

THE STAKES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN COLOMBIA

I. OVERVIEW

This presidential election (first round on 26 May 2002; second round, if needed, on 16 June) will be crucial for the future of Colombia's democracy and its struggle against insurgents and paramilitaries, drugs and widespread poverty.¹ Social and economic distress is now widespread. Public frustration with the ill-fated peace process of the Pastrana Administration over the past three years, its definitive rupture on 20 February 2002, and increased attacks by the main rebel group, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC) on civilians and infrastructure since mid-January have made "war/peace" and "violence" the key vote-determining issues.² The failure to negotiate a solution to the longstanding civil war over the past three years has polarised the electorate.

The atmosphere is apprehensive and tense. In recent elections the insurgent groups, particularly the FARC but also the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), have challenged the legitimacy of the electoral process with intimidation and violence.³

¹ If no candidate wins 50 per cent plus 1 of all valid votes, including blank ones, in the initial round, a runoff between the two top vote-getters will be held. On 27 February 2002, the National Electoral Council established that blank votes constitute valid votes. As such they form part of the total number of valid votes cast in parliamentary and presidential elections. The winner in the second round is the candidate who obtains a simple majority.

² See Gran Encuesta Semana-El Tiempo-RCN, April 2002, in <http://semana.terra.com.co/1043/actualidad/ZZZ5CI4WI0Da.asp>; see also Sections II & III below.

³ Note that intimidation of voters and candidates on the departmental level by both the insurgents and the paramilitaries has been more common than attempts at imposing a violent boycott on elections.

The escalation of fighting this month between FARC and paramilitary forces in the north-western department of Chocó, which killed more than 110 civilians and an unknown number of combatants, demonstrates again the disregard both groups of irregulars have for the population as they pursue territory and power.⁴ It also puts into perspective the limitations of the government's forces, which reached the scene only days later. All presidential candidates are under death threats. In mid-April, the front-runner, Álvaro Uribe, barely escaped the fate of candidates who were killed in earlier presidential races.⁵ Presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and her vice presidential running mate, Clara Rojas, were kidnapped by the FARC a few months earlier and remain hostages.⁶

Since at least September 2001, voters provoked by rising frustration with a deadlocked negotiation and a worsening conflict appear to have found the

⁴ See "Sangrienta paradoja", in *Semana*, 6-13 May 2002, pp. 38-40; and *El Tiempo*, 8 May 2002, pp. 1-2, 1-3 and 1-4. Most of the civilians, among them 45 children, were killed by a make-shift mortar impact on a church in the municipality of Bojayá in which they had sought refuge. On 7 May, the FARC publicly admitted responsibility for the massacre, "justifying" their action, however, by stating that the paramilitary forces had used the people of Bojayá as human shields. *El Tiempo*, 7 May 2002.

⁵ On 14 April, Uribe's armoured vehicle was severely damaged by a bomb blast in the Atlantic seaport of Barranquilla that killed three fishermen and the driver of one of the protecting cars and wounded several by-passers. The Liberal candidate Luis Carlos Galán (1989), the UP's Jaime Pardo (1987) and Bernardo Jaramillo (1989) and the AD M-19's Carlos Pizarro (1990) were killed by drug-traffickers and paramilitary gunmen prior to the 1990 presidential elections.

⁶ See ICG Latin America Report No. 1, *Colombia's Elusive Quest for Peace*, 26 March 2002. Betancourt and Rojas were abducted when travelling to the former Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) on 23 February 2002.

tougher rhetoric of “dissident Liberal” candidate Álvaro Uribe appealing. Far behind in the polls last year, Uribe emerged as the unrivalled leader by January 2002 and has essentially maintained his advantage over the past four months.⁷ The advocates of the primacy of a political settlement, including “official Liberal” candidate Horacio Serpa, were compelled to adjust their strategy. Serpa, who in mid-2001 still supported President Pastrana’s negotiating efforts, although he viewed them as flawed, shifted toward the harder Uribe line. It is unclear, however, whether this adjustment will regain him enough support to prevent a first-round Uribe victory.

