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# Alvaro Uribe Velez: Maintaining Popularity Despite Significant Government Scandals

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**ALVARO URIBE VELEZ: MAINTAINING POPULARITY  
DESPITE SIGNIFICANT GOVERNMENT SCANDALS**

by  
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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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Colombia's fifty-year-old civil war, the longest in Latin America history, critically impacted the lives of its citizens. This civil war had its roots in the assassination of a beloved populist leader, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, when citizens took to the streets in mass protests and riots. Following the *bogotazo*, country entered a period known as the *violencia*, then in the 1970s the peasant led guerrilla movements emerged as a result of the lack of land reform. In the 1980s, the illicit cocaine trade emerged as a social phenomenon when drug cartels began to organize and establish control over certain areas and trade routes. Alongside these cartels and often acting as one, right-wing paramilitaries also formed as an extension of the monetary class – landed elites and the commercial sector—and the government in order to protect individuals' own financial interests. The constant war between these different armed groups increased in the late 1990s, so much so that by the end of Andres Pastrana's Presidency, 1998-2002, public opinion shifted against negotiating with armed rebels. Instead, many citizens wanted the government to reassert its control over violence and generate the economic growth and stability that had been lacking since the economic crisis of the late 1990s. In so being "in the next election, enfranchised Colombians voted overwhelmingly for Alvaro Uribe Velez, who promised to wage all-out war on the FARC to improve national security."<sup>1</sup> During the first four years of his presidency, Uribe was able to maintain popularity. In 2005 after the Colombian Supreme Court made a constitutional amendment that allowed for presidents to run for a consecutive four-year term in office, Uribe announced he would run for another term. In 2006, Uribe was once again the most popular candidate and won the presidential election.

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, V. J. (2008). The New Research on Civil Wars: Does It Help Us Understand the Colombian Conflict? *Latin American Politics and Society*, 50(3), p.65

Over the next eight years Uribe's government would be plagued by very high profile scandals, which include the parapolitics scandal, the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (Administrative Security Department, DAS) scandal, and the false-positives scandal. These scandals led to a number of arrests of important officials in his administration. In order to understand the centrality of the scandals to Uribe's presidency, it must be understood that he campaigned on the promise of public security for Colombian citizens. However, these scandals serve to illustrate that the methods Uribe's government used to increase public security were grounded in human rights violations. His government colluded with paramilitaries to terrorize and execute extra-judicial killings against trade unionists and opponents of his government; it illegally wiretapped political opponents; and its policies led to the military systematically killing civilians. Nonetheless, Uribe's approval ratings remained extremely high in comparison to other countries in Latin America, his administration received a 69.3 percent evaluation of performance rating in 2008.

This thesis seeks to investigate how Alvaro Uribe Velez gained and maintained such high levels of popularity, even in comparison with other Latin American country's leaders, despite his administration being riddled with serious scandals. Economic policy such as measures of economic development, decreased organized violence, and strong citizen support, in spite of the increase in petty crime and displacement rates, may be interpreted as indicators of Colombia having benefitted from the stability. However, I argue that these scandals, instead of simply posing as a potential challenge to Uribe's popularity, expose a mechanism of control that served to enhance that popularity. This is because the parapolitics scandal, the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (Administrative Security Department, DAS) scandal, and the false-positive scandal are not just aberrations that occurred during his presidency. Instead, they

function as mechanisms that support and enhance his success in delivering stability to Colombia's middle and upper-classes, while further marginalizing the lower class.

The parapolitics scandal refers to evidence demonstrating that in Colombia there are formal connections between the paramilitaries and members of the political system. The parapolitics scandal is indicative of state officials having ties to criminal organizations, fraudulent elections, and a paramilitary supported and endorsed government. The relationship between these two entities demonstrates that they function as mechanisms that support and enhance Uribe's successes.

The paramilitary scandal broke out in March 2006 and truly exploded in late 2006 early 2007. According to Harvey Kline's *Showing Teeth to the Dragons*, the paramilitary-political connections were discovered

when the technical corps of investigation of the national prosecutor's office arrested Edgar Ignacio Fierro Florez ("Don Antonio"), a lieutenant of Rodrigo Tovar Pupo ("Jorge 40"). Fierro Florez had in his possession... two computers, two flash drives, and many compact discs and handwritten documents. Lists of collaborators and activities in the Caribbean coastal area were among the files found on the computer, as well as the description of 558 assassinations. The file that shook Colombian democracy... was one that contained the names of politicians and merchants in the Caribbean coastal departments with alleged strong ties to Jorge 40's paramilitary group.<sup>2</sup>

Following the discovery of these documents came many studies in order to fully uncover the extent of the parapolitical networks. By 2008, almost 40 percent of Congress members had been implicated<sup>3</sup> and the national prosecutor's office had cases against "155 regional political leaders,

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<sup>2</sup> Kline, H. F. (2009). *Showing teeth to the dragons: state-building by Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, 2002-2006*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. p188.

<sup>3</sup> Hristov, J., 2009. Legalizing the illegal: paramilitarism in Colombia's 'post-paramilitary' era. NACLA Report on the Americas. p15. Retrieved November 2015 from [http://www.jasminhristov.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/publications/NACLA\\_FINAL\\_VERSION.pdf](http://www.jasminhristov.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/publications/NACLA_FINAL_VERSION.pdf)

76 members of the armed forces, 14 members of the judicial branch, and 12 governors”.<sup>4</sup> In line with these statistics was Salvatore Mancuso’s statement that about 35 percent of Congress was controlled by the AUC.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, some of Alvaro Uribe’s closest political allies were amongst those under investigation. These include former Minister of Defense (and current Colombian President) Juan Manuel Santos, Vice President Francisco Santos Calderón, Senator Mario Uribe, Santiago Uribe Veléz (Alvaro Uribe’s brother), former presidential adviser Obdulio Gaviria, amid others. Even though Mario Uribe was the only person convicted from this list, a trend referred to as parauribismo exemplifies that “85 percent of those implicated in the parapolitics scandal are from parties that support the president.”<sup>6</sup> The fact that such a high percentage of individuals involved in the parapolitical nexus supported Uribe’s government showcases the deep and ingrained nature of the parapolitical networks in Colombia. It also demonstrates the paramilitary’s influence at even the highest levels of government.

Moreover, the extent of the paramilitary-political relations had a negative effect on Uribe’s credibility. This occurred because the organization, *Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris*, released a study demonstrating that paramilitary groups had influenced the 2002 and 2006 presidential elections.<sup>7</sup> Alongside these accusations of electoral fraud, former top Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) paramilitary commanders such as Don Berma and Salvatore

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<sup>4</sup> Kline, H. F. (2009). *Showing teeth to the dragons: state-building by Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, 2002-2006*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. p198.

<sup>5</sup> Salvatore Mancuso vincula a más políticos con las autodefensas. (2007, May 16). *Semana*, p.3. <http://www.semana.com/on-line/articulo/salvatore-mancuso-vincula-mas-politicosaufodefensas/85941-3>

<sup>6</sup> Hristov, J., 2009. Legalizing the illegal: paramilitarism in Colombia’s ‘post-paramilitary’ era. NACLA Report on the Americas. p16. Retrieved November 2015 from [http://www.jasminhristov.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/publications/NACLA\\_FINAL\\_VERSION.pdf](http://www.jasminhristov.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/publications/NACLA_FINAL_VERSION.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Kline, H. F. (2009). *Showing teeth to the dragons: state-building by Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, 2002-2006*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. p190.

Mancuso also declared that their organization funded Uribe's 2002 and 2006 campaigns.<sup>8</sup> While Uribe's government tried to discredit and deny both of those claims he never offered evidence to disprove the accusations. Instead, he argued that they were simply malicious attacks from the media, and dismissed the allegations.

The state's strong, interwoven ties to paramilitary organizations renders transparency and accountability in Colombia's democratic process non-existent. Having a paramilitary infused state renders the Colombian government partial to the interests of criminal organizations and makes it an accomplice to the human rights violations that paramilitaries have committed. Moreover, it implies that there is a strong network of politicians that, in order to maintain power and status, are willing to cooperate with and cover for their accomplices if/when criminal investigations ensue. In so being, Uribe's government benefitted from this symbiotic relationship until the scandal erupted.

