A commission of the Liberal-dominated constitutional convention of 1863 noted the “influence of the clergy over the ignorant populations” and reported that the clergy intervened “openly and imprudently” in electoral affairs (Posada-Carbó 2012, 22).<sup>18</sup> Liberals enacted measures seeking to curtail church intervention in elections: the 1863 constitution, for example, denied clergymen the right to vote and to hold office (Delpar 1980, 275–76). Some Liberals even retracted their support for universal suffrage in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after they became convinced that it only benefitted the Conservative Party (Posada-Carbó 2012, 21).

Liberals also implemented a broad range of secularizing reforms that reduced the influence of the Catholic Church. Shortly after taking office, the Liberal government of José Hilario López (1849–53) expelled the Jesuits from Colombia and passed laws that ended slavery,

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<sup>16</sup> Although many Colombians, especially among the lower classes, had strong religious beliefs, it is difficult to know exactly how much influence the Church had over the electorate (Posada-Carbó 2012, 3 and 12, Deas 1996, 166–67). The Liberal politician Manuel Murillo Toro doubted that the clergy played a big role in elections, noting that while the priests helped the Conservative Party in some areas, they did not make much of a difference in many other areas (Deas 1996, 166–167).

<sup>17</sup> In 1838, Catholics had founded an organization, the Sociedad Católica, that sought to defend Catholicism and gain Catholic representation in the legislature, but it did not last long (Posada-Carbó 2012, 13–14).

<sup>18</sup> One delegate to the 1863 Constitutional Convention, José María Rojas Garrido, complained that the clergy “stole” the elections: “The bishops and the clerics are not citizens, [they] are...soldiers of Rome, recruited by the Conservative Party against the rights and the liberty of the republic”(cited in Posada-Carbó 2012, 22).

made the Church financially dependent on provincial legislatures, gave municipal councils a role in choosing priests, and deprived priests of the right to be tried in ecclesiastical courts (Safford and Palacios 2002, 205). Conservatives rebelled in protest in 1851, but this rebellion was quickly suppressed (Bushnell 1993, 109–110, Safford and Palacios 2002, 205–06). The following year, the government enacted a new constitution, which abolished religious censorship and provided for freedom of religion. The López administration also passed a law that separated church and state and introduced civil marriage and legalized divorce, and it exiled the archbishop of Bogotá when he refused to cooperate with some of the new policies (Bushnell 1993, 109). All of these measures helped strengthen the alliance between the Conservative Party and the Catholic Church (Safford and Palacios 2002, 206–07). Conservatives, in fact, had founded the Conservative Party partly in response to what they viewed as an attack on the Catholic Church (Posada-Carbó 2012, 17–18).

A second wave of Liberal reforms took place in the early 1860s during the presidency of Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera. Shortly after taking power in an 1861 revolt, Mosquera asserted state control of the Catholic Church, expelled the Jesuits who had returned to Colombia in the late 1850s, and expropriated most Church assets (Bushnell 1993, 120, Delpar 1980, 274–76). When the Archbishop of Bogotá and other Church leaders protested, he imprisoned them, and declared that any religious communities that resisted would be abolished (Safford and Palacios 2002, 224). The Pope responded by excommunicating Mosquera (Bushnell 1993, 120). In 1863, Liberals also approved a new constitution that imposed a highly federalist system on Colombia and restricted the Church even further.

Another intense religious conflict occurred in 1870s when the Liberals passed legislation making primary education free, compulsory, and secular—religious education was supposed to take place only during designated hours and for those children whose parents who requested it (Bushnell 1993, 129, Shaw Jr. 1941, 598). This angered the Church and many Conservatives, who were also upset that the government had brought in a German mission that included some Protestants to help design the curriculum. In 1876, Conservatives revolted with the support of many Church leaders. The so-called War of the Parish Priests lasted 11 months and cost an estimated 9,000 lives, but the Liberal government ultimately managed to suppress the rebellion. In the wake of the revolt, the Liberals expelled four bishops as well as all clergymen who had taken up arms, and the party sought to impose further restraints on the Church to prevent future

rebellions (Delpar 1980, 286–88). In 1877, Congress also passed laws that abrogated the annual payments made to the Church for expropriated property and stipulated that clergyman could be convicted of violating the law if they incited civil disobedience through their sermons, speeches, or publications (Delpar 1980, 287). These conflicts strengthened partisan identities and widened the divide between Liberals and Conservatives.

Beginning in the 1880s, religious conflict dissipated somewhat, although the Church continued to intervene in elections on behalf of the Conservative Party. The Liberal leader Rafael Núñez, who became president in 1880, sought to mollify Conservatives, resuming payments to the Church for expropriated property and repealing the 1877 laws that expelled the four bishops and placed tight restraints on the actions of the clergy (Delpar 1980, 288–89). In 1886, Núñez created his own party, the National Party, and brought the Conservatives into the government, ushering in an era of Conservative rule that would last until 1930. Under his leadership, Colombia reached a concordat with the Vatican, and enacted a new constitution that declared Roman Catholicism to be the state religion and called for public education to be carried out in accordance with Catholic principles. Liberals, meanwhile, moderated their anti-clericalism partly in order to build their ties to Conservative dissidents who opposed Núñez (Delpar 1980, 290–91).

Partisan identities, however, had been firmly established in much of the population by the time the religious divide between Liberals and Conservatives softened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These identities had been strengthened not just by the religious divide, but also by the violent conflicts that ravaged Colombia for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over the course of the century, Colombia suffered through eight civil wars and more than 50 local rebellions, the vast majority of which pitted Liberals against Conservatives (López-Alves 2000, 118). Experiences of war not only created strong emotional attachments to one's own party, but also powerful antipathies toward the other side. Those Colombians who had not participated in a war directly had often lost family members in conflicts and had grown up hearing about the heroic struggles of their own party and the barbarism of the opposing side. Ernst Rothlisberger, a Swiss professor who lived in Colombia during the revolution of 1885, claimed that:

The majority do not fight in one party or another out of conviction but because they must avenge some atrocity. This fellow's father was killed, that one's brother was impressed, the mother and sisters of another were abused; in the next revolution they will avenge these offenses. (Cited in Delpar 1981, 40–41)

Executions of prisoners, which occurred in many of the wars, contributed to party polarization, enraging the friends, family members, and co-partisans of the victims (Safford and Palacios 2002, 150). The wars, moreover, intensified through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, gathering ever more victims and solidifying partisan attachments. Indeed, as we shall see, the Thousand Days' War, the bloodiest of all the conflicts fought between the Conservatives and Liberals, came at the very end of the century.

The two parties proved extraordinarily durable, retaining their dominance throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nevertheless, the parties underwent frequent splits caused by differences over ideology or policy as well as competition for leadership. The Liberals were particularly prone to splits, suffering major schisms in 1854, 1866–67, and 1875–78, which led Liberal candidates to run against each other in elections (Delpar 1981, 90–93, Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a, 27). Conservatives also split, however. Nevertheless, none of these splits led to permanent ruptures in the parties. According to Delpar (1981, 13), by 1863, the party had “sunk sufficient roots—nourished by the ideological, political, and personal bonds among its leaders in both the capital and the hinterland—to assure the party’s survival.” Factions typically patched up their differences when they faced a serious threat, such as a violent rebellion from the other party (Delpar 1981, 93). Conservatives and Liberals sometimes formed alliances and backed each other’s candidates, but these alliances tended to be short-lived and they did not alter the underlying partisan loyalties.

At times, the splits resulted in the formation of new parties and many Conservative and Liberal politician joined the new parties. Nevertheless, these parties tended not to inspire enduring partisan loyalties, and they typically lasted only a decade or two. Most of the people who joined the new parties eventually returned to the Liberal or Conservative fold (Delpar 1981, 58–59). In the 1875 electoral campaign, the Liberal Party split into Radicals and Independents. The latter faction gradually developed into a separate party with its own organization, newspaper, and platform, and it came to control the presidency and the legislature in the 1880s under the leadership of Rafael Núñez (Posada-Carbó 2015, 33–34). Núñez allied with the Conservatives, which helped lead to the disintegration of the Independent Party, as many Independents returned to the Liberal fold. In response, Núñez, together with the Conservative leader, José Miguel Caro, formed the National Party in 1886. The National Party was gradually taken over by Conservatives, especially after Núñez’s death in 1894. It too, however, suffered

from internal splits, most notably by the Historical Conservatives, and the National Party ceased to exist in 1902 at the end of the Thousand Days' War. Another party, the Republican Union, emerged in 1909 from the ranks of both Conservatives and Liberals. As we shall see, the Republican Union gained control of the government and the Constituent Assembly in 1910 and played a crucial role in the democratization process in Colombia, but it too had a relatively short life, dissolving in 1921 (Posada-Carbó 2015, forthcoming-b).