Two and a half months after the parliamentary election,⁸ eleven tickets are competing to lead the executive branch.⁹ Since the 1991 constitution

introduced a second round, no president has been elected in the first round. However, the latest polls suggest that this trend might be broken. Although there have been slight fluctuations during the spring, Uribe stood at 49.3 per cent a week before the 26 May vote. His main contender, Horacio Serpa, who had 27.4 per cent in April, was at an unprecedented low of 23 per cent.¹⁰ In a projected run-off, Uribe outdistances Serpa, 54.9 percent to 32.8 per cent. The top candidates are both from the Liberal Party, one of the two traditional parties (although Uribe is running as a “dissident” Liberal). For the first time in Colombia’s history, the Conservative Party, the other traditional power centre, has not fielded a presidential candidate.

Since September 2001, the standing of each of the four main contenders – Luis Garzón, Noemi Sanín, Horacio Serpa and Álvaro Uribe – has fluctuated between 5 per cent and 36.1 per cent.¹¹ The relatively steady trend lines suggest both a significant degree of voter realignment over the past nine months and a firming up of present preferences. Thus, in September 2001, 61 per cent of interviewees stated that they would not reconsider their choice of candidate; in January 2002, that number had grown to 68 per cent and in February 2002 to 79 per cent.¹² The penultimate poll (April 2002) reported that 86 per cent of those inclined towards Uribe were certain to vote for him, while 81 per cent, 69 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively, of those expressing a preference for Serpa, Garzón or Sanín called themselves definite.¹³ Furthermore, Uribe has a favourable image with 73 per cent of voters, followed by Sanín (58 per cent), Serpa (52 per cent) and Garzón (38 per cent). While 31.2 per cent of interviewees stated that they would never vote for Serpa, only 18.02 per cent said this regarding Uribe, 16.64 per cent regarding Sanín and 14.09 per cent regarding Garzón.¹⁴ In sum, the available pre-election data suggests that the basic question is not who will be Colombia’s next

⁷ *Gran Encuesta Semana-El Tiempo-RCN*, in *Semana*, 4-11 February 2002, pp. 29; Oscar Collazos, *El poder para quién*, Bogotá, 2001, pp. 242-245. Uribe was a staunch critic of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and negotiations in the midst of ongoing war, extortion and kidnappings. The DMZ was created by President Pastrana in October 1998. It encompassed five municipalities of approximately 42,000 square kilometres and was meant to serve as a location for peace negotiations with the FARC. On 20 February 2002, the president declared the end of the DMZ and the peace process. See ICG Report op. cit. When not stated otherwise, all pre-election results presented in this briefing are based on polls conducted by Napoleón Franco & Cia. These polls are characterized by a margin of error of between +/- 1.41 and +/- 3.6 per cent and 95.0 per cent reliability. Close to 2,000 men and women of voting age, resident in six regions of Colombia and from all socio-economic strata (1-6) are interviewed face to face and in their homes on the basis of a structured questionnaire. The information on voter intention is generated from interviews conducted exclusively with persons who declare that they will definitely or most probably vote. See www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2002/encuestas/. For more detailed information on pre-election polls, see the tables in the appendix.

⁸ See ICG Latin America Briefing, *The 10 March 2002 Parliamentary Elections in Colombia*, 17 April 2002.

⁹ The candidates, in the order in which they appear on the ballot, are: Luis Garzón/Vera Grabe (Polo Democrático); Noemi Sanín/Fabio Villegas (Movimiento Sí Colombia); Harold Bedoya/Marino Jaramillo (Fuerza Colombia) ; Álvaro Uribe/Francisco Santos (Primero Colombia); Francisco Tovar/Ricardo Díaz (Defensa Ciudadana); Guillermo Cardona/Hernán Cuervo (Movimiento Comunal y Comunitario de Colombia); Augusto Lora/Germán Rojas (Movimiento M-19); Horacio Serpa/José Hernández (Partido Liberal Colombiana); Álvaro Cristancho/Manuel Delgado (Movimiento de Participación Comunitaria); Ingrid Betancourt/Clara Rojas (Partido Verde Oxígeno); and

Rodolfo Rincón/Donaldo Jinete (Movimiento de Participación Comunitaria).

