

COLOMBIA



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THE BATTLE OF BOGOTÁ

Colombia Between War and Peace

THE COLOMBIAN PRESIDENTIAL election of 2014 proved to be a landmark in the country's recent history: the first major political defeat sustained by *uribismo* since the beginning of the new century. The hard-right champion Álvaro Uribe Vélez had swept to victory in 2002 and was comfortably re-elected four years later. After Colombia's constitutional court blocked Uribe's attempt to stand for a third term in office, his anointed successor Juan Manuel Santos chalked up another triumph for the Uribe camp in 2010. But Santos and Uribe would part ways acrimoniously over the question of peace talks with the FARC guerrillas, leading the former president to endorse Óscar Iván Zuluaga in the 2014 poll. Zuluaga emerged victorious in the first round of the presidential elections, but was defeated by Santos in the subsequent run-off with support from a hastily-improvised coalition of forces spanning the political ground from left to centre-right. Uribe's first electoral setback has ensured that talks between Santos and the FARC leadership will continue, keeping alive the possibility of a negotiated settlement to end a conflict that has endured for half a century and claimed over 200,000 lives.

Uribe's legacy

When Uribe first took the reins in 2002, after winning an absolute majority in the first round, he did so in a country with a record of conservative hegemony unparalleled in Latin America: no left-wing, or even populist candidate had ever been elected to the Colombian presidency. This oligarchic stranglehold was both cause and consequence of Colombia's infamously violent history, ranging from the civil wars of the

19th century, to *La Violencia* of the 1940s and 50s, to the drug conflicts and paramilitary terror of recent decades.¹ Uribe's triumph nonetheless constituted a notable shift within this political culture, marking the end of a Conservative–Liberal dyarchy that had lasted for more than a century. Uribe, a renegade Liberal, stood for election as the candidate of his own 'Colombia First' alliance. The 1990s had seen an explosion of new political brands as the traditional parties lost popular legitimacy. On taking office, however, Uribe found that the fragmentation which had enabled him to win the presidency was an obstacle to effective governance: he changed the electoral laws to impose stricter party discipline and minimum thresholds for representation, and welded his own congressional supporters into the Social Party of National Unity—better known simply as the 'Party of the U'. The Liberals and Conservatives also rowed in behind Uribe, as did another right-wing splinter group, Radical Change; parliamentary opposition came from the centrist Greens and the left-wing Alternative Democratic Pole.

The central plank of Uribe's programme was a new approach to counter-insurgency, breaking decisively with the abortive peace negotiations of his predecessor Andrés Pastrana. Promising to wage total war on the FARC and ELN guerrillas, Uribe made extensive use of the military aid supplied by Washington under the terms of Plan Colombia. The brain-child of Clinton administration officials—its first draft was in English rather than Spanish—Plan Colombia was ostensibly geared towards the elimination of drug trafficking, but its real target was the guerrilla insurgency which had grown dramatically since the early 90s. Colombia became the largest recipient of US military aid outside the Middle East over the following decade. This deluge of cash, weapons and training from the Pentagon allowed the Colombian army to deploy more soldiers in the field, with a higher ratio of professionals to conscripts, and to improve its weaponry and intelligence-gathering capabilities. Between 1998 and 2002, the size of the armed forces had already grown by 60 per cent, to 132,000, and would reach 283,000 by the end of Uribe's presidency.² Many of the territorial gains made by the guerrillas over the

¹ For an overview of this history, see Francisco Gutiérrez, *El orangután con sacoleva: Cien años de democracia y represión en Colombia (1910–2010)*, Bogotá 2014, and Forrest Hylton, 'Evil Hour in Colombia', NLR 23, Sept–Oct 2003. I would like to thank Francisco Gutiérrez and Mahmood Mamdani for their support.

² International Crisis Group, *Colombia: Peace At Last?*, Latin America Report no. 45, 25 September 2012, p. 2.

previous decade were rolled back: the number of municipalities in which they operated shrank from 377 in 2002 to 142 in 2010. Over 12,000 FARC members were killed by state forces between 2002 and 2009, with another 12,000-plus captured and more than 17,000 demobilized.³

It had become easier for the Colombian state to strike back against the FARC, because of what Forrest Hylton identified in 2003 as ‘the fundamental paradox of an increasing political delegitimation accompanied by startling organizational growth’.⁴ The FARC had expanded its military presence from 17 fronts in 1978 to 105 by 1994, making use of the income deriving from a tax on coca production and various forms of extortion: its annual income in the 90s was estimated to be \$500m. Much of this territorial expansion, however, was not based on any deep political roots comparable to those put down in traditional guerrilla strongholds where the FARC had been the only real authority for decades. The guerrillas were often seen by the local population in these new conflict zones as another armed actor bringing trouble in their wake, and the FARC’s claim to be the ‘army of the people’ commanded little popular assent. The very practices that generated most income for the FARC and ELN war chests were also those most likely to alienate the insurgents from the civilian population.

Uribe’s iron fist for the guerrillas was accompanied by an open hand for the right-wing paramilitaries who had been responsible for the majority of human rights abuses in the 1990s, leaving a bloody trail of massacres and assassinations in their wake. Under the leadership of the Castaño brothers, Carlos and Fidel, regional paramilitary groups had been grouped into a national movement, the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). The AUC endorsed Uribe’s candidacy in 2002, with Carlos Castaño describing the new president as ‘the man closest to our philosophy’. Uribe rewarded this strand of his coalition with the Orwellian ‘Justice and Peace Law’, offering amnesty to the paramilitary chiefs in return for light prison sentences and a ‘demobilization’ that was honoured far more in the breach than the observance. Former US ambassador Myles Frechette described it as ‘a law that couldn’t be better designed to give the criminals a way out’.⁵ The AUC was stood down, but

³ *Colombia: Peace At Last?*, pp. 2–3.

⁴ Hylton, ‘Evil Hour in Colombia’, p. 85.