The DAS scandal further serves to illustrate Uribe's government ties to the paramilitaries. The DAS was the state's intelligence agency and reported directly to Uribe, it was dismantled when Juan Manuel Santos became president. Its mission was to carry out "strategic intelligence, criminal investigations, immigration controls, and protection of high officials in order to contribute actively to guarantee internal and external security of the state, to preserve the integrity of the constitution, and to defend national interests."<sup>9</sup> In 2008, it became public that the DAS had strong ties to the paramilitaries and was illegally wiretapping political opponents of Uribe's government.

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<sup>8</sup> Colombia drug lord "funded Uribe." (2009, April 23). *BBC News*. Retrieved October 2015 from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8015555.stm>

<sup>9</sup> Kline, H. F. (2009). *Showing teeth to the dragons: state-building by Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, 2002-2006*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. p190.

Since the scandal broke out, many DAS officials have been tried and condemned. Among these are top DAS officials such as the former Director, Jorge Noguera. Noguera had been Uribe's presidential campaign manager in 2002 and then became director of DAS in August of 2002.<sup>10</sup> He was forced to resign in October 2005 because he was "under threat of prosecution for alleged cooperation with several powerful Colombian paramilitary bosses".<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, he was appointed to serve as Colombians consul in Milan, Italy until mid-2006 when Rafael García accused him of collaborating with paramilitaries. García was the former head of information technology for DAS, and was "convicted of erasing or otherwise altering official records" after the scandal broke out.<sup>12</sup> One of the major allegations that García made against Noguera is that during his time as Director, DAS practiced violence against Trade Unions, including death. For example, Garcia claimed that Noguera ordered the creation of "a list of trade unionists and others to be targeted by paramilitaries in the northern coast", including Professor Alfredo Correa de Andreis. Correa was killed in 2004 by the previously mentioned AUC commander Edgar Ignacio Fierro Florez's Northern Bloc.<sup>13</sup> According to the Colombian Prosecutor General's office,

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<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2008, October 16). Breaking the Grip? Obstacles to Justice for Paramilitary Mafias in Colombia. Retrieved November 16, 2015, from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/10/16/breaking-grip/obstacles-justice-paramilitary-mafias-colombia>

<sup>11</sup> Aiello, K. (n.d.). Spying Scandal Highlights the Use of Colombia's Women as Weapons of War. Retrieved November 2015, from <https://nacla.org/news/spying-scandal-highlights-use-colombias-women-weapons-war>

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2008, October 16). Breaking the Grip? Obstacles to Justice for Paramilitary Mafias in Colombia. Retrieved November 16, 2015, from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/10/16/breaking-grip/obstacles-justice-paramilitary-mafias-colombia>

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*



García's allegations hold true.<sup>14</sup> This exemplifies how Uribe's government collaborated with the paramilitaries and thus acted in illegal ways in order to rid itself of its political opponents.

In addition, in collaborating with the paramilitaries, Uribe operated a parallel state. The Head of the DAS, Maria del Pilar Hurtado illegally wiretapped political opponents of President Uribe's government. Victims of the illegal wiretappings included "Magistrates of the Supreme Court, opponent leaders in Colombia and Human Rights Defenders" as well as journalists.<sup>15</sup>

When the DAS wiretapping controversy broke out, Pilar Hurtado stepped down, and like Noguera, tried to avoid being implicated by going abroad. Hurtado sought political asylum in Panama until it was revoked four years later.<sup>16</sup> While she was in Panama, the former General Secretary at the Colombian President's Office, Bernardo Moreno, as well as many other high level former intelligence and counterintelligence officials were condemned for the illegal wiretappings and then testified against her.<sup>17</sup> The extensive indictment of top level DAS employees demonstrates that Uribe's government sought to acquire information that would lead to furthering the goals of his democratic security platform through violating human rights. In so being, these tactics act as illegal mechanisms that serve to further compromise Colombia's democracy and allow him to silence opponents, but not to have a monopoly on power.

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<sup>14</sup>General Attorney of Colombia Office. (2014). General Attorney Office investigates the loss of files regarding the case of DAS wiretappings on Claudia Julieta Duque. Fiscalía General de la Nación. Retrieved November 11, 2015, from <http://www.fiscalia.gov.co/en/noticias/general-attorney-office-investigates-the-loss-of-files-regarding-the-case-of-das-wiretappings-on-claudia-julieta-duque/>

<sup>15</sup> General Attorney of Colombia Office. (2015). The arrest of former DAS director was declared as legal. (2015, January 31). Retrieved November 11, 2015, from <http://www.fiscalia.gov.co/en/noticias/destacada/the-arrest-of-former-das-director-was-declared-as-legal/>

<sup>16</sup> ¿Llegó a su fin el caso de las chuzadas? (2015, May 2). Retrieved November 15, 2015, from <http://www.semana.com//nacion/articulo/llego-su-fin-el-caso-de-las-chuzadas-del-das/426126-3>

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

Uribe's public response to the charges against those he worked closely with has been minimal. He hides behind his statements of war on cartels and the FARC, refuses to answer to journalist questions, denies all allegations of involvement in DAS's ties to paramilitaries and its illegal activities. His actual response to the evident corruption of his employees and close political allies has been mostly through his twitter account, which seems to be his first line of defense. Communicating through twitter is very strategic given that only his side of the conversation is read, and questions do not have to be responded. For example, in 2013, when a preliminary criminal investigation against Uribe was reopened by Colombia's Attorney General's Office, Uribe and his lawyers are reported to have denied all charges. On his Twitter feed he stated that "the allegations were 'criminal vengeance' by imprisoned drug-dealing paramilitaries."<sup>18</sup> This statement demonstrates that Uribe not only denies the allegations, but that he completely dismisses them. By refusing to address this he attempts to delegitimize their claims. Now in 2015, two years since he was cleared by the Attorney General's Office, Uribe continues with his Twitter tactic instead of making official declarations to the media. After Noguera and Hurtado were unanimously convicted by the Supreme Court of Justice, Uribe tweeted "*El Martes, en versión ante CorteSJ me pronunciare sobre el dolor que me embarga*" to express his pain over his former intelligence agency directors being condemned.<sup>19</sup> Through this, Uribe once more avoids being questioned about his former colleagues, and situates himself in a position that separates his government and individual's within his government's actions.

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<sup>18</sup> "Colombia's Alvaro Uribe Investigated for 'militia Links'" BBC News. BBC News, 9 Jan. 2013. Web. Retrieved 16 Apr. 2015 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-20956820>

<sup>19</sup> "Expresidente Uribe, Dolido Por Condena De Hurtado Y Moreno." El Heraldo, 28 Feb. 2015. p1. Web. Retrieved 15 Apr. 2015 from <http://www.elheraldo.co/nacional/expresidente-uribe-dolido-por-condena-de-hurtado-y-moreno-185868>

Nonetheless, because these individuals clearly reported to him, as was the role of the directors of DAS, whether his involvement in the controversy is proven or not, his government benefitted from collaborating with paramilitaries in order to advance his agenda and from illegally wiretapping political opponents because he could anticipate their political moves.