¹⁰ *El Tiempo*, 28 April 2002, pp. 1-14/1-15; *El Tiempo*, 19 May 2002, p. 1-1.

¹¹ See tables in the appendix.

¹² *Gran Encuesta Semana-El Tiempo-RCN*, 4-11 March 2002, in www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2002/encuestas/ encuesta_5/.

¹³ *Ibid.*, in

<http://semana.terra.com.co/1043/actualidad/encuesta7.asp>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

president but whether Uribe wins in the first or second round.¹⁵

II. ELECTION PREPARATIONS

Based on historic patterns of voter participation, a higher turnout for the 26 May 2002 presidential election is expected than on 10 March 2002 when officially only 42.3 per cent of the electorate voted for the parliament.¹⁶ According to the National Registry, there are 24,042,280 eligible voters inside the country, and 117,838 expatriates have registered for ballots at consulates.¹⁷ In order to reduce the possibility of fraud, which marred the parliamentary elections, the President of the National Electoral Council, Luis Vergara, has called upon the political parties and movements to instruct their electoral witnesses better in vote count procedures.¹⁸ Local officials are being urged to be on time to avoid last-minute personnel changes in the voting places that might compromise the transparency of the elections.¹⁹

The Ministry of Defence, in turn, is preparing to implement the second stage of “*Plan Democracia*”, which involves the deployment of 180,000 soldiers and police – believed sufficient to ensure the security of 90 per cent of voting places.²⁰ In March

voting in only fifteen of Colombia’s 1095 municipalities was disrupted by guerrilla violence.²¹

The Organisation of American States (OAS) will monitor the elections with a 50-person team that has been in Bogotá since 29 April and is setting up six regional offices in Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Cali, Medellín, Montería and Ibagué.²² In contrast to March, OAS observers will accompany all stages of the electoral process, including distribution of electoral materials, training of officials, follow-up of irregularities, the vote count itself and proclamation of the winner.²³ Several other international observer missions are also on the scene.

III. THE MAIN CANDIDATES

With the exception of Luis Eduardo Garzón, who has a working class background, the main candidates can all be considered to belong to Colombia’s middle class; they are also members of the same generation (1950s), except for Horacio Serpa, who was born a decade earlier. As a child Serpa was probably aware of the assassination of the Liberal *caudillo* Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in April 1948, and he must have witnessed directly some instances of the subsequent bloodshed during the “Era of Violence”. He was fourteen when the National Front government, which he later served as municipal judge and member of parliament, was constituted in 1957.²⁴ Luis Garzón, Noemi Sanín and Álvaro Uribe, in turn, grew up and studied under the National Front government and so likely have much dimmer recollections of the “Era of Violence”. Also, none of them are as linked to the history and fate of either of the two traditional parties, Conservative and Liberal, as is Serpa (Liberal).

Garzón, Sanín and Uribe assumed their first positions of public responsibility in the early 1980s,

¹⁵ The latest poll (May 2002) by *Centro Nacional de Consultoría Ltda. e Invamer S.A.* indicates that 55 per cent of young people (between 18 and 24), will vote for Uribe, only 22 per cent for Serpa. Uribe’s support is broken down between 53 per cent of all male voters and 44 per cent of all female voters. Serpa’s gender support is apparently more even: 30 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively. See *El Espectador*, 19 May 2002, p. 4A.

¹⁶ According to the latest Napoleón Franco & Cia. poll (May 2002), 71 per cent of the electorate will vote for president. *El Tiempo*, 10 May 2002, p. 1-12. In all probability, the real rate of participation in the parliamentary elections was well above 50 per cent. See ICG Briefing, op. cit.