The Conservative and Liberal parties were relatively evenly balanced, which contributed to the endurance of the party system (Bushnell 1993, 117). Neither side was able to permanently dominate or destroy the other in spite of their efforts in this regard. Control of government shifted over time because of military victories as well as electoral triumphs and changes in party alignments. Whereas Conservatives dominated from 1841–1849, 1855–1861, and from 1886–1930, Liberals controlled the presidency from 1849–1855 and from 1861–1885. Both parties, however, managed to retain their core base of support even when they were in opposition. Indeed, the parties were typically more united when they were in the opposition than when they controlled the government.

By the 1860s, both parties had affiliated organizations located throughout the country, although the national organizations did not control their provincial affiliates and leaders (Posada-Carbó, forthcoming-a, 27).<sup>19</sup> Many of these organizations were impermanent. For example, the electoral committees that each party formed to support candidates and compete in elections typically disappeared after the elections, but elections were held frequently in Colombia so that these organizations were soon revived. Moreover, both parties had other organizations, such as newspapers, schools, and associations of artisans, that operated on a semi-permanent basis. The newspapers waged propaganda campaigns and kept their supporters informed, the schools trained future leaders, and the associations of artisans helped mobilize people to participate in elections as well as armed conflicts (Delpar 1981, 101, Posada-Carbó 2010).

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both parties established permanent and centralized national organizations. The Conservatives held a national party convention in 1879 at which they drew up a party constitution, named a party leader, designated an official newspaper, and created a complex party organization (Delpar 1981, 127). This organizational structure would endure,

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<sup>19</sup> According to Delpar (1981, xi), “by 1863, the Liberal party was well on its way toward developing the leadership, linkages, and organizational structure that would permit its relatively smooth evolution into a mass party in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”

with only minor changes, for years. Similarly, in 1880 the Liberal Party formed a National Central Committee, and it encouraged the creation of state-level and municipal-level committees, which were supposed to correspond regularly with the national committee (Delpar 1981, 126). During the early 1880s, the Liberal Party also founded a party newspaper, *La Unión*, and organized auxiliary organizations, including the Society of Public Safety, which had affiliates in various towns throughout the country and was charged with defending Liberal ideas and institutions (Delpar 1981, 126–27). Liberals continued to make organizational advances in the years that followed. During the 1890s, the party created an elaborate organization that went down to the municipal level (Delpar 1981, 177). Party conventions were held regularly and were attended by representatives from all departments (Delpar 1981, 183). National party chiefs continued to have limited control over the state-level authorities because the links between state-level and national-level branches remained relatively loose, but they had frequent interaction (Delpar 1981, 183 & 191). Although the Liberals were in the opposition during this period, they nevertheless managed to found Liberal schools and colleges, establish Liberal newspapers, and obtain financial contributions from wealthy leaders (Delpar 1981, 183).

Thus, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two strong parties had emerged in Colombia. These parties, which emerged largely as a result of the religious cleavage, had national organizations and strong partisan loyalties among political elites as well as among the electorate. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the two parties had sought power through armed rebellions as well as through elections. As we shall see, however, the professionalization of the Colombian military in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, combined with the devastating impact of the Thousand Days' War, made the armed struggle a much less attractive option for the opposition, leading it to focus on the electoral path to power.

### **ABANDONING THE ARMED STRUGGLE**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Colombian state had low coercive capacity, which stemmed partly from deliberate decisions of the country's leaders not to invest in the military, but also derived from the country's lack of development, poor communications infrastructure, and extreme geographical fragmentation. These weaknesses encouraged the political opposition to seek power by force and as a result, Colombia was plagued by rebellions throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The

rebellions, in turn, provoked government repression and undermined the prospects for democracy. At the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Colombian government took important steps to professionalize its military, spurred in large part by the bloody Thousand Days War (1899–1902) and the ensuing loss of Panama. Although the professionalization effort was only partly successful, it helped deter the opposition from engaging in further revolts. Equally importantly, the memory of the Thousand Days War helped persuade a large spectrum of elites in both the Conservative and the Liberal parties that further civil wars had to be avoided at all costs.

The weakness of the Colombian armed forces during the 19<sup>th</sup> century stemmed in part from actions taken in the wake of independence. When the independence struggle ended in 1825, the new nation of Gran Colombia, which included present-day Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, had a large military composed of some 25,000–30,000 men. The armed forces, which absorbed three-quarters of the government's revenues, were dominated by Venezuelan officers and soldiers, whose involvement in politics created resentment among the elites of Bogotá where the capital of the new nation was based (Safford and Palacios 2002, 111). The fact that many of the Venezuelan military officers, unlike the Colombian elites, were of humble origin and African descent exacerbated the resentment. The Colombian political elites sought to cut back on military spending and reduce the size, privileges, and influence of the armed forces, which caused tensions with the military officers (Bushnell 1993, 115-118, Safford and Palacios 2002). Simón Bolívar, the initial president of Gran Colombia, who hailed from Caracas, largely sided with the Venezuelan officers, but by 1830 Bolívar was quite ill and incapable of governing, leaving Colombian elites in charge. That year, General Rafael Urdaneta, a Venezuelan military officer, seized power in a coup and vowed to rule until Bolívar's return. Bolívar died in December 1830, thereby undermining this plan, and Colombian forces regrouped and defeated Urdaneta in mid-1831. Without Bolívar to maintain the union, both Venezuela and Ecuador seceded from Gran Colombia, and most Venezuelan officers returned to their homeland.

Anti-military attitudes persisted among the civilian political elites of Colombia even after the secession of Venezuela and the departure of the Venezuelan officers. In the wake of Urdaneta's overthrow, Colombia's new leaders purged 298 military officers who had sided with him, although some of these officers were later reinstated (Safford and Palacios 2002, 137–139). The new government also set the size of the army at 3,300 men, and it reduced the military

budget from three-quarters of the national budget to roughly one half, although it continued to be the single largest item (Bushnell 1993, 87).

In the decades that followed, Colombian political elites kept the military small and underfunded. Civilian political elites viewed the military as a threat to their control of the government, and they thought that limiting the size of the military could minimize this threat. Moreover, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colombia had no pressing external security threats that required a military buildup. Although Colombia had border disputes with its neighbors, it did not fight any foreign wars during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, aside from brief conflicts with Ecuador and Peru that were resolved in Colombia's favor without it having to mobilize troops on a national scale (Esquivel Triana 2010, 159). Nor did it face powerful rivals. Colombia's neighbors—Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela—had relatively weak militaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were often preoccupied with internal insurgencies. Colombia, too, faced significant internal threats, but many politicians did not view the military as a reliable ally in suppressing internal revolts. Thus, Colombia's political leaders had few incentives to invest in the armed forces.

Civilian leaders also sought to keep the military small in order to reduce the drain of the armed forces on the treasury. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colombia was a poor country that had few exports and generated meager tax revenues. According to data from Maddison (2013), Colombia's gross domestic product per capita in 1870 was \$676, below that of every South American nation except Ecuador and Venezuela (no data was available for Bolivia and Paraguay). At the end of the 1870s, Colombia had less than one half of the exports of Chile and only one quarter of those of Argentina and Peru (Safford 1965, 504). Colombia's national and state government revenues, meanwhile, were about three-fifths the size of Argentina's and Chile's revenues and one-sixth of Peru's (Safford 1965, 505). This made it difficult for Colombia to afford a major military buildup.

Colombia's low level of development and its geographical fragmentation also reduced the coercive capacity of the state. Even after the secession of Ecuador and Venezuela, Colombia remained a vast nation, the third largest in South America. Moreover, the population of Colombia was not concentrated in a single city or region, but rather was spread throughout the nation. In 1870, 46 percent of the population lived in the eastern mountain range (Cundinamarca, Boyacá, and Santander), 27 percent of the population was located in the west (Antioquia and Cauca), and 19 percent lived in the states that bordered the Atlantic coast (Bolívar, Magdalena,

and Panamá) (Patiño Villa 2010, 140). The vast majority of people lived in rural areas in 1870; Bogotá was the largest city with 41,000 inhabitants in a nation of 2.9 million people (Deas 1985, 659). Colombia was also extremely mountainous, which made transportation and communication difficult. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a trip from Medellín to Bogotá could take 20 to 30 days even though the two cities were only 260 miles apart (Somma 2011, 220). As a result, the government could not easily transport troops from one part of the country to another. Nor could it easily communicate with troops in the field. The introduction of the railroad, steamships, and the telegraph during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century improved transport and communication. Nevertheless, steamships could not reach many parts of the country, and the construction of railroad lines was extremely slow: between 1867 and 1910 only 13 miles of track were laid each year (Safford and Palacios 2002, 254). The construction of telegraph lines proceeded more quickly, covering 6,000 miles by 1892, but these lines were frequently out of service (Safford and Palacios 2002, 255).<sup>20</sup>

The size of the Colombian military fluctuated over time but until the 1880s it remained quite small, never exceeding 4,000 men (Payne 1968, 120, López-Alves 2000, 138). The Liberal governments of the 1850s to 1870s were particularly frugal with the military, slashing the army to fewer than 2,000 men. This level was well below that of most other South American nations, although Colombia was one of the largest, both in size and population. The Federal constitution of 1863 sought to delegate military responsibilities to the states, calling on each state to organize its own army and prohibiting the central government from intervening in local rebellions. As a result, between 1863 and 1875, the army accounted for only 12 percent of the federal budget (Delpar 1981, 87). William Scruggs, the US Minister to Colombia, reported in 1875 “the National Army is merely nominal. Indeed, it can scarcely be said to exist”(cited in Delpar 1981, 87–88). Nor were there large police forces to help keep order: Bogotá, for example, had less than 60 police officers in 1880 although it had a population of 60,000 (Somma 2011, 230). A national police force was not created until the 1890s, and even then it had only 400 to 600 agents during that decade (Cardona 2008, 78).

