

Profiles

Government

President	Term in office
Belisario Betancur	1982 - 1986
Virgilio Barco	1986 - 1990
César Gaviria	1990 - 1994
Ernesto Samper	1994 - 1998
Andrés Pastrana	1998 - 2002
Álvaro Uribe	2002 - 2006

Official peace bodies

Peace Commission (August 1982 – August 1986)

As well as launching an amnesty and national dialogue process, President Betancur reorganized and expanded the Peace Commission created by the Turbay government, appointing 40 members from different social and political sectors. The Commission's principal mission was to initiate dialogues with different social groupings on social and political reforms, as well as with the guerrillas. The Peace Commission signed ceasefire agreements with different groups: the FARC in March 1984, the M-19, EPL and ADO in August 1984, and some sectors of ELN in December 1985.

National Rehabilitation Plan

As part of his peace strategy, President Betancur established a National Rehabilitation Plan (PNR) to address the objective causes of the violence and establish harmonious relations between the state and society. It aimed to increase the state's social investment, as well as its presence in rural regions, and thus diminish support for the guerrillas. Fiscal problems limited the strategy's implementation. President Barco reactivated and extended the PNR in August 1987, with the same intentions as the Betancur administration. The programmes were to cost 4 per cent of GDP annually, but the state had neither the resources nor the administrative capacity to implement them. Moreover, the social interventionism was out of step with the orthodox macro-economic policies of the Barco administration. Although some components of the PNR continued to function during the Pastrana administration, it lost its importance as a component of peace policy.

Council for Reconciliation, Normalization and Rehabilitation (August 1986 – August 1994)

In a strategy opposed to that of President Betancur, President Barco established a Council for Reconciliation,

Normalization and Rehabilitation, better known as the Peace Council. This Council, headed by a presidential adviser, centralized government peace policy. In the first stage (1986-88) it focused its attention on managing social protests and implementing the PNR in order to prepare for the second phase comprising the Initiative for Peace and peace talks with the guerrillas from 1988. It was responsible for conducting negotiations with the M-19, and during the Gaviria administration, with the other smaller guerrilla groups. It also participated in talks with the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination Body (CGSB) in Caracas and Tlaxcala.

Office of the High Commissioner for Peace of the Colombian Presidency (August 1994 – present)

The office is part of the Presidency and the High Commissioner is appointed directly by the president. When President Samper took office, he elevated the status of the Peace Council, giving the High Commissioner for Peace the status of minister and appointing Carlos Holmes Trujillo to the post in August 1994. Holmes held the post for a year until political crisis engulfed the Samper administration. Daniel García-Peña was subsequently named as coordinator of the Office of the High Commissioner until the end of Samper's term of office. Government peace policy promoted civil society participation and minor initiatives with the guerrillas.

During the Pastrana administration, the Office of the High Commissioner retained responsibility for the peace process with the guerrilla groups. Víctor G. Ricardo was appointed as High Commissioner, concentrating his efforts on the peace process with the FARC. Camilo Gómez briefly replaced Ricardo in May 2002 before President Uribe appointed Luis Carlos Restrepo, the former coordinator of the Mandate for Peace, in August. The efforts of the newly renamed Office of the High Commissioner for Peace and Coexistence have focused on the peace process with the paramilitary groups.

National Peace Council

The National Peace Council is a mechanism for developing a 'permanent peace policy', or 'state peace policy', and coordinating different government bodies. The Law creating it was passed in February 1998 under the Samper Administration and the Council was installed in April. Convened and chaired by the president, it is a legal organism that represents the diversity of Colombian society and was conceived as a consensus-building arena between the state and civil society. Armed actors were also to be allowed to participate as long as they had shown a commitment to engaging in a peace process.

The Council was to appoint a National Peace Committee to carry out necessary functions, with three of the seven

members of the Committee to be from civil society. Municipal and departmental level peace councils were also to be formed at the initiative of mayors and governors. Subsequent governments have opted not to use this body. President Pastrana only convened the Council in the most critical moments of the peace process, without turning it into a real instrument of government peace policy. President Uribe has not convened it to date.

Comisión de Notables

The most recent *Comisión de Personalidades* (Commission of Distinguished Citizens), which became known as the *Comisión de Notables* in the media, was formed in May 2001. Its predecessor, the *Comision de Notables* (a civil initiative), had been convened during the Barco administration and continued to function during Gaviria's presidency. The creation of a new *Comision de Personalidades* was agreed between President Pastrana and FARC leader Manuel Marulanda at their first meeting after the *Loz Pozos Accord* in February 2001, with the government and the FARC each nominating two members.