As the DAS scandal continued to develop, the false positives scandal erupted in Bogotá in 2008 during Uribe's second term. False-positives refers to extra-judicial killings wherein Colombian military members killed civilians living in poor working class and remote areas, dressed them up as FARC guerrilla members and laid weapons on them, and then reported them as enemy combatants. Victims tended to belong to marginalized groups, such as unemployed persons, drug addicts, social and community leaders, indigenous persons, minors, peasants, and persons with disabilities.<sup>20</sup> According to a 2015 report released by Human Rights Watch, the scandal broke out in September 2008 when "a media scandal over army troops' killings of young men and teenage boys from the Bogotá suburb of Soacha helped force the government to take serious measures to stop the crimes, including by dismissing three army generals".<sup>21</sup> It was the media scandal and international pressure that led to governmental response to the crimes that the Colombian military had engaged in since the 1990s, but truly blew up in 2004 through 2008 when Uribe was in office.<sup>22</sup> Since 2008, the Colombian attorney general's office has investigated and determined that "to date, members of at least 41 brigades and mobile brigades have been

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<sup>20</sup> International Criminal Court. (2012). *Situation in Colombia Interim Report*. p28. Retrieved 9 November 2015 from <https://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/3D3055BD-16E2-4C83-BA85-35BCFD2A7922/285102/OTPCOLOMBIAPublicInterimReportNovember2012.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2015, June 24). *On Their Watch*. p1. Retrieved November 2015, from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/24/their-watch/evidence-senior-army-officers-responsibility-false-positive-killings>

<sup>22</sup> International Criminal Court. (2012). *Situation in Colombia Interim Report*. p3. Retrieved 9 November 2015 from <https://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/3D3055BD-16E2-4C83-BA85-35BCFD2A7922/285102/OTPCOLOMBIAPublicInterimReportNovember2012.pdf>

implicated.... [that accounts for] almost all the army brigades in Colombia”.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Human Rights Watch states that “more than 3,000 alleged false positives by military personnel” are currently under investigation.<sup>24</sup> While those convicted have mostly been low-ranking soldiers, there is strong evidence that suggests that high-ranking officers also share responsibility in the extra-judicial killings of non-combatants.

Furthermore, in analyzing the Prosecutor General’s records, Human Rights Watch has determined that these killings were systematic modes of operation within the armed forces of Colombia. These false positives “entailed significant planning and coordination, ranging from bringing victims to remote locations, to ensuring each case had official documentation purporting it was a lawful combat death.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, evidence suggests that the motivation behind these widespread killings was the fact that during Uribe’s government there was pressure for the military to show “results in the fight against guerrillas and crime”.<sup>26</sup> There was also a new system put in place which measured the military’s success against the guerrilla in terms of the number of combat kills. In order to incentivize soldiers, the government established a reward and punishment strategy. Soldiers were rewarded them with “vacation time, promotions, medals, training courses, and congratulations from their superiors, among other prizes”<sup>27</sup>; and punished with army removal for not meeting certain combat kill quotas.

Although most convictions have been of low ranking soldiers, the top level commanders of the Colombian military as well as the former president share a direct responsibility for these

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<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2015, June 24). On Their Watch. p8. Retrieved November 2015, from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/24/their-watch/evidence-senior-army-officers-responsibility-false-positive-killings>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 1

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 6

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 26

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 29

killings. The policies Uribe implemented during his time in office worked to further encourage this unlawful and institutionalized system of killing typically marginalized civilians, because although false positives did not have their start during his period in office, their frequency did increase drastically. Moreover, the absence of military accountability demonstrated throughout this scandal shows how the state acted undemocratically in order to make it seem as if it were indeed achieving the goals of peace and security that the president had set for the country when he came into office. In so being, Colombia's legal process and criminal system was compromised and shadows a repressive government.

In addition to this, these extra-judicial killings buttressed Uribe's government because, prior to the scandal, they served to illustrate the successful nature of his government to address the issues on the agenda. The inflated statistics of killed guerrilla members demonstrated that his hardliner stance against the armed rebel groups was going to bring Colombia the peace and security that citizens demanded. Thus, despite the evidence human rights organizations brought forth, Uribe tried to dismiss the false positives scandal. He initially stated that "the scandal was being used to discredit and hinder the security forces in their fight against terrorists," but after witnessing the public's negative reaction, he "pushed for hard punishments in the few most well-known cases."<sup>28</sup> This showcases his government's concerns were not to find a solution for the systematic production of violence the armed forces of Colombia were inflicting on civilians living in remote populations. Instead, his government focused on downplaying the false positives scandal in order to protect and maintain its image as successful because it was winning back rebel territory. His focus on maintaining popular support, while not addressing the issue of those

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<sup>28</sup> Rojas Mejia, P. (2010, January 15). Progress on the false positives cases: a case of false hope? Colombia Reports. Retrieved November 2015 from <http://colombiareports.com/progress-on-the-false-positives-cases-just-a-case-of-false-hope/>

suffering from increased violence at the hands of the military, completely contradicts the environment of public security that Colombians wanted him to provide.

Uribe's campaign promise to provide public safety for Colombian citizens was implemented through the Democratic Security and Defense Policy initiative of 2003. This policy's objectives, according to Uribe's official website, are to restore peace, respect the constitution and the laws, respect human rights, restore faith in the Armed Forces, create opportunities for economic progress, and finally, to do this all with transparency. This would be achieved through offensive components such as coordinating and unifying military, police, and government intelligence; strengthening the state's armed forces, the police, the intelligence, and its finances; and consolidating control of national territory by restoring the state presence in critical areas through the use of the military and local police.<sup>29</sup> It would also be accomplished through defensive components such as protecting the population and enhancing the respect for human rights; protecting the economic infrastructure by securing the infrastructure of transportation, energy, and communications; and strengthening the governments deterrent capacity.<sup>30</sup> These measures were greatly accomplished through an increase in military and police spending and expanding government bureaucracy to create greater control over these armed state forces. As a result of the state's implementation of these security measures, Uribe's regime argued that peace and financial stability would become a possibility in Colombia. However, the false positives are a direct result of the increase in military and intelligence unification and spending. The scandal contradicts the environment of public security for all Colombian citizens

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<sup>29</sup> MARKS, T. A. (2006). Colombian Military Support for "Democratic Security." *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 17(2), 204-205

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 206

that Uribe promised. Because of this, the democratic value to secure and protect the human rights of all citizens was violated.

Moreover, Uribe's 2002 campaign was also founded on the premise that through his Democratic Security Policy, Colombia would also grow economically. Uribe argued that Colombia would recover from the 1999 recession from which the country was still suffering.<sup>31</sup> According to Salomón Kalmanovitz's *Recesión y recuperación de la economía Colombiana*,

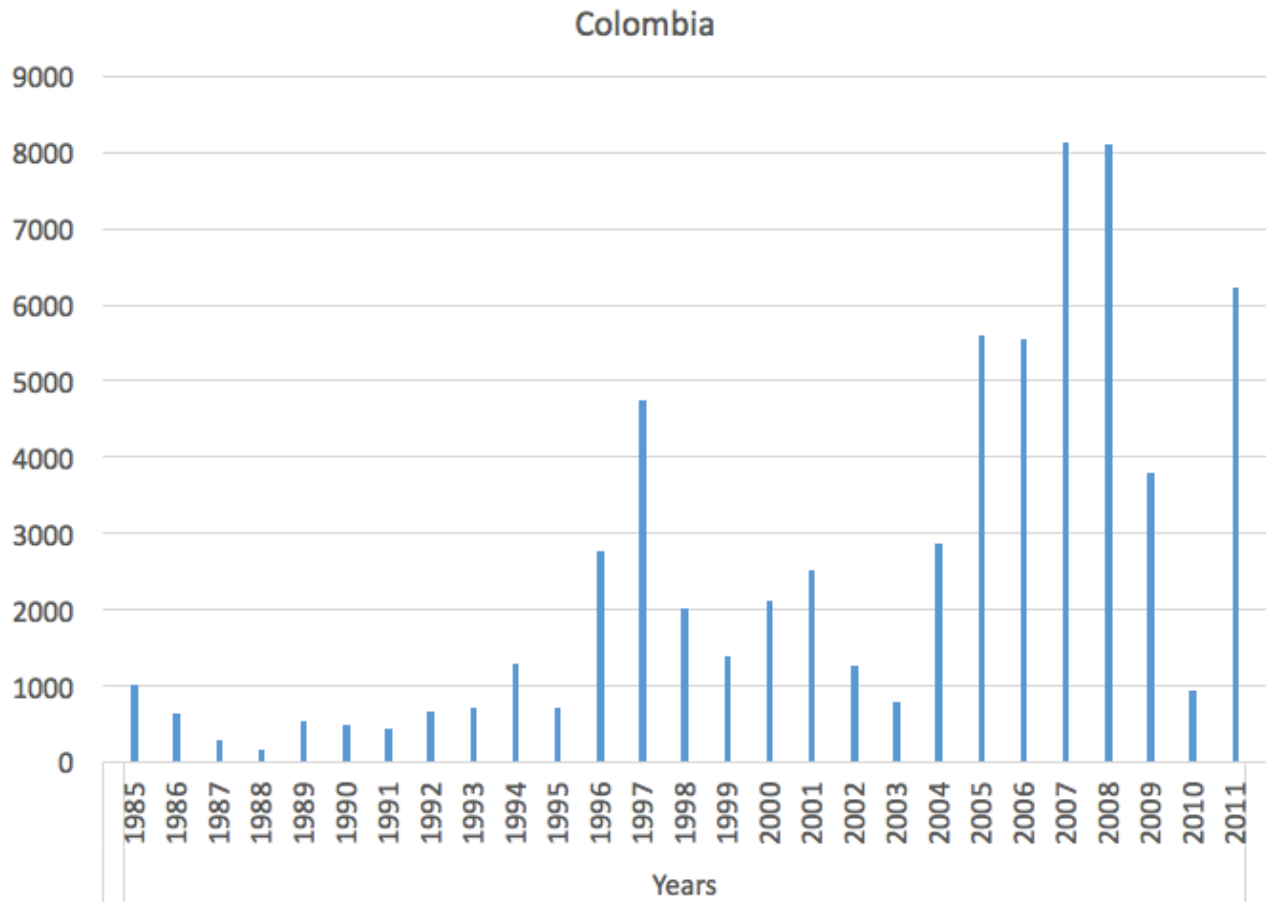
Las acciones en el campo de la seguridad dieron lugar a una mejora sustancial de las expectativas de empresarios y consumidores. Los éxitos militares del Gobierno y el repliegue táctico de la guerrilla despertaron a los empresarios, que aumentaron la inversión, al tiempo que mejoraban también las expectativas de los consumidores.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, because the false positives served to augment statistics that illustrated the government was taking back territory from the rebels and public security was on the rise, these extrajudicial and true-killings also served to attract investment. Direct foreign investment data (figure 1) during the Uribe years further demonstrate the economic growth during Uribe's time in office. Through it, it is clear that the economy grew from 2003-2008, then began to decline when the false positives scandal erupted and the global economic recession struck. Thus, the false positives served as a mechanism through which Uribe's administration gained popular support because the enhanced public security statistics served to attract investment.