The troops, moreover, were poorly paid, trained, and equipped. The wages of soldiers were often well below what they could obtain in other types of labor in many parts of the country (Deas 2002, 90, Maingot 1967, 103–04, 115–18). As a result, the soldiers tended to come from

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<sup>20</sup> A contemporary joke was that telegraph delays were so common that a man sent his wife in the provinces a wire saying, “by the time you read this, I will be in your arms”(Safford and Palacios 2002, 255).

the poorest homes and the least developed areas: in 1882 the Colombian government reported that less than one-third of the troops could read (Deas 2002, 92). The government often forcibly recruited troops, especially during wartime, pressganging men that it rounded up in public markets or in military operations (Somma 2011, 233–34, Jurado Jurado 2005). Individuals from affluent families could avoid military service by paying a fee or by providing a substitute, but the poor did not have that option. Not surprisingly, the forcibly recruited troops typically demonstrated little motivation and discipline, resisting combat and exercises and deserting in high numbers. The reluctance of the Colombian government to invest in the military also meant that troops had little in the way of military equipment. The soldiers frequently went into battle armed only with clubs, spears, and machetes; rifles had to be shared among various combatants (Tirado Mejía 1976, 54–57).

Army officers also lacked training and professionalization. In 1848, President Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera founded a military college, but it closed in 1854 because of a lack of political support (Safford and Palacios 2002, 236). Subsequent efforts in 1861, 1883, 1891, and 1896 to create schools that would train officers and professionalize the military also failed (Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 25, Maingot 1967, 120–21). Army officers typically owed their positions to political connections, rather than military expertise. As the US Minister to Colombia observed in 1875: “By constitutional provision, any citizen can be created an officer of any grade from the lowest to the highest, without the slightest military experience or education”(cited in Delpar 1981, 87). Partly as a result, the military did not develop a corporate ethos during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the partisan loyalties of officers typically trumped their military loyalties (Delpar 1981, 87, López-Alves 2000, 135–37). During civil wars, the military frequently divided along party lines, with Liberal and Conservative officers fighting on opposite sides.

The military and the police intervened in elections throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly on the side of the ruling party. Officers often marched their troops to the polls and instructed them how to vote, even forcibly recruiting civilians to swell their numbers. According to the American consul in Barranquilla, soldiers and policemen impressed 300 people in 1883 and obliged them to vote in what he referred to as an “election farce”(Delpar 1981, 107). Given the relatively small size of the Colombian electorate during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the military vote could potentially sway elections. The Liberal politician Salvador Camacho Roldán calculated that the troops constituted about one-eighth of the votes in the state of Cundinamarca

and swayed the outcome of the elections in the nation's capital (Delpar 1981, 107). Not all soldiers were eligible to vote, however, nor could they always be counted on to vote for the ruling party since the military had members belonging to different parties and factions (Deas 1996, 172, Posada-Carbó 1997, 268).

The military and the police also influenced elections by intimidating opposition voters. The government often stationed troops at the polls to scare away or block opposition voters from voting, and at times rumors were circulated that the troops would be impressing civilians in order to frighten off potential opposition voters (Deas 1996, 173). In some instances, the military even helped the national government overthrow recalcitrant opposition governments in states and municipalities. Ernest Dichman, the US Minister in Colombia, observed in 1878 that the role of the Colombian Guard's troops in Panama was "to make and unmake" governments (cited in Delpar 1981, 88). Similarly, Carlos Holguín, a Conservative politician who subsequently became president, noted that during the Radical period every presidential election "implied the necessity of overthrowing local governments" (cited in Posada-Carbó 1995, 11). Military interventions in elections did generate protests, as occurred in the 1875 elections, for example (Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 34–37). In addition, concerns about repeated military intervention helped fuel efforts to weaken the military or at least maintain it at a relatively small size.

The low coercive capacity of the state led to frequent rebellions throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As we have seen, Colombia suffered through eight civil wars and more than 50 local rebellions during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (López-Alves 2000, 118). Camacho Arango et al. (2018, 25) point out that there were many years of peace in Colombia: indeed, they count 49 years of peace and only 14 years of civil war between 1839 and 1902. Nevertheless, every decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had at least one major revolt, and some decades had multiple rebellions. The weakness of the military meant that it had a difficult time suppressing these rebellions, especially given the size and ruggedness of the Colombian territory, which complicated the transport of troops. In a few cases, the rebels actually triumphed: military rebels carried out successful coups in 1830, 1854, and 1867, and political parties carried out successful insurgencies in 1831, 1854, and 1859.<sup>21</sup> These successful revolts constituted most of the instances in which control of the presidency passed from one party to another during the 19<sup>th</sup> century—elections only led twice to

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<sup>21</sup> In 1830 and 1854, military leaders overthrew the government in coups, but then were themselves overthrown in successful insurgencies by forces representing the erstwhile political leaders.

alternation of the party in power: in 1836 and 1849 (Bushnell 1992, 19). Armed struggle thus represented a more promising path to power than elections in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Colombia, and the low coercive capacity of the state in Colombia encouraged rebellions by persuading the rebels that they could actually win.

The revolts typically pitted Liberals versus Conservatives. Occasionally, Liberals and Conservatives would fight on the same side or would fight amongst themselves in intra-party struggles, but as partisan identities developed over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the conflicts increasingly broke down along party lines. Electoral fraud, political exclusion, and unconstitutional seizures of power by one side or the other often served as the catalysts for the civil wars. Other factors, including economic and social cleavages, international interference, regionalism and personal political ambition, also contributed to some of the conflicts, but all of these factors were processed through the partisan arena (Earle 2000, Safford 2000). Many of the conflicts were rooted in differences the two parties had with regard to policies vis-à-vis the Catholic Church. Liberal reforms that sought to curtail the influence of the Catholic Church met intense resistance from Conservatives who received material as well symbolic support from the clergy.<sup>22</sup> The War of the Supremes (1839–42), for example, began when President José Ignacio de Márquez ordered the closure of all monasteries with less than eight members, while the 1876–77 War of the Parish Priests was triggered by a Liberal decree restricting religious education in the public schools.

The rebels managed to assemble increasingly large armies over time. In the mid-century conflicts, the rebel armies consisted of only 3,000–4,000 troops, but they mobilized 15,000 soldiers in the War of the Parish Priests, 9,000 insurgents in the 1884–85 Liberal revolt, and tens of thousands of troops in the 1899–1902 Thousand Days' War (Somma 2011, 203–04).<sup>23</sup> In each of these latter conflicts, the rebels controlled entire cities and significant areas of the countryside during parts of the war.

The rebels were able to assemble large armies and fight extended conflicts thanks in part to the growing strength of partisan identities in Colombia, which led more and more people to join the cause. Rebel leaders from both parties mobilized their supporters by demonizing the

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<sup>22</sup> Uribe-Castro (2019) finds that the expropriation of Church assets in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century reduced municipal-level violence in Colombia by weakening the Church and making it a less attractive ally.

<sup>23</sup> Women and children also fought in the rebel armies (Jaramillo 1986, 60–63). One female soldier, María Martínez de Nisser, famously kept a diary of her combat experiences (Safford 2000).

other side and by offering their supporters an opportunity for vengeance. Both sides also recruited volunteers by pledging to enact policies that would benefit them or by promising them a share of the wartime booty. Liberal warlords, for example, motivated Afro-Colombians to fight in some of the early conflicts by promising them emancipation. Conservatives responded by appealing to racial and class-based fears, as in this 1861 speech by Conservative President Mariano Ospina :

“Do you believe that ignorant blacks from Cauca, that these outlaws, dangerous men from the villages, that these men who formed the rebels’ army are interested in philosophical questions about the form of government? No, this is a stupid belief. The motives of the masses surrounding the rebels’ army are none other than your property and hatred for your race...the hate of the lazy indigent for the prosperous rich...the animosity of the criminal towards justice.” (Cited in Rojas de Ferro 1995, 218)

Conservatives also relied on religious appeals and the Catholic Church to help mobilize the faithful.<sup>24</sup> During the War of Supremes (1839–42), James Semple, an American diplomat, reported that “the Archbishop issued a proclamation calling on all the faithful, from the highest to the lowest, to turn out and defend the city of the Holy Faith [Bogotá]... This operation had a great effect, many men of all classes went to the barracks and took arms “(Uribe-Castro 2019, 4). Both sides at times coerced or pressured peasants to fight in the rebel armies. According to Somma (2011, 203–16), landlords were able to mobilize peasants to join the rebel armies because of the high economic dependence of the peasantry and the traditional social deference that they exhibited toward their employers.

