Expeditionary Culture Field Guide

COLOMBIA

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and successfully achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information it contains will help you understand the unique cultural features of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for achieving mission success (Photo: Then-US Navy Secretary Mabus meets then-Colombian Minister of Defense Pinzon in Bogota).

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 is the "Culture General" section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Andean Ridge region of South America.

Part 2 is the "Culture Specific" section, which describes unique cultural features of Colombian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: US Army soldier teaches machine gun repair to Colombian Army personnel).

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value─freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and belief systems into categories─what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"—in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains–which include kinship, language and communication, social and political systems and others (see chart on next page)─as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even categorize those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-

based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the

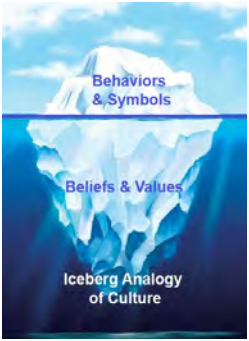
world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true—regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

Core Beliefs



Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions

where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout South America, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

The Andean Ridge includes 5 countries on the South American continent: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Scientists believe the first humans arrived in the region by approximately 11000 BC. Hunter-gatherers congregated in fishing villages along the Pacific coast and developed agriculture in the highlands between 5000 BC and 2500 BC. From 1800-500 BC, Andean peoples developed more complex societies that eventually shared a culture known as Chavin. They built simple monuments and developed copper and bronze metallurgy (Photo: A Chavin-era carving).

From approximately 200 BC to 600 AD, smaller regional civilizations rose and fell in the Andes. Among them, the Nazca of southern Peru are known for creating large images in the desert floor ranging in size from 150 to 500 ft crossways. The Tiwanaku and Wari empires rose in the 7th century AD in the mountains and highlands of Peru and Bolivia. While the Tiwanaku developed unique agricultural techniques for extremely high elevations, the Wari built roads and developed terraced agriculture – a technique still common in the Andean Ridge today. Both empires declined due to prolonged drought in the 10th century, giving way to a period of smaller kingdoms that lasted until the 15th century (Photo: Aerial photo of a Nazca image of a monkey).

The Inca Empire, with its capital city at Cuzco in modern day Peru, expanded rapidly through marriage, military coercion, and conquest in the 15th century. The Incas built roads, irrigation networks, and thousands of warehouses for storing preserved meat and potatoes, as well as valuables. The empire fell into a civil war in 1525 when 2 brothers competed for the throne. The war ended in 1532, just prior to a Spanish conquest. Of note, scholars refer to the millennia of history in the New World prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus and other Europeans as the “Pre-Columbian” period.

Columbus touched on the Venezuelan coast in 1498, while other explorers landed on Colombia’s Caribbean coast in 1499. In the 16th century, Spanish explorers conquered much of the Americas, seeking wealth, enhanced social status, and the spread Catholicism. They encountered the Incas in 1532 then conquered the territories of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia by 1541. In 1543 the Spanish crown officially colonized all the Andean Ridge territories, uniting the entire region as the Viceroyalty of Peru. The Spanish dominated the region for approximately 300 years, importing African slaves to extract resources such as silver and gold to enrich Spain.

Starting in the 18th century, local leaders sought autonomy from the Spanish Crown. While initial revolts were unsuccessful, revolutionary fervor spread in the colonies. In the early 19th century, Venezuelan aristocrat Simón Bolívar (pictured) led revolutionary forces that won the independence of the entire Andean Ridge. The territories of modern Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador defeated the Spanish in 1819, forming Gran Colombia. Peru defeated the Spanish army in 1824, followed closely by Bolivia in 1825. The union of Gran Colombia was not long-lasting: Venezuela and Ecuador seceded in 1830, becoming independent countries. Although Panama and Colombia remained united for some 70 years, Panama gained independence with the aid of the US in 1903.

Since independence, the Andean Ridge nations have suffered from territorial competition, political upheaval, and poor governance. A series of strongmen ruled Venezuela until a political coalition instituted 2-party rule in 1958. In Colombia a 2-party system emerged after 1849 that has endured into the 21st century despite violent civil wars and insurgencies. Ecuador experienced internal instability and military rule before returning to civilian rule in 1979. In the 19th century, Peru and Bolivia vacillated between different forms of government before establishing civilian rule in 1980 and 1982, respectively. Today, facing challenges from left and right extremists, the Andean Ridge nations still struggle to maintain stable governance.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. The Andean Ridge was home to some of Latin America's first organized societies, such as the coastal fishing villages that formed as early as 5000 BC. Later, with the advent of agriculture, communities developed along river valleys and in the mountains. Stable food sources led to trade and the formation of civilizations.

Spanish conquest and colonialism drastically changed society in the Andean Ridge. Local populations were decimated by conflict, forced labor, and new diseases brought by the Spanish. These included smallpox, measles, typhoid, and influenza. Historians estimate that the indigenous Andean population, roughly 10 million prior to the Spanish conquest, had decreased to just 600,000 by 1620. To replace the diminishing indigenous workforce, the Spanish imported tens of thousands of African slaves to the region

(Photo: *Saint James the Greater Killing Incas*, anonymous 18th century painting in the Cathedral of Cuzco, Peru).

This colonial history laid the foundations of the region's current-day ethnic and racial compositions. Today, people of *mestizo* (mixed European and Pre-Columbian indigenous ancestry) and *mulatto* (mixed African and European ancestry) heritage are common in the region. Mestizos form majority populations in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. The legacy of Spanish colonialism continues to influence social relations in the region, as white and mestizo populations hold most of the wealth and political power. Indigenous, black, and mulatto residents tend to be poorer, although they have become more politically and socially active since the 1980s.

The Andean nations are in various stages of development. Colombia continues its long history of 2-party rule and in 2012 entered peace talks with domestic insurgents. In Ecuador, protesters have ousted 3 of the last 5 elected Presidents, although former President Correa survived into his 2nd term. Peru has enjoyed relative stability since the 1990s, while Bolivia elected populist Evo Morales President in 2005 and reelected him in 2009 and 2014.

Venezuela is headed by Nicolas Maduro, successor of the controversial Hugo Chavez: a populist, anti-capitalist, and anti-US President who from 1999 to 2013 nationalized industries and implemented large scale social programs. Under Chavez, Venezuela sought closer relations with Caribbean nations,

particularly Cuba, and supported expansion of a trade alliance among Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Caribbean nations as an alternative to a proposed US regional free trade agreement.

Although relations among the Andean nations are generally friendly, Peru and Ecuador have a longstanding rivalry, as do Venezuela and Colombia. Colombia's conflict with domestic insurgents spread into Venezuela and Ecuador during the early 21st century, temporarily straining relations among those nations. Illicit cocaine production is a major transnational problem, especially for Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia (Photo: International observers patrol the Ecuador-Peru border in 1996).

Over the past 2 decades, the Andean nations have increasingly integrated with the South American regional community. For example, the Andean nations are active members of the Union of South American Nations (*Unión de Naciones Suramericanas*, UNASUR), an organization founded to address common political, economic, social, and security issues. The US has strong economic and security interests in the Andean Ridge, where it provides aid, promotes democracy, and cooperates on counter-narcotics efforts. Likewise, China has developed economic and political links with the region.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Regional Pre-Columbian populations practiced a variety of ceremonies, beliefs, and practices related to spirits and deities who inhabited the natural environment. When the Spanish conquerors arrived, they encountered the Inca's complex belief system that included worship of several important deities, such as Viracocha, the creator god, and Inti, the sun god.

Christianity arrived in the Andean Ridge with the Spanish, who introduced Catholicism beginning in the 16th century. As Catholicism spread, it eventually became nearly universal in the Spanish colonies. The Catholic Church became entrenched in colonial life, influencing education, social services, and colonial policy. Today, the Catholic Church remains a powerful influence on politics and an important part of community life (Photo: A Bolivian Aymara woman praying).

Catholicism remains the dominant religion in the region with 75% or more of Bolivians, Ecuadorians, Colombians, and Venezuelans identifying as Catholic. While most of the remaining population identifies as Christian Protestant, some countries also have small Jewish, Baha'i, and Mormon communities. Of note, indigenous beliefs and practices are still important to many residents of the Andean Ridge today. While some people adhere solely to traditional beliefs and practices, others incorporate them with Christian practices.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life and relationships are highly valued throughout the Andean Ridge. While the traditional family unit consists of a husband, wife, and their children, extended kin on both sides of the family are highly influential in family matters. Accordingly, extended family groups often live close together. Children generally live with their parents until they marry and typically have several godparents who provide support and career opportunities later in life. While inheritance traditionally passed from father to son or son-in-law, under modern laws, women may own and inherit property.

While close family ties mean family members have some influence over their children's choice of spouses, men and women generally choose their own partners. Both Spanish traditions and Roman Catholic teachings strongly value marriage as an institution and discourage divorce. Nevertheless, divorce rates are rising while marriage rates are dropping as women gain social and economic independence (Photo: A family in Venezuela).

A growing rural-urban divide in economic and educational opportunities across the Andean Ridge results in notable differences in rural and urban family life. While the traditional family structure remains common in rural areas, in urban centers family structures have become much more diverse.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Andean Ridge's traditional Spanish and indigenous cultures privilege the male's role as provider and leader. ***Machismo***, or masculine behavior and pride, is an important element of male identity in the region. By contrast, these cultures traditionally cast women in subordinate domestic roles. Women have acquired equal rights under the law in such areas as property ownership and suffrage. Nevertheless, social, economic, and political inequalities between genders remain.

Despite most countries' progressive gender equality laws and policies, women face continued challenges to their participation in the workforce. In much of the region, women still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers, oftentimes facing the challenges of balancing domestic duties with employment in the workforce. Moreover, women often face gender discrimination in hiring and promotion processes. Women who do work typically are paid just 70%-80% as much as men.

Women also face challenges to their participation in the political sector. While Ecuador and Bolivia have established quotas (42% and 25% respectively) for female representation in their national parliaments, women's participation in local politics across the region is much lower. In 2016, women accounted for just 3% of elected mayors in Peru, 9% in Ecuador, and 16% in in Colombia (Photo: A Quechua woman in Peru).

Homosexuality is legal throughout the region. Civil unions between homosexual couples are recognized in Ecuador and Colombia. Every country except Peru has some type of anti-discrimination legislation. Nevertheless, homosexuals still suffer discrimination, stigmatization, and violence in some areas.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

As a result of Spanish colonialism, Spanish is an official language throughout the Andean Ridge and is spoken by most of the population. Despite the dominance of Spanish, the Andean Ridge is linguistically diverse: 93 languages are spoken in Peru, 84 in Colombia, 44 in Venezuela, 43 in Bolivia, and 24 in Ecuador. While almost all of these languages are indigenous forms, a few are so-called creoles, languages that developed from a combination of English or Spanish with an indigenous variety.

The 2 most widely spoken indigenous languages in the region are Quechua (the language of the Incas) and Aymara. Peru recognizes these 2 tongues as official languages, while Bolivia recognizes all indigenous languages as official, including extinct languages. English is taught in most schools and is also popular in the business community.

Of note, while some Pre-Columbian civilizations in Mexico and Central America developed written language, those in the Andean Ridge did not. The Incas did develop a complex system of record-keeping, called the ***quipu***, which used knots tied in ropes to record numerical quantities (Photo: Lake Titicaca from the Bolivian shore).

In their oral communication, Andean people, particularly members of indigenous communities, tend to be reserved and unemotional. They also value respect and modesty in interpersonal relations.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Education in Pre-Columbian societies was primarily informal, as children learned skills and traditions from their parents and relatives. Scholars believe the Incas employed a more formal education system to instruct male nobles in martial skills, Quechua language, religion, history, and the use of the *quipu*. Women selected to marry nobility also attended formal schools and were taught religion, spinning, weaving, cooking, and brewing.

During the first decades of the colonial period, the Spanish introduced formal education systems that taught indigenous elites Catholic beliefs, Spanish, and “a useful skill” to support the colonists. The Catholic Church was the primary provider of education in the region throughout the colonial period, establishing many schools and universities. By the late 17th century, Spanish interest in educating indigenous students waned, and most schools accepted only Spanish elites.

In the late 19th century, educational opportunities for women and indigenous groups began to expand. Today, education is valued and increasingly accessible throughout the region. Primary education enrollment rates are high, ranging from 87% in Venezuela to 96% in Peru. Adult literacy rates are above 92% in all Andean countries. Nevertheless, the Andean Ridge nations still struggle to extend secondary and tertiary education access to all their citizens (Photo: A Peruvian sailor prepares a Peruvian schoolboy for a ceremony celebrating the US Navy's construction of a new school).

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in most Andean Ridge cultures, establishing and maintaining relationships with others can take precedence over accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner.

Concepts of personal space differ from those in the US. During conversations, regional residents often stand closer than most Americans do. They also may ask personal questions about family, relationships, and employment as a means of demonstrating polite interest. Men and women may interact differently than Americans are used to. For example, men shake hands both in greeting and parting, while a woman may greet a man with a kiss on one cheek.

Andean Ridge residents also manage time differently. While they may expect foreigners to arrive on time to business meetings, regional residents typically arrive 15-30 minutes late. Similarly, social gatherings generally start half an hour or more after the scheduled time; hosts may even consider on-time arrival rude. While the workday runs on a schedule similar to the US, lunchtime is generally a mid-day break of around 2 hours, during which shops and businesses may close.

The rhythm of daily life typically changes during national holidays and local celebrations. For example, Quito, Ecuador celebrates Founders Day in early December with a week of festivals, parades, and sporting events. Towns and cities throughout the region celebrate Carnival, an annual celebration prior to Christian Lent (Photo: A float in a parade for the Blacks and Whites Carnival in Puerto Asis, Colombia).

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Andean Ridge's forms of artistic expression – including its art, architecture, dance, music, and theater – reflect a combination of Spanish, indigenous, and African influences.

For example in Peru, a cathedral features Incan religious symbols; some indigenous dances satirize the Spanish invaders; and both European and indigenous influences inspire Peruvian sculpture and painting. In Colombia, a traditional dance style mimics the shuffling steps of African slaves in chains.

Dance and music infuse daily living in the Andean Ridge. Many regions lay claim to unique indigenous or *mestizo* musical styles, such as ***yaravi*** from Peru. Ecuadorians have adopted the ***pasillo,*** a style of ballad from the north Andes, as their national music. Afro-Caribbean culture has pervaded the Venezuelan and Colombian sea coasts, influencing music and dance in those areas.

Traditional handicrafts such as weaving, sculpture, and ceramics have been revived in recent decades. The region has produced many contemporary novelists and poets who explore their unique cultural heritage. Many have achieved international fame, including Gabriel García Márquez, a Colombian author who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982.

Soccer is unquestionably the most popular sport in the Andean Ridge. Many regional residents avidly follow professional soccer and are amateur players themselves. Bullfighting, an inheritance of Spanish culture, is also popular in most of the region.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies widely in the region depending on local products and tastes. In the highlands, potatoes and grains, along with meat from llamas, guinea pigs, chicken, and fish are common. Along the coast, fresh seafood, tomatoes, onions, spicy peppers, and rice or cassava (a tuberous starchy root, high in carbohydrates and essential to Caribbean and other tropical diets) are popular. ***Ceviche*** (raw fish marinated in lemon juice and herbs) is popular in many areas, both along the coast and inland (Photo: Market offerings in Peru).