⁵ Juan Forero, ‘Report adds to criticism of Colombian disarmament law’, *New York Times*, 1 August 2005.

many far-right death squads reorganized themselves under new labels—‘Black Eagles’, ‘*Rastrojos*’, etc.—and continued their long-established practices. Amnesty International’s 2010 Colombia report exposed the sham character of Uribe’s deal with the AUC leadership:

Paramilitary groups continued to operate in many parts of the country, sometimes in collusion with sectors of the security forces. Their continued activities belied government claims that all paramilitaries had laid down their arms following a government-sponsored demobilization programme that began in 2003 . . . the tactics employed by these groups to terrorize the civilian population, including death threats and massacres, reflected those used by paramilitary groups prior to demobilization.⁶

Uribe and his allies made a habit of branding their domestic opponents as ‘terrorist sympathizers’: the verbal equivalent of pinning a target sign to someone’s back. Colombia remained the most dangerous country in the world for trade union members. The brunt of state and paramilitary violence was borne, as ever, by the marginalized rural population and the urban poor. One of Uribe’s principal achievements was to shift the burden of the conflict away from the urban middle and upper classes, most notably by reducing the number of kidnappings tenfold, from 3,572 in 2000 to 305 in 2011.⁷ Another boost to his popularity came from the economic growth registered by Colombia after it emerged from the deep recession of the late 90s. Annual GDP growth rose from 4.6 per cent in 2003 to 5.7 per cent in 2005 and 8.2 per cent in 2007, while unemployment fell from 14.1 per cent in 2003 to 11.2 per cent in 2007.⁸ Much of this growth was driven by the mining and hydrocarbon sectors, which accounted for almost two-fifths of total exports in 2007; oil was the largest single export earner, followed by coal.⁹ Uribe was re-elected in the first round of the 2006 presidential election, defeating his nearest challenger Carlos Gaviria Díaz of the Alternative Democratic Pole by a wide margin—although 55 per cent of eligible voters stayed at home on polling day: Uribe was supported by just over a quarter of

⁶ *Colombia—Amnesty International Report 2010*. See also Human Rights Watch, *Paramilitaries’ Heirs: The New Face of Violence in Colombia*, New York 2010.

⁷ *Colombia: Peace At Last?*, p. 6. Some wealthier parts of the countryside in the Andina and Llanos regions also benefited from the government’s counter-insurgency, and would become electoral strongholds of *uribismo*.

⁸ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Colombia: Country Profile 2008*, pp. 22, 27.

⁹ *Colombia: Country Profile 2008*, pp. 24, 29.

the total electorate.¹⁰ So far as the Anglophone media was concerned, all was for the best in Bogotá: in a 2007 *Guardian* supplement on Colombia's 'changing landscape', the paper's Latin America correspondent informed its readers that 'the president has delivered to the cities what his war-weary people craved—security, and with it the chance of a better life . . . the hope is that Colombia is escaping its blood-soaked history, and it is intoxicating.'¹¹ The *Economist* hailed 'that rarest of beasts: a democratic, pro-Western president winning an anti-terrorist war', and chided the begrudgers who 'make much of the fact that trade unionists are murdered in Colombia' for failing to see the bigger picture.¹²

Scandals, setbacks and succession

Uribe's second term in office was marked by a succession of scandals that stemmed naturally from his counter-insurgency programme. Some of the most egregious provisions of the Justice and Peace Law had been struck out by the courts after domestic and international pressure, and the paramilitary leaders now faced the prospect of serious jail time. Resenting what they saw as a betrayal, the AUC commanders began speaking openly about their links with the Uribe administration. Dozens of Uribe's congressional allies, including his cousin Mario, faced criminal charges as a result of the so-called 'para-politics' affair. Uribe eventually ordered the extradition of 14 high-ranking paramilitary chiefs to the United States in a bid to stem the revelations.¹³ The tide of controversy also began to engulf the DAS secret police, whose leading officials reported directly to the president's office. The current affairs magazine *Semana* published evidence of a vast spying programme that targeted opponents of Uribe, including his challenger in the 2006 presidential election, Carlos Gaviria Díaz, and the chief 'para-politics' investigator, Iván Velásquez. Most damagingly for the president, the DAS chief Jorge Noguera was accused

¹⁰ Uribe's first victory in 2002 was based on a turnout of 46.5 per cent; participation remained below 50 per cent in the 2010 and 2014 elections.

¹¹ *Guardian* special report, *Inside Colombia: A Changing Landscape*, 8 June 2007.

¹² 'The Uribe Temptation', *Economist*, 17 April 2008. It was hardly surprising, after all, if some found it necessary to express their disapproval of trade unionism in such emphatic terms: 'Although Colombians should be, and are, free to join unions, Mr Uribe says, there are historical reasons for distrust. In the 1960s unions were penetrated by Marxists who espoused all forms of struggle, including violence.'

¹³ Gary Leech, 'Extradition of paramilitary leaders undermines para-politics investigation', *Colombia Journal*, 13 May 2008.

of complicity in a string of paramilitary murders. Noguera, of whom Uribe had said 'I would put my hands into the fire for him', is now serving a 25-year prison sentence for his role in the killing of a prominent Barranquilla sociologist.¹⁴ The DAS itself was ultimately disbanded. The most damning indictment of Uribe's security policies, however, came from the 'false positives' scandal that erupted in 2008. In a bid to satisfy body-count targets handed down by the military command, army units had been systematically murdering civilians and dressing their corpses in guerrilla uniforms so that they could be added to the battlefield statistics. Juan Manuel Santos was Uribe's defence minister at the time when this practice was most widespread. Ongoing investigations have identified at least 3,300 such killings between 2002 and 2008.¹⁵ General Mario Montoya, another close Uribe associate, was forced to resign as the army's supreme commander in the wake of the revelations.

These blemishes on Uribe's record might have been dismissed by his foreign admirers as a detail of history if their predictions of a speedy triumph over the guerrillas had been realized. The prospect of total victory seemed most tantalizing in 2008, when the killing of FARC leader Raúl Reyes by Colombian state forces was followed within weeks by the death through natural causes of Manuel Marulanda, the movement's septuagenarian commander-in-chief. Reyes fell victim to an air strike on Ecuadorian soil as he was attempting to negotiate the release of hostages being held by the FARC, including the former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, and the raid provoked a tense stand-off with the governments of Rafael Correa and Hugo Chávez.¹⁶ Marulanda was replaced by Alfonso Cano, who set in motion a reorganization of guerrilla strategy that would create a dilemma for Uribe's successor Juan Manuel Santos.