The government prevailed in most civil wars in part because it typically had superior weaponry. For example, during the Thousand Days’ War, the rebels had only 20,000 firearms as opposed to 200,000 in the possession of the government (Jaramillo 1986, 74). Nevertheless, the government often prevailed only because of the assistance of party militias, which did much of the fighting (López-Alves 2000, 137). According to Maingot (1967, 103), “the army never managed to maintain for any length of time a large enough force to successfully withstand the ad hoc armies each party could hastily recruit and put into the field.” In the Thousand Days’ War, for example, the Liberal rebels defeated the Colombian Army at the outset, and the government

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<sup>24</sup> Conservatives often presented their struggle against the Liberals as a moral or religious crusade. José Eusebio Caro, one of the founders of the Conservative Party, wrote that this moral struggle “will not come to an end until the Conservative party has annihilated completely and absolutely the Liberal party....The Liberal party must disappear like crime and licentiousness”(cited in Rojas de Ferro 1995, 217).

only triumphed in the end thanks to the Conservative militias that rose to defend it (Studer 1975, 46). The difficulty that the government had in defeating the rebels often led the wars to drag on for months: the War of the Supremes, for example, lasted 27 months and the Thousand Days' War spanned 39 months (Patiño Villa 2010, 98–99). Moreover, in order to persuade the rebels to surrender, the government was at times obliged to grant concessions, such as amnesties or policy reforms.

The rebellions deepened authoritarianism and undermined the prospects for democracy in various ways. To begin with, the revolts frequently prompted the government to declare states of emergency, suspending and routinely violating civil and political liberties. Censorship was widely practiced during the rebellions, and opposition newspapers were at times shut down. Governments often took advantage of rebellions to imprison or exile their enemies, including those who had not taken up arms against the state. The government also sometimes executed prisoners during the civil wars. During the War of the Supremes, for example, prisoners were executed by both sides, sometimes by firing squad and other times with lances (Safford and Palacios 2002, 222). In addition, the government frequently forced citizens to provide loans to finance the war efforts or seized properties belonging to supporters of the rebels (López-Alves 2000, 121). After the outbreak of the Thousand Days' War, the national government gave departmental governors the power to expropriate property and decree forced loans in the areas where the “authors, accomplices, supporters and sympathizers” of the revolts lived (Safford and Palacios 2002, 249–50). Although some of these repressive measures lasted only as long as the rebellions, others proved to be long-lived. The 1884–85 civil war, for example, gave birth to the long-lasting 1886 constitution, which restricted civil rights and gave the government the right to censor the press in times of war (Park 1985, 265).

The economic costs of the rebellions were also high. In 1882 one Independent Liberal newspaper described the ravages of war as follows:

“Every two years we have a war or feel the effects of one. When blood is not shed, or forced loans are not exacted, or property is not confiscated, there is at the very least profound agitation affecting even the lowest levels of society; business is paralyzed, industries decay, and capital flees to where it can find better guarantees—that is, in four or six months of agitation we destroy the good we have done in the previous two years.”(Cited in Delpar 1981, 98)

Holguín (1976, 83–84) estimates that the nine national revolts cost the government \$31.5 million Colombian pesos, and 14 local rebellions cost \$5.6 million Colombian pesos, counting only the money that the Treasury allocated for the wars. McGreevey (1971, 176) calculates that the soldiers who died in the wars would have earned \$822 million in US dollars over their lifetimes. Neither of these figures, however, comes close to representing the true cost of war since they do not include the economic losses due to the disruption of business and the destruction of property.

The human costs of the civil wars were also high. According to McGreevey (1971, 88), the civil wars between 1830 to 1899 led to 33,300 deaths, and this number does not even count many of the fatalities in the Thousand Days' War (1899–1902). Moreover, the human costs of these conflicts went up over time. Whereas the civil wars prior to 1860 led to no more 4,000 deaths each, the revolution of 1860 caused 6,000 deaths, the War of the Parish Priests led to 9,000 deaths, and the Thousand Days' War led to an estimated 100,000 deaths (Patiño Villa 2010, 98–99). Some of the increase in fatalities was due to the introduction of more sophisticated weaponry into Colombia. During the 1876–77 War of the Parish Priests, for example, the Liberal government of Aquileo Parra acquired 5,500 Remington rifles and eight artillery pieces, while the rebels obtained 3,000 rifles (Somma 2011, 236). Whereas a traditional rifle could fire one shot per minute, a Remington could fire six per minute, and a machine gun could fire dozens. According to General Manuel Briceño, a participant in the 1876–77 war, “700 men armed with Remingtons equals 3,500 armed with common rifles. One machine gun equals 500 men armed with ordinary rifles” (Somma 2011, 237, Tirado Mejía 1976, 55). Such firearms significantly increased the lethality of the conflicts.

The high human and economic costs of these wars led President Rafael Núñez to seek to create a military capable of bringing an end to the rebellions. Núñez, who came to power in 1880 and dominated Colombian politics until his death in 1894, made the preservation of order the number-one priority of his administration. He embarked upon a major state-building project known as the Regeneration that included efforts to strengthen the armed forces. The Núñez administration purchased 5,000 Gras rifles from France and doubled the amount of money spent on the military, increasing it from \$982,432, or 11 percent of the total budget in 1880, to \$2,087,403, or 24 percent of the budget in 1882 (Park 1985, 210, Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez

1994, 36).<sup>25</sup> Núñez also obtained permission from Congress to boost the size of the military, and in 1885, when another rebellion broke out, he reached an agreement with the Conservatives to create a volunteer national reserve army (Safford and Palacios 2002, 245). This reserve army, which was composed entirely of Conservative volunteers, was incorporated by Núñez into the regular army when it reached 3,675 men (Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 31, Delpar 1981, 130). By 1888, the army had more than 6,200 troops, up from less than 1,500 men in the 1870s. In 1886, the Núñez administration also enacted a new constitution that strengthened the president, brought an end to the federalist system established in 1863, and declared that the central government alone had the power to import, manufacture, and possess arms and munitions of war.

Nevertheless, Núñez's reforms did relatively little to professionalize the military or bring an end to the rebellions that plagued Colombia. The military remained highly politicized (López-Alves 2000, 103). In fact, Núñez deepened the politicization of the military by purging Liberals from the officer corps and seeking to make the army beholden to him (Esquivel Triana 2010, 242–43). Efforts to improve the training of officers by creating military schools proved short-lived, and the military continued to rely heavily on poorly trained and forcibly recruited troops (Soifer 2015, 230). Moreover, after the brief expansion of the army in the 1880s, the number of troops began to decline again (López-Alves 2000, 138–39). Even the 1886 constitution did not lead to dramatic changes in the military (Esquivel Triana 2010, 165). To be sure, it did become somewhat stronger during the 1880s, and Núñez improved internal transportation and communications by developing telegraph lines, roads, and railways, all of which facilitated the government's ability to deploy troops and supplies (Somma 2011, 238). Nevertheless, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Colombian state still had a low level of coercive capacity, which became evident when the government struggled to defeat the rebels in the Thousand Days' War.

It was not until after that war that the government took major steps to professionalize the military, motivated by the war's devastating losses. Not only did the war cost an estimated 100,000 lives, it also destroyed the Colombian economy, and led indirectly to the loss of Panama by stimulating secessionist sentiments on the isthmus. During the closing days of the war, the Colombian government, under pressure from the United States and Panamanian elites, signed a

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<sup>25</sup> Núñez argued that the increased expenditure would actually save the government money by reducing the likelihood of war (Park 1985, 210).

treaty with the United States, giving it the right to build a canal in Panama and control it in perpetuity. Public opinion in Colombia, however, quickly turned against this treaty, and the Colombian Senate voted it down unanimously (Bushnell 1993, 153). In the wake of this decision, Panamanians revolted with the encouragement of the United States, and the US Navy blocked Colombia from sending troops to the isthmus to quell the rebellion. After the revolt, the United States quickly recognized the independence of Panama and signed a new treaty with the Panamanian government that gave the United States the right to build and control the canal.

The loss of Panama, along with the military's poor performance in the war, led to the emergence of a small group of reformers within the government who advocated for the professionalization of the military (Studer 1975, 52–54). These reformers, who were dubbed the *cismáticos* or schismatics, called for a military that would be disciplined and removed from politics. Under the leadership of General Rafael Reyes, who became president in 1904, the *cismáticos* initiated a major military reform program that helped end the cycle of rebellions in Colombia.<sup>26</sup> With the assistance of the Liberal General Rafael Uribe Uribe, who had sent his sons to study in a Chilean military school, Reyes recruited a Chilean mission to help modernize the military (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 22–30, Arancibia Clavel 2002). The Colombian government chose Chile, which had previously sent missions to Ecuador and El Salvador, in part because it had a strong, successful, and disciplined military that was subordinated to civilian rule and modeled along German lines (Arancibia Clavel 2002, 386–87, Maingot 1967, 168–69). As Uribe Uribe later wrote: “Why Chile? Because it was the Latin American country most advanced in the application of the Prussian school, which in that period constituted the model or paradigm of military training in Europe and other latitudes”(cited in Arancibia Clavel 2002, 386). The first Chilean mission, led by Captain Arturo Ahumada, arrived in 1907. It was followed by three more missions, which lasted until 1915. None of these missions was large, but they exercised considerable influence, particularly at the outset.

