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DECENTRALISATION IN COLOMBIA'S
MUNICIPALITIES, 1988-2000**

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Electoral Behaviour Trends and Decentralisation in Colombia's Municipalities, 1988-2000*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to show the trends of electoral behaviour in Colombia's municipalities in relation to the decentralisation process. More specifically, based on a statistical analysis, it hopes to explain the relationship among the following variables: level of electoral participation, effective number of parties, decentralisation level, degree of socio-economic development and levels of violence. The analysis of these aspects allows us to identify both the direct and indirect effects of political decentralisation on some dimensions of electoral democracy in the local sphere. The principal thesis of the study is that the electoral variables cannot be explained only by decentralisation, but rather that this process, together with the factors mention, have a relative impact on the observed trends in the formal political system. Among the results of the analysis, two aspects merit highlighting: first, the hypothesis that fiscal decentralisation acts as an incentive for the creation of new political movements that would compete for the distribution of public resources is not proven for the Colombian municipalities as a whole; second, armed conflict and violence have negative effects on the exercise of the right to vote. Political control by armed means is being consolidated via the direct coercion of voters or is degenerating into confrontations between the different armed groups, which impedes political participation through institutional channels.

Introduction: The meanings of democratisation in the Colombian political system.

This document's general aim is to examine the evolution of some variables related to electoral behaviour in the nineties, specifically participation levels, electoral support and the number of parties at the municipal level, taking as a starting point the year in which the first popular election of mayors took place. The second objective is to identify the factors that influence the behaviour of these variables, to which end aspects related to the fiscal dimension of decentralisation, the socio-economic conditions of the municipalities and the levels of violence and intensity of the armed conflict in the local sphere were all considered.

The analysis of these aspects of electoral behaviour allows us to identify what the direct or indirect effects of political decentralisation have been on some dimensions of electoral democracy in the local sphere. It must be noted that decentralisation does not necessarily mean greater democratisation, as various authors have pointed out.¹ In Colombia, however, the debate about the design and application of the decentralising reforms have had as a

* This investigation was made possible thanks to financial support from the Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). We are grateful for the critiques, commentaries and suggestions of James Putzel and Jean-Paul Faguet of the LSE and of Rodolfo Masías and Luis Javier Orjuela of the Universidad de los Andes.

¹ See, for example, Richard Crook & James Manor, *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Africa and West Africa. Participation, Accountability and Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

permanent reference point the need to democratise the formal political system by making it more open and inclusive.

In the political camp, the theoreticians of decentralisation and the decision-makers expected that there would be a widening of the party system with the decentralising reforms, to move beyond the monopoly that the Liberal and Conservative parties had held onto in the political representation and decision-making arenas. The popular election of mayors was implemented in 1986 for that reason, seeking to expand electoral competition at the local level and generate propitious conditions for the emergence and consolidation of political forces outside of the bipartite structure. In addition, the political decentralisation reforms sought a wider incorporation of the different social groups and sectors into the formal arenas of participation, to overcome problems of state legitimacy and respond to the demands for greater influence by citizens and local elites in the political decisions.

The goal of democratising Colombia's political system has been present in other reforms, specifically the 1991 Constitution, which introduced much broader changes into the formal political system. If the political system is defined as something broader than the set of institutions and norms that regulate the relations between political parties and the state, the system of relations among the different social sectors and between them and the state must be included in this definition. In this regard, the Constituent Assembly was an attempt to democratise Colombia's political regime, to provide space for social sectors that had never been included in it.

Although the Liberal and Conservative parties have maintained their dominion over the electoral political scene for over a century, the bipartite system had become the object of multiple criticisms in recent decades. In the first place, some social and academic sectors "began to perceive the bipartite system as a semi-closed, barely representative system and a source of exclusions".² Moreover, the exclusively bipartite politics was considered responsible for the political crisis affecting the country, due to multiple factors such as the traditional parties' inability to channel social conflicts or represent broad sectors of the society as well as their increasing delegitimisation for recurring to patronage and corrupt practices.

Although the existence of a bipartite system does not constitute an obstacle to democracy *per se*, the institutional accords in the Colombian case between the elites of the Liberal and Conservative parties – especially the National Front (1954-1974) – resulted in rules and political practices that allowed the traditional parties to maintain their nearly absolute monopoly over government posts. Different authors have perceived the bipartite system as a restrictive feature of Colombian democracy. In this regard, Eduardo Pizarro argued some years ago that one of the greatest problems of Colombia's political system was its restricted nature, reflected in the exclusionary bi-party monopoly, the permanent state of exception and the excessive centralisation of decisions in the executive branch, leading to the decline of arenas of popular election.³ According to this thesis, the dismantling of the National Front did not give way to a truly competitive system, but rather moved to a system characterised by the bureaucratic divvying up of representative posts between the two traditional parties.

² Eduardo Pizarro, '¿Hacia un sistema multipartidista? Las terceras fuerzas en Colombia hoy', *Análisis Político*, 31 (May-August 1997), p.82.

³ Eduardo Pizarro, 'Democracia Restringida y desinstitucionalización política', in Pedro Medellín (ed.), *La Reforma del Estado en América Latina*, Bogotá: Fescol, 1989, p.308.

With the National Front, according to Francisco Leal, Colombia's more diverse and complex democracy came up against a:

blockade, with well diversified methods, of almost all emerging forms of political participation. Anything that did not make it through the bipartite sieve was systematically, subtly or brazenly annulled.⁴

This exclusion was what gave rise to guerrilla movements such as the April 19 Movement (M19), whose hopes of winning power legitimately were frustrated in 1970.⁵

It is possible to find other hypotheses in this regard, although with different focuses. One example is Ramírez's thesis about the exclusionary nature of Colombian democracy growing out of the marginalising of broad sectors of society that find no representation within the political regime;⁶ or that of Leal and Dávila about the patronage-based political system, which presumably became a fundamental mechanism of both traditional parties for guaranteeing control of the political regime.⁷ Others, like Francisco Gutiérrez, state that while there are distinct meanings to political closedown, what relates it to the Colombian case is closedown understood as an exclusionary bipartite system.⁸ In this regard, he sustains that although:

the existence of stable two-party structures protected by strong institutional designs do not necessarily shut down the dynamics of democratic representation, as the United States case and, above all, that of England illustrate, the Colombian case could be more restrictive.⁹

This would be explained by the agglomeration of parties around the centre, which reduces the possibility that different political alternatives could enter with any electoral strength. This restrictive nature, in turn, would be explained by the systematic recurrence of the traditional parties to extra-institutional methods such as violence, patronage and corruption to ensure their institutional control, or by forms of politicking that ignore the interests of the grassroots sectors once the politicians gain power.

In this context, the decentralising reforms at the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties tended to democratise the Colombian political system. In the first place, they sought to open up the political system, promoting participatory democracy at the local level as a response to the social protest that had been gathering strength in the previous years and to the transformations the country was experiencing in the economic and social spheres.¹⁰ This led to the introduction of the direct election of mayors, which sought to promote the incorporation of forces outside the two parties to these arenas of political representation and electoral competition, as well as to strengthen the relationship between governors and governed.

⁴ Francisco Leal, 'La Crisis Política Colombiana: Alternativas y Frustraciones', *Análisis Político*, 1 (May-August 1987), p.77.

⁵ The government at that time manipulated the electoral results to prevent the populist political movement called the Alianza Nacional Popular (ANAPO) from coming to power. Had that occurred, the bipartite political regime would have come to an end.

⁶ William Ramírez, *Estado, Violencia y Democracia*, Bogota: Tercer Mundo Editores, 1990.

⁷ Francisco Leal & Andrés Dávila, *Cientelismo, el sistema político y su expresión regional*, IEPRI, Bogota: Tercer Mundo, 1991.

⁸ Francisco Gutiérrez, '¿Se ha abierto el sistema político colombiano? Una evaluación de los procesos de cambio (1970-1998)', *América Latina Hoy*, 2 (2001), pp.198-215.

⁹ Gutiérrez (2001), p.193.

¹⁰ María del Pilar Gaitán, 'La elección popular de alcaldes: un desafío para la democracia', *Revista Análisis Político*, 3 (January-April 1988), p.98.