Uribe was obliged to pass the baton to Santos after his efforts to change the constitution and run for a third term were thwarted by the courts. Powerful sectors of Colombian opinion had begun to fear that an

¹⁴ Simon Romero, 'A scandal over spying intensifies in Colombia', *New York Times*, 17 September 2009; 'Ex-spy chief of Colombia is sentenced to prison', *New York Times*, 14 September 2011.

¹⁵ Chris Kraul, 'In Colombia, 6 sentenced in "false positives" death scheme', *Los Angeles Times*, 14 June 2012.

¹⁶ Luis Bruschtein, 'Cuando fue asesinado, Reyes estaba negociando', *Página/12*, 4 March 2008; 'Francia revela que Raúl Reyes era el contacto para negociar la liberación de Betancourt', *La Jornada*, 4 March 2008.

extension of Uribe's presidency would disrupt the country's institutional stability, leading to executive despotism and perhaps even to war with neighbouring countries. Santos had served at the heart of Uribe's administration, helping the president to form the Party of the U before taking up his post as defence minister in 2006. Having secured the party's endorsement with backing from Uribe, Santos saw off the challenge of his main opponent, Antanas Mockus of the Green Party, in the second round of the 2010 election, winning 70 per cent of the vote (once again, abstention reached 55 per cent).

The new president brought with him a very different formation from that of his sponsor. Uribe's senior by one year, Santos is the scion of an elite family: his great-uncle Eduardo Santos was president from 1938 to 1942, and his relatives were until recently the owners of Colombia's most influential newspaper, *El Tiempo*. Having taken his degree at the University of Kansas before completing postgraduate studies at Harvard and the LSE, Santos had never run for public office until the 2010 presidential poll. A nine-year stint as the London representative of Colombia's National Federation of Coffee Growers was followed by government appointments as foreign trade minister under César Gaviria and minister of finance under Andrés Pastrana. This smooth, technocratic ascent contrasted sharply with his predecessor's trajectory. Uribe had laboriously climbed the political ladder from periphery to centre in a career that spanned two decades, serving as mayor, senator and governor before entering the presidential palace. Educated at the University of Antioquia, he was in his forties when he first took summer courses at Harvard and completed a year's study at Oxford. Most significantly, perhaps, Uribe's father, a wealthy landowner, had been killed by the FARC in the course of a botched kidnapping attempt in 1983. Santos is much less garrulous than Uribe, whose *antioqueño* accent could be heard booming from the airwaves at every possible opportunity (to the disdain of Bogotá's old-money elite): the most effective part of his governing style may have been a timely injection of silence that preserved a certain ambiguity about the new administration's political character and led some commentators to dub Santos the 'poker president'.

Santos broke with some of Uribe's more adventurist policies, hastening to re-establish good relations with Venezuela and Ecuador and embracing Hugo Chávez as 'my new best friend'. These moves were welcomed by business leaders who had been infuriated by Uribe's sabre-rattling

and the disruption it caused to cross-border trade with two of Colombia's most important commercial partners—all the more so amidst a global economic crisis that threatened to scupper the growth of recent years. But the most important policy shift, leading to a dramatic rupture between Santos and Uribe, would come on the domestic front. Santos had pledged to carry on with Uribe's campaign to destroy the FARC through military pressure: within months of taking office, he was able to claim credit for the killing of Jorge Briceño, commander of the FARC's eastern bloc. Santos joyfully compared Briceño's death to the demise of Osama bin Laden, and ordered the army to intensify its pursuit of Alfonso Cano. Cano fell victim to another military raid in November 2011: the fourth member of the seven-man FARC secretariat to be killed in just over three years, showcasing the greater use of informants and satellite technology by Colombia's armed forces that had been made possible by Washington's support.

Yet these trophy killings were something of an Indian summer for the *uribista* counter-insurgency. During his three years at the helm, Cano had steered through a new approach to the war: just as the Colombian state had responded to the FARC's new, aggressive strategy of the 90s with Plan Colombia, the FARC responded to Uribe's 'Democratic Security' policy by consolidating its forces in old areas of strength and resorting to guerrilla tactics, in place of the large-scale offensives that had become a feature of its campaign during the expansionist phase. The retreat of FARC guerrillas towards forest and mountain regions rendered the army's overwhelming superiority in the air less effective. The number of attacks and casualties sustained by government forces began to increase.¹⁷ On a more modest scale, the ELN guerrillas stepped up their campaign after sustaining heavy blows in the early years of the century.¹⁸ The left-wing guerrillas had certainly been weakened, and could no longer think seriously in terms of victory. Their partial military recovery has not been accompanied by any significant political growth. The FARC's insurgency remains overwhelmingly rural in a country where three-quarters of the population lives in urban districts, and its political isolation is near-total: in contrast to the ill-fated Patriotic Union of the 1980s, which began life as a FARC initiative, the main electoral force on the left, the Alternative Democratic Pole, has been determined to keep its distance from the

¹⁷ *Colombia: Peace at Last?*, p. 3.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Left in the Cold? The ELN and Colombia's Peace Talks*, Latin America Report no. 51, 26 February 2014.

guerrillas. But complete military success was also beyond the grasp of the Colombian army: the FARC and ELN had preserved their organizational and leadership structures in the face of intense pressure.