The modernization program sought to professionalize and depoliticize the military, converting it into a national institution rather than one divided by party affiliation (Bergquist 1978, 225–226, Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 22). One of the first steps was to enact Law 17 of 1907,

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<sup>26</sup> In 1906, Reyes also created a new nationwide police force, the National Gendarmerie, to help stamp out rebellions. However, this police force, which was under the control of the Ministry of Defense, was abolished by Reyes's successor, who returned the police to the control of local authorities, thereby undermining the government's ability to control local rebellions (Cardona 2008, 79–81).

which aimed to establish rational and meritocratic criteria for advancement within the military and to deal with the huge number of officers who had received promotions during the war (Cardona 2008, 85–88, Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 62).<sup>27</sup> The following year, Reyes issued Decree 1313, which required that officers take certain courses in order to be promoted (Cardona 2008, 90). In addition, the Reyes administration established several institutions to train military officers: the Army Cadet School, the Naval School, and the Superior War College (ESG) (Arancibia Clavel 2002, 385–86, Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 60–63, Cardona 2008, 88–91). By 1914, the Army Cadet School had 110 students and the Superior War College had accepted 36 students (Cardona 2008, 89–90). The Chilean officers played a key role in organizing and running these schools.

The Colombian government also sought to improve the training and recruitment of soldiers. At the end of the Thousand Days' War in 1902, the Colombian armed forces had some 50,000 poorly trained troops in arms. The Reyes administration immediately moved to reduce the size of the army, bringing it down to approximately 5,000 men by 1905. Reyes also declared the end of forced recruitment, and in 1909 Congress prohibited it with the enactment of Law 40 (Arancibia Clavel 2002, 399, Cardona 2008, 97). The Colombian government, however, largely failed in its efforts to establish obligatory military service and to ban the use of payments to avoid military service. As a result, soldiers continued to be drawn largely from the poorest sectors of Colombia society (Cardona 2008, 98).

In addition, the Reyes administration sought to ensure that the military had a monopoly on the use of force by initiating a program to collect the many weapons Colombians had stockpiled during the Thousand Days' War and earlier. By 1909, this program had collected 65,505 guns and 1,138,649 bullets, thereby making it more difficult for potential rebels to arm themselves (Bergquist 1978, 225, Esquivel Triana 2010, 265, Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 21). Reyes also sought to reduce the likelihood of rebellion by creating several new departments and breaking up existing ones into smaller administrative units in order to weaken regional power centers and appease local groups (Bergquist 1978, 226).

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<sup>27</sup> As one officer later noted, previously “it was enough, in order to obtain a military rank and position in the Army, to have presented oneself to the commander of a garrison on the unfortunate day when public order had been declared to be perturbed, and receive command over fifty men to go out to the killing of brothers. This easy way of becoming an officer of the Army also made us enemies of the Military Schools”(cited in Maingot 1967, 176).

The Reyes administration's efforts to develop the country's communication and transportation networks also enhanced the state's coercive capacity. By 1910, Colombia had 1,050 kilometers of railroads, up from 205 kilometers in 1885 (Cardona 2008, 13), making it substantially easier to rapidly transport the troops necessary to quell rebellions. The telegraph network expanded even more quickly, and by 1913, the country had 20,000 kilometers of telegraph lines, up from 9,619 in 1892 (Safford and Palacios 2002, 255). As a result, municipalities could quickly summon the military, and the military could communicate with its troops in the field.

Many of Reyes's military reforms generated resistance from old-guard Colombian military officers who sought to protect their traditional prerogatives. Some politicians also resisted the reforms and continued to try to interfere with the military for political purposes. Although Reyes was generally a strong supporter of the reforms, he provoked the ire of the Chilean mission by promoting his personal friends in the military, rather than the graduates of the Army School of Cadets (Abel 1987, 60). The government of Carlos Restrepo (1910–14), who succeeded Reyes, continued with the professionalization efforts, but somewhat more tepidly (Maingot 1967, 192–96). Like Reyes, Restrepo argued that the country needed a professional army to keep the peace: “an army that did not belong to any branch or party; an Army of the Nation; protector of the rights of all, an impartial moderator of political passions”(cited in Esquivel Triana 2010, 273). The Restrepo administration modernized the military's weaponry, expanded officer training, strictly implemented the regulations governing officer promotions, and avoided using the military to intervene in elections (Esquivel Triana 2010, 269–73, Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 62–67, Abel 1987, 61–62). Restrepo also sought to deny troops the right to vote to ensure that they did not get involved in elections, but he failed to get this measure approved by Congress.

The return of Conservative administrations in 1914 largely brought an end to the professionalization efforts, however. The fourth and final Chilean mission, which began in 1914, consisted of only one officer to begin with, and this officer resigned in 1915 when the Minister of War stripped him of his powers to appoint the officers teaching in the Military School (Arancibia Clavel 2002, 435–38). The military training programs deteriorated in the years that followed as the old-guard officers reasserted control (Maingot 1967, 198–200). After a failed attempt to hire a German mission, the Colombian government contracted a Swiss training

mission in 1924. The Swiss, however, encountered many of the same obstacles that had obstructed the Chileans, and they ended their mission in 1928, without having made significant progress (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, Ch. 5).

Although the professionalization effort that began under Reyes largely petered out after 1914, it nevertheless generated some positive long-term effects. Beginning in the 1910s, the military largely ceased to intervene in elections, although the local police continued to be used in support of whichever party happened to be in power locally (Deas 1996, 174–75, Posada-Carbó 1997, 269, Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 62–92). Increasingly, the military saw its role as to guarantee that elections were held in an orderly fashion, rather than to support one side or another, and local authorities often called on the military to keep the peace at election time. Conservative officers dominated the military during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but these generals largely abstained from politics (Abel 1987, 62, Bushnell 1993, 157). Indeed, when a Liberal candidate was elected president in 1930, the military did not seek to intervene to block him from taking office.

The Colombian military remained relatively small after the reforms. Between 1909 and 1922, the army fluctuated between 5,000 and 6,000 troops, a number below that of many of its neighbors (Abel 1987, 62, Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 124–25). The military budget declined during the 1910s and 1920s, dropping to a low of 7.6 percent of the total budget in 1923 (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 116). Military salaries were low throughout this period, the equipment was often deficient, and the training of officers and the troops remained rudimentary in most cases (Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 137, Maingot 1967, 200–08). Nevertheless, the coercive capacity of the Colombian state was clearly greater than it had been during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the military proved itself more than capable of suppressing threats to the internal order that emerged during this period. These threats came from military revolts, labor strikes, indigenous uprisings, and periodic opposition protests, all of which were quickly, and sometimes brutally, suppressed (Atehortúa Cruz and Vélez 1994, 97–110, Abel 1974, 209, Atehortúa Cruz 2009, 173–85).

The Liberal Party engaged in some small local uprisings, but eschewed major rebellions during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in part because of the bitter memories of the disastrous Thousand Days' War. The party, however, also recognized that it had little chance of prevailing in battle (Maingot 1967, 165–66). Instead, Liberals focused on the electoral path to power: competing in elections, winning representation, and pushing for further democratic

reforms. Some elements of the Liberal Party did advocate rebellion in the wake of the party's defeat in the 1922 elections, in which the Conservatives practiced widespread fraud. However, General Benjamín Herrera, the head of the Liberal Party and its defeated presidential candidate in 1922, had led the Liberal side in the bloody Thousand Days' War, and he refused to allow the party to take up arms again (Maingot 1967, 158).

Thus, the professionalization of the military in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with the memories of the disastrous Thousand Days' War and the ensuing loss of Panama, helped bring an end to Colombia's cycle of rebellions, which had undermined the prospects for democracy. The Liberal Party abandoned the armed struggle in large part because it recognized that it was unlikely to gain power through a revolt—and that any such rebellion could be quite costly. Instead, Liberals began to focus on the electoral path to power and push aggressively for democratic reforms.<sup>28</sup>

### **SPLITS WITHIN THE RULING PARTY**

Although Liberals abandoned armed struggle at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and began to focus on the electoral path to power, they lacked the political strength to enact democratic reforms on their own. As we shall see, however, a split within the ruling Conservative Party enabled the Liberals to forge an alliance with Conservative dissidents that made reform feasible. The Conservative Party underwent a couple of important splits in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it was the second split that proved crucial because it led to the emergence of a new party, the Republican Union, composed of dissident Conservatives and Liberals, that strongly advocated reform. The Republican Union gained control of the government and Constituent Assembly in 1910, and enacted constitutional reforms that established minority representation, strengthened horizontal accountability, weakened the executive, and reduced income requirements on the franchise. In the wake of these reforms, Colombia began to have relatively free and fair elections for the first time.