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<sup>31</sup> Posada-Carbó, E. (2006). Colombia Hews to the Path of Change. *Journal of Democracy*, 17(4), p.84

<sup>32</sup> Kalmanovitz, Salomón. (2004). *Recesión y recuperación de la economía Colombiana*. Nueva Sociedad: Democracia y Política en América Latina, 192 p. 102

**Figure 1** Direct Foreign Investment in Millions of Dollars

As the parapolitics, DAS, and false positive scandals illustrates, public security did not improve as much as Uribe's government argues. While some security indicators, such as kidnappings (figure 2)<sup>33</sup>, and intentional homicide counts (figure 3)<sup>34</sup> decreased, other indicators

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Statistics. (2015). Colombia Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, Kidnappings at National Level [Data file]. Retrieved November 2015 from [https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-kidnapping&REGION=Americas&REGION\\_\\_label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&SUBREGION\\_\\_label=South+America&COUNTRY=40&COUNTRY\\_\\_label=Colombia&format=html&fullscreen=true&showtoc=true#state:0](https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-kidnapping&REGION=Americas&REGION__label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&SUBREGION__label=South+America&COUNTRY=40&COUNTRY__label=Colombia&format=html&fullscreen=true&showtoc=true#state:0)

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Statistics. (2015). Colombia Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, Intentional Homicides [Data file]. Retrieved November 2015 from [https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-homicide-count-data&REGION=Americas&REGION\\_\\_label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&S](https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-homicide-count-data&REGION=Americas&REGION__label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&S)



such as assault (figure 4)<sup>35</sup> and theft (figure 5)<sup>36</sup> increased. Moreover, the number of internally displaced persons also rose during the first Uribe administration. These statistics seem to demonstrate that organized crime definitely decreased during his first term and that many benefitted from this occurrence, which may be attributed to the cease-fire and demobilization of the AUC paramilitary during Uribe's first four years. Nevertheless, Amnesty International's 2007 Report expresses that in spite of the paramilitary-government negotiations, "some demobilized paramilitaries had failed to demobilize, and that new paramilitary groups had emerged."<sup>37</sup> This serves to illustrate that the demobilization strategy was not as successful as the government claimed because they were demobilized only to be replaced by another.

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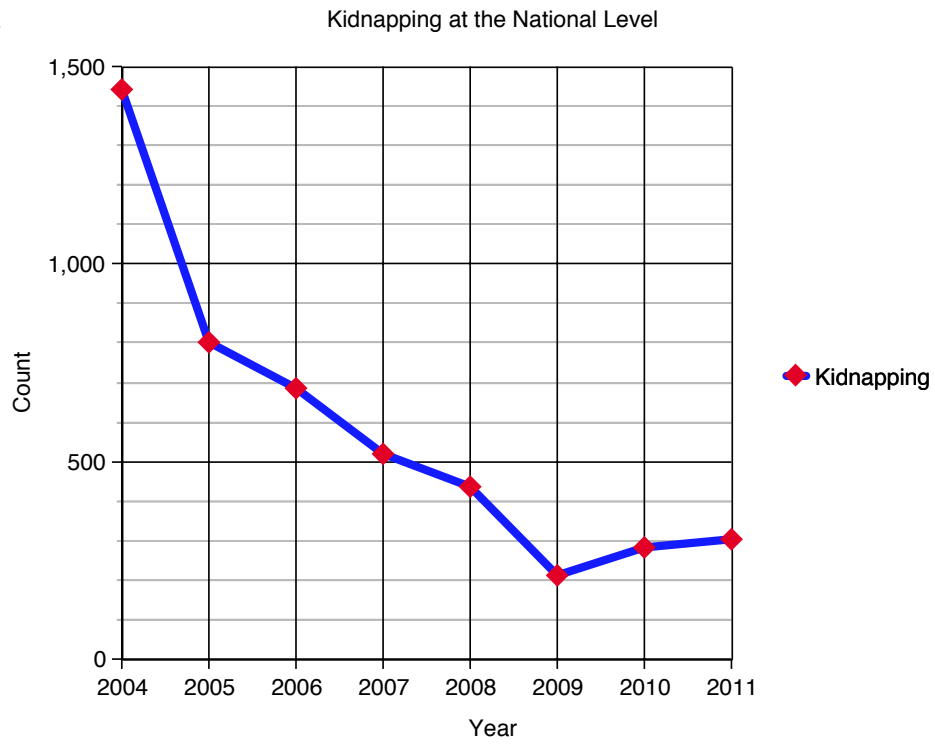
UBREGION\_\_label=South+America&COUNTRY=40&COUNTRY\_\_label=Colombia&format=html&fullscreen=true&showtoc=true#state:0

<sup>35</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Statistics. (2015). Colombia Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, Assaults at National Level [Data file]. Retrieved November 2015 from [https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-assaults&REGION=Americas&REGION\\_\\_label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&SUBREGION\\_\\_label=South+America&COUNTRY=40&COUNTRY\\_\\_label=Colombia&format=html&fullscreen=true&showtoc=true#state:0](https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-assaults&REGION=Americas&REGION__label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&SUBREGION__label=South+America&COUNTRY=40&COUNTRY__label=Colombia&format=html&fullscreen=true&showtoc=true#state:0)