Logic dictated that Santos would turn back towards negotiations, which have always been part of the counter-insurgent toolkit (even Uribe held inconclusive talks with the ELN during his second term, and was seriously considering putting out feelers to the FARC). Yet Uribe was sheltered from having to face up to these political and military realities by his departure from office, just as they were becoming evident. He has blamed the upsurge in FARC/ELN attacks and military casualties on a (non-existent) slackening of counter-insurgent efforts under Santos. When Santos went public with his intention to negotiate with the guerrillas, he sought to protect himself from right-wing opposition by continuing to prosecute the war: there would be no bilateral truce with the insurgents while talks continued. While this may have won him support from some of those who had praised Uribe's military successes, there was no doubt about the line that would be adopted by the former president himself. Uribe sharply attacked Santos and a battle for control over the Party of the U ensued. The bulk of its congressmen preferred to retain access to the pork and jobs at the president's disposal than to follow Uribe's ideological purism. At the beginning of 2013, Uribe and his supporters formed a new party, the absurdly named Democratic Centre, and rallied behind its presidential candidate Óscar Iván Zuluaga, setting the stage for a test of strength within the ruling bloc.

2014: first-round shock

The polarization between Santos and Uribe was not based on any significant divergence over economic policy. While Santos spoke of his admiration for Franklin Roosevelt and even claimed that he would be happy to find himself branded as a 'traitor to his class', his administration followed the path laid down by its predecessor, relying on the mining and energy sector to drive the economy forward and renewing efforts to conclude a free trade pact with the US.¹⁹ Growth averaged nearly 5 per cent between 2010 and 2014, while inequality remained vertiginous.²⁰ It was the ongoing talks with FARC representatives in

¹⁹ 'Traitor to his class': Simon Romero, 'Colombia leader seeks wide-ranging changes, and looks beyond the US', *New York Times*, 5 March 2011.

²⁰ Economist Intelligence Unit, *Colombia: Country Report October 2014*, p. 11.

TABLE I. *First-round presidential election results, May 2014*

<i>Party</i>	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>
Centro Democrático	Óscar Iván Zuluaga	3,759,971	29
Unidad Nacional	Juan Manuel Santos	3,301,815	26
Partido Conservador	Marta Lucía Ramírez	1,995,698	16
Polo Democrático Alternativo and Unión Patriótica	Clara López	1,958,414	15
Alianza Verde	Enrique Peñalosa	1,065,142	8

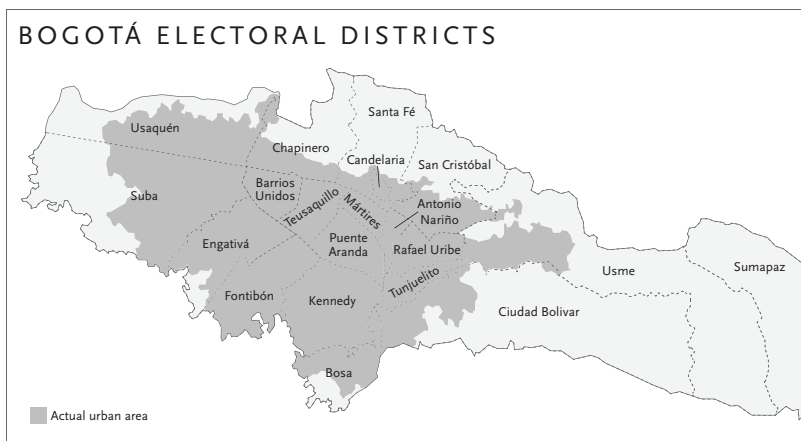
Havana that generated all the heat between the two camps. Santos had the advantages of incumbency, and of the party apparatus that he had wrested from Uribe's control: the former president bitterly accused him of using government resources (*'mermelada'*) to buy votes. Uribe and Zuluaga rallied their supporters with a call for total victory over the FARC. Whether or not the *uribista* camp truly believed that this lay within their reach, eight years of total war had taught them that the conflict could largely be confined to the countryside, minimizing disruption to daily life in the cities. The weeks leading up to the first-round poll were dominated by allegations that Zuluaga's campaign had been trying to obtain classified information about the peace talks that could be used against Santos: *Semana* released a video five days before the vote that appeared to show Zuluaga discussing strategies for making use of such material with a hacker who was facing criminal charges.²¹ Zuluaga refused to take questions from the press during the last days of the campaign, but the controversy did not stop him from topping the poll, setting up a head-to-head contest with Santos in the second round (Table 1). Most alarmingly for Santos, he had been defeated in the two largest cities, Bogotá and Medellín, with the vote for his party declining across the board by comparison with the legislative elections held in March (Tables 2 and 3). Zuluaga's strongest performance was in Antioquia, the *uribista* heartland whose capital is Medellín: there, his margin of victory over Santos was 40 per cent (658,313 to 282,111).

²¹ 'El video del "hacker" y Zuluaga', *Semana*, 17 May 2014.

 TABLES 2 & 3. *Decline in Santos vote share vs. increase in Zuluaga vote share, March–May 2014*

<i>City (Population: 2011)</i>	<i>Santos Coalition: March 2014</i>	<i>Santos: May 2014</i>	<i>Difference (%)</i>
Bogotá (8.75m)	503,601	444,051	-12
Medellín (3.7m)	104,736	69,381	-34
Cali (2.45m)	158,845	128,836	-19
Barranquilla (1.9m)	162,222	81,892	-50
Bucaramanga (1.1m)	67,286	51,945	-23
Cartagena (988,000)	100,066	37,776	-62
<i>City</i>	<i>Zuluaga Party: March 2014</i>	<i>Zuluaga: May 2014</i>	<i>Difference (%)</i>
Bogotá	373,798	542,432	45
Medellín	204,467	268,915	32
Cali	63,479	98,334	55
Barranquilla	31,216	47,174	51
Bucaramanga	33,700	48,652	44
Cartagena	30,250	45,581	51

Almost 40 per cent of the first-round vote went to candidates from smaller parties: Marta Lucía Ramírez of the Conservatives, Clara López of the Alternative Democratic Pole, and Enrique Peñalosa of the Greens. Ramírez quickly rallied to Zuluaga's side, in line with her well-known sympathies for *uribismo*. If her supporters were added to those of Zuluaga, Santos would now face a right-wing bloc endorsed by almost 45 per cent of voters. The Conservatives were divided, however, with much of the congressional party preferring to ally themselves with the incumbent. After a tense 24-hour wait, these congressmen, who effectively controlled the bulk of the party's electoral machinery, opted for Santos. It is doubtful if the president could have been re-elected without



the backing of these ‘rebel’ Conservatives. Enrique Peñalosa, who had received Uribe’s backing when he stood in Bogotá’s mayoral election of 2011, remained on the sidelines, along with his party—although Greens were permitted to support Santos or Zuluaga as individuals.