The Conservative Party split in the early 1890s as a result of disenchantment with the policies pursued by the Nationalist-Conservative government of Rafael Núñez and his vice

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<sup>28</sup> The democratic reforms that the government enacted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the incomplete-list electoral system, also discouraged uprisings by giving the Liberals a stake in the existing system (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009). But it is highly unlikely that these reforms would have been enacted if both sides had not already been determined to bring an end to the rebellions.

president and successor, Miguel Antonio Caro. The Conservative dissidents who became known as Historical Conservatives opposed many of the economic policies of the Núñez and Caro administrations, including their use of nonredeemable paper money (Bergquist 1978, 36–41).<sup>29</sup> They also objected to various repressive laws, such as the Law of Horses, and to the political exclusion of the Liberals; government intervention in elections ensured that the Liberals only won two seats in the legislature between 1886 and 1904. In 1891, Historical Conservatives proposed their own presidential candidate, Marceliano Vélez, whom Liberal leaders instructed their co-partisans to support. Nevertheless, the incumbent Núñez controlled the electoral machinery, and he easily defeated Vélez amidst widespread abstention and charges of fraud and intimidation (Bergquist 1978, 41–42, Delpar 1981, 150–51, Park 1985, 275–76).

The split within the Conservative Party deepened once Núñez retired to Cartagena and Caro took over the reins of power. Caro's refusal to modify the government's policies led to a Liberal revolt in 1895, which the Conservatives easily suppressed. To the disappointment of the Liberals, the Historical Conservatives sided with the government during the rebellion, although they tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a peace settlement, which would have involved constitutional reforms (Bergquist 1978, 48–49). In the years that followed, the Caro administration continued to resist major reforms, causing Historical Conservatives as well as Liberals to become increasingly disaffected with the government. In 1896, leading Historical Conservatives published a manifesto entitled "Motives of Dissidence," which outlined their disagreements with the Nationalist-Conservatives including the government's authoritarianism, exclusion of Liberals, and fiscal and economic policies (Bergquist 1978, 57–58, Delpar 1981, 159–60).

For the 1897 presidential elections, the Historical Conservatives proposed as their candidate General Rafael Reyes, the leader of the triumphant Conservative army in the 1895 war. Although Reyes clearly had not been in the Historical Conservatives' camp prior to his nomination, he embraced their platform, which called for economic and political reform, including limitations on executive power, the restoration of civil liberties, and the enactment of measures that would ensure free and fair elections (Bergquist 1978, 59–61). The Nationalist-Conservatives, meanwhile, nominated Manuel Antonio Sanclemente, an 83-year old traditional

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<sup>29</sup> Bergquist (1978, Ch. 3) argues that the split reflected different economic interests: Liberals and Historical Conservatives tended to have greater investments in the growing coffee industry.

politician from the Cauca, and the Liberals nominated José Miguel Samper, a moderate Liberal. Reyes initially appeared to be the frontrunner, but he managed to alienate the Historical Conservatives who withdrew their endorsement of him after he began to distance himself from their reform platform. Although Samper triumphed in Bogotá, where elections were conducted fairly, the governors intervened in the provinces to ensure the victory of Sanclemente (Bergquist 1978, 74, Delpar 1981, 168–69).

In the wake of the presidential election, the Historical Conservatives continued to promote their program of political and economic reform, which included measures to restore civil liberties and guarantee minority representation and honest elections. The Liberal Party also supported these reforms and argued that they were the only means to ensure peace in Colombia. On September 19, 1898, the Liberal leader Rafael Uribe Uribe gave a speech in favor of the reforms in the Chamber of Representatives:

Colombia's biggest problem is that of peace. The problem can only be solved in one way: by giving justice to the Liberal Party. And that justice can only be achieved by approving the proposed reforms... Give us the freedom to make public and defend our rights with the vote, the quill, and the lips; otherwise, nobody in the world will have enough power to silence the barrels of our rifles. (Cited in Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 295)

Although the legislature approved some of the Historical Conservative's proposals including a repeal of the Law of the Horses, the Nationalist-Conservatives controlled the Senate and, under the instructions of President Sanclemente, they blocked the electoral reform from passing (Bergquist 1978, 77–80, Delpar 1981, 176, Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 296).

Much as Uribe Uribe predicted, the Liberal Party took up arms shortly after the electoral reform ran aground. The party had long been divided over tactics, but the failure of the reforms, along with the country's deteriorating economic and fiscal situation, tilted the balance in favor of revolt.<sup>30</sup> Uribe Uribe, who became the leader of those who supported the armed struggle, began to solicit weapons from foreign governments, including Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, but with little success (Delpar 1981, 169–70, Bergquist 1978, 83–84). The directorate of the party was reluctant to go to war, but Liberal revolts broke out in several provinces in October 1899 and quickly spread throughout the country, forcing the leadership's hand. Uribe

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<sup>30</sup> Bergquist (1978, 86) argues that the majority of Liberals had favored armed rebellion since at least the early 1890s.

Uribe did not believe the Liberals were yet ready to fight, but he quickly joined the war effort, choosing “the camps of friends [over] the dungeons of the enemy”(Delpar 1981, 182).

As we have seen, the Thousand Days’ War carried tremendous human and material costs. The Historical Conservatives sided with the government in the war, but pushed for a peaceful resolution of the conflict to little avail. Frustration with the continued bloodshed led the Historical Conservatives to carry out a coup in July 1900 that brought the Vice President José Manuel Marroquín to power. The Historical Conservatives believed that Marroquín shared their views and would bring a quick end to the war, but they were disappointed (Bergquist 1978, 151–53). Marroquín brought many Historical Conservatives into his government, but he obstinately refused to make concessions to the Liberals and instead engaged in harsh repression. As a result, the war dragged on until 1902.

The final peace treaties did not make any major political concessions to the Liberals, but only stated that the Conservative government would consider the reform proposals that had been discussed in Congress in 1898 (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 298). Nevertheless, as soon as the war ended, the position of the hardline Nationalist-Conservatives began to weaken (Bergquist 1978, 196). The hardline minister, Aristides Fernández, who had presided over much of the repression of Liberals during the war and sought to continue their exclusion in its aftermath, resigned under pressure in 1903. The Marroquín administration then lifted the state of siege, repealed Fernández’s authoritarian press decree, and replaced it with the more liberal press law of 1898 (Bergquist 1978, 210–11). The government also repealed the decree that gave the executive the right to name all of the members of the Electoral Council, which presided over elections and resolved electoral disputes. In addition, Historical Conservatives in the legislature enacted reforms that overhauled the government’s economic policies (Bergquist 1978, 211–13).

In the 1904 presidential elections, Historical Conservatives once again supported Rafael Reyes, who ran against Joaquín F. Vélez, the hardline candidate of the Nationalist-Conservative faction. This time Reyes emerged victorious in an extremely close election that was marred by fraud and took months to resolve (Bergquist 1978, 222–23, Covo 2013). Reyes won in part because he enjoyed the support of Liberals as well as Historical Conservatives, but also because President Marroquín reportedly withdrew his support for the candidacy of Vélez once the latter announced that he would launch an investigation into the loss of Panama (Bergquist 1978, 222–23).

In an effort to deter future rebellions, Reyes immediately began to enact policies that represented a dramatic departure from previous Conservative governments. First, as we have seen, he sought to strengthen the coercive capacity of the state by professionalizing the military, collecting weaponry left over from the war, and developing state infrastructure. Second and equally importantly, the Reyes administration sought to end the political exclusion of the Liberal Party. Upon taking office, Reyes forged an alliance of sorts with Uribe Uribe and appointed Liberals to his cabinet as well as various other positions in executive branch (Bergquist 1978, 226). He also shut down Congress and convened a Constituent Assembly in which Liberals comprised one third of the members (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 299, Rios Penalosa 1991).<sup>31</sup>

The Constituent Assembly quickly passed a constitutional amendment that introduced guaranteed minority representation in all government legislative bodies. Legislative Act Number 8, enacted on April 13, 1905, specified that: “in all popular elections that aim to constitute public bodies and in the naming of Senators, the representation of minorities is recognized...” (República de Colombia 1906, 63). This act did not specify how minority representation would be achieved, but on April 28 the Assembly enacted Law Number 42, which called for the incomplete-list system to be used in all legislative elections (República de Colombia 1906, 273–274, Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 300). Under the incomplete-list system, two-thirds of the seats were to be reserved for the party list that won the elections in each district and one-third would be reserved for the party list that finished second. Previously, Colombia had used the complete-list system in which all seats went to the party list that finished first in each district.