It was particularly hoped that this reform would have important effects on the configuration of the party system at the local level, in that political forces other than the two parties that had begun to gain strength in those scenarios would find opportunities to gain access to representative posts through direct election by the citizenry. It must be borne in mind that until then the local people in charge were designated by the governors, who in turn were designated by the President, thus permitting the monopoly of governmental posts by the traditional parties from the national level all the way down to the local one.

Moreover, the direct election of mayors was accompanied by the creation of entities and mechanisms to strengthen civic participation in local political affairs, such as local administrative boards, the possibility of signing contracts between the municipality and the civic organisations for implementing works and providing services such as the popular consultation.¹¹

For its part, the 1991 constitutional reform was seen as a way to solve a good number of the problems that were affecting the country, but mainly as a way to conjure away the national problems in at least three senses. In the first place, the limitations of the formal rules constituted the main problem, since the different social and political actors considered them illegitimate and exclusionary. It was thus seen as necessary to establish a new political framework, which implied institutionalising arenas for expressing and settling social conflicts as well as expanding and strengthening the arenas of political representation and civic participation. Secondly, the reform appeared to be a clear opportunity to modernise Colombian political life and do away with the principal vices of the old political class (mainly the patronage system). Finally, the 1991 Constitution was seen as an essential tool for moving beyond the bipartite regime and opening up the political space to forces that had traditionally been relegated or utterly excluded.

For all these reasons, it was believed that the first step in paving the way to peace and stability was to move beyond a political structure characterised by closure and the exclusion of broad social sectors and political forces. To that end, new rules of the game were introduced, such as: a) open competition by different social and political actors, which materialised into the unlimited right to construct political parties, movements and groupings; b) the incorporation of new political representation mechanisms, such as the national circumscription for Senate and special circumscriptions for both the Senate and House, special circumscriptions for political minorities and the popular election of governors; c) new consultation arenas and mechanisms aimed at promoting civic participation in both the electoral aspect and the political decision-making process; d) the expansion of forms of political participation through mechanisms such as the referendum, plebiscite, open town assemblies, recall of the mandate and popular consultation.¹²

One of the main concerns of the political reforms was to find a way to surmount the limitations of Colombian democracy,¹³ which presupposed the central, although not exclusive importance of promoting the opening up of the political space to third parties and the inclusion of different sectors into political life. That is the direction of this study.

¹¹ Gaitán (1988), p.100.

¹² Ana María Bejarano, 'La constitución de 1991: un proyecto de construcción institucional,' in Gandour, Miguel and Mejía, Bernardo (eds.), *Hacia el rediseño del Estado*, Bogota: Tercer Mundo Editores, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 1994, pp.197-224.

¹³ The promotion of new arenas of participation has also been laced with the need to counteract violent forms of opposition to the state and consolidate closer relations between the state and civil society.

Political decentralisation in Colombia: in search of the opening and broadening of the political system.

This study posits that decentralisation can largely – but not exclusively – explain the trends of electoral behaviour in Colombia's municipalities. The inclusion of factors directly related to the local context is an attempt to nuance positions that attribute the majority of the changes in the party system and in the participation within institutional channels to the decentralist reforms.

The different studies that examine the benefits expected from decentralisation and its real achievements differ with respect to the democratising effects attributed to these reforms. For example, James Manor concludes that decentralisation may have democratising aims but can also be limited to achieving greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness in public resource administration. He further argues that even for it to have greater reach in improving governmental performance, it must be linked to an institutional context based on democratic principles.¹⁴

For the author, the benefits of democratic decentralisation are principally greater control by the social bases over the formulation of state policies that directly affect them, accountability by those governing to those governed, which makes possible greater levels of legitimacy or political support for the governments, relatively high governance levels that allow regional and social conflicts to be managed through the incorporation of civic demands into the decision-making bodies.

Along this same line, Rondinelli states that decentralisation can help in the articulation and implementation of development policies aimed at securing growth with equality, strengthening the capacity of regional authorities, and capacitating political leaders in identifying their own development problems and priorities.¹⁵ This idea is buttressed by the evaluations of multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank, that have promoted these processes. They claim that decentralisation fosters efficiency, by permitting a close correspondence between the supply of public services and individual preferences, and promoting responsibility and equality through a clear relationship between costs and benefits. This is the justification for the establishment of local governments that are sensitive to the wishes of their citizens, and not simply acting as instruments of central government.¹⁶ With these decentralist processes in the early seventies, the governments of developing countries were seeking more efficient and transparent public resource management as well as the opening up of political systems in transition.

Other authors, however, question the virtues inherent to decentralisation. Michiel de Vries, for example, underscores that there is a similarity among the arguments justifying this type of reform and the reasons the opposing current puts forward for centralisation. According to this argument, the devolution of responsibilities and power to sub-national government levels does not necessarily result in greater democracy and efficiency. Factors such as the local elites'

¹⁴ James Manor, *The political Economy of Democratic Decentralization*, Washington: The World Bank, 1999.

¹⁵ Dennis Rondinelli, 'Government Decentralization in Comparative Perspective: Theory and Practice in Developing Countries,' *International Review of Administrative Science*, 47:2 (1981), pp.133-145.

¹⁶ World Bank, *World Bank Experience with Rural development*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank, Operations Evaluation Department, 1987.

interest in, or resistance to, adopting the decision to decentralise have a much more direct influence on the democratising effects of the decentralist reforms.¹⁷

In this direction, Stephan Haggard sees decentralisation as the result of a negotiation of interests among politicians at different governmental levels (presidents, legislators and politicians at the central and municipal levels). His thesis is that the politicians at each level seek to augment or maintain their power to influence (directly or indirectly) decision-making related to the distribution of functions and resources, orienting the reforms to strengthening their own hegemony or political career.¹⁸ In this regard, the structure of the political system in its inter-governmental relations and decision-making influences the levels of democratisation reached by the decentralisation.

Other studies mention the context of developing countries as a factor that has an impact on the ideal form of the decentralisation, as well as the real form it takes. According to the authors, the stability of the democratic regime in question affects the efficient administration of public resources and the accountability of the local governments (specifically the levels of political violence and fraudulent or irregular elections). The studies conclude that the existence of arenas of participation is not a sufficient condition for the success of decentralisation if the institutions that back the local authorities are permeated by clientelist relations or co-opted by armed actors.¹⁹

Decentralisation in Colombia and the rest of Latin America has been understood as a process through which powers, functions and resources are gradually transferred from the central level of the state, on behalf of greater autonomy and leadership of the regions and municipalities in policy decision-making and implementation, as well as more direct participation by the citizenry in managing local public affairs.²⁰ According to this argument, it was expected that the reforms implemented in Colombia in the late seventies would produce changes in the formal political system, specifically a closer relationship between citizens and rulers.

The decentralisation process that got underway in Colombia in the early eighties was framed within the general aim of recovering the state's legitimacy through the modernisation of the political, administrative and fiscal structures. The process set two specific objectives: improve the provision of local public goods and services through the transfer of resources and functions from the central government level to the municipalities; and deepen democracy in the municipal sphere through the creation of arenas and mechanisms that would permit citizens to participate in governmental decisions.²¹ The aims of the decentralist reforms

¹⁷ Michele De Vries, 'The rise and fall of decentralization: A comparative analysis of arguments and practices in European countries,' *European Journal of Political Research*, 38 (2000), pp.193-223.

¹⁸ Eliza Willis, Christopher da C.B & Stephan Haggard, 'The politics of decentralization in Latin America,' *Latin American Research Review*, 34:1 (1999), pp. 7-55. According to Stephan Haggard, the decentralisation model adopted or its characteristics (the fields or levels to which the approved reforms refer) depend largely on the structure of political parties. For example, if the political leaders of a given party are organised at the sub-national levels, the politicians from the same party who occupy positions (executive or legislative) at the national level will tend to make decisions that benefit local interests and demands. On the contrary, if the political leaders are organized at the national level, the decisions regarding reforms will be made to benefit the interests of national elites more.

¹⁹ Junaid Ahmad, *Rethinking Decentralization in Developing Countries*, Washington DC: World Bank, 1998.

²⁰ Luis Javier Orjuela, 'La descentralización en Colombia: paradigma para la eficiencia y legitimidad del Estado,' in John Dugas y Angélica Ocampo, *et al., Los caminos de la descentralización. Diversidad y retos de la transformación municipal*, Bogotá: Universidad de Los Andes – Departamento de Ciencia Política, 1992, p. 37.