Communicable diseases remain a concern in the Andean Ridge. In 2017, the countries reported about 65 cases of malaria per 1,000 people and 62 cases of dengue fever (a debilitating disease also spread by mosquitos) per 100,000. In addition, approximately 19% of rural residents lack access to clean drinking water, a situation which facilitates widespread outbreaks of diarrhea, parasitic fever, and hepatitis. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is low with the new infection rate relatively stable over the last decade.

Andean Ridge countries face many challenges in providing healthcare to their populations. Significant disparities in health and access to healthcare exist between urban and rural

communities. Some rural communities lack even basic healthcare infrastructure. Similarly, large urban slums, common in major cities, often have no sanitation or health infrastructure (Photo: US Air Force staff sergeant checks on a Peruvian patient at a mobile field hospital).

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. A number of Pre-Columbian Andean populations lived in hunter/gatherer societies or practiced subsistence agriculture and herding. Larger and wealthier civilizations, particularly the Inca, produced luxury items such as ceramics, art, jewelry, and fine woven goods for local consumption and regional trade.

Spanish colonists developed mineral extraction and refining industries to increase Spain's wealth, doing little to build local industry. For example, colonial governments emphasized exploitation of the region's large silver and lesser gold deposits. They developed agriculture and other local industries primarily to support the mining industry. Spanish colonists also farmed large estates with forced indigenous or African slave labor, more as a sign of status and privilege as economic pursuit (Photo: Andes mountain range).

After independence, political instability throughout the region hampered economic development. In addition, countries experienced several boom-bust cycles as they exported non-renewable resources and commodities that left them vulnerable to swings in the market. For example, Bolivia transitioned from focusing on silver extraction in the 19th century to tin mining in the 20th, and then natural gas since the 1970s. By contrast, Ecuador experienced

its first boom late in the 19th century, exporting cacao, followed by bananas in the early 20th century, and then oil starting in the 1960s.

Although Venezuela had been the largest economy in the region, turbulent politics and vulnerability to oil market volatility have created economic instability. Colombia's economy, the region's largest, is diversified across the agricultural, industrial, and mining sectors. Peru's economy is also relatively diverse, with gold, zinc, copper, textiles, and fish meal as its major exports. Ecuador has a large agricultural sector and oil industry, while Bolivia, the poorest nation in the region, remains largely dependent on mining and natural gas. A large illicit economy based on cocaine production also exists in the region, particularly in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia (Photo: Ecuadorian woman with quinoa, courtesy USAID).

The region's economies were affected by the 2008 global financial crisis to different degrees. The crisis generally reduced demand for Andean Ridge exports and slowed investment in the region. Bolivia experienced few adverse economic effects, while Peru and Colombia underwent relatively minor economic contractions. By contrast, Venezuela's economy contracted for 2 years and has been slower to recover.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Since the end of the colonial period, as Andean Ridge economies have developed at different rates, modern technology has spread unevenly through the region.

Roads form the primary transportation infrastructure throughout the region. While Venezuela has one of the best road systems in Latin America, in most of the region, paved roads are restricted to urban areas and select major highways. Mountainous terrain and poor quality roads make road travel slow and dangerous in some areas.

While Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela all have major Caribbean or Pacific sea ports, Bolivia is land-locked. Rail infrastructure is poor and neglected throughout the region (Photo: A mountain road in Bolivia).

Information technology is spreading rapidly throughout the Andean Ridge. Between 2016 and 2017, Internet usage grew from 6-16% per country to an average of 58% across the 5 countries. Mobile phone use grew even more rapidly: while most countries reported subscription rates of around 5 per 100 people in 2000, by 2018, subscriptions had increased to an average of 104 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants.

The Andean Ridge countries have a wealth of energy resources. Hydropower is a major source of electricity due to the many mountain rivers in the region; both Colombia and Peru generate 3/4 of their electricity through hydropower. Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela also have oil and natural gas reserves, which serve as both a domestic energy source and a major export. The US is the main trading partner for most of the region and seeks to develop and expand free trade agreements. Chinese trade relations have grown to become 2nd only to the US in several countries, and China now surpasses the US as a destination for Peruvian exports. Regional trade is also strong and bolstered by Union of South American Nations' (USAN) trade agreements. Domestic instability, disputes with heavy-handed foreign multinationals, and a history of nationalization of private industry sometimes hinder the growth of trade (Photo: USAF TSgt discusses clinic construction with Peruvian Defense officials).

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Andean Ridge society at large, we will focus on specific features of Colombian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Colombia is South America's oldest democracy, with a long tradition of civil governance and regular and fair elections. Despite relative stability, Colombia is emerging from nearly 50 years of internal conflict marked by violent atrocities from all parties involved. These include left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitary forces, and drug cartels battling each other and the Colombian military. Despite these hardships and the country's entrenched social, political, and economic divisions, the Colombian people remain hopeful for peace and proud of their diverse indigenous, European, and African roots.

Early History

During the "Pre-Columbian" period existing prior to the late 15th-century arrival of the Spanish (see p. 6 of Part 1 Culture General), Colombia was home to several indigenous groups residing along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and in the Andes Mountains. Most of these groups were fishers, hunters, and nomadic agriculturalists. The Chibcha had the most politically centralized society in the region, practicing sedentary farming and developing a highly structured economy in the high basins of Colombia's easternmost Andes ridge (Illustration: Petroglyph from Alban).

One Chibcha group, the Taironas, developed an urban civilization around 800 AD in the mountains near present-day Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast. Achievements included great stone engineering feats, notably irrigation and drainage works, temples, roads, and bridges. The largest Chibcha group was the Muisca, whose population likely reached 800,000 or more in the late 15th century. Talented weavers, the Muisca cultivated corn and potatoes near present-day Bogotá.

Arrival of the Spanish

Although Colombia was named for Christopher Columbus, the explorer never reached its shores. Instead, a member of Columbus' crew brought the first European explorers in 1499. By 1525, the Spanish had established their first permanent settlement at Santa Marta on Colombia's Caribbean coast.

The Spanish encountered several different indigenous groups in Colombia, such as the Carib and Arawak on the coast, and the Chibcha groups Tairona and Muisca in the interior. The Muisca were excellent potters and goldsmiths, fashioning elaborate gold jewelry and ceremonial vessels. Of note, a Muisca ritual likely inspired the Spaniards' search for the riches of legendary "El Dorado" (the "Gilded One" or "Golden King"), resulting in conquest of South America. In the legendary ritual, a Muisca tribal chief covered himself in gold dust and dove into a local lake (Photo: A Muisca gold work from 1000-1500).

Spanish Colonization

Impressed by the indigenous groups' wealth and seeking yet more gold, the Spanish conquerors expanded beyond Santa Marta. In 1533 they founded Cartagena on the Caribbean coast, which quickly became the region's principal port. By 1536, the Spanish were pushing into Colombia's interior from 2 directions, plundering indigenous settlements as they advanced.

Next, the Spanish conquered the Muisca's homeland in the Andes highland, taking their gold and founding the city of Santa Fé de Bogotá (later known simply as Bogotá) in 1538. In 1542, the Spanish crown united all of its territories in northern and western South America as the Viceroyalty of Peru with its capital at Lima.

The Decimation of the Indigenous Population: Estimated at about 2 million at the time of the Spaniards' arrival, Colombia's indigenous population decreased dramatically in subsequent decades due to conquest, disease, and their mistreatment in the ***encomienda*** system.

Within this system of bondage, indigenous people worked in exchange for food and housing and a small salary that was immediately paid back to the Spanish Crown as a tax.

The Importation of African Slaves: To offset the lack of a local labor force, the Spanish began to import slaves from Africa to work in mines and plantations along the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Gradually, through the 16th and 17th centuries, the population of African slaves became a significant proportion of the labor force in those regions.

New Granada

In 1564, Spain reorganized its northern South American holdings as the New Kingdom of Granada within the larger Viceroyalty. Comprising most of present-day Colombia and Panama, the Kingdom distributed land to individual Spanish conquerors and opened more salt, gold, and emerald mines. In 1719, the Spanish Crown reorganized its South American holdings again, making Bogotá the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, which included present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama.

The Spanish Class System: Over 250 years of Spanish colonization entrenched a strict class system that supported very little social mobility. At the top were the Spanish, followed by ***criollos*** (Spanish people born in the New World), ***mestizos*** (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent), ***mulattos*** (people of mixed Spanish and African descent), indigenous people, African slaves, and ***zambos*** (people of mixed African and indigenous descent). In addition to holding all economic and political power, the Spanish also enjoyed the highest social prestige (Photo: Colonial-era buildings in Cartagena).

Struggle for Independence

Beginning in the 18th century, *criollo* and *mestizo* residents began to protest Spanish domination of land, wealth, and commerce in the colony. Increased taxes prompted an uprising in 1781, during which local residents set up their own town

councils. When French Emperor Napoleon I removed Spanish King Ferdinand VII and appointed his own brother King of Spain in 1808, New Granada refused to recognize the new monarch and unrest spread.

In 1810, Bogota's citizens created their own governing council in full defiance of Spanish authority and declared independence. Subsequent efforts to unify the struggle against Spanish authority were hampered by disagreements between provincial and the Bogotá councils over the new country's proposed political structure.

For example, while the Bogotá council advocated a centralist, authoritarian government, the provincial councils preferred a federalist model along the lines of the newly-independent US. Despite these and other disagreements (such as the role of the Catholic Church – see p. 2-3 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the territory drafted a constitution in 1811 and proclaimed the United Provinces of New Granada. Ongoing tensions between the centralist and federalist supporters left New Granada vulnerable to Spain's efforts to reconquer it following Ferdinand VII's restoration as the King of Spain.

Simón Bolívar: By 1816, Spanish forces had re-taken Cartagena and Bogotá and installed a military regime. The regime's violent suppression efforts contributed to the rapid growth of the independence movement. Meanwhile, Simón Bolívar, a Spanish nobleman from Venezuela, arrived in New Granada to lead the independence movement. In 1819, Bolívar assembled an army of horsemen from the Colombian and Venezuelan plains, marched over the Andes, and defeated the Spanish troops at the Battle of Boyacá, about 100 mi northeast of Bogotá (Photo: The battle site at Boyacá today includes several monuments).

With Francisco de Paula Santander as Vice President, Bolívar assumed the Presidency of the new republic of Colombia, comprising the former territories of the Viceroyalty of New

Granada. The new republic lasted just 11 years: in 1830 Ecuador and Venezuela seceded to become independent countries.

The Emergence of the Conservatives and Liberals

While Bolívar sought social equality following independence, society in the new country remained highly stratified. The descendants of the Spanish continued to control almost all of the country's wealth and resources. The societal tensions caused by this economic division were soon intensified by a growing political division that had begun to form before independence.

On one side were Bolivar's supporters, who sought a strong centralized government, alliance with the Catholic Church, and limited suffrage. These largely wealthy landowners formed what would become the Conservative Party. On the other side, Santander's followers favored a decentralized government, with state instead of federal control over education and other civil matters, the separation of church and state, and broader voting rights. These activists eventually formed the Liberal Party, which was largely allied with the professional and merchant classes.

By 1849, the rivalry between these groups had evolved into outright conflict that in turn spawned a series of civil wars and anti-government uprisings lasting decades (Photo: Statue of Santander in Medellín).

Civil Conflicts

Although each political party held the Presidency for roughly equal periods of time through the 19th and early 20th centuries, their power-sharing was not peaceful. Instead, Colombia suffered 8 major civil conflicts and more than 50 uprisings between independence and the mid-1950s, mostly between supporters of the Conservative and Liberal parties. A particularly traumatic period was the conflict known as *The War of a Thousand Days* from 1899-1903 resulting in about 100,000 Colombian deaths.

The Loss of Panama: The US had been interested in the region since the 1850s, primarily because of Panama's strategic location on a narrow piece of land between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Taking advantage of Colombia's instability during the war in 1903, the US acquired the rights to finish a canal between the 2 oceans through Panama begun by a French company decades earlier. The US then supported Panama in its efforts to attain independence from Colombia. Furious, Colombia severed diplomatic ties with both countries, recognizing Panama's independence only in 1921 after a treaty with the US was ratified. The agreement included a $25 million payment from the US to Colombia for its loss of territory (Photo: The Panama canal in 1915).

La Violencia*:** Colombians refer to a period of conflict between 1948 and 1957 as ***La Violencia, or "The Violence." It began when a popular Liberal Party leader was assassinated in Bogotá. Protests quickly turned into mass rioting and killing. Violence spread across the country as both Liberal and Conservative supporters committed atrocities that resulted in the deaths of about 300,000 people.

The National Front

In an attempt to stop the carnage, the military staged a coup in 1953, taking and retaining control of the government for almost 5 years. This case of military intervention in the civilian government was the only one in Colombia's history. In 1957, the Conservative and Liberal parties formed an alliance, the ***Frente Nacional*** or National Front, ending *La Violencia*. Under the terms of the agreement, the parties rotated power and control of the Presidency for the next 16 years.

Extreme inequality between the social classes persisted even though the National Front realized economic and social progress in many areas such as infrastructure, education, and women's rights. More significantly, the National Front effectively blocked all other parties from having any official power or governmental representation, forcing other political

groups to operate outside the official arena. Soon, dissidents, intellectuals, students, and peasants began to form protest groups.

Left-wing Guerillas

Eventually, disillusioned activists began to take up arms, with Marxist-based guerrilla and militia groups flourishing in Colombia's rural areas. Although each group had its own philosophies and political aims, all these activists initially planned to use violence to end the exploitation of Colombia's poor by the wealthy. They also aimed to force government distribution of resources more equally among all citizens. Later, most of these groups largely abandoned their ideological causes and turned to extortion, robbery, kidnapping, and the illegal drug trade to finance their activities.

The FARC: The most well-known group to emerge was the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (***Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*** or FARC). Founded in the mid-1960s, the FARC would eventually become the oldest, largest, and best-financed guerrilla organization in Latin America. In the 1980s, the FARC attempted to refashion its organization as a political party, successfully putting candidates on the ballot in many local elections. In response, paramilitary squads (see "The AUC" below) murdered 3,000 of the FARC candidates between 1984 and 1987. This violence prompted the FARC to abandon its political goals, end a truce with the government, and return to its guerilla tactics by 1990. At its peak in 2001, the FARC counted an estimated 16,000 fighters (Photo: FARC guerillas during 2006 peace talks).

The ELN: Colombians inspired by Cuba's revolution founded the National Liberation Army (***Ejército de Liberación Nacional*** or ELN) in the mid-1960s. This group also aimed to remedy Colombia's extreme social inequities. After reaching its peak power in the late 1990s, the ELN pledged a ceasefire in 2007.

The M-19: The urban equivalent to the rural-based FARC, the 19th of April Movement (***Movimiento 19 de Abril*** or M-19) peaked in the 1980s when it became Colombia's 2nd largest rebel group. In 1985, the M-19 allied with a drug cartel to coordinate an attack on the Palace of Justice in Bogotá in which 11 Supreme Court Justices and 100 other people were killed. A 1989 truce between the government and the M-19 resulted in its demobilization and reintegration into political life as a political party called the M-19 Democratic Alliance (***Alianza Democrática M-19***).