¹⁷ The deadline for registering abroad was 3 May. ICG interview, 29 April 2002. On the problems related to the official count of potential voters see ICG Briefing, op. cit.

¹⁸ See ICG Briefing, op. cit. More and more evidence is becoming available that fraud in the parliamentary election was worse than initially estimated. The same voting officials who were involved in cases of fraud in March, e.g. by tampering with ballot, will serve again in the presidential election.

¹⁹ “El CNE hace llamado a las campañas presidenciales”, in www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2002/noticias/02-05-2002/nota56232.html.

²⁰ “Ministro de Defensa presenta ‘Plan Democracia’ para las próximas elecciones”, in www.mindefensa.gov.co/politica/

[intervenci.../pdinterv20020205olan_democracia.htm](#)

²¹ See ICG Briefing, op.cit.

²² ICG interview with OAS official, 7 May 2002, Bogotá.

²³ Organización de los Estados Americanos, Misión de Observación Electoral, *Líneas de Acción del Plan Estratégico de la Misión*, Bogotá, s.d. On 16 May the chief of the OAS mission, Santiago Murray, said that the insurgent and paramilitary forces were applying pressure on the electorate in 500 out of a total of 1,098 municipalities. “Se harán elecciones en todo el país”, in http://206.49.180.163:4000/elecciones_2002/cubrimiento_especial/conflic.../nota57514.htm.

²⁴ On the “Era of Violence” see ICG Report, op. cit.

and hence witnessed closely the rise of the drug cartels and the paramilitary forces, the consolidation of the FARC and ELN, the extermination of the left-wing *Unión Patriótica* (UP), the demise of the National Front government and the demobilisation of the M-19 and other smaller insurgent organisations. Perhaps partly because of these differences in age and era, Serpa appears to be more a politician of the old guard than Uribe, Sanín and Garzón.

A. URIBE

Born in 1952 in Medellín, Antioquia, Alvaro Uribe Velez graduated as a lawyer from the University of Antioquia in 1977. He served as general secretary at the Ministry of Labour (1977-78), director of civilian aeronautics (1980-82), mayor of Medellín (1982), member of the Medellín City Council (1984-86), a senator from the Liberal Party (two terms, 1986-90 and 1990-94) and governor of the department of Antioquia (1995-97). In 1993, Uribe earned a post-graduate degree in administration and conflict resolution at Harvard University and in 1997-98 was Senior Associate Member at St. Antony's College, Oxford.

Among his highlights as mayor, governor and senator are: securing financing for the Medellín subway and support for laws on pension reform, labour reform and the social security system. In 1993, Uribe was awarded the distinction "Best Senator" by the Colombian media. As governor of Antioquia, he streamlined the department's bureaucracy, substantially reduced public administrative spending, persuaded a number of large land owners to lease out 10 per cent of their properties to landless peasants on preferential terms and trained perhaps as many as 80,000 residents in peaceful resolution of conflicts.²⁵ This last measure was devised by Uribe in collaboration with academics from Harvard and laid the foundation for the subsequent creation (1994) of the more controversial *Convivir* (*Cooperativas de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada* or *Private Security and Vigilance Cooperatives*) in the department of

Antioquia.²⁶ Uribe's contact with the guerrilla conflict has been direct and personal: his father was killed during a FARC abduction attempt in 1983.

Uribe's running mate for the vice-presidency is the journalist Francisco Santos. In August 1991, after having been abducted by the drug mafia, Santos founded the NGO *Fundación País Libre* (Foundation Free Country), which promotes discussion, analysis and action on kidnapping in Colombia. He is a member of one of Bogotá's most powerful families and a co-owner of the main national daily newspaper *El Tiempo*.