²¹ Alberto Maldonado, 'Avances y resultados de la descentralización política en Colombia,' *Documento Territorial*, 52, Bogotá: Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2001. According to Edgar Salas, the orientation

posited from the outset the need to democratise the political system to make it more inclusive, promoting the participation of third party forces in the spaces of political representation, as well as promoting electoral and civic participation.

The first objective arose as a response to two concrete facts: the accelerated growth of central government finances resulting from the growing local demands for expanded public services; and the political unrest generated by the low coverage level of basic services such as water, education and health services.²² The second objective reflected the need to promote a local public administration more responsive to citizens' demands and more open to participation. There was also a desire to increase the possibilities of third political forces to hold elected posts, and to generate propitious spaces for the consolidation of new political movements.²³

To that end, the political reforms extended the electoral competition to posts that were previously named at the central government level (direct election of mayors in 1988 and of governors in 1991) and strengthened civic participation at the local level (local administrative boards and municipal planning councils were created, among others).

Decentralisation was also conceived as a strategy to surmount the social crisis and political instability of the time. This was reflected in generalised violence, an intensification of the internal armed conflict and increasing social protests associated with the state's inability to satisfy the citizenry's demands for the provision of public goods and services.²⁴

Three stages in the design of decentralisation in Colombia summarise the development of the reforms geared to fulfil these objectives. The first, which covered from the mid-seventies to the early eighties, involved *fiscal* measures to strengthen municipal finances. The main reforms approved in that stage are contained in Law 14 of 1983, which modified the municipal tax scheme (especially land tax) to increase the municipalities' collection levels and make the tax system more elastic. Law 12 of 1986 regulated the transfer of value added tax (IVA) to the municipalities and established parameters for investing this tax income.

The *political* and *administrative* reforms developed in the mid-eighties, which define the second stage, contained the main advances with respect to participation and some municipal responsibilities for service provision. Among the most important reforms was Law 11 of 1986, which regulated the direct election of mayors and established mechanisms for community participation in local decisions (among them Local Administrative Boards). Other reforms to the 1996 Constitution deepened political decentralisation through the development of civic participation mechanisms (the popular initiative, Municipal Planning

proposed by the Colombian model is: administration-participation = local democracy-efficiency, understanding that decentralisation expresses these two final aspects and that the reforms are designed to strengthen of administration and participation through specific mechanisms and arenas ('Evaluación de la descentralización: componente de capacidad institucional,' in Departamento Nacional de Planeación, *Evaluación de la descentralización municipal en Colombia: balance de una década*, Tomo II, Bogota: DNP, 2002).

²² Richard Bird, 'Colombia: the central role of the central government in fiscal decentralization,' in Richard Bird & François Vaillancourt (eds), *Fiscal Decentralization in Developing Countries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.172.

²³ DNP, *Evaluación de la descentralización municipal en Colombia: balance de una década*, Tomo I, Bogota: DNP, 2002.

²⁴ Over 90% of the civic work stoppages occurring between 1971 and 1981 demanded better public service coverage and quality (Pedro Santana, 'El desarrollo desigual de las regiones y el movimiento cívico en Colombia,' *Revista Controversia*, 107-108 (1983).

Councils, the open town forum, recall of the mandate, the referendum, popular consultation and the plebiscite).²⁵ The new Constitution also established the direct election of governors.

During the third stage, laws were implemented that regulated the dispositions of the 1991 Constitution and other administrative and fiscal reforms. These delegated greater responsibility to the municipalities for public service provision and social investment;²⁶ accompanied by an increase in resource transfers from the central level to the municipalities (an amount that currently represents over 50% of their income, rising from approximately 2% of the GDP in 1990 to almost 7% in 1997).²⁷ The analysis of electoral behaviour, addressing the concern about the need to democratise Colombia's formal political system, permits an approximation to some of the expected changes following the implanting of reforms that sought to expand the party system and include citizens more in political decision-making.

Methodological Precisions

This research concentrates on some variables of electoral behaviour in the municipal sphere: level of electoral participation in the election of mayors, electoral support obtained by the major and effective number of parties. Some effects of the reforms applied to the formal political system (direct election of mayors as of 1988 and of governors based on the 1991 Constitution) can be examined through these variables, as they are indicators of the opening up of the system and hence of electoral democracy.

The scope of the reforms to open up Colombia's formal political system can be summarised in three points: a) widening of the possibilities for political forces outside the bipartite system to participate in the electoral competition and in governmental decision-making; b) creation of formal local channels of participation that permit the social sectors and groups to express their demands and preferences, influence decision-making and elect their rulers; c) strengthening of the electoral backing of local governments to improve their levels of governance and encourage more legitimate public administration.

With respect to the first point, the effective number of parties measures how far the system has or has not allowed different movements and parties access to the arenas of political representation. But the issue is not one of an 'ingenuous count' of how many parties succeeded in obtaining representation, but rather the effective number of parties in the arenas of representation. For that purpose, we used the index developed by Laakso and Taagepera, whose construction "requires an operative definition of the number of electoral parties that depends only on the proportion of votes they obtain".²⁸ Through this measure, the relative

²⁵ Tools were also created with the new Constitution so that public service users could learn about and oversee the management of the companies responsible for providing these services, and the contracts between the administrations and civic organisations.

²⁶ Law 60 of 1993 establishes that the municipalities must earmark at least 30% of their transfers for obligatory investment to education, 20% to health, 20% to drinking water and sanitation, 15% to housing and the remaining 20% to investment in the sectors mentioned. Law 100 of the same year assigned new responsibilities to the municipalities and created participation committees for affairs related to health, while Law 115 of 1994 modified the functions with respect to education issues.

²⁷ Fabio Sánchez, *Diagnóstico de la capacidad de los gobiernos locales en Colombia Bogotá*, a consultancy report presented to the IDB, 2000.

²⁸ Arendt Lijphart, *Sistemas electorales y sistemas de Partidos. Un estudio de veintisiete democracias 1945-1990*, Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1994.

size of the parties can be measured, letting the proportion of votes they obtained determine their weight.²⁹

The level of electoral participation helps identify how involved the different sectors and social groups are in formal decision-making processes about local political life, such as the election of rulers. Finally, the electoral backing of the elected mayor has to do with political contexts associated with the candidates' popularity, although strong voter backing for a given candidate can also be associated with anti-democratic political practices such as patronage. This variable permits the identification of relations of proximity between governors and governed.

Table 1 explains how the indicators were calculated for each of the mentioned variables.

Table 1.

Variables	Indicator
Diversity of political forces in arenas of local representation.	Effective number of parties (Council members)
Change of parties or political forces in the municipal government from one election to the next.	Alternation in municipal governments (change of party sign)
Electoral participation.	Number of voters relative to the electoral potential (mayoral office)
Electoral backing for the mayor elected.	Representativity: Number of votes obtained by the mayor elected relative to the total votes (mayoral office)

The sample is made up of 870 municipalities out of the approximately 1,082 comprising the national total (in other words, approximately 80%).³⁰ The regional and population

²⁹ According to Laakso and Taagepera: "In a bipartite system with two equally strong parties, the effective number of parties is exactly 2.00. If one party is considerably stronger than the other, with a respective percentage of votes or seats of, for example, 70% and 30%, the effective number of parties is 1.72, a figure that agrees with our own intuitive judgement that moves us from a pure bipartite system toward a single-party system. Similarly, with three exactly equal parties, the formula for the effective number gives us a value of 3.00. If one of these parties is weaker than the other two, the effective number of parties will have a value between 2.00 and 3.00, depending on the relative force of the third party" (Lijphart, 1994, pp. 114-118). The formula is:

$$\text{Effective Number of Parties} = \frac{1}{\sum_i e_i^2}$$

in which e is the proportion of seats of party i.

For a critique of this indicator, see Juan Molinar, 'Counting the Number of parties: alternative index,' *American Political Science Review*, 85:4 (1991), pp.1383-1391.