The Guerrillas' Impact: Colombia's rural population suffered greatly as these guerilla groups carried out massacres and forced enlistment of children and young people. At their peak, the guerrilla groups controlled about 40% of Colombia's territory. The Colombian government's offensives against the guerrillas further disrupted life in rural areas, eventually displacing millions of people from their homes. (Photo: Internally displaced people in 2007).

Right-wing Paramilitaries

Because they could not rely on government forces for protection, Colombia's wealthy landowners organized paramilitaries beginning in the 1980s to protect their property from guerilla attacks. These paramilitaries banded together as the United Self-Defense Units of Colombia (**Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia** or AUC) in 1997. In addition to targeting guerillas with the tacit approval of the government, the AUC also targeted union leaders and academics. It then became involved in the drug trade, from which it eventually received more than 70% of its funding. Soon, the AUC also terrorized Colombia's rural population with massacres and assassinations, while controlling most of northern Colombia. Beginning in 2004, the AUC began to demobilize but has remained active while demanding amnesty.

The Illegal Drug Industry

Meanwhile, during the 1970s and 1980s, Colombia's illegal drug industry grew significantly, escalating the civil conflict.

Both the FARC and AUC became heavily involved in the drug trade by selling protection to the Medellin and Cali drug cartels in order to finance their military operations. Following Colombian security forces' assassination of Medellin drug cartel leader Pablo Escobar in 1993, violence associated with the drug trade decreased as the cartels fragmented into smaller organizations.

A New Constitution and a New Hope

Colombia adopted a new constitution in 1991 that brought major reform, such as civil divorce, the office of Vice President, and departmental (state) governors. In addition, it bolstered the administration of justice, encouraging political pluralism and the rule of law, and provided congressional representation for Colombia's indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations. Despite these encouraging developments, the violence continued in the 1990s and early 2000s as both guerillas and paramilitaries killed, kidnapped, and extorted money from both innocent civilians and the drug cartels.

Plan Colombia: When he took office in 1998, President Andrés Pastrana of the Conservative Party faced several security challenges. These included increased attacks by the FARC and the ELN across the country, widespread illicit drug production and associated criminal activities, and the spread of illegal paramilitary groups. In 1999, the government introduced the ***Plan Colombia***, a 6-year strategy to combat the narcotics trade. The plan also focused on economic recovery, respect for human rights, and assistance to Colombians displaced by the ongoing violence. Under this plan, the US provided significant financing to eradicate coca crops and cocaine production facilities, along with police and military training (Photo: A plane sprays herbicides over a coca field).

In 1999, Pastrana opened peace talks with the FARC, resulting in the demilitarization of the FARC's historic base of power in south-central Colombia. Although peace talks continued for 3 years, the relentless violence continued. In 2002 the FARC was still kidnapping

civilians, carrying out military attacks, and trafficking narcotics, using the demilitarized zone as a base of operations. Consequently, Pastrana cancelled talks and revoked the zone.

Modern Colombia

Álvaro Uribe

Liberal Party member Álvaro Uribe was elected President in 2002. His first order of business was to defeat the guerillas, disband all illegal paramilitary organizations, and decrease illegal drug traffic. To achieve these goals, Uribe organized peasant brigades and escalated military actions against armed groups. Midway through his term, Uribe successfully lobbied for a constitutional change that would allow him to seek a 2nd term. He was re-elected with overwhelming support in 2006. During Uribe's tenure, armed attacks decreased by 90% and many guerillas and paramilitaries demobilized.

Uribe continued efforts to reduce the violence. In 2008, Colombian security forces famously rescued Ingrid Betancourt, a former Colombian presidential candidate, and 14 other hostages (including 3 Americans), held captive by the FARC for several years. Uribe's preoccupation with combating violence carried the consequence of neglecting to address Colombia's ongoing and serious rural poverty. When his supporters called for a further constitutional amendment that would allow him a 3rd term, Uribe declined, promoting Juan Manuel Santos his successor.

Juan Manuel Santos

Santos (pictured) was elected President in 2010, representing the Social Party of National Unity (***Partido Social de Unidad Nacional*** or Party of the U – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*). Colombia's largest political party today, the Party of the U was founded in 2005 by Santos, Uribe and other ex-members of the Liberal Party. Since his election, Santos has continued Uribe's efforts to reduce guerilla and paramilitary violence. In 2011, Santos supported legislation that returned land to millions of displaced people and compensated survivors of Colombia's decades of violence.

Country-wide protests against the FARC resulted in its release of several hostages and peace talks between the government and the FARC in late 2012. In November 2013, the talks recorded a major breakthrough when the FARC agreed to give up violence in exchange for full political participation. Criticizing Santos' conciliatory approach to the FARC, Uribe left the Party of the U and formed the Democratic Center party (***Centro Democrático*** – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) in January 2013. Despite this opposition, Santos was reelected in May 2014, defeating the Democratic Center candidate in a run-off election.

In December 2014, the FARC announced an immediate ceasefire. Shortly thereafter, it declared an end to forcibly recruiting minors and negotiated joint plans with the government to clear landmines planted by the FARC. Although the ELN was still laying mines in some areas, this agreement was significant: over the last 25 years, some 11,000 Colombians have been killed or wounded by mines.

In spring of 2015, the delegations were negotiating the terms of disarmament of the rebels and punishment for the atrocities committed by both rebels and government-backed forces. Discussions continued around planned land reform, a new counternarcotic policy, and a political role for the FARC.

The negotiations were not void of controversy: many Colombians feared that criminals and terrorists on both sides would escape punishment. Others believed that even if the FARC disbands, its factions would continue to traffic cocaine. Despite some misgivings, a majority of Colombians surveyed in early 2015 expressed optimism that the negotiations would lead to peace. The Colombian government and the FARC signed a revised peace deal on November 24th, 2016, and sent it to congress for ratification. Both houses of Congress ratified the revised peace accord on November 29-30th, thus marking an end to the conflict (Photo: Colombian army special forces).

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Colombian myths reflect the region's ethnic and cultural diversity. For example, some myths bear similarities with African folklore, while others reflect Pre-Columbian themes. Still others incorporate the devastating consequences of the 16th-century Spanish conquest and more recent periods of violence, such as the 20th century's *La Violencia*.

Llanero Myths

While all regions have their own myths and legends, the ***llaneros***, or inhabitants of Los Llanos, Colombia's vast grassland plains of the East, are well known for their legends and folklore. Many tell of dangerous natural phenomena or powerful supernatural forces that threaten the innocent. Some stories provide an explanation of otherwise unspoken social rules. Others preserve memories of past periods of violence, such as *La Violencia*, but reframe them so that diabolical supernatural figures commit the atrocities instead of humans (Illustration: An 1843 painting of *llaneros*).

For example, many *llaneros* report having seen ***bolas de fuego***, or fireballs that descend from the sun to chase people, even into their homes. If the balls catch the people, they and their homes may be engulfed in flames. Some *llaneros* say that these fireballs embody the soul of a woman who murdered her husband.

Another myth tells of a headless horseback rider (***jinete sin cabeza***) who appears to *llaneros* gathered at night. Dressed in black and carrying a machete, the horseman tries to attack the *llaneros*. The ***Leyenda del Diablo*** or Legend of the Devil tells that a *llanero* walking through trees at night is especially vulnerable to the devil, who peers down between the leaves in the form of a witch and tries to steal the *llanero's* soul.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Republic of Colombia
República de Colombia

Political Borders
Coastline 1,993 mi
Venezuela: 1,455 mi
Brazil: 1,112 mi
Peru: 928 mi
Ecuador: 440 mi
Panama: 211 mi

Capital
Bogotá

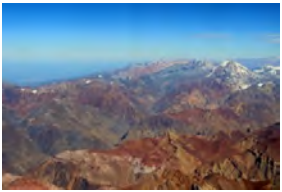
Demographics
Colombia's population is about 49.1 million, making it the 2nd most populous country in South America after Brazil. Colombia's annual population growth rate, currently at 0.93%, has slowed significantly in recent years. This decline is due in part to emigration to evade guerilla and drug-related violence (see p. 7-10 of *History and Myth*) and Colombians' search for employment abroad. The drop is also due to a decreased birthrate (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*). Colombia is primarily urban: over 81% of the population lives in metropolitan areas.

Flag
The Colombian flag consists of 3 horizontal yellow, blue, and red stripes. There are 2 interpretations of the flag's significance. In the 1st, the yellow band at twice the width of the other bands symbolizes Colombia's historically large gold reserves. While the blue represents Colombian seas, the red symbolizes blood spilled in attaining freedom. In the 2nd interpretation, the yellow band denotes sovereignty and justice. Blue indicates loyalty and vigilance while red represents the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity.

Geography

Situated in the northwestern part of the South American continent, Colombia shares a border with Panama to the Northwest, with Ecuador and Peru to the Southwest, with Brazil to the Southeast, and with Venezuela to the East and Northeast. The north coast of Colombia, located between Venezuela and Panama, faces the Caribbean Sea, while the west coast borders the North Pacific Ocean between Panama and Ecuador. Colombia's total land area is about 708,000 sq mi – approximately twice the size of Texas and slightly smaller than South Africa. The equator passes through Colombia's South.

The towering Andes Mountains (pictured) dominate Colombia's landscape. The Colombian Andes comprise 3 separate mountain ranges that extend across the country from north to south. The highest volcanic peaks, some of which rise over 18,000 ft, lie in the Andes' Central Range (***Cordillera Central*).**



Generally, Colombia's Andes regions feature valleys, mountain plateaus, and active volcanoes. The country's Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean coasts feature low plains. Tropical rainforests dominate the Southeast and South. Rolling, fertile plains characterize Colombia's East, an area known as ***Los Llanos***. Stretching approximately 950 mi, the Magdalena is Colombia's longest river and connects the northern coast with mountainous interior regions.

Climate

Colombia does not experience distinct seasons. Instead, Colombians describe the climate as "vertical," since air temperatures vary by elevation. Accordingly, coastal regions and eastern lowlands are hot and humid, while regions above 3,000 ft experience more temperate climates. Further, alpine climates exist in mountainous regions above 10,000 ft, where snow and glaciers cover the highest peaks. Bogotá, at 8,629 ft, elevation, averages 55°F year round, while Medellin, at almost 5,000 ft, averages 70°F year round. At sea level, the coastal city of Santa Marta averages 84°F.

Natural Hazards

Colombia is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, including earthquakes and volcanic activity. Its location at the intersection of 2 major tectonic plates, the Nazca and South American plates, means that the country is especially susceptible to earthquakes. In 1999, Colombia suffered its most devastating earthquake which destroyed portions of the Central Cordillera cities of Armenia and Pereira, killing nearly 1,200 people.

Colombia's 7 active volcanos are located along the Andean Volcanic Belt, a sub-section of the 25,000 mi long Ring of Fire made up of volcanic mountain chains along the continental margins of the Pacific Ocean. One of the world's deadliest eruptions occurred in 1985, when Nevado del Ruiz buried a downslope city under mud and debris, killing approximately 25,000 people. Colombia's most active volcano, Galeras (pictured), erupted in 1993, killing 9 people, and again in 2010 when it forced the evacuation of 8,000 people.

Environmental Issues

Although over 72% of Colombia's land is protected in national parks, deforestation remains an ongoing concern. Illegal logging in the Amazonian jungles and Pacific coast forests is the major cause of deforestation. Closely following is the clearing of land for the illicit cultivation of drug crops in isolated regions of protected areas. In addition, overuse of pesticides and the process of refining coca plants into cocaine has introduced dangerous chemicals into soil and water supplies. Soil erosion resulting from deforestation reduces agricultural yields and impedes natural retention of water, which in turn causes shortages in potable water. Air pollution caused by automobile emissions is a persistent concern in Bogotá.

Government

Colombia is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 32 states or departments (***departamentos***), administered by elected governors and department assemblies. There is also a capital district in Bogotá. Departments further subdivide into municipalities,

governed by mayors. Adopted in 1991 (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), Colombia's constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, protects civil rights, and includes special provisions for indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations (see "Ethnic Groups" below).

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the President, who is both chief-of-state and head-of-government. A council of ministers supports the President. The President is elected by popular vote and can serve up to 2 consecutive 4-year terms. The current President, Ivan Duque Marquez, took office in 2018, becoming Colombia's 32nd President. Marta Lucia Ramirez Blanco became Vice President that same year.

Legislative Branch

Colombia's legislature is a 2-chamber Congress (pictured), composed of a 108-seat Senate and 172-seat Chamber of Representatives. In the Senate, 100 seats are elected from a national candidate list, 5 from the FARC party, 1 for the runner-up presidential candidate, and 2 are elected by indigenous and Afro-Colombian constituents. Of 172 Representatives, 166 are directly elected through proportional representation along with 5 FARC members and 1 seat for the runner-up vice presidential candidate. While legislation originates in the Chamber of Representatives, the Senate ultimately controls most legislative powers, including amending the constitution, appointing positions in government, and approving declarations of war.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a Supreme Court, a Constitutional Court, a Council of State, and Superior Judicial Council. A system of lower courts oversees minor cases. As the highest court, the Supreme Court is the final court of appeal for both civil and criminal cases. The President nominates 3 candidates for Prosecutor General, and the Supreme Court in turn selects 1 of the nominees. Historically, judicial power has been weak, and justices are often criticized for being both corrupt and vulnerable to intimidation by paramilitary and guerilla groups.

Political Climate

Over the past century, Colombia's political landscape has been characterized by a 2-party system in which the traditionally dominant Liberal and Conservative parties competed for power (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth*). While both parties are still active, recently formed splinter groups are becoming increasingly powerful.

Formed by former Presidents Santos and Álvaro Uribe (pictured, with former US President George W. Bush), the Social Party of National Unity (***Partido Social de Unidad Nacional*** or Party of the U) is presently Colombia's largest political party and holder of the majority of Senate seats. Described as a "conservative liberal movement," Party of the U comprises a diverse collection of both ex-Conservative and ex-Liberal politicians.

Formed in 2013 by Uribe, the Democratic Center party (***Centro Democrático***) is a center-right party opposed to negotiations with the FARC (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). Liberal party splinter groups include the Green Party (***Partido Verde***), Radical Change (***Cambio Radical***), and the controversial PIN (***Partido de Integracion Nacional***) (see below).

Corruption permeates all levels of government as well as the democratic process. Individuals and groups such as paramilitaries (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*) often use vote-buying, illegal campaign financing, and intimidation to influence elections. Investigations into the 2006-10 Congress revealed several irregularities indicating that paramilitary groups had hand-selected, funded, and controlled many politicians. As a result, many Congressmen were convicted of corruption and one political party, ADN (***Alianza Democrática Nacional***), was forced to disband completely. Despite efforts to curb corruption, paramilitary influence resurfaced in the 2010 Congressional elections when remaining members of ADN joined PIN. Critics allege some PIN members today continue to have links to illegal paramilitaries and criminal gangs.

The government faces other challenges to maintaining the democratic process. As part of the current peace negotiations between the government and leftist guerilla groups (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*), the FARC, Colombia's oldest and largest left-wing guerrilla organization, is attempting to become an officially recognized political party. Using the example of M-19, a former guerrilla group that is now a political party (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), the FARC has given up violence in exchange for full participation in Colombia's political process.

