Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights in Colombia

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Veering between deep pessimism and cautious optimism, Colombia’s long-standing democracy struggles with widespread violence and killings, as well as with political corruption, fragmented political parties, and a multisided internal war. U.S. military and economic aid to Colombia has risen steadily since the approval of Plan Colombia in 2000, while Colombia’s economy has declined and drug trafficking has expanded. The complexity, persistence, and interconnectedness of these problems in Colombia raise profound questions about the viability of democracy under duress. What can stem the violence perpetrated against Colombian citizens, which has made public security a paramount political issue? Why do political parties and many politicians in this long-standing democracy garner only unstable domestic support? Most fundamentally, why has peace been so elusive?

Unfortunately, information and analysis on the domestic political challenges of human rights, democracy, and peace are far less available than are studies on the questions of U.S. policies and drugs. The premise of this book is that, while drug trafficking and U.S. foreign assistance have attracted extensive attention, it is imperative to understand Colombia’s underlying political challenges—which have not received adequate analysis—in order to properly understand and address the conflict, as well as the trafficking and
U.S. assistance issues. For example, while drug interdiction efforts have sought to stop production by destroying illegal crops, this policy has been undermined by the protection and support growers receive in exchange for “taxes” paid to leftist guerrillas or rightist paramilitaries. Indeed, the war efforts from many sides of this multilateral conflict help to fuel the powerful demand for drug production.

In an analogous fashion, political rules also undermine eradication efforts. Existing electoral rules create incentives for politicians at various levels of government to add further to the demand for drug production by accepting monies generated by trafficking. Politicians do so because electoral rules have produced extremely weak party control over their member politicians, while at the same time they have increased intraparty competition, making electoral campaigns ever more expensive. As long as current electoral rules persist, internal demands from political actors are likely to thwart efforts to reduce drug production.

Meanwhile, although the U.S. government has sought to combat drugs and insurgents through assistance to the Colombian armed forces, widespread concerns about human rights continue to constrain that policy. Indications of persistent links between the military and right-wing paramilitary groups, for example, as well as the presence of military personnel who continue in office despite allegations of human rights abuses, work to undermine the legitimacy of the armed forces. This in turn weakens the legitimacy of government as provider of public goods, especially security. Ongoing concerns about military-paramilitary relations and about impunity for abuses have constrained the positive impact of security improvements and demobilization efforts achieved by the Uribe government, limiting Uribe’s scope to use these advances to improve state authority or expand support for his political initiatives. Even as U.S. aid helps the Colombian military improve its protection of citizens from the violence that has helped to make security the top public priority, human rights concerns are likely to persist if they are not addressed. Indeed, as the military succeeds in reducing guerrilla threats, public concern about human rights issues is likely to increase as fears of guerrilla attacks diminish. Better understanding of the domestic politics in Colombia of human rights, democratic governance, and peace could improve both drug interdiction and U.S. foreign assistance policies.

A second theme of this book is that these three fundamental political issues are closely interrelated. Of the three issues, the questions related to war and peace in Colombia are undoubtedly the most prominent. None-
theless, as this chapter will argue, while it is sensible to start with an analysis of these questions to chart a path to peace, implementing any such plan will require sustained political leadership and will. To generate the political agreement to achieve peace, however, Colombia’s democracy is likely to need reforms to alter the existing rules that create perverse constraints on its ability to generate collective action in the legislature to produce public goods. At the same time, broad public support for Colombia’s democracy is contingent on its ability to provide public security, which, as the authors argue in this book, is ultimately contingent on its ability to protect human rights and bring peace. Violations of human rights on all sides of the war ultimately undermine the trust that Colombia’s government needs in order to negotiate an enduring end to the war, and the violations lower public confidence in elected government. As the chapters in this book show, the links between these issues create constraints on what ultimately can be done on one issue alone without addressing the other two as well. Of course, as this book illustrates, these linkages are not just about constraints: they also generate opportunities to make progress on the two corollary issues when addressing any one of these three core political issues.