³⁰ Municipalities with lost values of no more than 2 different variables for the same year were included (municipalities with lost values in the alternation variable were not included, since its 'unpredictable' nature does not allow this value to be calculated). We estimated 38 data in 13 municipalities, no value for the first year of the series (1988), since it is not possible to establish behavioural parameters for the first datum of any period. The estimation of missing data was done via two methods: the SPSS linear regression method for the values on the right side (2000), including the values of the variable in question for the previous years in the equation as independent variables (the value of the adjusted r greater than 0.6 in the equation allows this procedure to be used without any problem). A similar procedure was applied for the intermediary values (1992, 1994, 1997), using the cubic splines method, which calculates the data based on the variable's regression curve, taking the values of the immediately previous year and the one following the one being estimated to reduce the error in the curve's tendency to the maximum.

distribution of the sample is adjusted to that of the country, and data were included for all local elections held since 1998, a total of five (1988, 1992, 1994, 1997 and 2000).³¹

The statistical analysis of this work is aimed at verifying if, for the Colombian case, the relationship between electoral variables on the one hand, and decentralisation, violence and socio-economic factors on the other, fulfils the theoretical assumptions. For that purpose, some relations were identified that have been relevant in the theoretical explanation of the behaviour of certain electoral variables, specifically those related to levels of participation and number of parties.

The first objective was to test whether the electoral participation levels and effective number of parties of the municipalities are jointly explained by the fiscal aspects of decentralisation, the socio-economic characteristics of the municipalities and the factors of violence.³² Fiscal decentralisation is measured through the *fiscal effort* of the municipalities (municipal tax income as a percentage of the municipalities' total income) and through the degree of fiscal dependence of the municipalities on the recourses they receive through transfers (percentage of municipal income from current income of the nation over percentage of municipal income from transfers). The first permits identification of the municipal administration's capacity to generate its own resources and respond to local needs autonomously, while the second allows the importance of the transfers in the municipalities' finances (i.e. the degree of their dependence on resources from the central level, to be examined).³³

We also wanted to test the influence of decentralisation on electoral behaviour, whether the transfer of resources to the local level can generate greater levels of electoral participation and increase the effective number of parties. The supposition is that the resources become incentives for the politicians and movements seeking to consolidate support among voters as well as for the citizens who perceive the vote as a mechanism for directly influencing local political life. Similarly, the effective number of parties tends to be smaller in small

³¹ Although there were elections in 1990, this year is not included because the National Civil Status Registry, which is responsible for electoral information, did not publish those data. There is only information for 40 municipalities and capital cities, which is not a significant sample.

³² The municipalities' socio-economic characteristics are measured by population size, the index of unmet needs, the GINI or property concentration index. Violence is measured by the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants and the total armed actions committed by guerrillas. Due to the lack of specific available data relating to violence associated with paramilitaries (rather than guerrillas), we have been unable to include separate calculations for their involvement. However, where their actions have led to death, these are included in the homicide figures. We do not intend to imply by this that only guerrilla groups have an impact in the levels of violence, and have sought to include qualitative data in our analysis to show the electoral impact of paramilitary violence.

³³ Although the ideal would be to consider decentralisation in its political dimension to explain electoral behaviour, it is impossible to establish different degrees of decentralisation in this dimension, as the reforms in this field granted the same faculty of electing local executive and legislative entities and the same mechanisms of civic participation to all municipalities. The fiscal dimension of decentralisation permits the establishment of degrees and hence differences among the municipalities, which is why fiscal variables were included in the model. There are different ways to consider fiscal decentralisation, depending on the type of transfers that the national government makes to the sub-national governments. According to the fiscal federalism theory, such transfers can be: a) freely assigned by the recipient government, or b) conditioned by the transferring government to a determined application or to the fiscal effort made by the government receiving the transfers. The fiscal indicators considered in this research refer to the latter type of transfers. See in this regard, Richard & Peggy Musgrave, *Public Finance in Theory and Practice*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1989; Wallace Oates, *Fiscal Federalism*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991; Presidencia de la República-Departamento Nacional de Planeación, Colombia, *Descentralización y Federalismo Fiscal. Informe Final de la Misión para la Descentralización*, Bogota, 1992; República de Colombia, Comisión de Racionalización del Gasto y de las Finanzas Públicas, *Informe Final*, Bogota: Ministerio de Hacienda, 1997.

municipalities while the political spectrum is generally wider in the intermediate cities and large urban centres.

We wanted to test whether the electoral participation levels show an inverse relation to the municipalities' population size, as there is more direct and daily contact between citizens and rulers or political leaders in small municipalities.

The selection of these variables to see changes in electoral behaviour and their relation to democratisation of Colombia's political system has an underpinning that goes beyond the mentioned characteristics of the formal system in Colombia. A recent study on democracy in Latin America, undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), uses similar variables to construct an index of electoral democracy, which encompasses measures related to citizens' political rights that have to do with the constitution of the government, electoral participation, electoral competition and electoral representation.

These components are measured through the following sub-components or indicators: right to vote, clean elections, free elections and elected public posts. Although the type of measuring tends to be more qualitative than that with which this study works, the conceptual referent is very similar, as the variables selected here also reveal the state-civil society relations through formal participation channels.³⁴

Together with the electoral democracy index, the UNDP study constructed three new indices that correspond to other spheres of civil rights included in the definition of democracy elaborated in the investigation. These new indices are: a new accountability by the government officials (it measures citizens' rights regarding the exercise of government), an index on civil rights and one on social rights.

According to the research focus, the political, civil and social spheres of citizenship permit the development of democracy as a whole to be measured as a political regime in its three basic dimensions:

The political regime consists of the organisation of political power in a particular society, and therefore in a relationship between State and society ... [I]t concerns institutional relations aimed at the resolution of three basic ...problems. On the one hand, the government or system or form of government, that is to say, how and who governs ...On the other hand, the definition of the relations between individuals and the State and the appropriate spheres of each. Finally, the processing of conflicts and social demands.³⁵

This definition of a democratic regime is key to understanding the importance of the electoral democracy index, as it is possible through its indicators to observe the degree to which the State guarantees citizens' rights associated with the election of government. For the case of Latin America, the measurements done in the 22 countries under investigation led the authors to conclude that, despite maintaining a minimum of electoral guarantees, the other indices demonstrate a deficient development of democracy:

³⁴ Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), 'La democracia en América Latina. Hacia una democracia de ciudadanas y ciudadanos', April 2004, p.24, at <http://democracia.undp.org/Informe/Default.asp?Menu=15&Idioma=1>.

³⁵ PNUD (2004), p.226.

The deficient workings of Latin American democracies, with regards the offering of public services and the improving of the quality of life and human security, is a consequence of the deficient capacity of the state for the protection and promotion of the citizenry in its social, civic and political spheres.³⁶

Behaviour of the political variables during the period.

The data show that there were no significant variations in the levels of political participation throughout the nineties. The national averages during the period reached levels greater than 50%, which shows that an important proportion of the citizens eligible to vote turned to the established political decision-making spaces. Independent of the motivations, this has had a direct influence on municipal government affairs. Taking the national average for each year, Figure 1 shows that participation ranges between 55% and 72%. From the beginning of the nineties, average participation dropped, remaining relatively constant in the ensuing years.

Between 1988 and 1990, over 70% of the municipalities present participation levels of greater than 60%, which reflects a performance of this variable in the first two mayoral elections that favoured the democratisation of the political system. Nonetheless, this behaviour did not remain stable, as over half of the municipalities show electoral participation values below 60% between 1972 and 1977. It is important to mention that Colombia has presented electoral participation levels close to 50% since 1974 for all elections, without any significant alterations being observed.

Finally, it is important to stress that the data show an inverse relationship between the population size of the municipalities and electoral participation levels. It is observed for all years that average participation in the small municipalities (population categories 1, 2 and 3)³⁷ exceeds 50%, with values even greater than 70% in 1988. In contrast, the larger municipalities (categories 5 and 6) record averages of less than 50%, showing that there are differences in voter behaviour between predominantly urban areas and the rural zones.

Regarding electoral backing for the mayor, the information in Figure 1 shows that the candidates elected during the nineties received more than half of the total votes, indicating that the rulers in general enjoy the support of a significant group that has expressed its preferences through the vote. This variable did not show significant changes during the decade, which indicates that the rulers are elected with a significant consensus among voters, at least at the local level.

³⁶ PNUD (2004), p.238. According to observations on the thesis of democracy as social organisation, Jennifer Mc Coy proposes that “the state of democracy is defined by the level of development of the citizenry, that is to say, what proportion of the citizens enjoy the rights that are implicit in the three spheres of citizenship, what strength these rights have, and in what proportion of territory and population the state has the capacity to protect and promote these rights” (PNUD, 2004, p.235).