Defense

The Colombian Armed Forces are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches, with a joint strength of 293,200 active duty troops and 34,950 reserve personnel. It is charged with defending against foreign and domestic threats, supporting disaster relief efforts, and protecting economic infrastructure. Due to Colombia's history of internal instability (see p. 7-10 of *History and Myth*), domestic counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics efforts dominate operations.

Army: The Colombian Army is a well-equipped, well-trained force of 223,150 active-duty troops, consisting of 1 Special Forces unit, 10 maneuver divisions and brigades (including mechanized, light, and aviation), several combat support brigades, and 2 combat service support divisions.

Navy: Consisting of 56,400 active-duty personnel, the Colombian Navy is a well-equipped force of naval aviation, marine, and coastal defense units headquartered in Puerto Carreño. The Navy has 4 tactical submarines, 4 principal surface combatants, 54 patrol and coastal combatants, miscellaneous amphibious vessels and logistics and support vessels, and a variety of aviation weapons systems (Photo: Colombian naval ship ARC Buenaventura).

Air Force: The Colombian Air Force, the smallest of the 3 military branches, consists of 13,650 active-duty personnel and has 7 combat air commands with 69 combat aircraft and 24 squadrons.

Colombian Air Force Rank Insignia

Security Issues

Colombia's security environment is dominated by internal threats related to anti-government guerilla groups, illegal paramilitaries, and the activities of Colombia's illicit drug trafficking industry. Porous borders with neighboring Ecuador and Venezuela also present security challenges.

Internal Violence: Violence stemming from guerilla groups such as the FARC and ELN has plagued Colombia for over 5 decades – one of the longest running insurgencies in recent history (see p. 6-11 of *History and Myth*). Paramilitary militias were established initially to augment the overstretched Colombian military in the fight against guerilla groups. More recently, they helped fuel the violence by terrorizing populations thought to be sympathetic to guerilla causes. Despite being officially disbanded in 2006, many paramilitary groups continue to operate illegally, inciting further conflict.

In 2012, the government entered into peace talks with the FARC, making substantial inroads toward negotiating a ceasefire (see p. 11 of *History and Myth)*. Progress toward this goal stalled in April 2015 when the FARC allegedly attacked government forces, killing 10. In September 2016, Colombia signed a peace deal with FARC rebels. This agreement and negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) marked the beginning of a strategic transformation for Colombia. Despite these negotiations, several regions in Colombia remain destabilized.

A fragmented illegal drug industry continued to thrive following the 1993 demise of the powerful Medellín drug cartel (see p. 8-9 of *History and Myth*). Smaller organizations, including guerilla groups and other criminal organizations, still sustain the $10 billion industry (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Violence associated with the illegal drug trade is especially prevalent in rural areas and disproportionately affects civilians. Over 300 drug smuggling organizations are active today (Photo: Colombian authorities organize a search for coca plantations).

Colombia and Venezuela: Colombia's long-running insurgency has contributed to tensions with Venezuela, since both FARC and ELN guerilla groups maintained a strong operational presence along their border. Recent political and economic volatility in Venezuela has increased border permeability, allowing guerilla groups to operate on both sides of the border. Further, Colombian paramilitary groups have occasionally crossed into Venezuela in search of FARC encampments, significantly increasing tensions. Finally, the Colombian government has at times accused the Venezuelan government of allowing insurgents passage across its border and providing materiel and financial assistance to drug-related operations. Despite these tensions, the 2 countries maintain a dialogue. Most recently, Venezuela participated in Colombia's peace talks with the guerilla groups as a guarantor nation. Strong economic ties between the 2 nations also help dissipate the occasionally heightened political tensions (Photo: Colombian marines).

Colombia and Ecuador: Insurgency-related violence along the Colombia-Ecuador border is another significant source of tension. While the 2 countries retain strong economic ties, diplomatic relations weakened after Colombian troops crossed the Ecuadorian border to attack a FARC camp in 2008. The countries presently cooperate in border control, although illegal drug smuggling activities along the border keep tensions high.

Foreign Relations

With a few exceptions, Colombia's involvement in foreign affairs was largely limited to interaction with its immediate neighbors for most of the 20th century. Over recent decades, Colombia has expanded its international sphere of influence, taking an active role in regional and global institutions like the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the United Nations (UN) Security Council. Colombia has contributed to multiple UN peacekeeping missions and regularly provides military counter-narcotics training to Afghanistan and over 20 nations in West Africa and Latin America.

Relations with the US: The US and Colombia have strong political, economic, and military ties. Most notably, the US has partnered with Colombia in its battle against drug cartels and guerilla groups. Funneling over $6 billion in anti-narcotics aid under the 1999 "Plan Colombia" effort (see p. 9 in *History and Myth*), the US sought to curtail the spread of illicit drug production and diminish associated drug-related violence.

Today, the US continues to support Colombian civil society, human rights institutions, and other stabilizing agencies. This effort is intended to foster socio-economic development and reduce threats posed by the narcotics traffic and insurgent groups. In addition to financial assistance, the US provides military training and equipment to bolster Colombian military counter-narcotics operations (Photo: US troops examine a FARC leadership chart with Colombian Army troops).

With the US as Colombia's largest trading partner (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*), the 2 nations entered into a free-trade agreement in 2012. This pact allows goods, services, and capital to move liberally between the 2 nations. They also have signed numerous bi-lateral agreements on economic and military cooperation. These include environmental protection, chemical control, development of renewable and clean energy, science and technology, and civil aviation programs.

Relations with Nicaragua: In 2012, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) awarded a maritime territory to Nicaragua that both Nicaragua and Colombia had long claimed. This action caused considerable friction between the 2 countries. Colombia had received the territory during the US occupation of Nicaragua in 1928. According to the ICJ ruling, the San Andres archipelago would remain with Colombia while most of the sea around it would become Nicaragua's economic zone. Nicaragua subsequently announced plans to auction off oil exploration blocks in the disputed waters, further straining relations.

Ethnic Groups

Colombia is ethnically diverse as a result of over 500 years of intermingling of its indigenous peoples, Africans, and Europeans (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). Colombia's majority population consists of "non-ethnic" whites (people of Spanish or other European background) and *mestizos* (people of mixed white and indigenous descent). The government also officially recognizes 3 "ethnic" minority groups: Afro-Colombians, Amerindians or indigenous peoples, and gypsies (or Roma). The 2018 census found that 87.6% of the population were white or *mestizo* and 6.8% were Afro-Colombian. While it also found 4.3% were members of indigenous groups, other studies suggest the indigenous population is only about 1%. About 1.4% did not specify their ethnicity.

Whites and *Mestizos*: Colombia's white and *mestizo* population primarily resides in urban areas. Many inhabitants of the rural Andean highlands are also *mestizo*.

Afro-Colombians: This category includes Colombians with any African background and may include people who also have Spanish or indigenous roots. Afro-Colombians live primarily in the lowland areas of the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. While they comprise the majority in some cities, there are very few purely Afro-Colombian communities.

Indigenous Groups: Colombia counts about 80 indigenous groups whose members live primarily in small communities in remote areas throughout the country. Although some continue to speak indigenous languages (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*), most use Spanish as their primary language. The Páez (or Nasa Yuwes) of Cauca Department in southwestern Colombia constitute the largest indigenous group, with about 123,000 people in 2005. The next largest group is the Wayúu (or Guajiros) who live in Colombia's northern Guajira Peninsula bordering Venezuela. Other groups live in the jungle regions near Colombia's border with Panama

and the Amazonian jungles of Colombia's South (Photo: Guambiano people from Cauca Department).

Social Relations

Most Colombians continue to label themselves according to their ancestry and/or physical appearance even though the colonial era's strict class system (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*) no longer applies. In addition, many Colombians still attach certain characteristics to the old class system categories. Although these characteristics are no longer the only social differentiators, they still influence sociocultural status and social hierarchy to a certain extent. For example, "non-ethnic" or white and *mestizo* Colombians continue to hold most power, wealth, and social prestige in Colombian society today.

Since independence, both indigenous people and Afro-Colombians have largely existed on the periphery of national life. Over the last decades, Afro-Colombians have become more integrated than indigenous groups. Historically, Colombia's Afro-Colombians and indigenous populations did not enjoy the same rights and privileges of Colombia's white and *mestizo* populations. The 1991 constitution sought to rectify this situation, granting both groups special representation in the national legislature and indigenous groups certain territorial and cultural rights (Photo: Afro-Colombian children in the Pacific coast city of Tumaco).

In recent years, both indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have been displaced by Colombia's political violence. For example, many indigenous people were forced to flee into neighboring Brazil to avoid the violence. Afro-Colombian communities on Colombia's Pacific coast suffered high crime rates due to rebel activities in the region. In addition to suffering violence, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities experience poverty, illiteracy, and infant mortality rates above national averages. Finally, Afro-Colombians continue to face discrimination and socio-economic exclusion.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Colombia's population is overwhelmingly Christian. According to a 2014 study, the approximate affiliations include 79% Catholic, 13% Protestant, 6% none, and 2% other. Until 1991, the Roman Catholic Church was Colombia's official state church. Recognized as one of the most conservative in Latin America, the Church has historically been highly influential in politics, education, and family life.

Colombia's 1991 constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits religious discrimination. Although the constitution mandates a separation of church and state and lists no official religion or church, the Catholic Church retains a privileged status in the country. For example, while Catholic clergy may automatically perform marriages and provide chaplaincy services to the military, non-Catholic clergy must fulfill certain requirements to attain those privileges (Photo: Cathedral in Bogotá).

Despite an increase in secularism in recent decades, 77% of respondents in a 2014 survey reported that religion is very important in their lives. In the same survey, 45% of respondents agreed that government policies should promote religious values and beliefs, and 50% agreed that religious leaders should influence politics.

Of note, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*) historically have targeted religious leaders for extortion, often disrupting their work with displaced populations or other vulnerable groups. Other religious leaders who were outspoken critics of these organizations have been threatened or murdered.

Introduction of Christianity

When Spanish explorers entered Colombia in 1499 (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), they encountered a people with a rich spiritual life. Scholars suggest that indigenous groups recognized several different spirits and gods who were believed to be the creators of the universe and influenced daily life.

In addition to seeking wealth and new territories for the Spanish Crown, a high priority of the Spanish conquerors was the elimination of native religions and the conversion of the New World's indigenous population to Catholicism. Reflecting the religious zeal in Spain at the time, the conquerors viewed traditional indigenous beliefs and practices as manifestations of the devil. Consequently, the Spanish destroyed temples and other sacred sites while forbidding rituals and dances.

By the end of the 16th century, the Catholic Church and individual religious orders, such as the Franciscans and Jesuits, had begun widespread proselytization efforts among Colombia's indigenous population.

Religion during the Colonial Period

During the almost 3 centuries of Spanish colonial rule, the Catholic Church was central to most aspects of life, including education, politics, and economics. For example, Catholic orders founded most of Colombia's schools and universities (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*). The recipient of large land grants from the colonial government, the Catholic Church eventually came to control almost 1/3 of the country's territory (Illustration: An 1844 painting of the cathedral in Santa Marta).

Religion and Politics in Independent Colombia

Disagreement over the role of the Catholic Church was a significant aspect of the political division between the Liberal and Conservative parties that formed shortly after Colombia's independence (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*).

In general, the Liberals favored limiting the wealth and political influence of the Catholic Church. By contrast, the Conservatives believed the Catholic Church must be a part of the government in order to ensure social order and cohesion.

In the decades following, conflicts between members of the 2 parties spawned a series of civil wars and uprisings (see p. 5-6 of *History and Myth*). When the Conservatives were in power, the Catholic Church enjoyed broad governmental support. When the Liberals took control, they undertook various initiatives to weaken the Church, such as expelling the Jesuit order and asserting civilian control of Church holdings.

The 1886 Constitution

In 1886, President Rafael Núñez rejected the Liberal anti-Church posture and ushered in a new constitution that would last until 1991. Although this document protected freedom of worship, it also named Roman Catholicism as the state religion. An agreement between the government and the Church in 1887 gave the Catholic Church control over public school textbooks and sole authority in birth, marriage, and death rituals.

The Catholic Church and *La Violencia*

Intense debate concerning the relationship between church and state intensified in the mid-20th century when the Catholic Church became deeply enmeshed in partisan politics. The 1948 assassination of a Liberal political leader led to a civil conflict known as ***La Violencia*** (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*).

In their backlash, Liberal supporters adopted a distinctive anti-Catholic Church tone. In response, priests and Church leaders became political activists for the Conservative Party.

When a Conservative politician won the next Presidential election, Conservative and Church supporters intensified the violence against the Liberals. Some Catholic priests even publicly condoned the killing of Liberals, condemned as atheists and communists (Photo: St. Peter's Church in Cartagena).

The Catholic Church and the National Front

With a 1957 truce between the Conservatives and Liberals that ushered in the National Front (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), Catholic leadership agreed that the Church should discontinue partisan political activity. Over the next decade, the Church turned its focus inward to strengthen its own institutions, founding various social programs. Some of these include trade union movements, education initiatives in rural areas, and agrarian reform. Of note, when popular revolutionary movements began to form in the 1960s (see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*), at least one Catholic leader joined them.

Beginning in 1973, the Church's role began to change when a new state-Church agreement confirmed Catholicism as the state religion but established the Church's independence from civil powers. The agreement further removed tax-exempt status from church properties and transferred the Church's network of schools and social services among the indigenous populations to the government. Finally, it abolished the requirement that Catholicism be taught in public schools and provided for civil marriages outside the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church Today

Since the adoption of a new constitution in 1991, Roman Catholicism is no longer Colombia's official religion nor do disagreements regarding religion continue to fuel violent political disputes. Despite the general secularization of Colombian society, the Catholic Church's influence remains strong. Unlike many countries, Colombia's seminaries have no lack of students, and its ratio of priests to total population is among the highest in Latin America. The 1991 constitution declared Catholic marriages could be ended in civil divorce (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*), although abortion remains illegal in all but extreme cases (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*) (Photo: Holy week procession in Alejandría in Antioquia Department).

Many Colombian Catholics perceive Catholicism as simply a part of their cultural heritage having no regular role in their personal and professional lives. Despite this general trend, church attendance remains relatively strong, with about 49% of surveyed Catholics reporting at least weekly church attendance in 2014. The Church and religious orders operate schools and universities, orphanages, and hospitals across the country.

Catholics in rural areas tend to be more devout than those in urban areas. Many urban Catholics attend church services only during the most important holidays – Easter and Christmas – and for weddings, baptisms, and funerals (see p. 3-4 of *Family and Kinship*). By contrast, in rural areas, residents attend church regularly and celebrate Catholic holy days with elaborate religious processions and festivals (Photo: Colombian children participate in an Easter procession).

Other Christian Churches

Although the first Protestant missionaries arrived in the mid-19th century, Protestant churches experienced very little growth until the 1960s, when allegiance to the Catholic Church began to wane. While their number is less than many other Latin American countries, Protestants and other non-Catholic Christians now make up about 14% of Colombia's population.

While denominations such as the Presbyterians and Methodists have the longest history in Colombia, there are other prominent non-Catholic Christian organizations. These include the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Mormons. Generally, non-Catholic Christian churches exist across the country, even in indigenous communities having historical strongholds of Catholicism. Like the Catholic Church, these organizations have built schools and typically offer a range of social services.