An increasing number of scholars and policy makers—as well as a growing number of students and general readers—do want to know more about the internal politics of the Colombian case. Despite that shift, the scholarly literature on Colombia has not kept pace with the growing interest in the politics of this country on South America’s northernmost rim. While Colombia has Latin America’s fourth largest population and fifth largest economy, most authors preface their studies of the country lamenting the paucity of scholarly books on the subject. Notable exceptions in last five years include Crandall’s (2002) critique of U.S. drug policy toward Colombia, Taussig’s (2003) ethnography of local rural violence, Richani’s (2002) modeling of a stable war system equilibrium to explain the ongoing violence, and Van Cott’s (2000) assessment of indigenous rights in Colombia since the 1991 constitutional reform. Interesting studies by journalists during this period include Dudley (2004) on the demobilization and subsequent extermination of guerrillas in the 1980s and early 1990s and Kirk (2003) on the personal courage of Colombians facing violent abuses and their links to consumption and policy choices in Colombia’s biggest export market, the United States.

Moreover, while Colombia boasts some of Latin America’s leading universities and one of the region’s best-educated populations, very little
analysis by Colombian scholars themselves has appeared in the United States. Recent exceptions are Thoumi (2003), which examines the illegal drug industry’s international and domestic origins, and two coauthored books, Berquist, Peñaranda, and Gonzalo Sánchez (2001) on the conduct of the war and peace efforts in the 1990s and Safford and Palacios (2001) on nineteenth-century and pre-1974 Colombia. In short, few in-depth studies are available to help explain Colombian politics today, guide analysis of the prospects for policy choices, and understand the historical sources of today’s interrelated challenges.

This book aims to help fill the gap in the literature on contemporary Colombia by providing in-depth yet diverse analysis of the core political challenges facing Colombian democracy today, authored by leading scholars from both Colombia and the United States. In the chapters that follow, we examine Colombia’s attempts at negotiating peace, the weakening of political institutions, patterns of violence, and human rights policies, considering also the influential role played by the United States and the impact of drugs on politics. This book’s most distinctive contribution is its nuanced analyses by leading Colombian as well as U.S. scholars of the core political challenges in Colombia that lie behind the issues more commonly discussed in the United States, drugs and foreign aid.

For scholars, this book applies theory to understand the dynamics of human rights violations, corruption, political fragmentation, and reform. Policy makers will find careful analyses and debate about policy outcomes, alternatives, and recommendations for action to protect rights, strengthen democracy, and pursue peace. Students and general readers will find in this book a timely, topical route to understanding the history and dynamics of Colombia’s contemporary challenges of human rights, democracy, and peace.

This introduction takes up the core political questions about peace, democracy, and human rights. It outlines several approaches advanced in the book to answer these questions, lays out the organization of the book, and discusses the origin of this volume.

**Peace**

Colombia is home to the longest-running guerrilla war in this hemisphere, and this war has evolved into a multisided conflict. Today’s elder guerrilla
leaders launched their campaign to overthrow the government in the wave of Latin American revolutionary movements that followed Fidel Castro’s successful overthrow of Cuba’s Batista in 1959. While the movements in other countries from that era have all negotiated settlements or suffered defeat, in Colombia two major guerrilla groups soldier on, at times in competition with each other. Moreover, while the initial ideological impulse for these groups—the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the Army of National Liberation (ELN)—has largely faded with time and with changed circumstances, the FARC and ELN have in the years since been joined in the conflict by different antagonists among whom alliances have been sometimes struck, although rivalry generally prevails. Over the decades drug traffickers, right-wing paramilitary squads, other smaller guerrilla organizations, government police units, Colombia’s armed forces, occasional technicians from foreign insurgent groups, and, recently, U.S. advisors have all joined the fray. With the conflict metamorphosed into a shifting and multisided war, after so many years of conflict Colombians cycle through periods of deep pessimism and cautious optimism in their assessments of the prospects for achieving an enduring peace in the proximate future.

Why has Colombia’s internal war persisted so long? Why have peace efforts failed to produce durable agreements? Are there lessons from past cycles of negotiations and breakdowns that could help break the cycle?