³⁷ We took as a reference the National Planning Department’s following classification of municipalities into population categories: municipalities with a population inferior or equal to 5,000 inhabitants are grouped in category 1; between 5,000 and 20,000 inhabitants in category 2; between 20,000 and 50,000 in category 3; between 50,000 and 100,000 in category 4; between 100,000 and 500,000 in category 5; and greater than 500,000 in category 6. This classification will be referred to again later on for the explicative model.

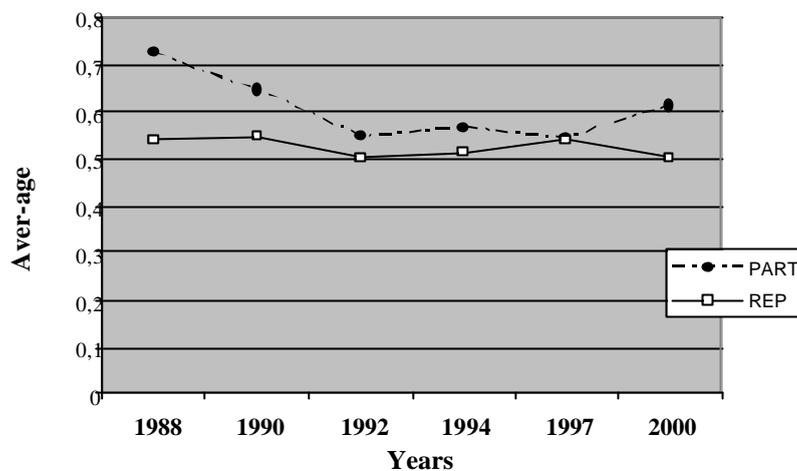


Figure 1: Percentages of electoral participation and of the mayor's representativity, 1988-2000

Source: Values calculated by authors based on electoral data from the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

Finally, it is important to mention that the lowest electoral support averages occurred in 1992 and 2000, which could be associated with a greater dispersion of the votes among multiple candidates or parties, given that the highest average number of effective parties appeared precisely in those years, as is observed in Figure 2.

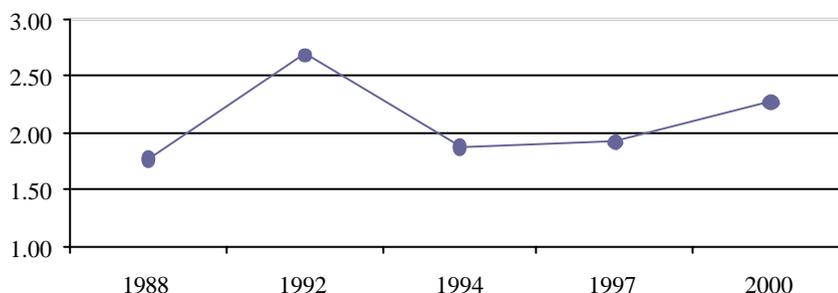


Figure 2: Average effective number of parties, 1988-2000

Source: Values calculated by authors based on electoral data of the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

Regarding the effective number of parties, it is observed that the averages of this variable were below two at the end of the eighties, with a marked rise in 1992, possibly due to the push given by the normative framework of the 1991 Constitution to the creation of new political forces. In 1994 and 1997, the values of the effective number of parties dropped again to levels very close to those of 1988, while at the start of the next decade it reached an average greater than two parties. These tendencies indicate that the Colombian party system has ceased being exclusively bipartite in the local sphere, as around 30% of the municipalities present systems with more than 2.5 parties on average throughout the nineties. In contrast, close to 10% of the municipalities in 1988 presented this tendency while 60% registered systems with fewer than two parties.

Table 2: Distribution of Municipalities (%) by intervals of Effective Number of Parties

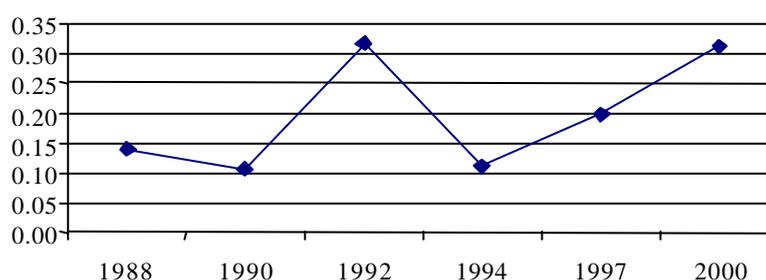
Source: Authors' own data calculated based on electoral statistics of the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

Intervals	1988	1992	1994	1997	2000
1 to 1.47	0.30	0.15	0.30	0.30	0.20
1.47 to 1.96	0.29	0.18	0.28	0.27	0.22
1.96 to 2.45	0.30	0.23	0.25	0.25	0.23
> 2.45	0.11	0.44	0.17	0.18	0.35

This tendency acquired very important levels in 1992 and 2000, which can be corroborated by examining the behaviour of this variable in its intervals (Table 2).³⁸ For these years, the proportion of municipalities concentrated in the interval with more than 2.5 parties respectively corresponds to 44% and 35% of the total sample. On the other hand, although the proportion of municipalities with systems approximating multi-party ones is lower than 20% in 1994 and 1997, that is significant compared to the tendencies at the end of the eighties (11%). While cases have appeared that approximate multi-party systems, single- or two-party systems still clearly persist in a significant part of the country's municipalities.

The effective number of parties variable permits the party system in the Municipal Councils to be characterized, showing the number of political forces in accord with their weight within these representational arenas. Nonetheless, this variable does not allow the party or parties making up that system to be identified, and it is a fundamental factor in discussing the importance of the changes within Colombia's political system. To examine these changes in greater detail, it is thus essential to examine which political forces have a presence throughout the national territory and the proportion in which they have had access to the municipal governments.

Two additional variables are included in the analysis of electoral behaviour. One permits us to observe the presence of non-traditional political parties and movements in executive municipal posts throughout the period. The other shows the historic predominance of the political forces, calculated based on the number of times a party or movement has won the municipal mayoral race.

**Figure 3: Proportion of municipalities that voted non-traditional parties into the mayor's office**

Source: Our own data calculated based on electoral statistics of the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

Figure 3 shows a favourable behaviour regarding new parties and movements. Non-traditional political forces won mayoral offices in 20% of the municipalities in 1997 and 31% in 2000. In contrast, during 1988, 1990 and 1994, almost all municipalities (90%) had

³⁸ Four intervals are considered; from 1 to 1.47; from 1.47 to 1.96; from 1.96 to 2.45 and greater than 2.45.

mayors elected under the banner of one of the two traditional parties (Liberal and Conservative).

Although a broader party spectrum was expected in the municipal arenas of political representation with the first election of mayors, third forces only gained access to the mayor's office in only 14% of them. Additionally, there was a backsliding in 1990, as only 11% of the municipalities elected mayors from non-traditional parties.

With respect to the party predominance variable, it is observed that one of the two traditional parties (Liberal and Conservative) was predominant in 52.7% of the municipalities during the period examined. For the statistical analysis of this variable, a party is considered predominant when it wins the majority of the elections in a municipality over a period of time (i.e. 5 or 6 elections for the total 6 electoral periods considered). This means that the bulk of the country's municipalities still have a tradition of voting for the Liberal or Conservative Party, which can be explained by the bipartite characteristics of the Colombian political system and the fact that there is no third party so far that disputes this tradition at the national level in an ongoing manner.

Explicative models of electoral behaviour

To explain electoral behaviour, regressions were made for panel-type data, appropriate when crosscutting information is available over time. The regressions consider two dependent variables – electoral participation and effective number of parties – and the objective is to explain their behaviour based on the following independent variables taken together: population size, fiscal decentralisation (through indicators of fiscal effort and the dependence of municipal income relative to transfers), unmet basic needs (UBN) index, GINI coefficient of property concentration, homicide rate and military actions of the guerrillas (Revolutionary Armed Forces – FARC, National Liberation Army – ELN and Popular Liberation Army – EPL). These explicative variables are socio-economic factors of the municipalities as well as aspects related to decentralisation and violence in the local sphere.