Of note, evangelical and Pentecostal churches have seen the most membership growth recently. A 2014 study found that about 47% of non-Catholic Christians are members of

Pentecostal churches where they engage in associated charismatic beliefs and practices. Some of these include divine healing, receiving direct revelations from God, and speaking in tongues during worship services.

Religion and Afro-Colombians

Like the general population, most Afro-Colombians are Catholic even though the Catholic Church historically did not focus its evangelization and education efforts on Afro-Colombian communities. As a result of limited Catholic doctrinal influence, Afro-Colombians tend to practice a “folk” form of Catholicism that incorporates elements of African or Caribbean religious traditions. For example, practitioners might seek aid from Catholic saints to protect them from supernatural forces or hold wakes to offer food, drink, and tobacco to saints. In some communities, funeral rituals include drumming, singing, and dancing to help the deceased’s spirit on its journey.

Religion and Indigenous Groups

Christian evangelization of Colombia’s indigenous groups did not halt with the end of colonialism. Instead, Catholic missions established agreements with government agencies to continue proselytizing the indigenous population well into the 20th century. Like Afro-Colombians, many members of indigenous groups as well as rural *mestizos* may practice a “folk” Catholicism that incorporates indigenous beliefs and practices into Catholic worship. Some indigenous people in remote areas may follow only traditional beliefs and practices.

Other Religions

Colombia is home to a Jewish community of about 6,000 people. Estimates of Colombia’s Muslim population range from 80,000-100,000. While there are Islamic centers throughout the country, Bogotá recently opened its first mosque, and the city of Maicao is home to South America’s 2nd largest mosque (pictured).

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

The family is the center of Colombian life, and historically, the Catholic Church has been a major influence on family size, structure, and values. More recently, the Catholic Church's impact on family life has decreased with Colombian society's secularization, modernization, and urbanization. Despite these shifts, Colombians still revere their families, sharing good fortune with their relations and involving them in all important decisions.

Residence

Housing structures in Colombia vary by climate, environment, and income level. Most Colombians live in urban areas, where modern conveniences like electricity and sanitation services are readily available for the middle and upper classes. By contrast, poor Colombians and residents of rural areas often lack access to these and other basic services.

Rural: In humid areas near the beaches and jungles, Colombians traditionally constructed homes of thatched wood and steeply pitched roofs, sometimes on stilts to protect inhabitants from water or wildlife. Near the Caribbean, residents traditionally built small, round, windowless adobe huts with thatched roofs. In the Andean mountains, homes often featured thick wood or adobe walls to block out the cold.

Rural homes are often white with bright blue, green, red, or orange trim and feature a porch or interior patio where residents may relax in hammocks. Small-scale landowners may reside in 2- or 3-bedroom homes, while wealthier residents often build Spanish colonial-style homes with pastel-colored exteriors. Besides lacking access to indoor plumbing and electricity, rural residents typically rely on wood-burning stoves for heat. (Photo: A home in Macanal).

Urban: Housing in Colombia's urban areas is varied. Due to lack of space, Colombians often build up instead of out, placing homes close together. Wealthy Colombians may live in Spanish colonial-style mansions or modern ranch-style houses with ceramic tile flooring, painted stucco walls, several bedrooms, a kitchen, and living and dining areas. Middle- and high-income Colombians may live in ***urbanizaciones***, secure high-rise apartment buildings surrounded by walls and guards. Lower income Colombians typically live in modest apartments in single or multi-story brick buildings.

In 2018, 15.5% of Colombia's population or about 7.7 million people living in rural areas were internally displaced after fleeing violence and crime (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). Drawn to Colombia's urban areas, these families often live together in ***tugurios***, small lots where people construct makeshift dwellings of tin, cardboard, and other materials. Also called ***barrios de invasion*** or invasion neighborhoods, these slums are marked by poverty and high crime rates. While the government plans to bring affordable housing to all Colombians, only about 140,000 homes are constructed annually – too few to fulfill demand.

Family Structure

In Colombian families, the father is generally the head of household with the mother usually subservient yet influential (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*). Most Colombians live as nuclear families (2 parents and their children). Extended families play an important role in daily life, gathering frequently for meals, birthdays, religious ceremonies, and other special occasions. Colombians revere their elderly family members for their wisdom and experience, often visiting or opening their homes to them. Many Colombians enjoy special bonds with close friends or their ***padrinos*** (godparents), who provide them emotional, spiritual, and financial support (Photo: A Colombian mother and her children).

Children

While Colombian families traditionally had 7-10 children, most today have 2-3 (see p. 3-4 of *Sex and Gender*). Children usually live with their parents until they marry, although a growing number of young adults move away for education or employment opportunities. A child's life experiences are largely shaped by his family's socioeconomic status. Children in lower income families often work to supplement the family's income. Some children are "adopted" by a wealthy family to provide domestic labor in exchange for a small salary, schooling, and room and board. In recent decades, some poor or orphaned children in rural areas have been forced into armed militia groups (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*). By contrast, children from upper class families have fewer responsibilities and greater access to education (Photo: Children in Colombia).

Birth: Colombians have a particular fondness for babies and strongly value motherhood. Before a child is born, the mother's friends plan a baby shower, bringing gifts for both mother and child and enjoying refreshments. After birth, the mother traditionally adheres to a 40-day maternity ***dieta*** (diet), during which she does not cook, clean, or perform other household chores. Colombians also emphasize "kangaroo care," frequent skin-to-skin contact between mother and infant, as an essential part of childbirth and mother-child bonding.

Rites of Passage

Because most Colombians identify with Roman Catholicism (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), they mark life's milestones with Catholic rites of passage, even if they do not regularly attend church services. For example, families usually baptize their children within a month of birth, then celebrate their first communion and confirmation when they are teenagers. A non-religious rite of passage and symbol of transition to adulthood for males is a 1-year period of military service at age 18.

Quinceañera*:** Colombians celebrate their daughters' 15th birthdays and entrance to womanhood with a formal party called a ***Fiesta de Quince (Party of 15) or ***quinceañera***. A typical *quinceañera* celebration begins with a special Catholic mass where the honored girl receives blessings from a priest. The girl typically leaves a toy at the altar as a symbolic farewell to her childhood. At the party that follows, the young woman, dressed in a formal gown and tiara, ceremoniously replaces her flat shoes with high heels to enjoy a first dance with her father. Guests enjoy music, dancing, and food. Families often spend months planning and years saving for the celebration.

Dating and Spouse Selection: Boys and girls typically interact from a young age, socializing at school and sports events. Rural residents normally begin dating around age 14, urban residents even sooner. Popular activities include shopping, attending parties, and going to the movies. Colombians typically spend several years dating before deciding to marry. Men traditionally ask a woman's father for permission before proposing.

Marriage: In wealthier families, months of luncheons, parties, and weekends at the family's ***finca*** (country home) generally precede the wedding. Brides usually have a ***despedida de soltera*** (farewell to singlehood) party, and the groom a bachelor party. Guests arrive about 2 days in advance of the wedding, traditionally called the ***entrada de los regalos*** (arrival of the gifts). Monetary gifts are considered bad taste, unless the wedding invitation specifically requests a ***lluvia de sobres*** (rain of envelopes). The groom often hires a band to serenade the bride the night before the wedding.

Colombian weddings usually follow the traditional Catholic church ceremony. During the service, the couple's godparents escort them as children carry 13 ***arras*** or gold coins, symbolic of the traditional dowry (money paid by the bride's family to the groom's family) (Photo: Catholic church in Bogotá).

The bride and groom exchange rings and use separate candles to light a single candle, representing unity in their new life together. After the ceremony, guests enjoy a reception with music, food, and dancing. Because church weddings can be expensive, more Colombians are choosing civil marriage. Other couples enter into common-law marriages (***union libre***) which they can register with the government after 2 years.

Divorce in Colombia

Although it carries little social stigma today, divorce in Colombia was once very uncommon. Due largely to the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to divorce, it became legal only recently: for civil marriages in 1973 and for Catholic marriages in 1991. No-fault divorce (does not require proof of wrongdoing by either party) became legal in 2005. At only 9%, Colombia's divorce rate is one of the world's lowest. By contrast, the rate in the US is 46%.

Death: After a death, a family member remains with the deceased until the body is transferred to a funeral home for preparation for burial. Following a wake, during which mourners view the body and offer prayers, family and friends attend a ***velorio***, a special funeral mass. During the proceedings, mourners may wail and cry loudly. In some coastal areas, the family may hire women called ***plañideras*** to cry at the *velorio*. Some Colombians may carry the casket on their shoulders to the cemetery, while others use a car decorated with flowers to transport the remains. Urban Colombians are increasingly choosing cremation over a casketed burial.

Following the burial, family members gather to offer prayers over a period of 9 nights called the ***luto***. To demonstrate their grief and mourning, female relatives tend not to use makeup, and relatives usually wear black attire. On each anniversary of the death, family members attend a mass to pray for the deceased.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditionally, Colombia was a male-dominated society where ***machismo***, strong masculine pride, was counterbalanced by female subservience. The country's social system was patriarchal, whereby men held all social power and authority. While women and men now have equal rights before the law, traditional attitudes continue to hinder women's full participation in educational, economic, and political spheres.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Colombian women traditionally held responsibility for all household chores and childcare. While women in upper-class families rarely worked outside the home, lower income women often worked along with their husbands to support their families. In addition, many women became the *de facto* head of the household when men migrated to urban areas for work. Today, many more women work outside the home and still perform the majority of domestic tasks. Of note, single mothers head about 50% of Colombia's displaced families (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*).

Labor Force: In 2019, about 57% of women worked outside the home, 1% more than the US rate. Although some women hold high level positions in government, business, and politics, they generally experience discrimination in hiring and promotion. Women also receive lower wages than men with comparable education levels and work experience. In addition, some jobs require women to meet certain beauty or appearance standards not required for men. About 1/3 of female urban workers are employed as domestic workers or maids. Most work 10-18 hours daily, earning far below the minimum wage. Many other women work as street vendors (Photo: Wayúu women sell their woven wares on the street).

Gender and the Law

In 1954, Colombia became one of the last Latin American countries to grant women the right to vote. Until the mid-1970s, the law required women to obey their husbands. Today, women and men enjoy equal rights in marriage and in their authority over their children. In addition, the 1991 constitution guarantees civil liberties for women and men and recognizes a female head of household. It also prohibits gender discrimination in the workplace and affords special protections to single mothers and pregnant women.

Despite these affirmative measures, laws are not always enforced. For example, although inheritance laws recognize gender equality, children typically receive benefits and inheritances following a divorce or death before the wife, thereby denying a woman her marital assets.

Gender and Politics

Even though Colombia featured Latin America's first female presidential candidate in 1974, rates of women's participation in the political process have been historically lower in Colombia than elsewhere in Latin America. Beginning with the 1991 constitution, Colombian law focused on improving gender equality within the government and political process. For example, the law requires that women hold at least 30% of government appointments and make up a minimum of 30% of political party lists, among other requirements.

While female politicians are generally well-respected, unlike men, women must demonstrate they are exceptional housewives and mothers before the public considers them serious candidates. In 2014, 3 women were major party presidential candidates. In 2018, 20% of lower house and 29% of upper house parliament members were women, compared with 25% and 25% in the US Congress, respectively (Photo: Former Colombia Senator Cecilia Matilde López Montaño.)

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Women face a significant level of violence in Colombia, some of it related to Colombia's internal conflicts (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*). Between 2001 and 2009, experts estimate that around 500,000 women were subjected to conflict-related sexual violence.

Reports of GBV have increased significantly over the last 10 years. In 2014, 39% of women experienced one or more sexual offenses in their lifetime. Of note, these increases are due both to increased reporting of (previously unreported) offenses and to heightened levels of violence. Experts trace these high levels to several causes, such as the widespread notion that men exercise legitimate power over women. Likewise, women often are accused of "provoking" violence when they do not comply with male expectations regarding their dress or behavior.

Although Colombia's GBV-related legislation aligns with highest international standards, government support services, such as battered women's shelters, are lacking. In addition, authorities often explicitly discourage victims from seeking justice. Consequently, even if GBV cases are reported, indictment and prosecution of perpetrators is rare. If perpetrators receive convictions, their punishment is often light.

Sex and Procreation

In line with Roman Catholic teachings, Colombians traditionally view sexual intimacy as appropriate only within marriage. There is a double standard, however. While women are expected to adhere to strict rules of chastity, male promiscuity and infidelity are largely tolerated. Colombians typically do not discuss sex openly, although attitudes have liberalized in recent years (Photo: Colombian women at a US trade show).

Colombia's birthrate has steadily declined since the 1960s, from 6 to 2. children per woman, due primarily to urbanization and government family planning initiatives (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*). Despite this general decrease, the country's rate

of teenage pregnancy has risen and is today one of Latin America's highest. According to government figures, 17% girls aged between 15 and 19 years are or have been pregnant. In response to this trend, Colombia's Congress passed a law in 2010 guaranteeing all citizens access to free contraceptive drugs and surgical procedures.

Until 2006, abortion was completely banned in Colombia. It is now legal only in the case of rape, incest, risk of death to the mother, or malformation of the fetus. Several obstacles prevent women from obtaining legal abortions. These include bureaucracy, refusal by doctors to perform the procedure, lack of understanding of the law, and resistance by the Catholic Church. Observers estimate about 450,000 illegal abortions are performed every year, most in unsafe conditions. As a result, abortion remains a leading cause of maternal mortality in Colombia.

Beauty Pageants

Beauty pageants are very popular across Colombia, from regional events like "Miss Sugarcane" to the national "Miss Colombia." Critics maintain these pageants misrepresent women, buttress gender stereotypes, and reinforce society's social and ethnic inequalities (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2014, Antioquia Department cut funding to its pageant to support an alternative "Talented Young Women" contest that promotes skills over appearance.

Homosexuality

Colombia decriminalized homosexual activity in 1980. In 2007-08, the Constitutional Court granted same-sex couples pension, social security, and property rights, then in 2011 ruled that same-sex couples "constitute a family." Same-sex marriage was legalized in Colombia on 28 April 2016 in a 6-3 ruling by the Constitutional Court of Colombia. Despite these legal changes, homosexuals experience stigmatization such as harassment for public displays of affection.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Over 99% of Colombians speak Spanish, making Colombia the 2nd largest Spanish-speaking country by population behind Mexico. A small subset of the population speaks other indigenous or creole languages, usually in addition to Spanish.

Spanish

Spanish evolved from Latin dialects spoken in the area of present-day Spain after the Roman Empire fell about 1500 years ago. Spanish explorers and conquerors brought their language to Colombia beginning in the early 16th century (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Today, some Colombians refer to their language as ***castellano*** (Castilian) after a region of Spain rather than using the more typical ***español*** (Spanish).

Spanish uses the same alphabet as English with 3 additional consonants – ch, ll (pronounced like "y" as in yam, "j" as in jam, or "s" depending on dialect), and ñ (pronounced like the "ny" in the word canyon). The similar alphabet, consistent spelling patterns, and Latin base make Spanish relatively easy for English speakers to learn.

Colombian Spanish has about 11 dialects. Colombians generally identify their fellow citizens' regional origins by variations in accents or pronoun use just as Americans might distinguish speakers from the South or Midwest. Because it is clear and easy to understand, the standard dialect of Bogotá and environs is the preferred dialect for broadcasts throughout Spanish-speaking Latin America. By contrast, Colombia's Caribbean coast dialect features differing pronunciations and faster rates of speech that can make it challenging to understand (Photo: Colombians of different ethnicities all speak Spanish).