Although various analysts argue that ideology among the guerrillas has waned, long-standing grievances have endured to help sustain the conflict. Colombia has one of the world’s most unequal distributions of income, and its concentration of wealth and land has increased since the late 1980s. The gulfs are deep between rich and poor, between rural and urban cultures, and between regions where the government is present or absent. These inequities provide plentiful sources for both opportunism and resentment. They are economic but also cultural and political. They derive not only from the fact that Colombia never achieved a major land reform but also from the urban disdain for rural cultures and the spotty presence of state institutions (let alone government control) in the Andean highlands and lowland agricultural frontiers.

One line of analysis about the conflict emphasizes social structure, culture, and inequality. The historian Herbert Tico Braun has developed this argument, and in this book he addresses the question, “Could it be that it is a cultural chasm, a flippant urban arrogance in the face of ignorant
campesinos and their ragged teeth, and a bitter rural resentment against the effrontery of urban folk, that has fueled the conflict in the Colombian countryside for over a half century . . . ?” From this vantage point one concludes that the conflict is likely to persist until inequality is reversed, and this is surely an important piece of the puzzle. Achieving a stable peace will require an understanding of the dynamics of persistent grievances.

Yet grievances alone generally are not sufficient to sustain armed conflict. Resources are necessary as well. The configuration of armed parties in the Colombian conflict has evolved over the years, and foreign sources of support became less available as the Cold War ended. Meanwhile, drug trafficking offered new opportunities for funding. For many analysts, particularly in the United States, ending the drug trade is key to ending the war, in order to choke off the resources that sustain mobilization. However important this source has become, and despite the massive attention it has attracted, it is not the only source of revenue. The guerrillas in particular have employed kidnappings and other forms of “taxation” as well.

Nor is drug money as a revenue source a fixed target, as Álvaro Camacho Guizado and Andrés López Restrepo demonstrate in this volume. At different times, drug traffickers have gained influence among opposing parties on different sides of the conflict. Additionally, as these two authors analyze in detail, the organization of the trafficking industry has shifted repeatedly in response to market changes and competition, as well as from official curtailment. These changes have altered the industry’s relations with the armed parties, and such alliances are likely to continue to shift over time. From this analysis, which considers both economic and political resources from trafficking, it is evident that market mechanisms could provide levers for hastening an end to the conflict (or, conversely, for prolonging the war) by shifting the availability of resources that can be derived from contraband. Of course, the illegal status of the drug commodities reduces the opportunities to affect their movement as traded goods with market mechanisms alone, especially in comparison to the possibilities for controlling the illegal movement of diamonds or oil that have fueled civil wars elsewhere. Yet market forces still drive the business of drugs, and they do hold potential to help alter the resources this commerce currently provides for the war.

While grievance and resource causes might be addressed through social reforms and market mechanisms, bringing peace still requires negotiat-
ing an end to the war. Most analysts recognize that even if the costs of war become untenable (whether through a shrinking of resources or through the dominance of one party over the others), negotiation will be necessary to conclude the violence. A number of analysts, many in the Uribe government, feel that making the costs of war unacceptably high to the guerrillas through escalation may be the only way to force negotiations, although others, such as Richani (2002), argue that U.S. aid to escalate government attacks merely helps to subsidize the cost of war and delays negotiations.

The history of negotiations thus far, however, is dispiriting. At different times various parties have made major concessions, but in repeated instances their opponents have exploited such first steps for narrow advantage. These responses, chronicled most recently in Dudley (2004), have ranged from simple failure to reciprocate good-faith gestures with similar good faith to outright betrayals where, for example, demobilized guerrillas have been killed by government, paramilitary, or other guerrilla forces. Moreover, while negotiations have at times led both guerrillas and paramilitaries to demobilize, repeated efforts have yet to establish an enduring peace.

Thus far, successive governments have each taken different negotiating strategies, breaking sharply with previous efforts. The limited success of negotiations, however, has left a trail of deepening distrust among all the parties. Unfortunately, disappointment and disillusion with past negotiations have meant that lessons from those efforts, which merit greater study, have been largely neglected. As Daniel García-Peña Jaramillo points out in this book, although these experiences have been frustrating they do provide a rich source of material to guide future negotiations. While partial demobilizations have allowed the conflict to endure, the history of negotiations does provide instructive lessons for today’s efforts.