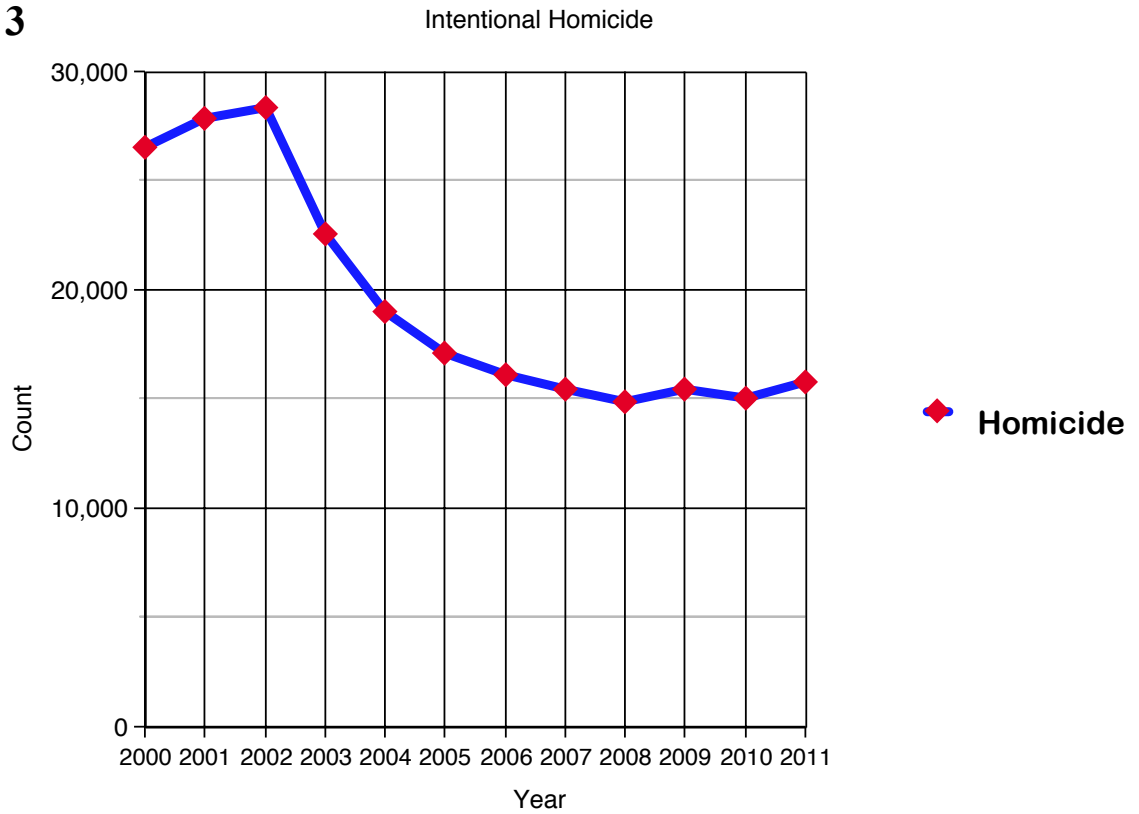
<sup>36</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Statistics. (2015). Colombia Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, Theft at National Level [Data file]. Retrieved November 2015 from [https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-persons-theft&REGION=Americas&REGION\\_\\_label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&SUBREGION\\_\\_label=South+America&COUNTRY=40&COUNTRY\\_\\_label=Colombia&format=html&fullscreen=true&showtoc=true#state:0](https://data.unodc.org/sys/rpt?reportfile=crime-statistics-persons-theft&REGION=Americas&REGION__label=Americas&SUBREGION=South%20America&SUBREGION__label=South+America&COUNTRY=40&COUNTRY__label=Colombia&format=html&fullscreen=true&showtoc=true#state:0)

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty International. (2008). *Amnesty International Report 2007* (Amnesty International Annual World Report). p88