In the case of the effective number of parties, the electoral district's size and the spatial factor were also considered in order to correct interpretive errors associated with spatial effects on the behaviour of the dependent variables, specifically spatial dependence (known as spatial auto-correlation) and spatial structure (spatial heterogeneity).³⁹ Finally, the regional factor was incorporated into the model, through which the municipalities are grouped into four regions: Andean, Pacific, Caribbean and Eastern.

For the selection of the independent variables, we took into account some studies on electoral behaviour or party system that give importance to contextual factors as explicative elements, for example, the normative framework, the degree of development and the socio-political violence. In this direction, a UNDP study on democracy in Latin America considers that diverse factors associated with political culture become relevant in the analysis of electoral

³⁹ The objective in specifying a spatial econometric model is to relate a variable in a spatial point with the values of the variable observed in other points of the same space. In a context of temporal series, this is obtained through the use of a phase lag whose function is to set the variable back one or more periods of time. In space, things are not so easy, because a variable can be displaced in different directions, which is why a spatially weighted matrix that permits points of space to be related with various distinct localities is used, without having to worry about choosing the spatial dependence *a priori*.

democracy insofar as they affect the conditions for the exercise of the right to vote, free competition and electoral practices.

With respect to the party system, some studies explain its size and composition based on the electoral system or the normative characteristics of the political regime. For example, according to Lijphart, Taagepera, y Ordeshook and Shevetsova, the electoral system, specifically the magnitude of the electoral district, has an influence on the number of parties, although it is not clear if it is the only determinant factor.⁴⁰

Other authors have rather focused on the emergence of new political forces. In this perspective, Simon Hug, in the book *Altering Party Systems*, makes an inventory of the different investigations that attempt to explain the emergence of new political forces, making it possible to create a list of the variables that could be considered relevant. The author's hypothesis is that the formation of a new political party is the result of the interaction among the existing parties and outside groups that decided to create a new party. This interaction occurs in a structured context, influenced by institutional or legal constraints and by the existing parties and, states Hug, in contexts in which uncertainty plays an important role for the parties.⁴¹

The author makes reference to other authors, such as Pinard, who associate the emergence of new parties with contexts in which a single party predominate,⁴² the relation between the emergence of new issues in the political arena and parties that assume these debates as their struggle. In addition, reference is made in Hug to other works such as that of Hamel and Robertson,⁴³ who find a direct relationship between the size of the population and the number of new political affairs that in turn stimulate the formation of new parties. In the theoretical aspect, this study also examines the relevance of income inequality levels to explain the emergence of new political forces.⁴⁴

In this regard, the indicators of violence included in the explicative model for the effective number of parties variable (the homicide rate and the military actions of the guerrillas), as well as the size of the electoral district and the regional factor permit us to approximate these theoretical postulates for the Colombian case.

With respect to electoral participation, the majority of empirical studies refer to the effects of democratic participation on income distribution, as well as on public goods and services in the local sphere. The most common postulates hold that greater participation through the vote results in lower levels of inequality and greater levels of social well-being for the marginal sectors.⁴⁵ Following this explicative logic, one would also expect there to be a relation

⁴⁰ Lijphart (1994); Rein Taagepera, 'The number of parties as a function of heterogeneity and electoral system', *Comparative Political Studies*, 32:5 (Agosto 1999), pp.531-548; Peter Ordeshook and Olga Shevetsova, 'Ethnic heterogeneity, district magnitude, and the number of parties', *American Journal of Political Science*, 38:1 (February 1994), pp.100-123.

⁴¹ Simon Hug, *Altering Party Systems. Strategic Behavior and the Emergence of New Political Parties in Western democracies*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001.

⁴² Maurice Pinard, 'Third Parties in Canada Revisited: A Rejoinder and Elaboration of the Theory of One Party Dominance', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 6 (1973), pp.439-460.

⁴³ Robert Harmel & John D. Robertson, 'Formation and Success of New Parties', *International Political Science Review*, 6:4 (1985), pp. 501-523.

⁴⁴ For a detailed review see Hug (2001), Introduction.

⁴⁵ Dennis Mueller & Thomas Stratmann, 'The economic effects of democratic participation', Center for Economic Studies and Info Institute for Economic Research, *Working Paper* 656:2 (2002). See also Andrew Foster & Mark R. Rosenzweig, 'Democratization, Decentralization and the Distribution of Local Public Goods

between electoral participation and inequality in the distribution of income and social well-being. In other words, that greater levels of inequality and low levels of well-being would stimulate participation by economically depressed social sectors that are more marginalised from access to economic, social and cultural rights.

In this regard, the socio-economic indicators such as GINI and UBN would be associated with the electoral participation levels recorded at the municipal level for this study.

Other studies mention population size, the characteristics of the locality's political culture and violence⁴⁶ as relevant factors to explain the electoral participation levels. Thus the study by Richard Crook and James Manor poses a direct relationship between the social and political context, the formal structure of the decentralised institutions, their relations with higher levels of the political system and the resources or administrative capacity and strengthening of civil society, among others on the one hand, and participation in formal channels on the other.⁴⁷ Diverse authors have examined the analyses of the influence of population size on participation levels.⁴⁸ A relationship between these two variables has also been identified in the previous section of this document.

Effective Number of Parties

It can be observed in Table 3 that the size of the electoral district,⁴⁹ the homicide rate and the spatial factor were the significant variables, with a 99% level of significance. The adjusted R^2 of 0.2 shows that the model is solid to explain this electoral variable.

The information contained in Table 2 permits it to be stated that, in the first place, the effective number of parties in collegial bodies tends to be greater when the electoral district is larger. This factor determines the number of seats for which the different parties can run, and in that sense also determines the number of parties that can have access to these public corporations. In other words, the fewer the number of seats available, the fewer the number tends to be of parties that can effectively gain access to them.

In the second place, there is an inversely proportional relationship between the effective number of parties and the homicide rate. The effective number of parties drops when the violence levels increase, possibly because they imply reduced guarantees of a free race for popular election posts and free and fair elections themselves at that juncture. In addition, it can be said that the influence of the spatial factor indicates the importance of voters' political tendencies in neighbouring municipalities in explaining the effective number of parties.

These relations between violence, spatial aspects and the size of the electoral district that is part of the normative electoral framework on the one hand, and the effective number of parties on the other, ratify the propositions contained in the different studies examined by Simon Hug.⁵⁰

in a Poor Rural Economy', Philadelphia: Penn Institute for Economic Research, University of Pennsylvania, 2001.

⁴⁶ Marco Romero, *Elecciones, reforma política y garantías electorales*, 2004 (mimeo).

⁴⁷ Crook & Manor (1998).

⁴⁸ Annie Gaardsted Frandsen, *Size and electoral participation in local elections*, Department of Political Science and Public Management: University of Southern Denmark. 2003.

⁴⁹ Number of seats for collegial bodies in each municipality established by law according to population size.

⁵⁰ Hug (2001).

The main hypothesis laid out in this text, which is that there is a strong relationship between the number of parties and fiscal decentralisation factors, cannot be corroborated with empirical information for the Colombian case, since the fiscal effort and current income as a percentage of transfers variables are not statistically significant. The same thing occurs with the municipalities' socio-economic conditions (NBI and GINI), which indicates that these factors do not directly influence either electoral behaviour or, more specifically, the effective number of parties for Colombia's municipalities.

Table 3: Explicative Model of the Effective Number of Parties

Explicative Variables	Total Period (1988-2000)
Constant	0.35162* 0.21810
Political Variables	0.05867***
Magnitude of the Electoral District (ME)	0.01146
Fiscal Effort Variables	-0.22566
Tax income as a percentage of total income (FE)	0.32295
Decentralisation Variables	-0.09951
Participation in current national income as a percentage of the transfers (D)	0.17491
Socio-economic Variables	-0.00149
Unmet Basic Needs (UBN) Index	0.00209
Violence and Armed Conflict Variables	-0.00576
Military activity of the armed actors (FARC, ELN, EPL) (AGA)	0.00998
Homicide Rate (HR)	-0.00216*** 0.00082
Control Variables	0.67227***
Effective Number of Parties, spatially lagged (SAV)	0.03712
Pacific Region	0.14745* 0.08898
Caribbean Region	-0.15846* 0.09379
Eastern Region	0.32920** 0.13597
Methodology	Panel Data (Random effects)
Number of Observations	1427
Number of Observations per group	521
R²	0.2273

The right column contains the value of the coefficient for each variable and indicates whether it is significant (***) the coefficient is significantly different from 0 to 99% reliability; ** the coefficient is significantly different from 0 to 95% reliability; * the coefficient is significantly different from 0 to 90% reliability; with no asterisks the coefficient is not significantly different from 0). The value of each coefficient corresponds to the standard error.