External actors have long been important to sustaining the conflict, providing resources to bolster one side or another at different times. The United States is, increasingly since the end of the Cold War, the single most important external actor, and some believe its role will be decisive in Colombia. The U.S. government provides rising levels of military assistance, but, as Cynthia Arnson argues in this book, many U.S. officials still believe that military action is not ultimately the solution to the conflict. She describes, for example, a disjunction during the Clinton administration between official acknowledgment that peace negotiations were necessary to resolve the conflict and official actions geared predominantly toward augmenting the
Colombian military’s capacity to step up the war, and she compares the U.S. role in Colombia’s protracted peace process to similar efforts elsewhere. Her analysis suggests that while future negotiations will have a military dimension, the most realistic hope for ending the conflict will involve addressing social and political reform as a basis for negotiations.

Grievances, contraband resources, negotiation failures, and military aid have all sustained the conflict to date. While these are large issues to tackle, they have been addressed successfully in other countries. Doing so in Colombia, as elsewhere, depends on political will.

**Democracy**

Political will, of course, depends in turn on both leadership and institutions. Colombia boasts one of the longest-running electoral democracies in Latin America. Yet discontent with elected officials and the policies they choose runs deep—not only among the armed opposition but among the voting public as well. In 2001 the public voted overwhelmingly to elect the maverick opposition candidate Alvaro Uribe to the presidency and then two years later gave their votes largely to the leftist opposition in midterm elections, at the same time rejecting thirteen of fourteen referenda Uribe had proposed.

In the 1950s, when the Liberal and Conservative parties ended a bloody civil war by agreeing to centralize political control in the presidency and take turns alternating in power, Colombia’s political system yielded to elitism and exclusionary institutions. Recognizing the opposition to this arrangement among voters as well as among guerrillas, politicians finally rewrote the constitution in 1991. While the reform did open the political system as hoped by allowing representation of new groups, it also generated unanticipated side effects.

New electoral rules adopted in the 1991 reform brought partial changes with inconsistent incentives for election strategies. These changes heightened competition among politicians but also encouraged personalistic rather than policy-based campaigns, a practice of “sharing” legislative seats through a sequence of colluding substitute legislators, and an atomized internal fragmentation of the two major political parties. The net result has been intense competition within more than between parties, weak or non-
existent party leadership, extreme difficulty achieving collective agreements in Congress, and laws written so poorly that a high proportion are rejected by judicial review. Rather than alleviate discontent with Colombia’s democratic institutions, these new problems have frequently worked to amplify it and, when they do, sap the potential for generating sustained political consensus.

Why has Colombia’s long-standing democracy had such difficulty garnering stable popular support? What could enhance political will in Colombia? What are the prospects for democratic survival in Colombia?

Various approaches can be taken to address these questions. A historical analysis provides one line of response. Voting decisions are framed by history and informed by observations and analysis of the past, after all, even when voters consider promises about the future as they decide how to vote.

Unfortunately, Colombia’s historical record contains enough uncertainties, betrayals, and corruption to daunt even the most idealistic voter. Drug money has fueled even presidential candidates’ campaigns. Meanwhile, M19 guerrillas who laid down their arms to join electoral politics were systematically assassinated in the early 1990s. And the 1991 reforms—which, like any reform, were a product of idealists, realists, and cynics together—thus far seem to have diminished the link between voters and their representatives, even as they have provided a welcome expansion of the scope for participation.

The historical analysis by Eduardo Pizarro and Ana María Bejarano in this volume indicates that politicians may have overreached as they opened Colombia’s political system, gutting its capacity to achieve policy consensus to produce public goods. Flaws in their choices of electoral rules hang over elections in Colombia today like the clouds that produced unending rains in Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude, working in this case to drown out and ultimately fog over both politicians’ and voters’ views of the future. In this line of analysis, the survival of democracy in Colombia depends on correcting the macro-level balance between responsiveness and governability in the political system.

While such broad rebalancing is a desirable goal, it raises new questions too. How would such rebalancing reforms occur in a political system that is severely weakened, where consensus and public support are difficult to achieve? More specifically, what should the new rules say? After all, electoral reform has been put on the legislative agenda repeatedly by both the
presidents Pastrana and Uribe. Yet the politicians empowered to set laws won their positions under the current legislation, so they have strong incentives to stick with the status quo rather than reform election laws.