Its mission was to produce a report on how to reduce the intensity of the armed conflict and ways of advancing the peace process. Among other things, the report recommended a bilateral truce for six months and a commitment to respect human rights and accept international humanitarian law. However, its release in September 2001 coincided with the deterioration of the Pastrana peace process and it faded from view.

Government Security Forces

The state security forces total approximately 268,000 members including the army (146,000); air force (10,000); navy (5,000); and police (110,000). All come under the authority of the Ministry of Defence, which is currently headed by a civilian.

The Colombian armed forces have only been involved in one military coup (1953-1957). However, they are powerful and have gained a large degree of autonomy in the absence of a civilian-defined policy to direct public order. This autonomy decreased slightly after the ratification of the 1991 constitution, especially during the Gaviria administration but revived during the political crisis of the Samper administration. Under Uribe, this is changing again and there has been greater civilian control of the armed forces.

According to some critics, the autonomy of the military in the control of security and defence policies has had negative consequences. Firstly, it resulted in a process of bureaucratization, consolidating an inefficient

organizational structure for confronting the guerrillas. This was accompanied by the consolidation of a series of privileges (military jurisdiction that favours impunity) and rents, limiting the military capacity of the security forces to address the armed conflict and resulting in significant levels of corruption.

This inefficiency reached its peak between 1996 -1998 when the security forces suffered significant blows from the guerrillas who captured more than 300 personnel in addition to those killed. Police stations were destroyed in at least 150 population centres and the police had to be withdrawn. This trend began to be reversed after 1998 following a process of modernization and significant military assistance from the United States.

The armed forces, in particular the army, were accused of being largely responsible for human rights violations at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s but their share direct involvement in killings and disappearances has fallen sharply in recent years, although they continue to face serious allegations of indirect human rights abuse through collaboration with paramilitary groups.

The armed forces have maintained close relations with the US since the early cold war. Numerous Colombian officers have been trained in military schools in the US and Panama. US military assistance to Colombia was continuous but limited until the advent of Plan Colombia, which resulted in assistance of US\$1,319 million, of which US\$860m was for Colombia, making the country the third largest recipient of US aid worldwide.

US counter-narcotic aid shifted from the national police to the army, with the 2000-2001 US aid package funding three new counter-narcotics battalions, adding another 2,400 troops. However, the police and its counter-narcotics unit (DIRAN) remain the lead agency for counter-drug activities, carrying out aerial fumigation of drug crops and most other operations.

In President Uribe and his policy of 'Democratic Security' the military has found its greatest ever political and institutional support. This has been reflected in increased military spending but also an increased demand for results.

As part of this effort, the Ministry of Defence is managing Uribe's controversial 'Peasant Soldier' programme that allows men to do military service in their home towns. A Network of Collaborators (previously Informers) has also been established to collect intelligence information on the armed groups in return for payment. Critics argue that this strengthens links between soldiers and paramilitaries.

Political parties

Colombia has been dominated by the two 'traditional' parties formed in the mid-nineteenth century. Their rivalry resulted in violent conflict between their followers throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and in *La Violencia* in the late 1940s and early 1950s. From 1958 to the mid-1970s these parties shared power within the National Front, alternating the presidency and dividing other positions of power equally between them. Until 1970, candidates of other parties were not allowed to contest elections or could only do so indirectly as dissidents of the two traditional parties.

The **Liberal Party** was formed in 1849, with an ideological orientation toward a federal arrangement and the separation of Church and state. It split into two factions in the early twentieth century – the economically orthodox Moderate Liberals, and the Radical Liberals who supported social intervention and welfare. The murder of Radical Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948 was one of the sparks of *La Violencia*, and elements of the radicalized Liberals contributed to the rise of guerrillas in the 1960s. The Moderate Liberal majority became ever more pro-establishment, especially following the formation of the National Front (1958-1974). In 1979 a reformist breakaway group, New Liberalism, was created. Leader Luis Carlos Galán won 10 per cent of the vote in the 1982 presidential elections before returning to the Liberal fold in 1988. He was assassinated in 1989, but the New Liberalism mantle was carried on by César Gaviria who became the successful Liberal presidential candidate in the 1990 elections. The Liberals held the Presidency again 1994–1998 with President Samper. A 'dissident' Liberal, Álvaro Uribe, standing for 'Primero Colombia' won the 2002 Presidential elections.