Colombian Spanish dialects are mutually intelligible with other Spanish dialects from around the world. Of note, Colombian Spanish does include some words and phrases having different meanings from those of other Spanish-speaking countries. Colombians refer to these terms as ***colombianismos***.

Indigenous Languages and Creoles

Besides Spanish, about 1.5% of Colombians speak 1 of the country's more than 80 indigenous languages (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Roughly 20% of Colombia's indigenous people speak Wayúu, a language of the Arawak family found principally in northeastern Colombia's La Guajira Department. While some of Colombia's indigenous languages have become extinct, many others still have just a few hundred speakers.

To help protect its linguistic diversity, Colombia passed the Law of Native Languages in 2010 making the preservation of the customs and languages of Colombia's indigenous people a national priority. To this end, the Ministry of Culture has catalogued all the country's indigenous languages. In addition, the Ministry is promoting bilingual education in several indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the need to speak Spanish in most educational and employment settings inhibits younger Colombians from maintaining proficiency in their native languages.

Some Afro-Colombians speak so-called creole languages that developed as a result of the slave trade (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). In general, Colombian creole languages combine vocabulary and simplified grammar structures from different African languages with Spanish or English. Palenquero is a Spanish-based creole traditionally spoken southeast of Cartagena. The inhabitants of the San Andrés y Providencia Islands speak an English-based creole (Photo: Children in the Pacific coast town of Tumaco).

English

An increasingly important language of global commerce, English is the most common 2nd language in Colombia. Although public school students receive English instruction, most Colombians do not learn to speak English proficiently. Most fluent English speakers live in large metropolitan areas.

Communication Overview

Communicating effectively with Colombians requires not just the ability to speak Spanish but also the ability to interact in culturally competent ways. Communication competence includes paralanguage (speech, volume, rate, and intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, and gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these aspects of communication help to ensure that Colombians interpret statements as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Colombians exhibit a warm, friendly, and often animated communication style. When conversing in groups, they may speak loudly and talk over one another. Colombians generally enjoy humor and often use it to build rapport and dispel tensions. While they commonly express their views about a situation forthrightly in a professional setting, Colombians prefer to handle interpersonal conflicts indirectly to avoid causing offense or placing blame.

Greetings

Like Americans, Colombians typically shake hands when greeting, although some work colleagues prefer to firmly grip rather than shake hands. Colombians typically make direct eye contact during initial greetings (Photo: A US official greets a Colombian soldier). In addition, women may kiss both male and female colleagues as well as friends on the cheek in social and professional settings. Men may hug and slap close associates and friends on the back if they have not seen each other recently.

Forms of Address

Colombians' forms of address demonstrate courtesy and reflect regional and dialectal variations. They address most work associates by their professional title (***Doctor/a***, ***Profesor/a***, etc.) and last name to convey appropriate respect. People without a professional degree should be addressed as ***Señor*** (Mr.), ***Señora*** (Mrs.), or ***Señorita*** (for young/unmarried women) combined with their last names.

In many areas, Colombians address only children, relatives, and close friends by their first names. Consequently, foreign nationals should avoid using a colleague's first name unless invited to do so. When speaking in English, foreigner nationals should be formal and polite, addressing their partners using the English equivalent of professional titles when possible.

Spanish has different "you" pronouns and verb conjugations depending on the level of formality and respect required. Colombians tend to use the formal "you" or ***usted*** in all formal and business transactions. By contrast, they reserve the informal ***tú*** for family, friends, and younger people. Of note, in the Bogotano dialect (that spoken in Bogotá), close friends, siblings, and spouses may use *usted* instead of *tú*, as such usage connotes even a deeper familiarity. Foreign nationals should use *usted* with all conversation partners unless advised otherwise (Photo: Colombians gather to receive medical services).

Names: Most Colombians have 2 last names. While the 1st is the person's father's surname, the 2nd is the mother's surname. For example, in the name of Ingrid Betancourt Pulecio, a presidential candidate who spent several years a captive of the FARC (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), Betancourt is her father's surname while Pulecio is her mother's surname.

Colombians commonly refer to others by their title and paternal surname. For example, a university graduate named Mario Rojas González would be addressed as ***Licenciado*** Rojas to reflect his degree and paternal last name. Of note, if a

Colombian woman marries, she may choose to drop her maternal last name and substitute her husband's paternal surname but is not required to do so.

Conversational Topics

Colombians typically begin conversations with inquiries about family, place of origin, health, hobbies, and sports before broaching more serious topics. They consider skipping such introductory subjects or rushing small talk impolite. Discussing positive observations about Colombia and its food, coffee, literature, or art can help establish rapport with Colombians. To avoid causing offense, foreign nationals should avoid discussing violence, politics, religion, and Colombia's notoriety as a drug-producing country. Of note, Colombians expect to spend some time chatting following a meeting's conclusion. To depart hastily without engaging socially is considered insulting in Colombian society.

Gestures

Colombians are not overly expressive with their hands or arms when speaking but do use certain gestures for emphasis or to replace spoken words. For example, Colombians may make a neck cutting gesture with a finger or open hand to indicate something is wrong or will not happen. Instead of pointing with an index finger, Colombians slightly raise their chin, widen their eyes, and pout their lips toward something (Photo: Colombian students).

Some common US gestures can cause offense in Colombia and should be avoided. Colombians consider using both index fingers to measure the length of an object and the "ok" gesture to be impolite. In addition, foreign nationals should avoid using an index finger to point at someone and instead use their whole hand to gesture.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Spanish
Hello	Hola
How are you?	¿Cómo está usted?
Fine, thank you	Bien, gracias
What is your name?	¿Cómo se llama?
My name is __	Me llamo __
Pleased to meet you	Mucho gusto
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You are welcome	De nada
Yes/No	Sí/No
Good morning	Buenos días
Good day	Buenas tardes
Good night	Buenas noches
Goodbye	Adiós
Excuse me	Con permiso
Do you speak English?	¿Habla usted inglés?
I don't understand	No entiendo
Write it down please.	Favor de escribirlo
Who?	¿Quién?
What?	¿Qué?
When?	¿Cuando?
Where?	¿Dónde?
Why?	¿Por qué
How?	¿Cómo?
Do you have___?	¿Tiene usted___?
I want___	Quiero___
How much does it cost?	¿Cuánto cuesta?
Can you help me?	¿Me puede ayudar?
Where is the bathroom?	¿Dónde esta el baño?
Straight ahead	Derecho
Right	Derecha
Left	Izquierda
With	Con
Without	Sin
OK	Bien

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 95.1%
- Male: 94.9%
- Female: 95.3% (2018 estimate)

History of Education

Colombia's history of formal education dates to the 16th century, when the Spanish conquered and then colonized the region (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). Most early efforts to formalize schooling were initiated by the Roman Catholic Church (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), which established schools and seminaries, mostly in Bogotá. In 1580, the Church founded the region's first university, ***Universidad de Estudios Generales*** (now ***Universidad Santo Tomás***).

Colonial era schools generally restricted enrollment to Spanish elites (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Most other residents (*mestizos*, African slaves, and the region's indigenous peoples) remained uneducated and illiterate. Grade school curricula focused on humanities and classics, while universities offered courses in law, medicine, philosophy, and theology (Photo: The Universidad Santo Tomás in Bogotá).

The Jesuits, a Catholic religious order, were the most active, well-trained, and well-funded educators, providing the majority of formal education throughout the Spanish colonies. Jesuit missionaries also traveled to the remote interior of Colombia, establishing missions to instruct indigenous people in Spanish and the Catholic faith (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). When the Jesuits fell out of favor in Europe around the mid-18th century, the Spanish king expelled them from the colony. As a result, Colombia's quality and availability of education declined.

19th- and Early 20th-Century Reforms

Early 19th-century independence fighters led by Simón Bolívar (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*) blamed the population's widespread illiteracy on Spanish colonialists' indifference. Bolívar's alliance proceeded to reform the education system, and by 1819, was calling for universal education.

Post-independence education reform proved controversial. Members of the Liberal Party sought to eliminate Church influence and provide secular, free, and compulsory education. Conversely, Conservative Party members fought to preserve the Church's role in schools and prevent compulsory education (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). Of note, in the mid-19th century the Conservatives invited the Jesuits to return to the region to resume their educational pursuits before the Liberals expelled them again (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Despite political infighting, over time Colombia made progress toward Bolívar's goals. First, the government passed legislation making education free and establishing teacher training institutions in 1870. The Catholic Church retained its influence in the educational system when an 1887 agreement with the government gave the Church control over public school textbooks. Then, in 1903, the government established a national system of education, and in 1927, made primary education compulsory. Most of the population could not comply with this requirement due to a lack of schools, teachers, and resources (Photo: An 1896 anatomy class at the University of Antioquia).

In the 1930s, the government outlawed enrollment discrimination based on race or religion. It also removed the Catholic Church as the authority on educational practices, paving the way for coed, secular education. Of note, the role of religion in education remained a controversial topic for many years, contributing to tensions that flamed *La Violencia* in the mid-20th century (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). In 1973, the government abolished the requirement to teach Catholicism in public schools.

To enhance the population's access to education across the country, the government made significant increases in education funding beginning in the 1960s. Between 1966 and 1986, funding rose 5-fold, accounting for over 1/4 of the national budget by 1987. As reforms took hold and resources improved, enrollment levels increased. Primary school enrollment grew from 550,000 in 1935 to 4.2 million in 1980 as secondary enrollment increased from about 46,000 students to over 1.8 million over the same period.

The constitution of 1991 (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*) made school enrollment mandatory for children between the ages of 5 and 15. Consequently, secondary school enrollment nearly doubled to over 3.5 million by 1999. In 2012, Colombia made secondary education free, further expanding enrollment.

Modern Education System

Colombia's modern education system has enjoyed much success. Literacy rates rose from between 20% and 35% before World War I to 92% by 2000. Despite this overall improvement, literacy rates continue to lag among Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: US sailor at a Colombian elementary school).

Catholic religious instruction is no longer mandatory in public schools and the public school curriculum contains no religious elements. Nevertheless, many public schools still provide some optional Catholic religious education. Of note, the 1991 constitution states that no student shall be forced to receive religious education in public schools.

In addition to providing education, schools play an important social role for students. Student-teacher relations are often close and informal. Students may address teachers by their first names, while teachers often play sports with students and act as their mentors. In addition, discussion-based teaching styles are also replacing authoritative teaching models.

Despite these positive aspects, many Colombian students face challenges in completing their education. The quality of education is low in many areas, particularly in poor and rural regions. Many students must repeat grades in both primary and secondary schools due to poor performance. Some rural and poor urban students must drop out of school in order to work to help support their families.

Pre-Primary: Colombian children aged 3-5 may attend 3 years of free public or tuition-based private preschool and kindergarten programs. While attendance during the first 2 years is optional, the 3rd year is compulsory. Although 92% of preschools are private Catholic schools, over 70% of preschool students attend public preschools.

Primary: Consisting of 5 grades starting at age 6, primary school is compulsory and free. Approximately 93% of all children enroll. Required subjects include science and environmental education, math, social sciences, history, geography, physical education, humanities, information technology, and languages. About 98% of enrolled students complete primary school and continue to secondary education.

Secondary: Basic secondary school (grades 6-9) is compulsory and free. While required courses are the same as primary school, there is a greater focus on natural sciences, logic, and critical thinking. Students also attend classes that explore vocational and professional specialties. Upon completion of grade 9, students receive a diploma (Photo: School in Oicatá).

Upper secondary school (grades 10-11) is free but not compulsory. Around 43% of students of the appropriate age enroll in upper secondary school. Because secondary schools are concentrated in metropolitan areas, urban children are more likely to attend them. By contrast, students in rural areas may have to travel long distances to reach the nearest secondary school.

Colombians may choose between 2 upper secondary education tracks, both of which confer a ***Bachillerato***, roughly equivalent to a US high school diploma. Most students pursue the academic track, focusing on a specific field of science, arts, or humanities in preparation for university study. Students on the technical track pursue studies in fields such as agriculture, finance, management, ecology, and information technology to enter the workforce or study at a university following graduation.

Post-Secondary: Colombia has 4 types of post-secondary educational institution. While universities offer traditional undergraduate and graduate programs, university institutions offer only undergraduate programs. Technological institutions offer technical and technological degrees, while professional technical institutions offer technical training for a particular job. The government National Training Service also runs tuition-free technology and technical workforce training institutions.

Colombian post-secondary enrollment has increased steadily since 2000. While just 24% of secondary school graduates enrolled in university in 2000, that rate had doubled to 55% by 2018. To meet this demand, 4 new universities and 20 new university institutions opened between 2007 and 2011. Critics assert that this rapid expansion came at the expense of quality, with institutions employing underqualified faculty. Dropout rates are also high, with around 17% of university students failing to complete their degree program (Photo: Students at La Universidad del Valle in Cali).

Education and Colombia's Internal Violence

Guerilla, paramilitary, and criminal organizations (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*) have killed, threatened, and displaced educators, often because they are the only government representatives in remote areas. In addition, guerilla organizations often maintain a presence in many universities to recruit students, generate political support for their causes, and undermine support for their adversaries.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Colombians value a balance of work and personal life, tending to measure quality of life by interpersonal relationships rather than professional success or material wealth. Consequently, they typically take the time required to build and sustain both business and personal connections. Colombians' personal space preferences vary by level of familiarity and region.

Time and Work

Colombia's work week runs from Monday-Friday. Many business offices open from 8:00am-12:00pm, close for a 2-hour lunch break from 12:00pm-2:00pm, then reopen from 2:00pm-6:00pm. Some establishments may not adhere to this schedule. Colombians generally attend meetings, conduct other business, run errands, and shop either before or after the 2-hour lunch period.

Shopping hours depend on store size and location. Many stores open weekdays from 9:00am-5:00pm and a half day on Saturday. Larger stores and supermarkets typically have extended evening hours, while smaller shops in more remote areas have less consistent schedules. Most museums close on Mondays, while many restaurants and stores close on Sundays. Post office hours vary widely (Photo: A customer buys a plant from a small business owner).

Working Environment: Colombian workplaces are generally hierarchical: upper level managers tend to make key decisions without significant input from their subordinates. Many managers maintain a friendly but paternalistic attitude towards their employees. Work colleagues tend to view the individual worker as less important than the group. While this tendency can foster a strong sense of group identity and belonging, it can also reduce initiative and innovation within a business.

Colombian law officially limits work to 8-hour days, 6 days per week with a break during shifts. Overtime up to 12 hours requires special authorization. Overtime and work conducted between 10:00pm-6:00am require higher pay. In reality, many Colombians, including the self-employed, often work longer hours to provide for their families.

Time Zone: Colombia's time zone, Colombia Time (COT), is 5 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). Colombia does not observe daylight savings time. Colombia's time is identical to Eastern Standard Time (EST) in the US, which means it is 1 hour behind the US Eastern Daylight Saving Time (EDT).

Date Notation: While Colombia like the US uses the Western (Gregorian), Colombians tend to write the day first, followed by the month and year.