Nonetheless, politicians are not entirely immune from public frustration or citizens’ enthusiasm for reform. As Matthew Shugart, Erika Moreno, and Luis Fajardo point out in this volume, politicians can find it in their interest to reform election laws if the arena for competition shifts or if the opportunity costs of reform come to outweigh the benefits of the status quo. At times public pressure can create incentives that override politicians’ attachment to the status quo. Yet, as these three authors argue, for reform to occur politicians would still need additional information. In particular, they would need to feel confident that a given reform would actually work better than the last reform and that the changes it introduced would minimize their potential political losses. Shugart et al. compare Colombia’s electoral rules with rules in other countries to highlight where distortions occur and to propose a reform that would build on existing rules. This reform would tailor modifications to address existing distortions and minimize redistribution of political groups’ access to power. In contrast to the historical institutional approach, this comparative institutional approach explains citizens’ disaffection at the micro level from specific features of rules and provides a more fine-grained blueprint for reform.

While the historical institutional approach taken by Pizarro and Bejarano faults Colombia’s freewheeling hypercompetitiveness as one of the causes of politicians’ weak accountability to citizens, Shugart et al. are more optimistic about the pluralism and competitiveness achieved since 1991 and the prospects for ongoing reforms to fine-tune the constitution. A third, more narrowly rational-choice approach developed in this book by Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín suggests that this very competitiveness actually may have helped Colombia evade political domination by drug traffickers who sought to take advantage of the system’s openness and their own expanded purchasing power to buy their way into political power.

Although Thoumi (2003) argues that Colombian politics is more vulnerable to the effects of illegal drugs than is its economy, Gutiérrez arrives at a more optimistic conclusion in this volume. Gutiérrez uses a behavioral rational-choice framework to model the traffickers’ efforts at political control and the system’s response. He argues that their relationship with politicians was built on a principal-agent problem that made the relation an

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“unhappy marriage.” While democratic competition left the system permeable to influence and vulnerable to corruption, this competition also weakened traffickers’ control over politicians and protected the polity from takeover by the traffickers.

This argument is a tonic to the many analyses of the system’s failings. Weak and deficient as Colombia’s political system may be, it has successfully survived daunting domestic challenges. By pointing out the system’s positive resilience, this approach at the same time lends support to the institutionalists’ contention that reform in Colombia should aim at balancing and tailoring rather than wholesale overhaul.

Human Rights

Despite accomplishments such as avoiding political domination by traffickers, Colombia is distinctive among its neighbors because the challenges to its political leaders and citizens are both so profound and so interrelated. Human rights abuses, official corruption, multisided armed conflict, drug trafficking, endemic poverty, public distrust of politics, and weakened government control all interact in a cascading fashion to worsen the harm caused by each of the other problems. Even with recent decreases in homicides and kidnappings, compared to the rest of Latin America this destructive synergy has chalked up record levels of violence, especially against noncombatants. The capacity of these problems to cause harm beyond Colombia’s borders together with the scale of the violence has attracted U.S. attention and moved Colombia to a priority spot on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In the end, political violence is an ongoing obstacle to achieving political reforms that could strengthen democratic government and bring stable peace.

Who should be held accountable for this violence? Has U.S. involvement helped? Is the Colombian government a besieged victim or is it complicit?

The various issues on Colombia’s extensive roster of acute policy challenges have attracted attention in the United States from a variety of groups and political leaders. This attention has generated widespread, albeit heterogeneous, foreign policy interest in Colombia. Since Colombia is but one locus of U.S. foreign policy, its policies there are developed within a broader conceptual framework. While the U.S. agenda in Colombia has at different
times emphasized drug interdiction, counterinsurgency, antiterrorism, police reform, and human rights, U.S. commitments of foreign aid—personnel as well as equipment and funding—have grown steadily since the late 1990s to rank third among those to the countries receiving U.S. assistance.