That left Clara López and the Pole. Like Santos, López belonged to a notable Colombian dynasty: two family members had served as presidents in the 20th century, and López herself worked for the administration of her uncle Alfonso López Michelsen in the 1970s before joining the left-wing Patriotic Union in the following decade. After being drafted in to replace a controversial mayor of Bogotá who faced charges of corruption, she saved face for the Pole by winning a reputation as a superb administrator. Her support would be invaluable for Santos, especially in Bogotá, where the leftist candidate had gained more votes than the president: in the capital’s poorer districts, the main contest was between Zuluaga and López, not Zuluaga and Santos (Table 4).²² But the Pole was divided over the question of endorsing Santos. López threw herself enthusiastically into the president’s second-round campaign, and he also benefited from the support of leading party members such as Iván Cepeda. In contrast, Jorge Enrique Robledo, who received the highest vote of any senator in the 2014 parliamentary elections, urged the Pole to remain neutral and

²² The last three mayoral elections in Bogotá—where almost one-fifth of Colombia’s population lives—have been won by candidates of the Pole: Lucho Garzón, Samuel Moreno and Gustavo Petro.

TABLE 4. *First-round results in Bogotá by district*

<i>Economic stratum (1=poor, 5=rich)</i>	<i>Bogota district</i>	<i>Zuluaga</i>	<i>Ramírez (Conservative)</i>	<i>Santos</i>	<i>López (Pole-UP)</i>	<i>Peñalosa (Greens)</i>
1	Ciudad Bolívar	27.3	17.7	15.6	21.6	5.7
	Sumapaz	19.2	1.8	11.4	61.9	1.7
1.5	Usme	24.7	18.8	14.7	22.9	6.8
2	Bosa	23.0	17.9	13.8	23.7	9.5
	San Cristóbal	19.1	18.4	16.8	23.8	8.6
	Santa Fe	21.9	13.3	21.4	22.1	10.5
2.5	Tunjelito	22.0	16.2	16.5	23.2	10.2
	Candelaria	16.3	11.6	23.2	25.5	11.2
	Engativá	19.2	14.6	18.6	20.1	16.5
	Rafael Uribe	22.2	16.4	17.5	22.7	9.0
3	Antonio Nariño	21.7	13.1	17.9	23.1	13.3
	Kennedy	21.6	15.7	15.9	22.6	12.7
	Mártires	25.3	12.2	21.5	18.4	12.7
	Puente Aranda	22.3	13.9	18.1	20.8	14.1
3.5	Barrios Unidos	21.0	12.3	20.7	17.2	19.2
	Fontibón	20.2	15.7	17.6	20.2	15.2
	Suba	22.6	14.1	17.0	16.7	20.6
	Teusaquillo	18.5	8.8	22.2	20.2	21.3
5	Chapinero	23.3	10.0	22.2	14.9	22.5
	Usaquén	24.6	12.3	18.1	14.1	23.5

criticized the position taken by López. The Pole's central committee gave individual members the freedom to support Santos without granting any collective party endorsement to the president. Even if López could persuade all of her voters to transfer their ballots to Santos, that would

still leave him trailing behind Zuluaga. He had to find other sources of support, but where?

Facing the prospect of defeat, Santos played the hardest hand of his career. He reorganized his camp by appointing former president César Gaviria as campaign director. Gaviria had done more than anyone to save the Liberal Party from extinction at the beginning of Uribe's presidency, when it was plagued by defections to *uribismo*. Chief architect of the 1991 constitution, a former secretary of the Organization of American States, Gaviria had the vision and the profile to dig a trench from which he could oppose (with mixed results) Uribe's attempts to modify the constitutional order. He was called back from retirement—where he had been arguing for drug legalization in the company of Brazil's Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Mexico's Ernesto Zedillo—to become the captain of the president's wobbling boat.²³ Santos followed up on this move by redefining his candidacy as representing a broad front for peace, proclaiming the choice to be between 'those, like me, who want the end of the war and those who prefer a war without end'. He secured endorsements from Green senator Claudia López, his 2010 opponent Antanas Mockus, and the one-time FARC hostage Ingrid Betancourt, all of whom recorded televised messages of support in the last stages of the campaign. Betancourt's vital campaign slot was aired three days before the second-round vote: 'Those like me who have experienced the war have many reasons to defend this peace agreement. The most important thing is to stop the suffering of other Colombians burdened by this conflict . . . I therefore support the peace process led by President Santos. Above all: peace.' López urged voters to opt for 'the fastest and least violent way to end the FARC . . . vote thinking of what is in your own interest, vote to end the FARC.'

Support also came from the most powerful economic groups in Colombia, who feared the destabilizing consequences of a Zuluaga–Uribe victory. Four days before the second-round vote, eighty of the country's most influential business leaders signed a letter endorsing Santos and highlighting his economic achievements. This was in spite of the fact that a widely publicized poll gave Zuluaga an eight-point

²³ Gaviria's return merely emphasized the crisis of leadership in the Liberal Party, which remains dominated by political nepotism (Gaviria's son Simón was party president from 2011 to 2013).