Nevertheless, the Reyes administration was far from democratic. Not only did Reyes shut down Congress and declare a state of siege in 1905, but he declined to reopen the legislature, governing instead through the compliant Constituent Assembly, which rubber-stamped his decrees (Rios Penalosa 1991, Duque Daza 2011, 195). The Constituent Assembly granted Reyes extraordinary powers in economic and fiscal matters as well as a ten-year term, rather than the six-year term to which he had been elected (Bushnell 1993, 158, Bergquist 1978, 228–29). In addition, Reyes exiled and imprisoned many of his foes, including both Liberals and Conservatives, and ordered the summary execution of four individuals who were involved in an

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<sup>31</sup> One Liberal and two Conservatives—one from each of the two main Conservative factions—represented each department in the assembly.

attempt to assassinate him in 1906 (Bushnell 1993, 158). He also dismissed a member of the Supreme Court when the judge alleged that Reyes had won the presidency due to fraud. With the assistance of the Constituent Assembly, Reyes subsequently removed all of the existing members of the Supreme Court, naming nine new members to the court to take their places (Barbosa 2015, Cajas Sarria 2013, 457–458).

Reyes's dictatorial ways as well as his economic policies prompted another split within the Conservative Party that ultimately led to his downfall and a transition to democracy. Many Historical Conservatives as well as Liberals quickly became disenchanted with his regime, and some of them began to participate in plots against him as early as 1904 (Bergquist 1978, 229). The catalyst for the downfall of Reyes, however, was an agreement that the government signed with the United States in 1909, recognizing Panamanian independence in exchange for an indemnity and the future use of the canal. This agreement triggered a wave of student-led protests and helped give birth to the Republican Union, a new opposition party composed of both Conservative and Liberal dissidents critical of Reyes.<sup>32</sup> The Republican Union won a large share of seats in the May 1909 congressional elections, the first legislative elections held since Reyes came to power, and in June 1909, Reyes resigned and fled Colombia (Bergquist 1978, 245).<sup>33</sup> At the instigation of the Republican Union, the legislature subsequently chose General Ramón González Valencia, to serve out Reyes's (original) term as president.<sup>34</sup> González Valencia, a Historical Conservative, had been elected as vice president in 1904, but had subsequently been removed by Reyes (Bergquist 1978, 248). The new president convoked popular elections for a new Constituent Assembly in February 1910 (Duque Daza 2011, 196).<sup>35</sup> The Republican Union won a majority of seats in the Constituent Assembly, which then elected Carlos Restrepo, a Conservative leader of the Republican Union, as Colombia's new president by a vote of 23–18 (Bergquist 1978, 252–253, Rodríguez Piñeres 1956, 269).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The Republican Union was initially known as the Republican Board.

<sup>33</sup> Although the Republican Union dominated the Chamber of Representatives, supporters of Reyes still controlled the Senate in 1909 (Melo 1989, 220).

<sup>34</sup> Supporters of Reyes pushed unsuccessfully for Jorge Holguín, whom Reyes had designated as his successor, to remain as president in 1909 (Duque Daza 2011, 196).

<sup>35</sup> Under the rules used in these elections, the municipalities elected the members of the Constituent Assembly; two members were chosen by the majority and one member by the minority in each of the 15 electoral districts (Rios Penalosa 1991, Melo 1989, 221).

<sup>36</sup> The reformed constitution stipulated that presidents henceforth would be elected in a direct popular vote (Article 25), but the members of the Constituent Assembly chose to elect the current president (Bergquist 1978, 252–253). The Constituent Assembly also acted as the legislature until a new Congress was elected.

Under the leadership of the Republican Union, the Constituent Assembly enacted a broad array of constitutional reforms that laid the groundwork for a more democratic Colombia. In late 1909, Republican Union legislators had come up with a list of the cardinal principles that they believed should govern constitutional reform. These included: minority representation; presidential accountability; a prohibition on immediate presidential reelection; annual sessions of Congress; freedom of the press; an electoral system independent of the parties; the establishment of a vote of censure; and the election of an Attorney General by Congress (Duque Daza 2011, 198). All of these principles were subsequently enshrined in the revised constitution. Liberals played a central role in the constitutional assembly, especially Nicolás Esguerra who was one of the founders of the Republican Union and was the main architect of the constitutional reforms (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 302).

Some of the most important constitutional reforms (Articles 25–34) weakened the power of the president in an effort to prevent a return to the personalistic and dictatorial rule of the Reyes and Núñez administrations (Bergquist 1978, Acuña Rodríguez 2017, 107–108, Duque Daza 2011, 200–209, Melo 1989). Article 25 reduced the presidential term from six to four years and Article 28 banned the immediate reelection of the president (República de Colombia 1939, 7–8). Under the reformed constitution, the president would no longer have the power to select the magistrates of the Supreme Court and the Superior Tribunals, although s/he retained the ability to name ministers, governors and mayors and the power to veto laws (Duque Daza 2011, 205–206). The president also lost the power to impose death sentences and to sign international treaties without the approval of Congress (Duque Daza 2011, 205–206). The president retained the right to declare a state of siege in the event of a foreign war or an internal uprising, but any emergency decrees enacted during the state of siege would cease to have effect once the war or uprising had ended (República de Colombia 1939, 8–9). Moreover, Article 29 stipulated that the president would be held “responsible for acts or omissions that violate the Constitution and its laws” (República de Colombia 1939, 8).

The constitutional reforms also strengthened horizontal accountability by expanding the powers and independence of Congress and the judiciary. Article 41 gave the Supreme Court the responsibility of “guarding the integrity of the constitution” and of ruling on the constitutionality of laws and decrees, which any citizen was allowed to challenge (República de Colombia 1939, 10, Cajas Sarria 2013, 459). The reformed constitution stipulated that Congress was to meet

every year, and it was given new responsibilities, including electing the members of the Supreme Court and choosing the designates who would replace the president in the event of his removal, since the reforms abolished the office of the vice presidency (República de Colombia 1939, 6). Congress also gained the right to censure members of the executive branch as well as Supreme Court justices (Article 20). In addition, the reformed constitution granted a variety of responsibilities to the departmental governments and assemblies.

The Constituent Assembly also guaranteed minority representation, reaffirming the reforms enacted during the Reyes administration. Members of the Constituent Assembly submitted four separate reform proposals stipulating how minority representation should be achieved, but in the end the Constituent Assembly could not come to an agreement (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 302). Instead, Article 45 provided that “in all elections in which one votes for more than two individuals, the election will use the incomplete list, the quotient rule, the cumulative vote or whatever system that ensures proportional representation of the parties”(República de Colombia 1939, 10). The revised constitution left it to ordinary law to determine which of these systems would be used, but it was not until 1916 that the legislature managed to pass an electoral code mandating the use of the incomplete vote (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 303).<sup>37</sup>

Thus, a split within the ruling Conservative Party led to the emergence of a new party, the Republican Union, which enacted important constitutional reforms that helped bring democracy to Colombia. To be sure, the constitutional reforms of 1910 had some shortcomings: they lacked a bill of rights; they maintained some suffrage restrictions; and they did not do enough to combat voter fraud (Duque Daza 2011, 206, Acuña Rodríguez 2017). Nevertheless, as discussed below, the 1910 reforms represented an important step forward in democratic development in Colombia and they would have lasting impact.

### **CONCLUSION: THE IMPACT OF THE REFORM**

As we have seen, Colombia had a relatively liberal authoritarian regime throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Colombia developed strong parties late in the century, but these parties initially sought power via the armed struggle as well as through elections, thereby undermining prospects

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<sup>37</sup> In the interim, the electoral authorities used the incomplete list as called for by Law 42 of 1905 (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 303).

for democracy. The brutal Thousand Days War, however, led to the professionalization of the military during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which brought an end to the cycle of rebellion. The Thousand Days War deterred opposition party rebellions by making the devastating costs of war all too apparent, while the professionalization of the military discouraged revolts by making it significantly more difficult for the opposition to prevail by means of armed struggle. As a result, the opposition began to focus increasingly on the electoral path to power and pushed for democratic reforms. Significant democratic reforms only occurred once a split fractured the ruling Conservative Party's hold on power. In the wake of this split, dissident Conservatives allied with members of the opposition Liberal Party to form a new party, the Republican Union, that enacted major constitutional reforms in 1910. These reforms weakened executive dominance, strengthened horizontal accountability, reduced restrictions on the franchise, and guaranteed minority party representation.

The constitutional reforms of 1910 reduced the level of violence and helped bring about more democratic practices in Colombia. According to Hartlyn (1988, 27), "between 1910 and 1949, Colombia had an oligarchical democracy, a political system, as Wilde (1978, 29) has argued, 'of notable stability openness, and competitiveness.'" After 1910, elections took place in relative calm and all sides accepted the results. As Bergquist (1978, 247) has described:

The unstable politics of the previous century, the politics of fundamental ideological contention and partisan exclusiveness, of chronic civil war and ephemeral constitutions, was succeeded after 1910 by a new era of remarkable political stability.

Colombian governments began to respect constitutional procedures and consistently allow the exercise of civil and political liberties, declining to repress opposition leaders or overturn opposition electoral victories. The political opposition, meanwhile, eschewed armed revolts, focusing on winning power at the ballot box. In the words of Safford and Palacios (2002, 266), "civil war was delegitimized as a form of political competition."