Has this deepening involvement achieved its goals thus far? While Colombia’s problems persist and it is unlikely that outsiders will solve them, both observers and participants do point to an impressive professionalization of the national police with U.S. assistance—a change that undoubtedly has helped human rights in Colombia. On the other hand, despite congressional efforts in the United States to condition military aid on improving human rights by breaking the military’s ties with right-wing paramilitaries, in practice the links and impunity for abuses continue even as some paramilitaries demobilize.

In a broad assessment of U.S. involvement in Colombia, Arlene Tickner concludes in this volume that the net effect of U.S. involvement unfortunately has been to worsen the outcomes on human rights and on the other issues that have prompted U.S. involvement. Tickner combines extensive personal interviews with a review of the history of the involvement to argue that realist policy views in the United States have prioritized drug interdiction and military aid, with counterproductive effects across a range of issues.

Other commentators have laid the blame for Colombia’s sustained levels of violence and murder more directly on armed nonstate groups—guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers. Indeed, Colombians often have difficulty discovering with certainty which of these three parties is behind specific assassinations. Faced with this wide variety of nonstate perpetrators of violence, some observers view the Colombian government as besieged, a victim, and not itself responsible for the country’s dismal human rights record.

In contrast, the legal scholar and human rights defender Gustavo Gallón argues forcefully in this volume that Colombia’s government is complicit in the violence. Gallón’s argument rests on assumptions that governments are responsible for providing public goods of justice, rule of law, and public safety. Gallón builds on this premise to advance an argument central to this book, that protecting human rights is the key to providing this set of public goods. Moreover, he argues, failing to do so makes the government complicit in the broad pattern of violations as much as it is in the instances where it supports agents who are direct perpetrators.
Human rights issues—already pressing—became especially salient after Álvaro Uribe assumed the presidency of Colombia in August 2002, even as violence statistics showed some improvements. Fulfilling campaign pledges, he sought to combat insurgent groups by adding part-time conscripts to the armed forces, by paying private citizens as freelance informants, and by decreeing laws that gave security forces broad new powers to suspend civil liberties. Human rights groups in Colombia and abroad argued that these measures introduced new potential for abuses. Officers have less oversight and control of the activities by part-time soldiers who sleep at home rather than in the barracks. Meantime, the informants program leaves wide scope for some potential informants to make accusations to settle local scores (or to blackmail). Last, the new laws further reduce the domain of civilian courts, expanding military and police authority to detain any person they themselves determine to be suspect, without judicial warrant. Perhaps of greatest concern, Uribe responded to criticism from human rights organizations of his efforts to give military courts jurisdiction over human rights cases and to allow impunity for demobilized paramilitaries by publicly associating human rights groups with the guerrillas.

The Colombian government’s ability to address the core security and justice issues of the war depends on its ability to develop state capacity to protect human rights and thereby enhance democratic practices to ultimately generate a sustainable political consensus for peace. At the core of the prolonged and multisided conflict in Colombia is this book’s question of what shall be the fundamental political rules that govern conflict among citizens, as well as between the government and citizens.

Organization of the Book

The basic premise of this book is that the political underpinnings of Colombia’s conflicts are insufficiently understood. We have organized the volume to address that need by presenting various perspectives on the underlying political issues in Colombia’s conflict. The book clusters these analyses in three interrelated and key issue areas: war and peace; the state of democracy; and human rights protection. Other prominent issues—such as drug trafficking and U.S. foreign policy, which cut across these three areas—are not excluded but rather are addressed within these sections. This introduction sets out the broad questions surrounding each of the three issue areas.
to frame the discussion developed in each section and the overall themes that relate these issues.

The discussion opens in the first section by focusing on the issue area in Colombia that is, sadly, most familiar among all audiences today—the problem of war and peace. The chapters in this section raise the macro-level questions of why the war has persisted so long in Colombia and whether there is any hope for peace in the foreseeable future. They examine these issues from the perspectives of history, political science, conflict resolution, and foreign policy. They look not only at the violence of war and the record of negotiations but also at the impact of drug trafficking and U.S. involvement with the conflict.