Time and Business

While most Colombians value punctuality and generally adhere to deadlines, they may arrive a few minutes late to appointments. Similarly, conducting business meetings tends to move more slowly in Colombia than in the US, in part because Colombians prefer to establish both personal and professional relationships first. They often rely on a personal introduction or recommendation from a mutual acquaintance to facilitate business contacts (Photo: US TSgt assists Colombian airman in preparing a checklist).

Initial business meetings usually involve a substantial amount of polite conversation to establish rapport (see p. 5 *of Language and Communication*). After a meeting, Colombians often follow up with correspondence detailing key discussion points, next steps, and deadlines for both parties' reference. Business discussions may also occur outside of working hours, during meals, or in more relaxed settings.

In the workplace, Colombians prefer to avoid confrontational behavior, including critiquing their colleagues publicly. Instead, Colombians prefer to convey negative feedback privately and in a constructive manner to avoid causing embarrassment or creating conflict within the work team.

Personal Space

As is common in many societies, personal space in Colombia varies based on the nature of the relationship. The distance Colombian speakers maintain also varies by region. For example, Colombians from urban and highland regions tend to maintain a greater distance than Colombians from the coasts. Throughout the country, distance between conversational partners diminishes with familiarity. Consequently, while Colombians tend to remain about an arm's length apart when meeting strangers, family and close business associates may stand or sit close together.

Touch

Colombians customarily use conversational touching to convey sincerity, affection, concern, or friendliness. Close friends and family members tend to touch each other over the course of a conversation and during greetings (see p. 3 *of Language and Communication*). Conversational touching occurs less frequently in professional contexts. Foreign nationals should demonstrate reserve by waiting for the Colombian counterpart to initiate the touch (Photo: Colombian women and the former US ambassador touch while exchanging greetings).

Eye Contact

Colombians tend to maintain direct eye contact when conversing with colleagues, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers. They consider avoiding direct eye contact during a conversation as suggestive of a lack of confidence or interest in the discussion.

Photographs

Churches, museums, secured areas, and similar places may prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should always acquire a Colombian's permission before taking his photo.

Driving

In urban areas, drivers tend to disobey traffic laws and ignore lane markings while maneuvering congested streets. Honking is common and usually conveys position on the roadway rather than anger. In isolated rural areas, poor road conditions combined with a lack of lighting, signage, and security make driving hazardous. Like Americans, Colombians drive on the right side of the road.

Colombia's cities and towns are generally laid out in a predictable grid pattern, adhering to a naming convention that makes addresses easy to find. Streets that run north-south are ***carreras*** while east-west roads are ***calles***.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January 6: Three Kings Day/Epiphany*
- March 19: San José Day*
- March/April: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Monday (dates vary)
- May 1: Labor Day
- May: Ascension Day* (date varies)
- May/June: Corpus Christi Day* (date varies)
- June: Sacred Heart of Jesus Day* (date varies)
- June 29: San Pedro and San Pablo Day*
- July 20: Independence Day
- August 7: Battle of Boyacá Day
- August 15: Assumption of Mary Day*
- October 12: Day of the [Latino] Race*
- November 1: All Saints' Day*
- November 11: Cartagena's Independence*
- December 8: Immaculate Conception Day
- December 25: Christmas

* When these holidays do not fall on a Monday, Colombians observe them the following Monday.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Colombian aesthetics and recreational pursuits reflect the region's rich cultural diversity. Indigenous, European, African, and Caribbean influences are evident in Colombian fashion, musical styles, arts and crafts, and sports forms.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Traditional clothing remains popular across the country and varies by region and climate. Traditional clothing in Colombia's milder areas, such as the Pacific and Caribbean coasts, is lightweight. Women often wear loose, colorful blouses with skirts that fall below the knee. Men typically wear linen or twill pants with brightly colored shirts and a handkerchief around the neck. On Colombia's Caribbean coast, many men prefer a ***guayabera***, a dress shirt with rows of vertical pleats worn untucked. Also from the Caribbean coast region, the man's ***sombrero vueltiao,*** a wide-brimmed hat woven from strips of dried cane, has become a widely-known symbol of Colombian culture.

In Colombia's cool mountainous regions, indigenous people often wear a ***ruana***, wool, poncho-like outer garment paired with a black bowler hat. Wayúu women of the Guajira Peninsula in northern Colombia prefer long, colorful, loose dresses paired with sandals.

The most well-known traditional dress for women is the ***pollera colora*** (pictured), a flowing, brightly colored skirt with a matching off-the shoulder blouse adorned with ruffles and lace. Often worn for traditional dances, the Colombian *pollera* is similar to styles found throughout Spanish-speaking Latin America. Women's traditional outfits also often include a ***pañolon***, a fringed shawl.

Modern: Most Colombians wear Western-style clothing daily. Men typically wear slacks and shirts, while women wear dresses, skirts and blouses, or pantsuits. By contrast, teenagers and young people dress much more casually, often favoring jeans and T-shirts. While all Colombians value a neat and well-dressed appearance, Bogotanos (residents of Bogotá) are particularly attentive to their clothing. In an office environment, Colombians' dress is conservative. While men favor dark suits and light dress shirts with ties, women often pair dresses or pantsuits with high heel shoes. Of note, Colombian women do not typically wear shorts except during sports activities.

Sports and Games

Traditional: In ***tejo***, a game attributed to Colombia's indigenous people, players throw a metal disk at a target box containing small clay pockets filled with gunpowder, causing a small explosion when hit. While friends often engage in casual games, professional teams also compete in a national tournament. ***Chaza*** or ***pelota nacional*** (national ball) is an indigenous racquet sport consisting of 2 teams of 4 players. Participants use their hands or a goatskin-lined, wooden racquet (***bombo***) to hit a rubber ball so that the opposing side fails to return it. ***Coleo*** is a rodeo-like competition popular in ***Los Llanos***, Colombia's eastern plains.

Football: Introduced by British sailors in the early 20th century, football (soccer) is Colombia's most popular sport. Colombians of all ages play the sport in addition to cheering on their favorite teams in various leagues. The men's national team has had success, reaching the quarter-finals during the 2014 FIFA World Cup where Colombian player James Rodriguez was the tournament's top scorer. As runner-up in the 2014 Copa América, South America's soccer championship, the Colombian women's national team qualified for the 2015 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games (Photo: US sailors and Marines play soccer with Colombia children).

Other Sports: Cycling has grown in popularity largely due to stars like Luis "Lucho" Herrera, who won the 1987 Tour of Spain, while Nairo Quintana took 2nd in the 2013 Tour de France and won the 2014 Giro d'Italia. Colombia's own annual Tour de Colombia covers one of the world's steepest and most challenging courses. Every Sunday, Bogotá holds a ***ciclovia,*** closing several hundred miles of roadway for use by a multitude of cyclists, rollerbladers, and skaters. Of note, Colombian-born race car driver Juan Pablo Montoya won his 2nd Indianapolis 500 in 2015.

Music and Dance

Traditional: Colombian traditional music includes a wide array of influences from indigenous to Spanish to Afro-Caribbean. The most popular of Colombia's many styles, ***cumbia*** combines drums, ***gaita*** (an indigenous flute), trombones, guitars, and maracas to produce complex African rhythms. During the accompanying dance, participants combine flirtatious movements recalling courtship with shuffling footwork that mimics the movements of chained African slaves.

Vallenato originated on Colombia's Caribbean coast and is played with an accordion, bongo drums, and a ***guacharaca*** (a ribbed, wooden stick strummed with a fork). Because it is the music of *Los Llanos*, ***joropo*** is often referred to as Colombia's country music. It features a harp, a ***cuatro*** (4- stringed guitar), and maracas to create a waltz-like rhythm. The ***bambuco*** demonstrates Spanish and European influence in its waltz-like beat.

Modern: Although not native to Colombia, salsa, techno, and pop are widely played. With 2 Grammys and 8 Latin Grammys, singer/songwriter Shakira (pictured) was the first Colombian to top US Billboard charts. Many Colombian artists combine modern and traditional styles. Examples include Pernett and hip hop band ChocQuib Town who favor *cumbia* rhythms, and Carlos Vives' blend of upbeat tempos and *vallenato* styles. Other well-known artists include Juanes, an immensely popular singer/guitarist who combines rock and *cumbia*, and Fonseca, who blends traditional music with boy band-type vocals.

Theater

Most urban areas feature a wide range of theatrical offerings ranging from conventional to experimental. Bogotá's biannual *Festival Iberooamericano del Teatro* draws thousands of international performers and theater enthusiasts.

Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez

Colombia's most well-known author is Gabriel García Márquez, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. He was born in Aracataca near the Caribbean coast in 1928 but lived mostly in Mexico and Europe. Known as "Gabo" to his fans, García Márquez began his career as a journalist before writing the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967. An innovative mixture of myths, dreams, and reality, the novel won instant acclaim and gave rise to a new genre in Latin American literature: magical realism.

Other well-received novels include *Love in the Time of Cholera, The Autumn of the Patriarch,* and *The General in his Labyrinth*, a treatment of the final months of Simón Bolívar (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). In the 1990s, García Márquez wrote a nonfiction account of kidnappings ordered by drug kingpin Pablo Escobar (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). In addition to novels, García Márquez wrote memoirs, short stories, screenplays, and nonfiction works that brought him widespread acclaim and commercial success. Upon Gabo's death in 2014, President Santos proclaimed him "the greatest Colombian who ever lived."

Literature

Following independence in 1819, Colombia's literary tradition began to bloom. Many 19th century authors were inspired by European Romanticism, including poet Rafael Pombo and poet/novelist Jorge Isaacs. José Asunción Silva's early 20th-

century poetry is considered a precursor to Latin American modernism. Also from that period, José Eustacio Rivera's novel *The Vortex* explored the plight of rubber workers in the Colombian jungle. Contemporary writers who have received significant acclaim include poet John Jairo Junieles and novelists Mario Mendoza and Laura Restrepo.

Arts and Crafts

Painting and Sculpture: The earliest Colombian works of art include petroglyphs (rock engravings) and cave drawings dating to 300 BC. During Colombia's colonial era (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*), artists primarily produced religious works of art for the colony's Roman Catholic churches and seminaries. Prolific colonial era painter Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos produced more than 500 works in the 17th and early 18th centuries.

Important artists from recent decades include Pedro Nel Gómez, best known for his murals in public buildings, and Édgar Negret, a sculptor whose works attained international renown. With his paintings and sculptures of large, rounded human figures, contemporary artist Fernando Botero is currently Colombia's most widely-recognized artist.

Textiles: Colombia's *sombrero vueltiao* (pictured) is as much art as attire. Constructed from dried cane fibers that have been dyed black, bleached, and braided, the hat was originally a product of the Zenú indigenous group. Declared a national symbol in 2004 when Colombia's delegation wore the hat during the Olympics, the hat is also popular among *cumbia* dancers. Other well-known textile products include the woven ***chinchorros*** (hammocks) and ***mochilas*** (shoulder bags) made by Wayúu people.

Metalwork: Colombia's Pre-Columbian indigenous populations were skilled goldsmiths who made intricate ornaments, breastplates, statues, pendants, figurines, jewelry, and knives. Bogotá's Colombian Gold Museum houses over 34,000 pieces.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Colombian cuisine varies by region and reflects the nation's unique geography and ethnic diversity. Unlike food from some other Latin American countries, typical Colombian fare (***comida criolla***) is not spicy or hot. Instead, Colombians prefer mildly seasoned dishes prepared from fresh, local ingredients.

Dining Customs

Colombians typically eat 3 daily meals and a mid-morning (***mediasnueves***) and mid-afternoon (***onces***) snack. While the mid-day meal is typically the largest, dinner can also be substantial (Photo: Meal of assorted barbecued meats, corn, and potatoes).

When invited to a Colombian home for dinner, guests are expected to arrive a few minutes late. Hosts usually serve their guests first and encourage them to begin eating immediately. After guests finish their portions, they usually must decline several offers of additional servings if they do not want more food. Guests who would like additional servings are expected to decline initially out of politeness and then accept on the 2nd offer.

Diet

Along the coasts, Spanish and African culinary traditions influence the preparation of local ingredients, including fresh fish, shellfish, snails, coconut, ***yuca*** (cassava – a tuberous starchy root), and tropical fruits. In this ***comida costeña*** (coastal cuisine), cooks often use coconut milk instead of oils to sauté meats and fish, then wrap them in banana leaves to steam. By contrast, potatoes, beans, sausage, and hearty soups are important components of Andean diets. Of note, guinea pig is an Andean delicacy. Dishes in the eastern plains (***Los Llanos***) tend to be heavy in starchy plantains, potatoes, and *yuca*. Rice is popular throughout the country.

Colombians across the country enjoy assorted meats (beef, pork loin, pork ribs, chicken, and sausage) barbecued on an iron grill (***parilla***) over a wood-burning fire. These meats are typically served with staples like grilled corn, potatoes, and ***arepas***, a flatbread made of ground corn.

In addition to meat, Colombians consume a variety of native fruits, including bananas, papayas, pineapples, mangos, ***maracuya*** (passion fruit), ***lulo*** (a small orange fruit with a bright green interior), and ***guanábana*** (pictured - a large, spiky green fruit with sweet flesh of custard consistency).

Popular Dishes and Meals

Popular dishes include ***arroz con pollo*** (chicken with rice); ***frijoles con chicharron*** (beans cooked with pork); ***sancocho*** (a thick soup that varies across the country according to local ingredients such as chicken, oxtail, plantains, pumpkin, and corn) and ***ajiaco*** (a hearty stew of chicken, corn, and several varieties of potato); and ***lechona*** (spiced pig skin stuffed with shredded pork and peas, then slow-roasted overnight).

While breakfast foods vary by region, they often include fruit, bread, eggs, ***changua*** (potato and egg soup) and ***calentado*** (fried rice with beans, meat, and sometimes plantains). In rural areas, ***caldo de papa*** (a potato broth seasoned with cilantro and chives) and ***tamales*** (corn dough filled with cheese or meats and steamed in a corn husk) are popular breakfast items.

Lunch typically begins with a soup followed by meat served with potatoes, rice, or *arepas*. Alternatively, lunch may consist of a large bowl of hearty soup. Dinner is usually a smaller meal that incorporates rice, pasta, or potatoes served alongside meat, chicken, or fish with salad.

For dessert, Colombians may enjoy crisp waffle cookies filled with ***arequipe***, a sweet, burnt milk sauce, or ***arroz con leche***, rice pudding flavored with cinnamon.

Eating Out

Urban Colombians in particular eat out regularly. Families often celebrate special occasions, such as birthdays and holidays, at restaurants – also popular socializing locations for groups of friends and couples.

Offering a variety of cuisines, restaurants range from upscale establishments to small, casual eateries serving inexpensive and hearty meals such as ***comida corriente***, a "meal of the day," commonly consisting of chicken, rice, fried plantains, and red beans. Typically located in the countryside, traditional ***asaderos*** specializing in barbecue are popular weekend destinations. Of note, many establishments automatically add a 10% surcharge to the bill. Additional tipping is not required or expected.

Street stalls are not as popular in Colombia as in some other Latin American countries. More commonly, Colombian food vendors concentrate in large open air markets where they sell light snacks and fresh fruits, including avocados, grapes, strawberries, and mangos. Some stalls specialize in *arepas* stuffed with cheese or other fillings. Others offer ***empanadas*** (pictured), fried turnovers filled with meat, potatoes, or vegetables, or ***envueltos***, another version of *tamales*.