TABLE 5. *Second-round results, June 2014*

<i>Party</i>	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>
Unidad Nacional	Juan Manuel Santos	7,816,986	51
Centro Democrático	Óscar Iván Zuluaga	6,905,001	45
		<i>Turnout:</i>	47.9

lead over the president. Ten days before the vote, *El Tiempo* journalist Jorge Orlando Melo gave a stark account of Colombia's division into two camps, for and against the heritage of Uribe:

The columnists, the so-called intellectuals, support the re-election [of Santos] with a near-unanimity that contrasts starkly with a nation split right down the middle . . . never before has there been such a distance between those who optimistically think of themselves as 'opinion-formers' and opinion itself.²⁴

Peace dividends

The gamble on a broad front for peace paid off for Santos when the votes were cast on 14 June, as he saw off the challenge from Zuluaga by a comfortable margin (Table 5). Zuluaga increased his support in all the major cities, but was outpaced by Santos, who more than trebled his vote in Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla: the capital opted for Santos, although Medellín remains an *uribista* city (Tables 6 and 7, overleaf). Turnout rose significantly, by two and a half million votes, from 40 per

²⁴ Jorge Orlando Melo, 'El poder del voto nuevo', *El Tiempo*, 4 June 2014. One notable exception to this rule was the novelist William Ospina, whose endorsement of Zuluaga as 'the lesser of two evils' caused quite a stir—not least because of his reputation as a man of the left: 'Uribismo is responsible for many of the bad things that have happened in Colombia over the last twenty years, but "Santismo" is responsible for all of the bad things that have happened in Colombia over the last hundred years . . . it's nothing personal: Santos is a smart, shrewd and even elegant man. But the look that he casts over the world, his style of governance, is that of the old Bogotá elite that considers itself appointed by God to rule this country with a terrifying mixture of disdain and indifference.' Ospina, 'De Dos Males', *El Espectador*, 31 May 2014.

TABLES 6 & 7. *Increase in vote for Santos and Zuluaga, May–June 2014*

<i>City</i>	<i>Santos vote: May 2014</i>	<i>Santos vote: June 2014</i>	<i>% difference</i>
Bogotá	444,051	1,337,349	201
Medellín	69,381	208,597	201
Cali	128,836	375,371	191
Barranquilla	81,892	267,654	227
Bucaramanga	51,945	130,869	152
Cartagena	37,776	119,841	217

<i>City</i>	<i>Zuluaga vote: May 2014</i>	<i>Zuluaga vote: June 2014</i>	<i>% difference</i>
Bogotá	542,432	1,075,638	98
Medellín	268,915	447,208	66
Cali	98,334	202,793	106
Barranquilla	47,154	85,755	82
Bucaramanga	48,652	92,538	90
Cartagena	45,581	89,878	97

cent in the first round to almost 48 per cent in the second.²⁵ Santos won an overall majority in Bogotá districts where he had trailed behind in third or even fourth place on his first attempt: San Cristóbal, Santa Fe, Engativá, Antonio Nariño, Kennedy and Puente Aranda.

The Santos victory ensured that his negotiations with the FARC would continue. But what is likely to be the outcome of those talks? The sound

²⁵ In contrast, the second round of the 2010 election had seen participation drop by 5 per cent.

and fury of the Santos–Uribe battle has to some extent diverted attention from the probable character of any peace agreement. In September 2014, Santos and the FARC agreed to publish the text of draft agreements reached thus far at the talks in Havana. The president insisted that ‘this should end all the misinformed speculation that people who aren’t friends of the process have been spreading . . . we are not negotiating our democratic system, our economic model, our development or our institutions.’²⁶ Indeed, there is little chance of a clear break with the economic model that has been consolidated under Uribe and Santos in the wake of any peace settlement. For its defenders, that model has delivered the goods and should not be called into question. Now Latin America’s fourth-largest economy, Colombia is also the region’s best country in which to do business, according to the World Bank, having vaulted past Chile and Peru. The Economist Intelligence Unit predicts ‘robust’ GDP growth under Santos, averaging 4.5 per cent over the second term of his presidency.²⁷ There is another national distinction that Colombia’s admirers are less likely to emphasize: it remains one of the most unequal countries in the world, its Gini coefficient comfortably exceeding those of Mexico and Brazil.

The oil and mining sectors are at the heart of this model, and have sheltered Colombia from the worst effects of the global economic crisis: in 2011 they represented 8 per cent of GDP, but 70 per cent of total exports. Oil production is expected to peak at 1.2 million barrels per day in 2015 and decline steadily thereafter; proven oil and gas reserves will be exhausted in seven or eight years.²⁸ This is one area in which a peace agreement can be expected to yield rapid dividends: the government has blamed a renewal of pipeline attacks by guerrillas for the first decline in oil production since 2005.²⁹ But the EIU warns that ‘investment in extractive industries will moderate over the medium term, in line with stagnating commodity prices, and rising social and environmental conflicts surrounding new projects’.³⁰ In any case, as the OECD

²⁶ Andrew Willis, ‘Colombia to create new congressional seats under FARC peace deal’, *Bloomberg*, 24 September 2014.

²⁷ World Bank, *Doing Business 2015*, p. 4; Economist Intelligence Unit, *Colombia: Country Report November 2014*, p. 2.

²⁸ OECD Economic Surveys, *Colombia: Economic Assessment*, January 2013, p. 14.

²⁹ Oscar Medina and Andrew Willis, ‘Colombia growth slows more than forecast amid rebel attacks’, *Bloomberg*, 16 September 2014.

³⁰ *Colombia: Country Report November 2014*, p. 8.

has acknowledged, mining and hydrocarbons tend to be very capital-intensive and do not create many jobs.³¹ Less frequently remarked upon is the link between such activity and the abuse of human rights. A 2013 report by the Colombian Comptroller General discovered a striking correlation: 80 per cent of human rights violations occurred in municipalities with large-scale mining and energy projects, although these districts accounted for just 35 per cent of the total; 87 per cent of forced displacements, 78 per cent of crimes against trade unionists and 89 per cent of those against indigenous people took place in these territories.³² The report also found that there were massive tax leakages from the mining industry, reducing the economic benefits that accrued to Colombia.

If unemployment has nonetheless fallen under Santos, from a little over 10 per cent in 2010 to 7.9 per cent in 2014, this is partly the result of a significant boost in government outlay on social programmes. In early 2013, Santos rolled out plans to channel 5 trillion pesos (US\$2.75 billion) into a variety of projects, including public infrastructure, housing subsidies and support for manufacturing.³³ The UN's regional economic commission, CEPAL, has identified state investment as one of the key factors behind Colombia's above-average growth rates.³⁴ Government intervention has done much to fuel a construction boom in Colombia's cities: home- and office-building grew by 14 per cent in 2014.³⁵ Santos has also launched a major programme to improve Colombia's transport system, with plans to spend almost US\$50 billion on road, river and railway networks, port facilities and the expansion of Bogotá's airport; these

³¹ *Colombia: Economic Assessment*, p. 1.