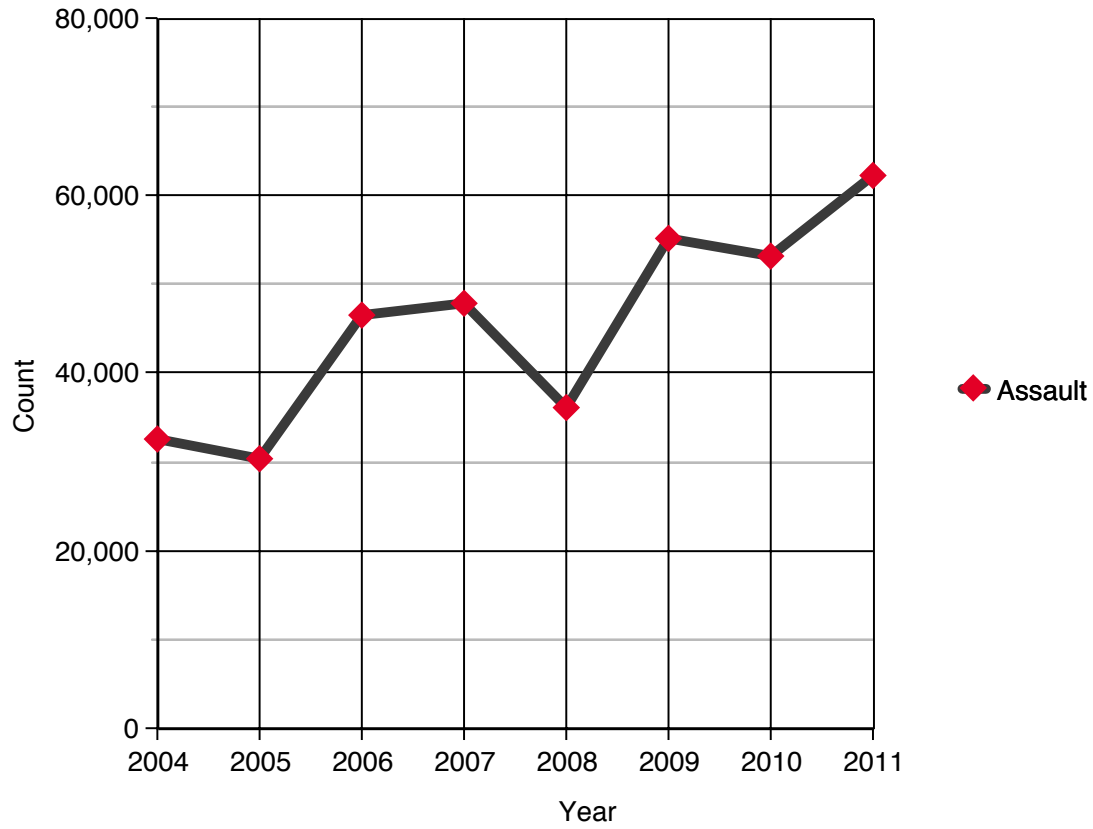
**Figure 2**



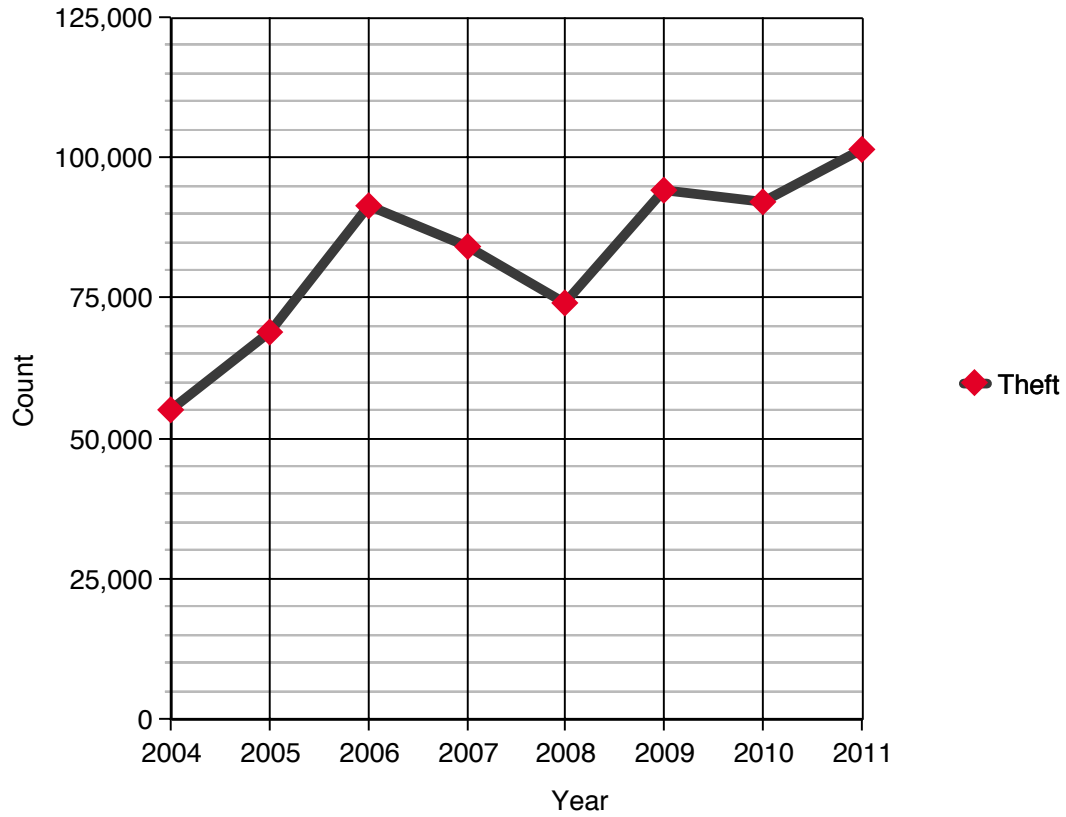
**Figure 3**



**Figure 4** Assault at the National Level



**Figure 5** Theft at the National Level



The increase in petty crime during the Uribe administration demonstrates that while a significant part of the population was benefitting from the governments economic and security policies, Colombia's lower socio-economic class sections were not benefitting as much.<sup>38</sup> Similar to the increases in petty crime, the increase in internally displaced members of the population, as demonstrated in figure 6, exemplifies the short comings of the government's Democratic Security policies.<sup>39</sup> The increase in violence towards the typically marginalized members of the population further illustrates that it is mostly the middle and upper classes that benefitted from the new policies that the government had enacted. In fact, in a case study of one of Cali's poorest cities, Aguablanca, Eduardo Moncada argues that those living in lower stratas "generally experience unequal access to basic social services and remain mired in the low-income service and informal sectors of the economy."<sup>40</sup> Uribe's policies did little to mitigate the social class divide.

Because of the rise in displaced persons, Uribe's strategy of militarized fighting in rural areas is contradictory to the "climate of security" he was trying to achieve throughout Colombia. According to Amnesty International, the civilian communities that are most at risk due to these policies are the "Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and peasant farmer communities, as well as

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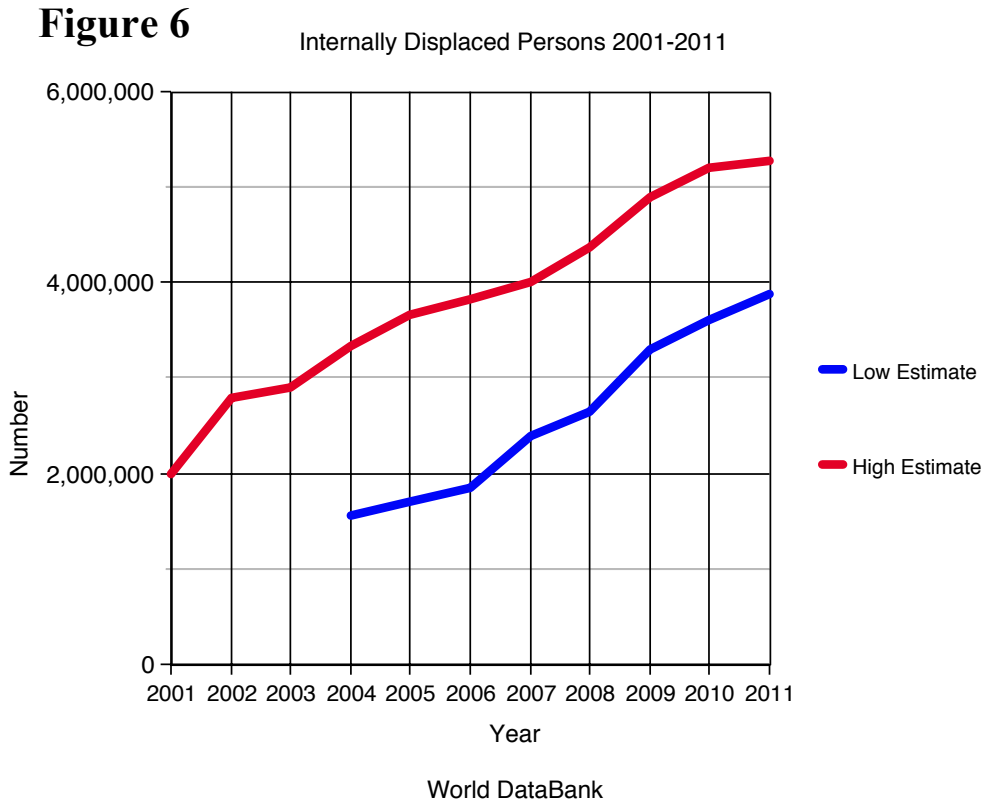
<sup>38</sup> Colombia has a stratification system that classifies "urban populations into different strata with similar economic characteristics" and serves to divide the cities "into zones of wealth and poverty".

Esbjørn, A., & Pérez Fjalland, E. (2012, November 22). COLOMBIA - SOCIAL STRATIFICATION BY LAW. International Federation for Housing and Planning. Retrieved November 2015 from <http://www.ifhp.org/ifhp-blog/colombia-social-stratification-law>

<sup>39</sup> World Development Indicators. (2015) Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Retrieved November 2015 from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>

<sup>40</sup> Moncada, Eduardo. (2011). *Counting Bodies: Crime Mapping, Policing, and Race in Colombia*. New racial missions of policing: International perspectives on evolving law-enforcement politics (Ethnic and Racial Studies; Ethnic and Racial Studies). London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis. p 125

civilians living in areas of intense military conflict.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, under-resourced communities were suffering from an increase in violent conflict. In so being, although indicators of violence demonstrate a decreasing trend during Uribe’s first term in office there was an unbalanced relationship among the different social classes and exemplify the deeply embedded socio-economic class divisions that exist in Colombia.



Nonetheless, Uribe’s approval ratings are extremely high in comparison to other countries in Latin America. According to the Latin American Public Opinion Project, during his first two years in office, Uribe could boast of a 70.3 percent evaluation of performance rating as

<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International. (2008). *Amnesty International Report 2007* (Amnesty International Annual World Report). p 90

can be seen in figure 7.<sup>42</sup> It was overwhelmingly the highest approval rating even among other Latin American countries. Moreover, although his policies led to an increase in violence towards already marginalized populations, at the moment of re-election, Uribe was overwhelmingly the leading candidate and received 62 percent of the vote.<sup>43</sup> This illustrates that 9 percent more of the those who voted, compared to the 2002 election, were in favor of having him as president, as can be seen in figure 8. Even in 2008, after the three scandals had already been exposed, his approval rating remained the highest in Latin America with 69.3 percent of the population approving of his presidency's work (figure 9).<sup>44</sup> This further demonstrates the satisfaction of citizens and the support of the policies implemented during the first four years that resulted in overall increased economic and social stability for Colombians – in spite of the increased violence and instability that resulted for historically marginalized communities.