Beverages

Colombians enjoy their world-famous coffee (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*) throughout the day. Typical ways to order coffee include ***tinto*** (black) and ***café con leche*** (coffee with milk). Colombians also enjoy freshly squeezed juices from papaya, pineapple, passion fruit, strawberry, and blackberry.

Popular alcoholic beverages include ***aguardiente*** (an anise favored sugarcane brandy), rum, and beer, including local brews such as Bavaria, Aguila, Club Colombia, and Costeña. Popular in Bogotá, ***Chicha*** is an indigenous Andean beer made from fermented corn. Some Colombians also enjoy imported whiskey and wine.

Health Overview

Colombia's healthcare system has improved dramatically over the past 3 decades, increasing the population's overall wellbeing. Between 1985 and 2020, life expectancy at birth steadily increased from approximately 68 to 76.6 years. Meanwhile, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1), decreased dramatically from 34 to 12.3 deaths per 1,000 live births. While quality of care varies greatly among private, public, urban, and rural facilities, Colombians in general have access to modern healthcare. Despite these positive trends, a high rate of illegal abortions has kept Colombia's maternal mortality rate high – at 64 per 100,000 live births, it is above the Latin American average of 63 (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Colombian medicine centers on the use of herbal remedies, not surgical methods, to identify and treat the basic causes of illness.

Traditional medicine is especially popular among Colombians who cannot afford or do not have access to modern medical procedures. Of note, many rural communities rely entirely on medicinal plants to treat diseases and other ailments. Merchants in both urban and rural markets commonly sell medicinal plants and herbal remedies (Photo: A ***saúco*** flower, used in Colombia to reduce swelling and heal wounds).

In addition to using herbal remedies, some Colombians consult traditional healers to cleanse the body of illness, to ward off spirits who bring sickness, and to restore physical and spiritual wholeness. In some indigenous communities (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*), traditional healers administer medical remedies or consume hallucinogenic drinks in order to enter the spirit world and rid a patient of illness.

Modern Healthcare System

Prior to 1990, about 25% of the Colombian population was medically insured. In an effort to provide greater access, ambitious healthcare reform introduced mandatory universal health insurance in 1993. Today, about 98% of Colombians are insured. In addition, access to healthcare has increased dramatically for poor and indigenous populations. In 2010, Colombia passed one of Latin America's most progressive reproductive rights laws, guaranteeing both men and women universal access to free contraceptive drugs and surgical procedures (see p. 3-4 of *Sex and Gender*). Major illnesses, like HIV/AIDS, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases are also covered under the health insurance system (Photo: Health clinic in Maripí in Boyacá Department).

Healthcare System Challenges: Colombia's national health insurance program faces several challenges. While employer and employee contributions fund the so-called "contributive" plan, government aid and taxes fund the "subsidized" plan for poor and unemployed Colombians. Historically, contributive plan members received services and procedures that were denied subsidized members. Although the government is attempting to narrow this eligibility gap, rising demand for healthcare plus increased costs, particularly for maternal and neonatal care, make progress slow.

Besides a shortfall in healthcare spending, Colombia lacks adequate medical professionals. In 2018, the country had about 2.2 physicians per 1,000 people, on par with neighboring Brazil's and Venezuela's 2.2. Further, Colombia's extensive network of hospitals and medical facilities is concentrated in cities. Although private urban facilities are staffed with highly-qualified doctors offering first-rate care, public urban hospitals often remain understaffed and poorly maintained. The quality of care further diminishes in rural areas, where residents often have access only to small, ill-equipped clinics. With the goal of improving rural healthcare, the government requires all

Colombian medical students to complete 1 year of service in a rural clinic as part of their residency. Of note, Afro-Colombians and indigenous groups disproportionately lack access to quality healthcare, suffering significantly higher infant mortality rates and lower life expectancies.

Health Challenges

Like many countries with an aging population, chronic and non-communicable disease such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes accounted for 75% of all deaths in Colombia in 2016. The top causes of death included cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, cancer, and other non-communicable diseases. Preventable "external causes," such as car accidents caused about 15% of all deaths (Photo: A Colombian family).

Further, communicable diseases, including tuberculosis, yellow fever, malaria, and dengue fever remain a risk, especially to inhabitants of rural and tropical regions. Although malaria is a risk in most areas below 5,500 ft elevation, Colombia is on track to register a 75% decrease in malaria incidence since 2000.

While tap water in most urban areas is clean, rural residents often lack access to clean water. Similarly, both rural and small town residents often lack access to sanitation facilities, putting them at risk of infection from parasites and bacteria.

Interpersonal Violence: Interpersonal violence was a leading cause of death among Colombians in 2018, contributing to 12.1 thousand deaths that year. In 2019, the murder rate was 25.4 per 100,000 population, a significant decrease and the lowest since 1974. Nevertheless, violence stemming from Colombia's ongoing internal conflicts (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*) continues to persist, especially along Colombia's border regions. Injuries from landmines in rural areas are especially pervasive.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

The Colombian economy was historically based on the mining and export of gold. As gold reserves dwindled, Colombia began to diversify its economy, forging an industrial sector and producing both goods and agricultural commodities for export by the 1950s.

In the 1990s, Colombia achieved steady economic growth by increasing spending on infrastructure and security, reducing tariffs, privatizing state-owned enterprises, and encouraging foreign investment. Although real GDP growth averaged 3.6% during the past decade, it fell to an estimated 2.6% in 2018.

Today, Colombia has a thriving multi-sector economy that is South America's 5th largest behind Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina. Rich in oil and mineral reserves, Colombia is Latin America's fourth largest oil producer and the world's fourth largest coal producer. Although the services and industry sectors are the primary economic drivers, agricultural activities remain important sources of economic growth. Further, over 700 large multinational corporations operate within Colombia, capitalizing on its educated labor force, high literacy rates, and stable currency (Photo: Medellín's Plaza Botero).

Despite these successes, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure (see p. 1-2 of *Technology and Material*), corruption, illegal drug trade, and an uncertain internal security situation (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*) threaten to disrupt economic progress. While unemployment averaged 9.7% in 2019, nearly 27% of the Colombian population lived below the poverty line. Wealth is distributed unequally, with urban upper and middle classes disproportionately holding the majority of economic resources.

Illegal Drug Industry

While specific numbers are unknown, observers estimate that Colombia produces 80% of the world's cocaine and 60% of all heroin sold in the US. Approximately 300 drug-trafficking organizations control the illegal drug trade, which permeates all levels of society. Farmers, government officials, and law enforcement personnel alike are implicated in this criminal activity. Despite government efforts and substantial US support to combat illicit drug activities, the Colombian drug trade continues to be a multi-billion dollar industry.

Services

Accounting for 58% of GDP and 63% of employment, the services sector is the largest and fastest-growing component of the Colombian economy. Important sub-components include transportation, telecommunications, tourism, financial services, and wholesale and retail sales.

Tourism: Colombia's tourism industry was stagnant during the latter half of the 20th and early 21st centuries, as unrest and armed conflict plagued the country (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*). More recently, stabilization in internal security has spurred a new growth in the industry. Tourist arrivals increased from about 540,000 in 2002 to 4.5 million in 2019, with the tourism sector directly accounting for 4.9% of GDP and 5.2% of employment (Photo: Cartagena, a tourist destination on the Caribbean coast).

Industry

As the 2nd largest component of the economy, the industrial sector accounts for 27% of GDP and 20% of employment.

Manufacturing: Manufacturing is a key sub-component of the industrial sector. Colombian companies specialize in the production of textiles, oil, clothing and footwear, beverages, chemicals, and cement. While government incentives have promoted the establishment of manufacturing centers in other regions, most industry is located in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali.

Construction: Construction accounts for 10% of GDP and 6% of employment. Government-led investment in infrastructure projects (see p. 1-2 of *Technology and Material)* and expansion in residential construction contributed to an average annual growth of 4-7% from 2000–2017. Today, the sector is sustained by both public and private investment.

Mining: Capitalizing on Colombia's rich natural resources, mining is a prolific industry that extracts gold, coal, silver, nickel, platinum, lead, and emeralds. Of note, 70-90% of the world's total emerald yield originates in Colombia.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector consists of farming, fishing, and forestry and is the Colombian's smallest economic sector, accounting for 6% of GDP and about 17% of employment.

Farming: Only about 2% of Colombia's territory is dedicated to cultivation. The most important crop, coffee, accounts for almost over 6% of all exports and contributes about 15% of the world's total coffee supply. Other important products include flowers, bananas, sugarcane, cotton, rice, tobacco, and corn. Large commercial farms employ modern agricultural techniques to produce commodities for export and domestic consumption. There are also small family-owned farms that engage in subsistence agriculture (Photo: Small-scale coffee farmer).

Livestock and Fishing: Livestock production is an important agricultural activity, with cattle occupying 80% of agricultural lands. Colombia's fishing industry is small, and domestic production does not meet local demand. Despite bordering 2 oceans, freshwater inland catches exceed ocean harvests.

Forestry: While forests cover approximately half of Colombia, the timber industry remains relatively undeveloped. Decades of logging for domestic use and land clearing for farming resulted in deforestation in some regions. Efforts to replant deforested areas with fast-growing, commercially valuable species are currently underway.

Currency

Colombia's currency is the Colombian *peso* (COP$), issued in 6 banknote values (1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000) and 5 coin values (50, 100, 200, 500, 1,000). Exchange rates vary, but $1 was worth about COP $3,749 in 2020. Several businesses accept credit cards with the exception of street stalls, market vendors, and other small businesses which require payment in cash.

Foreign Trade

In 2018, Colombia's exports totaled $41.77 billion and imports $51.23 billion. Exports included petroleum, coal, emeralds, coffee, nickel, flowers, bananas, and apparel. Buyers included the US (27%), China (10%), and Panama (7%). Top imports included industrial and transportation equipment, consumer goods, chemicals, paper products, and refined petroleum. These items were purchased from the US (26%), China (21%), Mexico (8%), and Brazil (6%).

Free Trade Agreements

Colombia has signed or is negotiating Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with several nations and the European Union (EU) as part of its strategy to promote multilateral cooperation and bolster economic growth. In 2012, Colombia entered into an FTA with the US, facilitating the movement of goods, services, and capital between the 2 nations. Colombia is a founding member of the Pacific Alliance, which promotes trade integration with Chile, Mexico, and Peru (Photo: Bank of the Republic in Barranquilla).

Foreign Aid

Since 2000, Colombia has been one of the largest recipients of US financial assistance, including $10 billion provided under "Plan Colombia" (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). In 2019, The US approved approximately $320.74 million in financial assistance to support counter narcotics, law enforcement, human rights, environmental, and economic development projects. In addition to the US assistance, Colombia receives humanitarian aid and disaster relief support from the EU.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Colombia has struggled to build and maintain its transportation infrastructure. In an effort to reduce both travel times and transport costs, the government recently began an ambitious program allowing private companies to build and operate transportation concessions. While journalism remains a dangerous occupation, Colombians enjoy a free press and unrestricted Internet access.

Transportation

Besides walking, common methods of everyday transport include buses, motorcycles, and bicycles; a minority of Colombians owns a car. Traveling by car can be risky in certain areas due to internal unrest (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*). Extreme urban congestion also makes driving challenging. In Bogotá congestion is managed by allowing cars in the city center only on certain days, based on their license plate number.

Bus routes serve most of the country. While buses called ***corrientes*** or ***sencillos*** (pictured) provide regional service, ***ejecutivos*** offer long-distance service in air-conditioned comfort. Within urban areas, residents may choose between a bus and a ***colectivo***, a mini-bus or van that collects passengers from set stops but only departs when full. Several cities operate integrated transport networks, such as Bogotá's TransMilenio system. Medellín has Colombia's only metro system which includes an aerial cable car that transports passengers to a hilltop city district. In urban areas, taxis are plentiful and economical. Motorcyclists also sell rides at modest prices on their ***mototaxis***. Of note, Bogotá features Latin America's largest network of bicycle routes as well as one of the world's longest pedestrian-only streets. Many residents take advantage of the city's weekly ***ciclovia*** or closure of roads to cars so that they may cycle, walk, or rollerblade through the city (see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Roadways: Of Colombia's about 133,595 mi of roadways, just 11% are paved. With only 750 mi of dual-lane, divided highways in 2012, Colombia announced plans in 2014 to build 4,400 mi of new roads, including 40 new toll roads (Photo: Highway near Barranquilla).

Railways: Colombia's deteriorating railway system currently transports only freight. As part of its broader infrastructure improvement effort launched in 2014, the country planned to increase railway operations by 50%. Colombia has 1,885 mi of rail lines. However, only 1,622 mi of lines are still in use. Passenger-rail use was suspended in 1992, resumed at the end of the 1990s, and, as of 2017, it is considered abandoned for long distances.

Ports and Waterways: Colombia has about 11,371 mi of navigable inland waterways. A 2014 project to improve navigability on the Magdalena River so that shippers can transport coal and oil was put on hold.. Important sea ports include Buenaventura and Tumaco on the Pacific coast and Santa Marta, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Muelles El Bosque, Puerto Bolívar, and Turbo on the Caribbean coast.

Airways: While Colombia has 836 airports, only about 121 have paved runways. Domestic carriers include Aires, AeroRepublica, Satena, and Colombia's national carrier, Avianca. The largest international airports include Medellín's José María Córdova Airport, Cali's Alfonso Bonilla Aragón Airport, and Bogotá's El Dorado Airport. The latter accounts for almost 50% of Colombia's air traffic.

Energy

With substantial proven reserves of fossil fuels (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*), Colombia is self-sufficient in energy and is even a net exporter of electricity, primarily to Venezuela and Ecuador. In 2017, Colombia generated about 69% of its electricity from hydroelectric plants with the remainder being generated by gas and coal-fired power plants (29%), and small hydro and cogeneration facilities.

Media

With communication across Colombia's mountainous geography historically difficult, Colombians traditionally have valued accurate news and information, holding journalists in high regard. Leading newspapers include Colombia's oldest, *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo* from Bogotá, *El Mundo* and *El Colombiano* in Medellín, and *Diario de Occidente* and *El País* in Cali. English-language publications include the *Bogotá Post* and the *City Paper* of Bogotá.

Radio and TV: Colombia's state-owned broadcaster *Señal Colombia Sistema de Medios Públicos* has 2 national radio stations and 3 national television stations, mostly devoted to educational and cultural content. Private media provide more than 500 radio and more than 60 television stations.

Violence against Journalists

During the decades of Colombia's internal violence (see p. 7-11 of *History and Myth*), journalism has been one of Colombia's most dangerous professions. Between 2000-2015, approximately 58 journalists were murdered in Colombia in a clear or probably connection with their work, making Colombia one of the western hemisphere's deadliest countries for media personnel. Around 90% of these murders went unpunished. As of 2018, Colombia ranked 130th in the World Press Freedom index, down 1 rank from 2017.

Telecommunications

While Colombia had just 15 landline telephones per 100 people in 2017, there were 134 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people in 2018. Of note, less than 75% of Colombia's population are regular mobile phone users, suggesting that some users have more than 1 cell phone subscription.

Internet: Approximately 64% of the population were regular Internet consumers in 2018, the majority using their mobile phones to access the web. The government puts no restrictions on Internet access nor does it monitor email or chat rooms without appropriate legal authority.

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