The formula for the effective number of estimated parties is given by:

$$ENP_{i,t} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 ME_{i,t} + \hat{\beta}_2 HR_{i,t} + \hat{\beta}_3 SAV_{i,t} + \hat{E}_{i,t}$$

where

ENP	effective number of parties
b_0	represents the constant
ME	magnitude of the electoral district
HR	Homicide rate
SAV	Spatial association variable
i	Municipality indicator
t	Time indicator

According to Hug, party diversity, or the emergence of new political forces, is associated with the emergence of new issues in the political arena. In this regard, it would be expected that the greater the inequality and percentage of the population with unmet basic needs (UBN), the greater the number of parties in posts of political representation defending the different interests of the more marginal social sectors. Nonetheless, according to the statistical results presented here, it can be said that there is no relationship between party diversity and the levels of inequality and UBN, which could mean that the political issues associated with the rise of new parties has to do with types of demand other than socio-economic ones or with factors of a different nature, such as the type of leadership or the form of politicking.

The statistical proof of the direct negative effects of violence on the number of parties in the period coincides with tendencies observed in previous analyses for the elections of mayors and Council members in previous years. Marco Romero, for example, does a thorough analysis of the municipalities' electoral guarantees, examining how they are being affected by the recomposition of the internal armed conflict and the new strategies of political control used by the armed groups outside the law.⁵¹

Currently, the pressure of the irregular armed groups is affecting political representation and the composition of the party system even more (i.e., it is endangering the very existence of certain parties) as well as the distribution of votes or posts among the different political forces. Thus, for the 2003 elections, the Colombian Federation of Municipalities reported 22 municipalities with single candidates, cases in which the armed groups forced candidates from parties opposed to their political project to withdraw under threat.

Regarding the importance of the spatial factor, on the other hand, it is important to mention that the tendencies presented by given municipalities are affected by the electoral behaviour of nearby ones. This spatial factor possibly indicates a relationship between the effective number of parties and cultural factors as well as aspects associated with the socio-political context of the area in question. Party predominance, for example, has regional behaviour that can be explained by political traditions in the municipalities that influence the emergence of new parties.

⁵¹ Romero (2004). This study gathers data from the Federación Nacional de Concejales, which reports 55 Council members killed in the first 11 months of 2002 and 1,800 others displaced by violence as of that same date (81.5% of the 12,000 there are in the country). In the case of mayors, the Federación Colombiana de Municipios reports the murder of 64 local rulers between 1998 and 2003. By the latest elections for Council members and mayors, held in October 2003, this tendency not only remained but worsened: as of 7 October, 11 mayoral candidates had been killed, over 160 candidates had withdrawn and 9 sitting mayors were killed during that year. According to this same institution, between 80 and 100 mayors had gone into exile for reasons of personal security by August 2003.

In synthesis, it can be said that party diversity in Colombia's political system, measured through the effective number of parties in collegial bodies (Municipal Councils), is associated with the normative electoral framework and population size, aspects favourable to the emergence of new parties without this implying their continuity in electoral races or permanence in posts of political representation.

The levels of common violence are directly affecting the effective number of parties because there is a tendency to resolve social conflicts and differences through violence and this translates into intimidation against candidates or movements that oppose the political projects defended in this manner. Irregular armed groups are using violence in contexts of internal armed conflict to guarantee political control of the entities of political representation, which often translates into the regulation of local political life via armed means, where opposition or the exercise of differences is increasingly difficult, which would explain a limited party system in these areas.

The above demonstrates that local democracy is fragile in the framework of the current armed conflict. There are threats to the requisites included in a minimalist definition of democracy: free and fair elections, free competition for popularly elected posts, the right to elect and be elected, all of them basic indicators of the index of electoral democracy drawn up by the UNDP for Latin America.

Finally, spatial and regional factors directly affect the size of the party system insofar as political practices and traditions in Colombia seem to have similar parameters in nearby areas and are differentiated in each identified region. This result is interesting because it allows for identifying the importance of cultural and historical factors in explaining Colombia's electoral behaviour and specifically its party system.

Electoral Participation

In examining the proposed model for explaining electoral participation (Table 4), one observes that the most relevant variables overall are decentralisation, the UBN Index, the homicide rate and the guerrilla military actions.

In the first place, the decentralisation variables (the municipalities' tax income as a percentage of total income and their current income as a percentage of the transfers) are statistically significant. The relationship between the fiscal effort and electoral participation is positive; that is, the greater the level the municipalities' tax income relative to their total income, the greater the electoral participation. This could be indicating high voter interest in influencing the destination of the resources obtained through taxes in municipalities where these taxes represent an important proportion of the municipal treasury, probably because the bulk of the voters in these cases are also the contributors and because the mayor and the Municipal Council have more manoeuvring room to decide the destiny of the resources when they come from the municipality itself. This situation is different in cases where the majority of the municipality's resources come from transfers, since they have a specific destination according to what is stipulated in Law 60 of 1993.

The relationship between electoral participation and the percentage of current national income received by the municipality as a percentage of transfers is negative. This could be understood by considering that the municipality's dependence on the central level is greater

when the current national income received by the municipality represents a greater proportion of the transfers. Consequently, there could be less room for manoeuvre regarding investments for the local governments, which could be a disincentive for voters.

In the second place, with respect to socio-economic variables, the Gini index of private property concentration is not significant, contrary to the significance of the UBN index. The relationship between this latter variable and electoral participation is positive, indicating that electoral participation is greater when a larger number of basic needs are unsatisfied, which could be explained by considering that election of the mayor becomes an opportunity to improve the municipality's conditions or its citizens' quality of life. The theoretical postulates of decentralisation suggest that a closer relationship between governors and governed, or between electors and those elected, promotes more direct civic participation when there is a real possibility of affecting decision-making concerning the constitution of the government and, via it, about local politics.

On the other hand, this participation via the vote becomes an effective control mechanism by the electorate over the actions of the rulers. The relationship between high UBN levels and high participation levels could be understood in this way, indicating an electoral discontent with previous administrations that were unable to modify living conditions in the locality.

In the third place, the variables of common and armed violence included in the model were significant. Both the armed actions of the guerrillas (FARC, ELN, EPL) and the homicide rate are negatively related to electoral participation. In this regard, it is important to consider that the intervention of armed actors in electoral processes has been gaining strength as a political strategy, through either pressure on the population to vote for a specific candidate or the obstruction of participation.⁵²

⁵² Miguel García & Gary Hoskin, 'Participación Política y Guerra en Colombia. Un Análisis de las Elecciones de 2002', in Gary Hoskin, Rodolfo Masías and Miguel García (eds), *Colombia 2002: Elecciones, Comportamiento Electoral y Democracia*, Bogotá: Departamento de Ciencia Política, CESO, Fundación Konrad Adenauer, Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2003, pp. 223-262. On this aspect, Hoskin and García argue that in the 2002 elections for the chamber of representatives, "to the action of illegal armed actors (guerrilla and paramilitary) against candidates and their campaign organisations, can be added the multiple intimidations of the citizenry. These actions took two forms: to force citizens to vote for a particular candidate, or simply to impede citizens from exercising their suffrage". On the other hand, one of the results found in the study by these authors is that a relationship exists between the presence and actions of the armed actors and electoral participation levels (García & Hoskin, 2003, p.233).