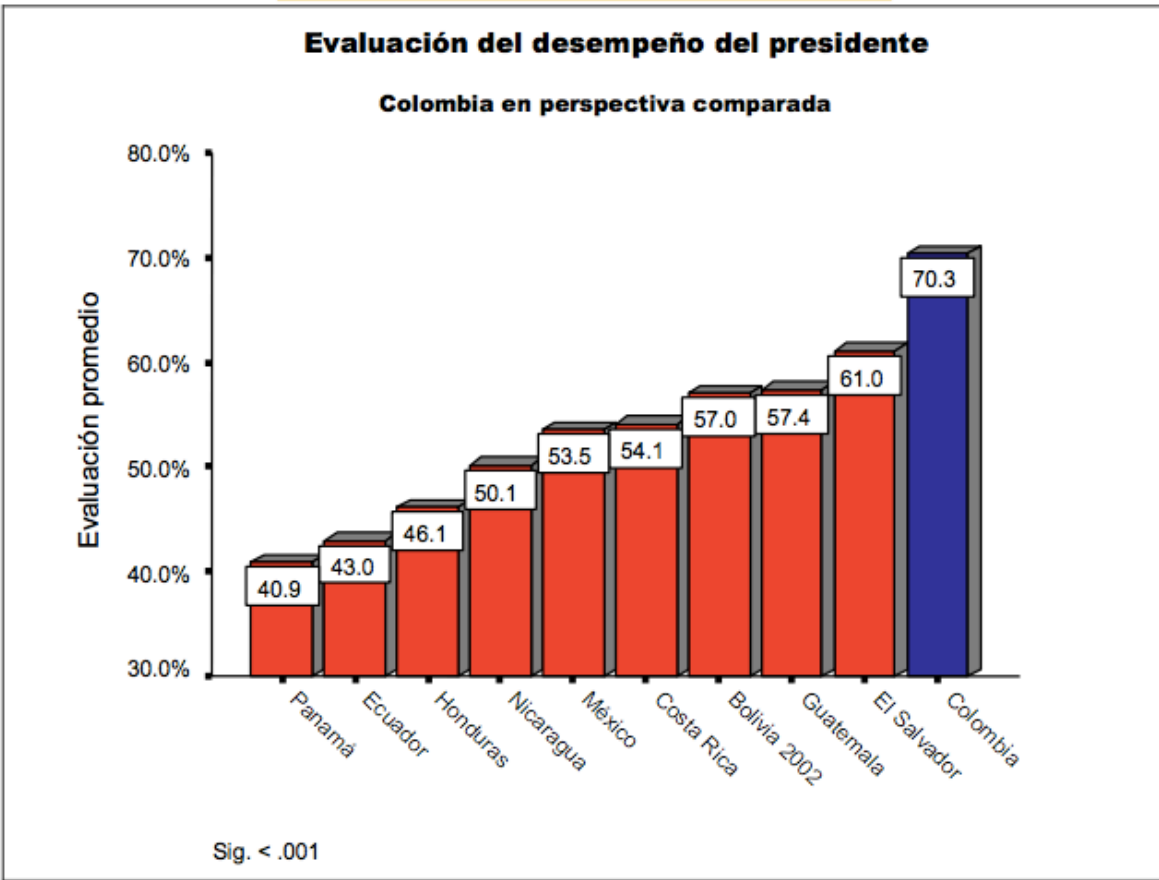
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<sup>42</sup> Latin American Public Opinion Project (2004) [Graph illustration Uribe's Performance Evaluation in Comparison to other Latin American Countries' Leaders] *Cultura política de la democracia en Colombia*, 2004. p 204 Retrieved October 2015 from [www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/colombia/2004-politicalculture.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/colombia/2004-politicalculture.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Carr, A. (n.d.). Presidential Election of 28 May 2006. Retrieved October 2015 from <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/c/colombia/colombia2006pres.txt>

<sup>44</sup> Latin American Public Opinion Project (2008) [Graph illustration Approval of President's Work in Comparison to other Latin American Countries' Leaders] *Cultura política de la democracia en Colombia*, 2008 *El impacto de la gobernabilidad*. p 276. Retrieved December 2015 <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2008/colombia-es.pdf>

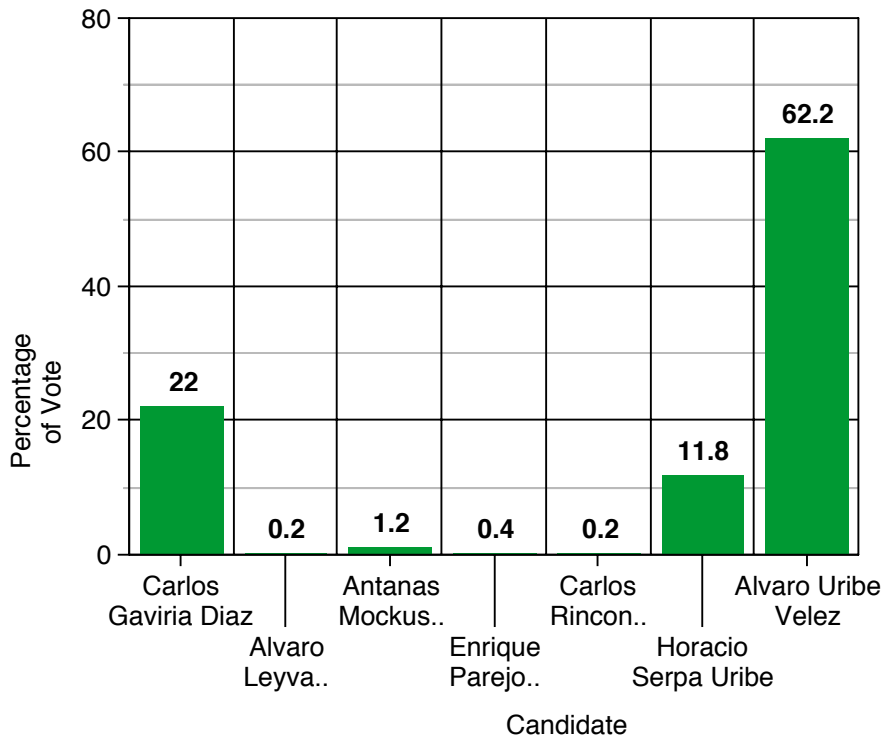
**Figure 7 Uribe's Performance Evaluation in Comparison to other Latin American Countries' Leaders**



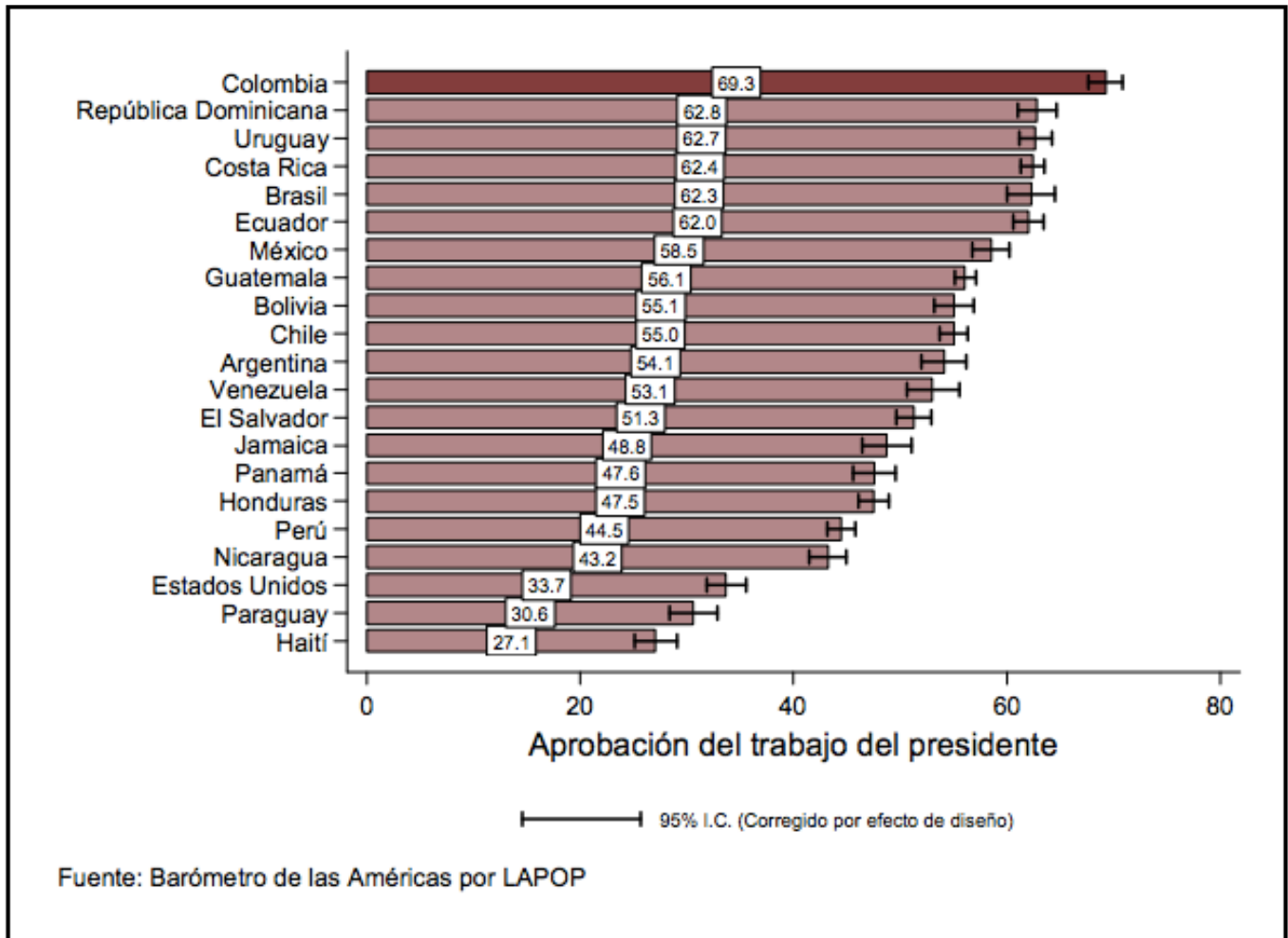
Source: Latin American Public Opinion Project (2004) [Graph illustration Uribe's Performance Evaluation in Comparison to other Latin American Countries' Leaders] Cultura política de la democracia en Colombia, 2004.