³² Contraloría General de la República, *Minería en Colombia: Fundamentos para superar el modelo extractivista*, Bogotá 2013. See also ABC Colombia, *Giving It Away: The Consequences of an Unsustainable Mining Policy in Colombia*, London 2012.

³³ Ómar Ahumada Rojas, 'Gobierno presenta su plan de choque para estimular la economía', *El Tiempo*, 15 April 2013; Eduardo García and Nelson Bocanegra, 'Colombia's plan to spur economic growth, curb peso rise', *Reuters*, 15 April 2013.

³⁴ Fernando González, 'El país, tercero en expansión económica, pero depende de exportaciones', *El Tiempo*, 5 August 2014.

³⁵ Matthew Bristow and Christine Jenkins, 'Colombia's economy grew 4.2 per cent in 3Q on construction boom', *Bloomberg*, 15 December 2014. However, senator Jorge Enrique Robledo of the Alternative Democratic Pole has charged the Santos government with delivering just 7 per cent of a promised 100,000 homes for low-income families: 'Sólo se ha entregado el 7% de las casas prometidas por Santos: Robledo', *Radio Caracol*, 8 May 2014.

ventures are expected to pump US\$5 billion into the economy annually between 2016 and 2020.³⁶

Preliminary agreements between the negotiating teams in Cuba have left radical agrarian reform off the table.³⁷ The government has agreed to launch a nationwide process of land restitution and property formalization, and to designate certain territories as ‘peasant reserves’ where forms of collective property and political as well as economic autonomy will be recognized; to this we can add the usual references to infrastructure, irrigation, credit, marketing and so on. Land *restitution*—the return of stolen land to its rightful owners—must be distinguished clearly from a more ambitious and comprehensive project of land *reform*:

Colombia has one of the most unequal distributions of land in the world. The problem, however, is not the land held by illegal groups, but the vast stretches of land in the hands of the country’s leading families, amongst them the legislators. Confiscating land illegally held by paramilitaries or drug barons has been on the statute books for some time. While it is welcome, it is not the solution to inequality in land distribution. Furthermore, due to a lack of political will, even this timid measure has never been properly implemented.³⁸

Land claimants and their supporters face threats of violence from supposedly demobilized paramilitaries: at least 35 people have been killed thus far.³⁹ It is little wonder that the pace of land restitution has

³⁶ Andres Schipani, ‘Ambitious plans to transform Colombia’, *Financial Times*, 17 November 2014.

³⁷ ‘FARC y gobierno logran acuerdo en tema agrario’, *Semana*, 26 May 2013.

³⁸ Lara Montesinos Coleman and Gearóid Ó Loingsigh, *Peace in Colombia: Reality, Myth and Wishful Thinking*, Brighton and Bogotá, April 2013, pp. 5–6. Land restitution is also hedged with qualifications designed to protect the agro-export model: ‘The government does not simply hand land back. There is a lengthy legal process to go through, where the burden of proof is placed on the peasant reclaiming the land. Having proved their case, the peasants, in order to access the land, have to agree to plant cash crops, such as African Palm, sugar cane, rubber, cocoa, and even certain vegetables for the European market such as asparagus, which do not form part of the Colombian diet.’ According to the UN Human Development Programme, 1.15 per cent of the Colombian population owns 52 per cent of the land: the second highest concentration in Latin America, exceeded only by Paraguay.

³⁹ Amnesty International, *A Land Title Is Not Enough: Ensuring Sustainable Land Restitution in Colombia*, London 2014, pp. 32–8.

been slow, with less than 70,000 hectares distributed in this fashion by the end of 2014.⁴⁰

A survivors' peace?

Both parties to the negotiations have tacitly accepted that complete victory is beyond their grasp. Whatever emerges from the talks, it will be the product of mutual exhaustion: a peace of survivors rather than one of victors.⁴¹ In this respect there are some parallels with South Africa's post-apartheid transition. But the bargaining position of the guerrillas is much weaker than was the case for the African National Congress in the early 90s. It was clear to any observer that as soon as free elections were held in South Africa, the ANC would emerge as the largest party and take the reins of power. The apartheid regime had been comprehensively delegitimized on the global stage, with even staunch allies like Thatcher and Reagan obliged to take their distance from Pretoria. The ANC's military wing was probably less proficient on the battlefield than the FARC is today, but the movement's political strength more than made up for that deficiency. The ANC leadership could thus barter with the Nationalist Party, offering them amnesty and the preservation of the economic status quo in return for a voluntary handover of power. In Colombia, on the other hand, the political base of the FARC and ELN is much weaker. Since the demise of the Patriotic Union, there has been no civilian party of any consequence allied to the guerrillas, and there is certainly no chance of FARC-aligned candidates winning an overall majority and forming a government, as the ANC was able to do in 1994.

Northern Ireland offers an example of a peace process that stands some way between the South African and Colombian cases.⁴² It has been cited

⁴⁰ Mark Anderson, 'Colombia's poor hit by tardy progress on land restitution, says Amnesty', *Guardian*, 27 November 2014.

⁴¹ For the concept of a 'survivors' peace', see Thabo Mbeki and Mahmood Mamdani, 'Courts can't end civil wars', *New York Times*, 5 February 2014.