The **Conservative Party** was formed in 1848. It was inspired by the Bolivarian model of a strong central state with close ties to the Catholic Church. It dominated Colombia from the 1886 Constitution to 1930, but split into two factions: the Moderate Conservatives who favoured a minimal state and free trade, and the ultra-right Historic Conservatives. It has not been very popular since the end of the National Front, holding the presidency for only two terms (1982-1986 and 1998-2002).

The **Communist Party of Colombia** (PCC), formed in 1930 as a pro-Soviet party, has been an important locus of anti-establishment political activity. Its relationship with the FARC has dominated its existence since the 1960s, although a formal separation between the two organizations is maintained. It cannot operate freely because of violent harassment by paramilitaries.

The smaller, initially Maoist, **Communist Party of Colombia – Marxist Leninist** (PCC-ML) broke away in 1965 and was closely related to the EPL.

The FARC itself attempted to participate in party politics with the foundation of the **Patriotic Union** (UP) in May 1985. However, at least 3,000 of the party's congress members, mayors, candidates and activists were killed by paramilitaries, security forces, and drug cartels in the following years. In 2000 the FARC launched the **Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia**, a clandestine front that aims to fill the void left by the UP.

Non-communist leftist parties have grouped together in a succession of umbrella groups and alliances. The latest is the **Polo Democrático** (Democratic Pole), named in 2002 after existing as the **Social and Political Front** since 2000. The Polo Democrático has also absorbed the **Via Alternativa** (Alternative Way) (created 1998) which includes, among others, former M-19 guerrillas and the Indigenous Social Alliance. Leader Luis Eduardo Garzón was elected Mayor of Bogotá in October 2003, the first leftist candidate to win the post.

Guerrilla Groups

FARC

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has the oldest roots of all the Colombian guerrilla groups. Although it has antecedents in the Liberal and Communist self-defence leagues during *La Violencia*, it arose after military attacks on Communist Party-inspired peasant cooperatives in Marquetalia, El Pato, Guayabero and Riochiquito. The *campesinos* who were displaced by these attacks created mobile guerrilla units, founding what was to become the FARC shortly afterward, adopting the name at their second conference in 1966. They continue to be led by Pedro Antonio Marín, alias Manuel Marulanda Vélez, also known as 'Tirofijo' (sure-shot), a peasant guerrilla who had fought since 1948 in *La Violencia*.

From the beginning, the FARC was associated with the Communist Party, as the armed component of the strategy of combining forms of struggle. Its expansion took place in zones colonized by *campesinos* where state presence was weak. It became a peasant army whose discourse is a mixture of revolutionary agrarianism and anti-imperialism. Since the fall of the Soviet Union it has emphasized its radical nationalist credentials and describes itself as Bolivarian after independence leader Simón Bolívar.

The FARC remains a peasant-based organization. In 1998, one FARC member estimated that the social composition

of FARC was 70 per cent 'peasants', 20 per cent 'working class, students and school teachers', and 10 per cent 'middle class intellectuals'. However some believe that its *campesino* base is not as strong as they suggest.

Estimates of the exact number of FARC members vary, but analysts say that there are around 18,000 divided into 70 fronts, mobile columns and urban militias. The FARC leadership has declared that it hopes to expand to 30,000 members in the coming years. It is estimated that they are present in 60 per cent of the country's municipalities. The FARC is particularly strong in the southern departments of Huila, Caquetá, Meta and Putumayo, as well as the southeastern department of Guaviare.

The FARC finances itself through kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and involvement in Colombia's drug trade. FARC-controlled areas produce much of Colombia's coca, although the guerrillas' link to the drug trade is the source of much controversy. The FARC "taxes" coca-growers, but some units in southern Colombia are thought to be involved in drug trafficking activities, and the Colombian armed forces estimate that the FARC gets about half its income from involvement in narcotics trafficking.

The FARC has been accused of violations of International Humanitarian Law. It also regularly recruits minors, at times by force, and carries out massacres, including killing large numbers of civilians through the indiscriminate use of inaccurate gas-cylinder bombs.

The FARC dealt the Colombian military several humiliating defeats in 1996-1998. As a result of the increasing use of military aviation by the army, these large-scale attacks have decreased. It has also come under more pressure from the paramilitaries.