Inter-party cooperation became the norm after 1910. Minority parties not only won a significant share of seats in the legislature, they also formed alliances with the ruling parties and held ministerial positions. President Restrepo, for example, resisted pressure from Conservatives to exclude the Liberals, naming three Liberals as well as various Conservatives to his cabinet (Rodríguez Piñeres 1956, 284–296). In defending his bipartisanship, Restrepo remarked: "I have

been a Conservative, but in the post that has been awarded to me I cannot work as a member of any political entity. From the Presidency, I will see Colombians only as compatriots whose rights I must protect equally” (Rodríguez Piñeres 1956, 278). Most subsequent administrations also included Liberals. Conservative President José Vicente Concha (1914–1918) forged an alliance with the Liberal faction led by Rafael Uribe Uribe and included various Liberals in his cabinet. The Conservative administration of Marco Fidel Suárez (1918–1921) also governed through a bipartisan cabinet, as did the Liberal administration of Enrique Olaya Herrera (1930–34) (Bergquist 1978, 256–257).

With armed uprisings largely a thing of past, elections became the focal point of political contestation and voter turnout rose sharply.<sup>38</sup> The number of votes cast nearly tripled in the two decades after 1914, rising from 337,597 in 1914 to 942,009 in 1934 (Jaramillo and Franco-Cuervo 2005, 307).<sup>39</sup> Approximately 28 percent of adult males voted in the 1914 elections, 30 percent voted in the 1918 elections, and 48 percent in 1922 and 1930 (Posada-Carbó 1997, 260). Opposition parties sometimes abstained from presidential elections. For example, the opposition refused to participate in the 1926, 1934, 1938, and 1949 presidential elections on the grounds that they would not be fair elections (Safford and Palacios 2002, 267). Nevertheless, even when opposition parties abstained from national elections, they typically participated in local elections (Posada-Carbó 1997, 273).

The 1910 constitutional reforms only modestly reduced suffrage restrictions, decreasing the income and property requirements necessary to vote. All adult male citizens continued to be able to vote in elections for municipal councils and departmental assemblies, however. Moreover, the income and literacy restrictions in national elections became less meaningful over time because Colombia’s growing development meant more people met these requirements.<sup>40</sup> Posada Carbó (1997, 258–259) argues that by the turn of the century many working-class people already earned more than the required sum owing to inflation. In addition, the literacy requirements could often be satisfied by merely signing one’s name (Posada-Carbó 1997, 258–59).

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<sup>38</sup> According to Posada-Carbó (1995, 5), “after 1910, Colombians dedicated themselves again to elections with a fervent passion: there was scarcely a year in which there wasn’t an election campaign underway.”

<sup>39</sup> Very little data is available on voter turnout before 1914.

<sup>40</sup> Article 44 stipulated that only male citizens who knew how to read and write or had an annual income of 300 Colombian pesos or property worth at least 1,000 pesos would be able to vote in elections to the presidency and lower chamber of the legislature; the Senate continued to be elected indirectly by Electoral Councils whose members were chosen by the Departmental Assemblies (República de Colombia 1939, 10).

Some fraud and intimidation in elections continued to take place. The 1922 election, in which a Conservative candidate, General Pedro Nel Ospina, defeated a Liberal candidate, General Benjamín Herrera, was notoriously fraudulent.<sup>41</sup> A recent study by Chaves, Fergusson, and Robinson found that in 508 out of the total 755 municipalities, the reported vote totals exceeded their estimate of the maximum potential franchise, which the authors based on the 1918 Colombian census (Chaves, Fergusson, and Robinson 2015, 125). Some fraud and intimidation also took place in other post-1910 elections. In 1918, for example, a violent uprising that left two people dead and two wounded took place in Santa Marta after allegations of fraud surfaced in that year's election (Posada-Carbó 1997, 268). Similar incidents took place in 1916, 1922, and 1923 (Posada-Carbó 1995, 9).

Nevertheless, on the whole fraud and intimidation in elections declined after 1910, and electoral violence was certainly much less common (Bergquist 1978, 247). After 1910, the executive branch lost much of its influence over the electoral authorities. Law 80 of 1910 gave Congress the right to appoint the members of the Great Electoral Council, which was assigned the responsibility of choosing the members of the Departmental Electoral Councils, which in turn elected the members of the Electoral Boards of each district (República de Colombia 1939, 105, 1988, 31–32). The Electoral Juries of each municipality, meanwhile, were elected at the local level using the incomplete-list system, which ensured that minorities had representation (República de Colombia 1939, 105–106, Posada-Carbó 1997, 266). Thus, local electoral authorities were largely independent from both the president and their governors, and no single party could control them (Posada-Carbó 1997, 265–266). Partly as a result, candidates supported by the government were not guaranteed to win. There were numerous cases in which incumbents were defeated in local elections after 1910, and Liberals and even members of smaller opposition parties sometimes won control of local governments (Posada-Carbó 1997, 262–263 and 275). Turnover also occurred at the national level. The candidate of the incumbent Republican Union party, Nicolás Esguerra, lost badly in the 1914 presidential elections, and the Conservatives lost the 1930 presidential elections, even though they controlled the government at the time.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In its wake, the Liberal party published a 422-page document documenting the fraud (Deas 1996, 166). In reply, the Conservative government then published a report disputing many of the Liberals' claims.

<sup>42</sup> Although Conservatives held the presidency between 1914 and 1930, the preferred candidate of the president did not always gain the presidency during this period. For example, in the 1918 presidential election, President Concha's preferred candidate, Guillermo León Valencia, lost to Marco Fidel Suárez in a contest between two Conservative candidates (Posada-Carbó 1997, 263).

Throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the opposition pushed for further reforms to reduce fraud and government intervention and to gain greater representation for minority parties.<sup>43</sup> There were more than 10 electoral reforms discussed in Congress between 1910 and 1930, many of them proposed by Liberals (Posada-Carbó 2000, 218, Montoya 1938, 31–57). These measures sought to strengthen the secret ballot, create an identity card for voters, reorganize the electoral authorities, ban the military from participating in elections, and establish obligatory voting and proportional representation, among other goals. Some of these measures passed. Liberals, for example, helped enact legislation in 1920 banning so-called pirate lists to prevent Conservatives from presenting two lists of candidates in order to try to win the seats set aside for the minority as well as those of the majority (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 315). In 1929, thanks to a split in the Conservative Party, Liberals also finally managed to pass a law mandating a form of proportional representation known as the quotient rule, which provided representation to minority parties based on their share of the vote, rather than just allocating them a third of the seats (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 313–14, Montoya 1938, 61–64). The same law created an identity card that citizens would need in order to vote, although this proved ineffective (Mayorga García 2010, Montoya 1938). In addition, Liberals also repeatedly proposed initiatives to prevent the military from voting on the grounds that officers and troops typically cast their votes for the national government (Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 65–66 and 84–85). Liberals did not succeed in banning military voting until they took power in 1930, but many members of the military regularly abstained from voting even before it was banned (Pinzón de Lewin 1994, 100–101, Posada-Carbó 1997, 269).

The existence of a strong opposition party helped bolster democracy in Colombia after 1910. The Liberal Party's strength and large presence in the legislature helped it gain passage of the reforms that occurred after 1910, and the party's national organization helped them monitor local-level fraud and intimidation and denounce it where it occurred. As one Colombian Liberal leader noted in 1915: "fraud became more difficult in the face of an organized opposition party"(cited in Posada-Carbó 1996, 11). The Liberal Party's strength and organization, along

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<sup>43</sup> The Republican Union also consistently sought to reduce electoral fraud and violence. The Restrepo administration, in accordance with the platform of the Republican Union, called for electoral reforms that would guarantee the secrecy of the ballot, make the electoral councils completely autonomous, and create a permanent electoral census, but the attempt was only partially successful (Melo 1989, 229, Acuña Rodríguez 2017, 117–118). In his presidential message of 1914, Restrepo urged Congress to study the problem, declaring: "As long as electoral fraud persists, the problem of public order will remain"(Posada-Carbó 1995, 18).

with a split within the Conservative Party, also enabled the Liberals to win the presidency in 1930, thus consolidating the country's transition to democracy. Once the Conservatives moved into the opposition, they, too, played an important democratizing role, monitoring and protesting electoral abuses and helping restrain the more authoritarian impulses of the governing Liberals.

The professionalization of the military also aided Colombian democracy after 1910. Although Conservative officers continued to dominate the military after 1910, the armed forces largely stayed out of politics. The military did not prevent the Republican Union from taking power in 1910, nor did it block the ascension of the Liberals in 1930. Moreover, the armed forces had enough coercive capacity both to discourage the opposition from taking up arms and to quickly—and often brutally—suppress the threats to order that occurred during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the coercive capacity of the state was considerably lower in Colombia than in some other South American countries, like Argentina and Chile, it was nevertheless sufficient to deter opposition uprisings. Moreover, the military behaved mostly in a disciplined and professional manner, helping to bolster Colombia's incipient democracy. Thus, both the professionalization of the military and the emergence of strong parties played an important role in the emergence and consolidation of democracy in Colombia.

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