Beyond the conflict itself, Colombia’s democracy is seriously frayed, and the second section addresses the state of this democracy once proudly praised as one of Latin America’s oldest. The chapters in this section explore the meso-level questions about why policy coherence and political parties have weakened so dramatically in Colombia’s democracy and the prospects for reform. The authors in this section are all political scientists, but they use different approaches—historical, institutional, and behavioral methods—to diagnose the ills, highlight the strengths, and recommend both broad and specific courses of action. These chapters analyze institutional rules, politicians’ behavior, corruption, and the possibilities for reform.

The last section directly addresses human rights, which provide the foundation of contemporary democracy and stable peace. These concluding chapters focus on micro-level questions of how violence at the individual level adds up and who should be accountable for reversing the abuses. Taking international relations and legal perspectives, the authors here lay out patterns of abuses and assess both Colombian and U.S. policies aimed at human rights.

The book concludes with an overview of human rights challenges confronting the Colombian government as it pursues the war.

Origins of the Book

The origins of this book date at least partly from a conversation several years ago with the University of Notre Dame’s former president, the Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C. As president from 1952 to 1987, Hesburgh had
used his position to play a national role as an educational and moral leader, distinguishing himself on civil rights and international issues. He was especially interested in Latin America and raised the monies to create the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at Notre Dame. As chair of the institute’s advisory council in 2000, he met with the institute’s director, Scott Mainwaring, and the two editors of this volume. Even an eternal optimist such as Hesburgh expressed frustration as our conversation turned to the conflict in Colombia. “We’ve got to do something about Colombia, but what can be done?” he mused.

Since that conversation, the institute has taken up the challenge implicit in that frustration. Looking to the institute’s history and its research agenda, we sought to define a role for a U.S. university in such a complex conflict and to use our resources to help find paths to restore peace and prosperity to one of Latin America’s oldest—but severely threatened—democracies.

Earlier, in the years just following its creation in 1982, the Kellogg Institute awarded residential research fellowships to numerous scholars from Latin America’s Southern Cone countries—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay—which were all under military rule. The institute not only provided a safe haven for scholars whose lives and careers were threatened in those countries but also generated a critical mass of scholarly talent in which these thinkers could continue to work on the political and economic challenges of their countries. Exchanging ideas with each other and with scholars from outside the region, they gained comparative perspective. Together with the former academic director of the institute, Guillermo O’Donnell, and others, they helped to construct the theoretical blueprint for transitions to democracy in the region.

Today, the theoretical challenge is distinct: scholars must now ask, What are the dynamics driving the internal corrosion of democracies—some of Latin America’s oldest—in the Northern Rim, from Venezuela through Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia? And how might these democracies be rebuilt to address the profound social conflicts in each country? In broadest terms—terms that resonate not only among Latin America’s democracies but also in Africa and Asia—these questions lead us to ask, Why is the performance of democratic governments often disappointing, and what can foster more successful performance?

The practical challenges of the conflict are sadly familiar, however. Like their colleagues in the Southern Cone two decades ago, Colombian scholars
have been targeted for threats and murder. With generous support from the Ford Foundation, the Kellogg Institute joined a partnership with the Colombian Commission of Jurists in Bogotá, the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, D.C., the Center for Civil and Human Rights at the Notre Dame Law School, and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame to take up both sets of challenges.

Under the auspices of this partnership, a series of prominent Colombian social scientists have found space at Notre Dame to continue analyzing the conflicts in their country, working together and exchanging ideas with U.S. and other Latin American scholars, as well as with policy makers in Washington. At the same time, other Colombians have received graduate training and hands-on internships in international human rights law, conflict resolution, and peace studies. In March 2001, a joint conference at Notre Dame gathered policy makers, diplomats, journalists, students, and scholars to discuss the conflict.

The chapters in this book grew out of that meeting, from which authors’ papers were first selected, then extensively revised and updated for this volume. Our hope—and the goal of the project that joined these partners—is that in addition to fostering understanding, this book will stimulate initiatives to protect human rights, strengthen democracy, and achieve peace in Colombia.

Note

I am grateful for the thoughtful comments provided at different stages of this essay from Cindy Arnson and Matt Shugart. Of course, I bear responsibility for the final product.

References

P A R T  O N E

P e a c e