The FARC have been involved in unsuccessful attempts to negotiate peace in 1984-87, 1991-1992 and 1999-2002. During the Pastrana administration, a 42,000 square kilometre zone was cleared of armed military presence to allow talks in five municipalities in Meta and Caquetá departments. The FARC is now demanding that President Uribe clear two departments, covering more than 110,000 square kilometres, to initiate new peace talks.

ELN

The National Liberation Army (ELN) was founded in 1964. Inspired partly by the impact of the Cuban revolution, it attracted radical students, priests, unionists and some of the remnants of the Liberal guerrillas. It made its first public move on 7 January 1965 with the seizure of the town of Simacota in Santander, where it distributed the 'Simacota Manifesto' making a wide-reaching call to overthrow the government.

Among the priests who joined was Camilo Torres, a radical firebrand who died during his first combat in 1966. The link between Torres and the ELN gave it a certain legitimacy with the nascent revolutionary guerrillas and would differentiate it from the gangs of bandits that were a residual element of the bipartisan violence.

Another priest who joined in the 1960s was Manuel Pérez, who served as the group's 'maximum leader' from the 1980s until his death from natural causes in 1998. The ELN is now led by Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista 'Gabino'.

The early years of the ELN were characterized by *caudillismo* (authoritarian rule by a charismatic leader) and a clear hierarchical and personalized structure. In this first cycle the strategy was to prosecute a national liberation war starting from rural rebellion in the style of the Cuban M-26. This implied the need to ally itself with social movements, which it partially achieved in the late 1960s with Camilo Torres' influence on the university student movement and the United Front.

The 1970s, especially after the heavy military defeat at Anorí in Antioquia in 1973, was a period of profound crisis in which the ELN reached the brink of dissolution. It re-emerged in the 1980s with a reformed organizational structure. Casting aside *caudillismo*, it adopted a confederated structure, which resulted in weaker mechanisms for effective rule and very slow decision-making. The political and military strategy centred around control of local and regional powers, where it showed an aptitude for adapting to institutional changes such as decentralization.

At the end of the 1980s they developed a wider national presence than their Santanderist roots. The ELN has not made numerical strength a priority, rather expanding its political base via 'armed clientelism', and concentrating its activities in a more limited number of localities than the FARC. Its strongest areas of influence are in the centre and north-east and it is also active in the south-west around Cali. In the late 1990s the FARC began to operate more in the oil-rich areas of Arauca and Norte de Santander, causing ELN-FARC clashes for control of the zone (which peaked in mid-2000). Also during Pastrana's administration, they suffered a significant defeat at the hands of the paramilitaries in the Sur de Bolívar.

Bombings of pipelines and energy infrastructure have been used as "war tactics" and the group has also carried out several high-profile mass kidnappings since 1999. Their primary sources of finance have been kidnapping and extortion, which they call "war taxes". They have not profited significantly from the drug trade. Membership is estimated at about 3,500 members, down from a late-1990s high of about 5,000.

In 1987, the ELN formed part of the new umbrella organization for guerrilla groups, the now defunct Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordination Body (CGSB). Through this they were briefly engaged in peace talks with the Gaviria government. For years, the ELN has declared its intention to negotiate its peace agenda through a 'national convention' with Colombia's civil-society groups. In 1999, ELN negotiators insisted that this event must take place in a zone similar to the FARC's demilitarized zone. Under President Pastrana this was agreed in principle in two municipalities in southern Bolívar department, but never realized.

Smaller Guerrilla Groups

Colombia has been home to many small guerrilla groups since the 1960s. Some signed peace agreements and demobilized at the beginning of the 1990s, some have been annihilated, and others continue operations.

The **Popular Liberation Army (EPL)** today consists of those remnants of the original EPL that resisted a peace accord with the government in 1991. The Maoist-inspired EPL was formed in 1967 as the armed wing of the PCC-ML. It faced obliteration in the 1970s but re-emerged in the 1980s and its membership peaked in 1990 at around 1,500. It rejected Maoism in 1984 and joined the CGSB the next year. Since demobilization, about 300 members have fought on, but their leader, Francisco Caraballo, has been in prison since 1994.