**Figure 8**

2006 Presidential Election



**Figure 9 Approval of President's Work in Comparison to other Latin American Countries' Leaders**



Employing undemocratic mechanisms, Uribe and his government pretended to deliver democratic stability that citizens desired, towards the end of his presidency, in 2009, Uribe remained quite popular.<sup>45</sup> The Latin American Public Opinion Project conducted a series of polls to determine how much confidence citizens had in the national government, the president, and in the national armed forces. The polls measured the response on a scale from one to seven, one

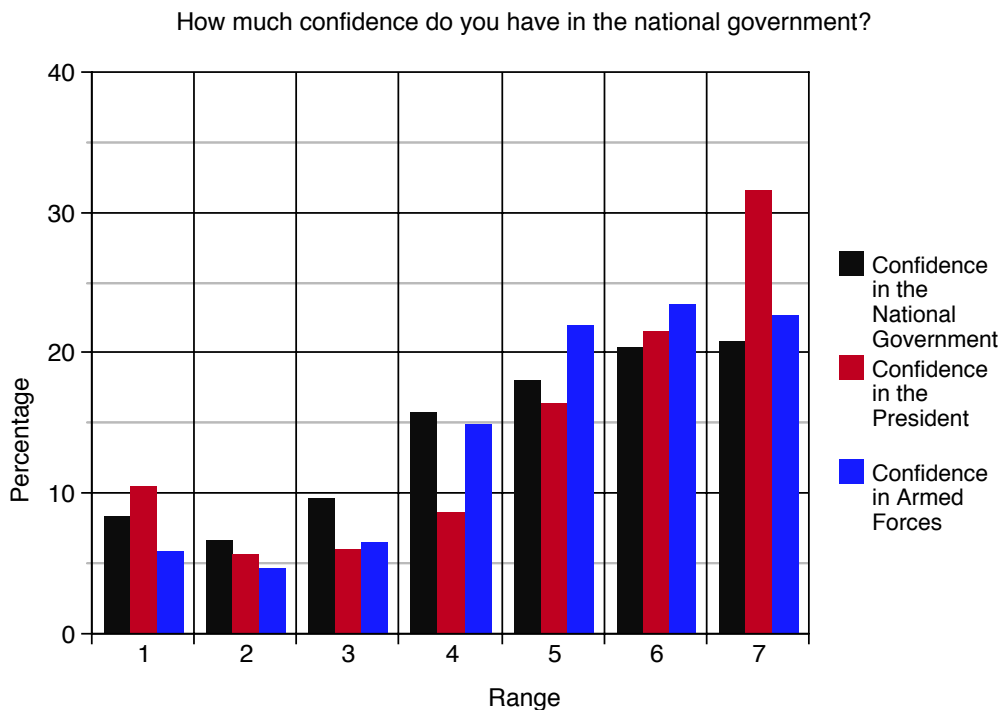
<sup>45</sup> The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), Retrieved October 2015 from [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org).



being no confidence and seven being a lot of confidence. The results, provided below in figure 10, demonstrate that the majority of citizens surveyed definitely maintained confidence in Uribe’s government despite the scandals. This, according to the 2010 Report that Latin American Public Opinion Project produced, is strongly attributed to the fact that Colombian citizens generally tend to support the government when the economy is growing or is in a period of stability.<sup>46</sup>

The 2007-2009 economic recession did not seem to have an effect on Colombian’s support of Uribe’s government in spite of the unfolding of the par politics, DAS, and false positives scandals. One possibility for this may be that the majority of Colombians who have a voice in politics are not personally affected by the polemics of Uribe’s government. In fact, they

**Figure 10**



Source: The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.LapopSurveys.org.

<sup>46</sup> Rodríguez-Raga, J. C., & Seligson, M. (2011). *Political Culture of Democracy in Colombia, 2010 Democratic Consolidation in the Americas in Hard Times*. Latin America Public Opinion Project. p66. Retrieved October 2015 from <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/colombia/2010-political-culture-English.pdf>

were still benefitting from the increase in public security that Uribe's government had been able to provide. In so being, although Uribe's government was heavily involved with paramilitaries (which although officially demobilized, still exists); was spying on its citizens; and committed human rights abuses in order to demonstrate positive results from the Democratic Security policies that were implemented, the overwhelming support from the majority of citizens may indicate that they believe his government's measures were necessary in order to bring an end to the decades old civil war and finally gain the peace the country desires. Thus, Uribe's administration was able to maintain popularity despite the fact that it relied on or created a clandestine parallel government because it framed the government's actions around the fight against cartels and guerrilla members, on the decrease in homicide and kidnapping rates, and the general improvement of the economy since he stepped into office. It also benefitted from the polarized social classes and was able to manipulate the public's desire for peace in a decades old civil war.

Uribe's basis of democratic support made him one of Latin America's most popular presidents, yet he did this through extra-legal and non-democratic tactics. His policy of democratic stability through increased intelligence and military spending led to many human rights violations, as has the collaborative relationship between paramilitaries and top-level government officials. In so being, the scandals serve to shed light on the polemics of Uribe's government and it points to the fragility of democracy where class divisions are so deeply embedded. Moreover, it suggests that Colombia's democracy and democratic process has been compromised.

To conclude, Alvaro Uribe's government was riddled with serious high profile scandals, such as the parapolitics, DAS, and false positives scandals. The parapolitics scandal revealed a

vast paramilitary-political network. Almost 40 percent of congress, many regional politicians, members of the armed forces, and members of the judicial branch were implicated. It also brought into question Uribe's presidential 2002 and 2006 campaign funds and the legitimacy of the elections. The DAS scandal further exemplifies the Uribe administration's para-political network. Many of the former intelligence agency's high ranking officials have been condemned for collaborating with the paramilitaries as well as for illegally wiretapping political opponents. Through these actions they violated human rights. As the parapolitics and DAS scandals continued to be investigated, the false positive scandal erupted. This scandal exposed the systematic extrajudicial killings the Colombian military of many lower socio-economic class citizens. Thus, it demonstrates the deep social class divide within Colombian citizens. The fact that these killings served as mechanisms through which Uribe's administration could partly prove its successful democratic security policies prior to the scandal illustrates the Colombian government was acting as a parallel state.

Nonetheless, despite the scandals and the increase in violence towards vulnerable communities as typified in the increase in assault, theft, and displacement rates, Uribe and his government remained amongst the most popular in Latin America. His approval rating before the scandals was 70.9 percent and in 2008 after the scandals had all been exposed it was 69.3 percent. His popularity may be explained as a result of the majority of citizens, excluding the those living in historically marginalized communities, benefitted from his policies. Moreover, Uribe did not address critics of his government or the media, instead he created a discourse that his government and its policies were responsible for successfully combatting the guerrillas and the cartels, decreasing homicide and kidnapping rates, and improving the economy. Thus Colombians may have chosen to support him because they saw his clandestine government

tactics as a necessary mechanism through which to end the civil war and gain economic growth and stability.

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