⁴² The Northern Irish and Colombian conflicts intersected on the eve of Uribe's accession to power, when three Irish republicans were arrested after leaving FARC-held territory and accused of supplying military assistance to the guerrillas; they insisted that they had travelled to Colombia so as to observe the peace process, then on the point of collapse. The three men were first acquitted, then convicted following a prosecution appeal, and went on the run before eventually surfacing in the Republic of Ireland, where they were sheltered by the absence of an extradition treaty with Colombia.

as a model both by FARC negotiators and by Santos, for whom ‘the preliminary agreement we announced with the FARC was inspired by the framework agreement with the IRA’.⁴³ There are certainly parallels that can be drawn between the two conflicts. By the early 90s, it was clear that the IRA had been contained by the British army and intelligence services, yet there was little prospect of the movement suffering outright defeat at the hands of those forces. Unlike the FARC, the IRA had a political wing, Sinn Féin, that was able to organize above ground without being wiped out as the UP had been. Sinn Féin was supported by a minority of the nationalist population in Northern Ireland, who were themselves a minority of the population as a whole: there was no question of the British government simply handing power to the party’s leadership, as in South Africa. However, the peace agreement of 1998 mandated power-sharing between unionist and nationalist parties, ensuring that Sinn Féin would have a guaranteed place in government. The FARC will receive no such assurances at the conclusion of the talks, although Santos has insisted that ‘they can continue their objectives but through legal democratic channels. I am willing to give them all the guarantees necessary for them to have this chance. It is up to them if they can win or not.’⁴⁴

Even that modest opening is unacceptable to the rejectionist bloc headed by Uribe and Zuluaga, for whom a victors’ peace is the only one worth contemplating. Almost seven million voters endorsed this vision in June 2014, and Uribe has continued to mobilize demonstrations against ‘impunity’ for the FARC (needless to say, impunity for the army and paramilitary groups is taken for granted). The current process rests on a precarious equilibrium, and the immediate choice is between a flawed peace agreement and continued war. The *uribista* camp draws its strength from the indifference of those who can afford to have a countryside soaked in blood. The development economist Lauchlin Currie argued in the late 60s that conflict could actually prove beneficial for the Colombian economy, as it would accelerate rural depopulation and generate a pool of cheap labour for urban industrialization. An ever increasing flow of landless and dispossessed peasants—*desplazados*—have been

⁴³ Jonathan Watts and Sibylla Brodzinsky, ‘Colombia closes in on a peace deal that could end world’s longest civil war’, *Guardian*, 16 March 2014. Northern Irish politicians travelled to Colombia and Cuba in 2012–13 to speak with both parties to the negotiations and offer advice.

⁴⁴ ‘Colombia closes in on a peace deal’.

incorporated, with varying levels of success, in construction projects financed by inflation-protected savings.⁴⁵ In the process, a bifurcated state effectively abandoned rural Colombia—the last agrarian census was conducted in 1970—leaving the army to deal with the consequences in its own grisly fashion.

In December 2014, the FARC leadership declared a unilateral ceasefire in a bid to ensure the success of the talks. If Santos prevails against the hard-right opposition and signs a deal with the FARC, there will be no rapid transformation, no wide-ranging social reforms: that much is clear. But will his vow that demobilized guerrillas (and the civilian left) ‘can continue their objectives but through legal democratic channels’ at least be honoured? In order for this to happen, two fundamental questions must be addressed. Paramilitary ‘successor groups’ remain active throughout the country. Their recent activities in Buenaventura, a port city of 290,000 on the Pacific coast, have been documented in gruesome detail by Human Rights Watch:

The successor groups have ‘disappeared’ scores—and possibly hundreds—of Buenaventura residents over the past several years. They dismember their victims and dump the body parts in the bay and along its mangrove-covered shores or bury them in hidden graves, according to residents and officials. In several neighbourhoods, residents report the existence of *casas de pique*—or ‘chop-up houses’ . . . prosecutors have opened more than 2,000 investigations into cases of disappearances and forced displacement committed by a range of actors in Buenaventura over the past two decades, but none has led to a conviction.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Lauchlin Currie (1902–93) is an intriguing figure: born in Canada, educated at Harvard and the LSE, he became a US citizen and worked for the Treasury Department between 1934 and 1939 before securing a post as FDR’s White House economist. Dispatched to China during the war as an envoy to Chiang Kai-Shek, he was later accused of spying for Moscow and stripped of his passport in 1954, by which time he had been sent to Colombia to assess its economy for the World Bank. Currie married a local woman and acquired Colombian citizenship; he became chief economist at the national planning department, holding the post from 1971 to 1981 and using it to promote a distinctive vision that gave priority to the urban construction sector. He died in Bogotá in 1993, having received Colombia’s highest civilian honour.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, *The Crisis in Buenaventura: Disappearances, Dismemberment, and Displacement in Colombia’s Main Pacific Port*, New York 2014, pp. 2–5. HRW also found ‘a profound distrust in authorities and a pervasive sense of defencelessness in the face of the groups’ constant abuses . . . many residents of Buenaventura have lost all faith in the ability of the government to protect them.’

As long as these groups remain active, opponents of the status quo will not be safe to organize politically. This brings us to the second question: the attitude of the Colombian state. The evidence of complicity between state and paramilitary forces is so voluminous as to be overwhelming.⁴⁷ The Centre for Research and Public Education (CINEP), a Colombian NGO, recorded 1,332 human rights violations in 2013: army, police and paramilitaries were responsible for the overwhelming majority of such abuses—87 per cent.⁴⁸ Santos will have to impose a decisive break with these practices if his pledge to supply ‘all the guarantees necessary’ for open political agitation is to be delivered upon. It is hardly auspicious that the president has brought forward legislation that will strengthen impunity, transferring jurisdiction over ‘false positives’ to military courts.⁴⁹ But it is by this minimal criterion—the freedom of social movements to operate without fear of assassination by state or paramilitary agents—that the long-term value of any peace deal will ultimately be judged.

⁴⁷ In October 2014, a Bogotá court sentenced the AUC leader Salvatore Mancuso to eight years in prison—the maximum sentence allowed under the Justice and Peace Law—and found that such collaboration had been official policy in the Norte de Santander region; according to Mancuso himself, ‘without the action or inaction of the state, we would not have been able to grow as we did’. Mancuso confessed to his role in 300 murders: “Fui adoctrinado por el Ejército y la Policía”: Mancuso’, *El Tiempo*, 31 October 2014.

⁴⁸ This culpability was shared evenly between paramilitary groups (44 per cent) and state forces (43 per cent): CINEP, *Banco de Datos de Violencia Política: Julio–Diciembre 2013*, Bogotá 2014.

⁴⁹ José Miguel Vivanco and Max Schoening, ‘Colombia’s compromise with murder’, *New York Times*, 12 November 2014.