The **19 April Movement (M-19)** formed in 1972 were predominantly urban guerrillas. They were named after the date of the perceived electoral fraud of 1970 (when the Popular National Alliance (ANAPO), may have polled the most votes in the presidential elections but was prevented from taking power by the National Front elites). ANAPO members were joined by other elements including FARC dissidents to form the M-19. It announced its arrival by stealing the sword of Simón Bolívar from a museum in Bogotá, and its spectacular activities won particular popularity among the urban poor. Many of its leaders were killed during the 1980s. The occupation of the Palace of Justice after the breakdown of the ceasefire was a serious political error that influenced its subsequent demobilization. It started peace talks with the Barco administration in 1989 and gave up the military struggle in March 1990 when it signed its *Political Pact* with the government. The M-19 entered politics as the Democratic Alliance M-19 (AD M-19), but presidential candidate Carlos Pizarro was assassinated in April 1990, causing mass protests and a strong vote for Antonio Navarro Wolff in the elections (12.5%). The AD M-19 gradually lost support and dissolved as it failed to transform sympathy for its cause into an activist party base.

Several other groups demobilized around the same time as the M-19. The **Quintín Lame group**, named after the leader of indigenous struggle in the early twentieth century, was formed to protect indigenous communities from both the army and from FARC. It received training from the M-19, but did not engage in any major military action and demobilized in 1991. The **Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRT)** was a small group formed in 1982 of uncertain origins (breakaways from the PCC-ML or the ELN) who demobilized in 1990. The **Socialist Renovation Current (CRS)** was an offshoot of the ELN, and signed a peace agreement in 1994.

A number of groups continue fighting. The **Guevarist Revolutionary Army (ERG)** and **Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP)** are both breakaways from the ELN with perhaps a few dozen members, carrying out occasional kidnappings and violent attacks.

Paramilitary Groups

Although private armed groups have long existed in Colombia because of the weakness of the state, today's paramilitary groups emerged in the 1980s alongside the booming drugs trade. New landholders arising from drug trafficking put together private armies to deal with the guerrillas who kidnapped and extorted wealthy ranchers in the area.

One of the first groups was **Death to Kidnappers (MAS)**, active in the Magdalena Medio region of north-central Colombia. Similar groups appeared across Colombia, especially in the north of Antioquia, Puerto Boyacá and Meta. Paramilitary fighters were often a mix of ex-soldiers, ex-guerrillas, and small-time criminals.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the paramilitaries acted mainly at local level and largely in response to regional and localized needs of large landowners to protect their investments.

Paramilitary tactics - selective assassinations, forced disappearances, massacres, forced displacement of entire populations - quickly made them one of the country's main human rights abusers, causing them to be outlawed in 1989. They played a significant role in the decimation of the UP in the late 1980s.

In the 1990s the paramilitaries continued to grow, as did reports of local-level collaboration between paramilitaries and the armed forces. These have been well documented by human rights groups, the United Nations, the US State Department, and Colombian government investigators.

The paramilitaries support themselves with donations from landowners and drug lords, and are increasingly involved in the drug trade itself. The main sources of funding are taxes on small businesses, contractors, and the multinationals they are hired to protect, contributions from large landowners and cattle ranchers, and drug trafficking.

In the early 1990s the **United Self-Defence Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU)**, headed by brothers Carlos and Fidel Castaño, emerged in northwestern Colombia. The ACCU depended on logistical support from the army, and role was to carry out the 'dirty war' on leftist leaders and peasant organizations. Their credentials as a counter-revolutionary force were enhanced considerably by their success in subduing workers unions in banana plantations in Urabá and by uprooting the leftist peasant organizations from the Latifundos on the Caribbean coast.

Advances such as these, combined with the demise of the Medellín and Cali drug cartels, ushered in a new phase when numbers grew and paramilitaries became better armed and trained. Military operations extended south (Putumayo, Meta, Guaviare), north (Santander, North Santander) and east (Casanare, Arauca). The successes of the Castaño brothers made them a focal point in any national strategy, and their control over Urabá and other areas close to the Panamanian border, a main contraband route, gave them further power.

Fuelled in large part by drug money, the paramilitaries' growth has far outpaced the guerrillas'. They have expanded nine fold since 1992 and have more than doubled in size since 1998 to an estimated 8,000 members. They currently commit about 80 per cent of killings associated with Colombia's conflict.

The ACCU formed the nucleus of the **United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC)**, an umbrella group formed in 1997 and headed by Carlos Castaño (Fidel had reportedly been killed in the mid 1990s). The AUC began making inroads into FARC-controlled coca-growing areas in southern Colombia in the late 1990s. It is estimated that drug trafficking provides the AUC with US\$75 million per year, some 80 per cent of the group's income.

Colombian governments have not granted the paramilitaries the 'political status' given to guerrillas, meaning that they will only negotiate their terms of disarmament. Talks in 2003 led to an agreement in which the AUC committed to demobilizing all its forces by the end of 2005.