Table 4: Explicative Model of Electoral Participation

Explicative Variables	Total Period (1988-2000)
Constant	0.70884*** 0.02627
Fiscal Effort Variables Tax income as a percentage of total income (FE)	0.08059*** 0.02859
Decentralisation Variables Participation in current national income as a percentage of the transfers (D)	-0.04261*** 0.01570
Socio-economic Variables Gini of private property concentration	-0.01525 0.03040
Unmet Basic Needs (UBN) Index	0.00032** 0.00018
Violence and Armed Conflict Variables Activity of the armed actors (FARC, ELN, EPL) (AGA)	-0.00339*** 0.00051
Homicide Rate (HR)	-0.00027*** 0.00004
Control Variables Population categorization	-0.04518*** 0.00347
Pacific Region	0.01958* 0.00916
Caribbean Region	0.08466*** 0.00960
Eastern Region	-0.04488*** 0.01386
Methodology	Panel Data (Random effects)
Number of Observations	3011
Number of Observations per group	688
R²	0.3208

The right column contains the value of the coefficient for each variable and indicates whether the coefficient is significant (***) the coefficient is significantly different from 0 to 99% reliability; ** the coefficient is significantly different from 0 to 95% reliability; * the coefficient is significantly different from 0 to 90% reliability; with no asterisks the coefficient is not significantly different from 0). The value of each coefficient presented below corresponds to the standard error.

The negative relationship between the participation level and violence, measured based on the activity of the armed actors, agrees with the results found by García and Hoskin, according to which a positive relationship exists between the guerrilla actions and the levels of electoral abstention.⁵³ In addition, these authors found that homicide violence also affects electoral participation. On the latter, as Table 4 shows, a significant negative relationship is observed between the homicide rate and electoral participation.

⁵³ García & Hoskin (2003).

According to the above, it could be said that the violence is affecting the democratic rules of the game, because it not only directly constrains voters, but also generates adverse conditions for the exercise of civil and political rights. For example, characteristics of the intensification of the conflict and political polarization the county is going through, such as the singling out of certain organised sectors of civil society or residents of specific territories, blockades of the free circulation of individuals by all armed actors, threats and armed confrontation, among others.

Finally the variables used as control, in other words population categorisation and being from a certain region (Pacific, Caribbean, Eastern and Andean), are also significant. Regarding the population, it was found that municipalities belonging to categories with smaller populations present higher participation levels, while those belonging to categories with larger populations register lower levels.

A possible hypothesis for this behaviour is that there is more direct contact between governors and governed in smaller municipalities, and that this generates greater incentives to participation and involvement in public affairs. It could be suggested, however, that the smaller municipalities are where clientelist relations associated with traditional forms of politicking in Colombia are more deeply rooted, and that these are a motor force for greater participation.

The formula of estimated electoral participation (EP) is given by:

$$EP_{i,t} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1 FE_{i,t} + \hat{\beta}_2 D_{i,t} + \hat{\beta}_3 UBN_{i,t} + \hat{\beta}_4 AGA_{i,t} + \hat{\beta}_5 HR_{i,t} + \hat{E}_{i,t}$$

where

- $\hat{\beta}_0$ represents the constant
- FE is the variable representing the fiscal effort
- D represents fiscal decentralisation, measured as a percentage of the current national income that the municipality receives over income from transfers
- UBN unmet basic needs
- AGA armed guerrilla activity
- HR homicide rate
- i municipality indicator
- t time indicator

In synthesis, the results of the explicative model for the level of electoral participation in the popular election of mayors shows that violence and the internal armed conflict are affecting the guarantees for the exercise of civil and political rights in the Colombian municipalities. Not only because the right to vote is being coerced by the armed actors but also because in many regions, above all the rural areas to which the guerrilla groups are retreating, this right is vetoed.

On the other hand, the intensification of the armed conflict and the current security policies applied by the government at the national level are generating conditions adverse to the free exercise of civil and political rights. The configuration of a humanitarian crisis with many dimensions makes the development of participatory processes in local settings more difficult.

The importance of the UBN Index reveals the interest of sectors with difficulties accessing economic, social and cultural rights in influencing the political decisions that directly affect them. It can be understood as a process of social control over the rulers' actions in municipalities where the mayor has a broader margin for deciding the destination of resources, or where there is less dependence on transfers from the central level. Fiscal decentralisation seems to have benefited electoral participation when it has permitted greater autonomy for local governments in drawing and distributing public resources.

Conclusions

This study attempts to show some of the tendencies of electoral behaviour with respect to decentralisation, violence and other socio-economic factors of the Colombian municipalities. In this regard, it was possible to contrast some theoretical postulates and findings of studies on decentralisation and electoral behaviour based on empirical information for the decade of the nineties.

Specifically, the statistical analysis was aimed at explaining the political participation level and effective number of parties variables as the result of various different factors: indicators of decentralisation, of a socio-economic nature, of violence, and those related to electoral norms. The study's main thesis is that these electoral variables cannot be explained via decentralisation in Colombia, but that decentralisation has only a relative impact on the tendencies observed in the formal political system, together with other factors.

At a descriptive level, the study showed that the highest levels of participation during the period were recorded in 1988, when the popular election of mayors was instituted, and they were never repeated despite the increase observed again in 2000. The relative success of the 1986 decentralising reforms in their first year of application is reflected primarily in the electoral participation levels, indicating the incorporation of a significant proportion of citizens into the formal mechanisms for electing a government, particularly at the beginning of the process. Nonetheless, this tendency did not continue over time.

On the other hand, a positive impact of the 1991 constitutional reforms are observed in the incorporation of different forces into the political system, as there is an increase in the effective number of parties as of 1992 that indicates the move from a bipartite system to one with more than 2 parties. The access of different political forces to popularly elected posts (mayoral offices) is a constant pattern throughout the period and common to the majority of municipalities of major population size. Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that this could be accompanied by a growing de-institutionalisation of the party system in the past decade. It is also necessary to note that, despite the changes observed over the decade, the national average of the effective number of parties for the period is approximately 2.5 parties, which indicates that the Colombian system continues approximating the bipartite scheme more than a multi-party one.

At an explicative level, the results of the model for the effective number of parties show that the bulk of Colombia's municipalities do not validate the hypothesis according to which fiscal decentralisation functions as an incentive for the creation of new political movements that would be competing for direct influence on the distribution of public resources (whether for personal benefit or for a specific social sector).

In contrast, factors associated with the characteristics of the electorate's political culture, such as the regional context and geographical proximity to other municipalities with similar behaviour, show greater weight in explaining the number of parties. Thus, the existence of a political culture in the rural areas and in determined regions may have a large influence on the size of the party system.

On the other hand, the results showed that the levels of common violence directly influenced the effective number of parties. The explicative weight of homicide rates on this variable seems to indicate that full conditions do not exist for the exercise of difference in violent settings and that this is being reflected in the political field. In the longer term, the relation between homicide rates and the effective number of parties shows a context that constitutes a threat for the exercise of civil and political rights related to the constitution of the government and becomes part of the basic dimensions of the democratic regime.

With respect to electoral participation, the explicative model showed the negative and direct effects of violence and the armed internal conflict on the exercise of the right to vote. This could mean that political control via armed means is consolidating through direct coercion of voters or is degenerating into contexts of confrontation between the different armed groups that impedes political participation within institutional channels. In any event, the relationship between violence, conflict and electoral participation shows that the forms of political control via armed means are affecting democracy and local government.

The above results pose challenges in interpreting the changes produced within the Colombian party system. First, they reflect the importance of factors such as political culture or regional patterns that have not been explored with sufficient rigour. Second, they make evident the difficulty that decentralising reforms face in violent contexts, where state control of the national territory is precarious, clientelist practices have mediated the relations between electors and elected, and irregular armed groups are co-opting the institutions via different regulatory mechanisms aimed at ensuring political control in the local sphere.

On the other hand, the results regarding the analysis of electoral behaviour show that the meaning of the different indicators (electoral backing, level of electoral participation and effective number of parties) is complex because it becomes necessary to contextualise these results always in the light of qualitative case analyses. Combining qualitative techniques with quantitative ones could make a difference with a more complete interpretation of electoral behaviour.

Finally, any discussion about the meanings of democracy in Colombia requires a more in-depth analysis, beyond the need to promote an opening of the formal political system. The data presented here are an approximation to these latter aspects, but it is necessary to examine others related to the weakness of the institutions in guaranteeing the exercise of citizenship in the social, civil and political spheres, above all in the rights referring to the constitution of the government. The debate about the meaning of democracy in Colombia must suggest responses for dealing with the weaknesses of the local institutions, when they are permeated or obstructed by actions of the armed groups and by political actors who reproduce practices such as clientelism or patronage. In this context, it is important to develop control mechanisms such as inspectorships or the accompaniment of electoral participation processes by international organisations.

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