B. SERPA

Horacio Serpa Uribe, presidential candidate of the Liberal Party in 1998 and 2002, was born to a lower-middle class family in Bucaramanga, Santander in 1943. He trained as a lawyer at the *Universidad del Atlántico* in Barranquilla and then dedicated almost his entire professional life to service in the three branches of government and the Liberal Party, in which he was national party director. He has been a municipal judge; mayor of Barrancabermeja; departmental secretary of education in Santander (1976); public prosecutor (1988-89), minister of government and peace councillor under President César Gaviria (1990, 1991-92), co-chairman of the Constituent Assembly (1990-91), minister of government and the interior under President Ernesto Samper (1994, 1995-97), member of parliament for Santander (1974-86) and senator (1986-91).²⁷

Among Serpa's political high points in parliament were support for the annulment of drug-dealer and Liberal deputy Pablo Escobar's parliamentary immunity; opposition to the extradition of Colombian citizens, and his strong denunciation of the paramilitaries. As co-chairman of the Constituent Assembly (CA), Serpa took a strong stance on the expansion of the social security net. As minister of the interior, he achieved parliament's approval of Protocol II of the Geneva Convention

²⁵ "Perfil de Uribe", Presidente 2002-2006", in www.alvarouribevelez.com.co/perfil/perfil.htm; see also Collazos, *El poder para quién*, pp. 253-310.

²⁶ Note that the *Convivir* were conceived as a nationwide program geared at enhancing citizen security. See Section II below.

²⁷ "Hoja de Vida de Horacio Serpa Uribe", typescript, s.d., s.l.; Collazos, *El poder para quién*, pp. 189-250 and Hernando Corral, "Horacio Serpa: De perfil y de frente", in *Revista Diners*, May 2002, p. 23.

(International Humanitarian Law) and later promoted agreements between Colombia, the International Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) to establish offices in Colombia. Serpa also created the National Office for Human Rights.²⁸

Horacio Serpa's running mate is José Hernández, an academic and member of the Conservative Party, and a former vice-minister of communications under President César Gaviria, president of the Constitutional Court (1991-2001) and university rector.

C. GARZÓN

Luis Eduardo Garzón is the least privileged of the candidates. He was born in Bogotá in 1951. Before becoming the president of the umbrella trade union, *Central Unitaria de Trabajadores* (CUT), in 1996, he studied law at the *Universidad Libre* in Bogotá but did not become a lawyer. From 1975 to 1994, he was an activist and leader in the trade union movement in Barrancabermeja's oil sector.²⁹ Garzón, a former member of the Communist Party, was jailed nine times for short periods. Reflecting his campaign slogan "Let's Reconcile!", he belongs to the National Peace Council, the National Commission for Reconciliation and the Peace Search Committee.³⁰ His running mate is Vera Grabe, an anthropologist, former leader of the insurgent M-19 group, and senator (1990-94).

D. SANÍN

Noemí Sanín, presidential candidate of *Opción Vida* in 1998 and of *Sí Colombia* in 2002, was born in Medellín, Antioquia circa 1950. After graduating as a lawyer from Bogotá's Javeriana University in 1973, she oscillated between the private (financial) and public sectors. Under Conservative President Belisario Betancur she served as minister of communications (1983-86). Liberal President César

Gaviria appointed her ambassador to Venezuela (1990-91), and from 1991 to 1994, she was foreign minister. In 1994-95, Sanín was Liberal President Ernesto Samper's ambassador in London. In 1995, when the Samper administration was in difficulties due to the drug-money scandal known as "Proceso 8,000", she resigned and began preparing her campaign for the 1998 presidential election.³¹ After coming in third in the first round, she studied for a time at Harvard University and in 2001 launched her presidential candidacy with *Sí Colombia*.³²

Among her achievements as Minister of Communications was a law on the modernisation of Colombian television. As ambassador to Venezuela and Great Britain and as the first woman heading a Latin American foreign ministry, she played a crucial role in Colombia gaining a seat for a term on the UN Security Council and presidencies of the G-77, the Group of Non-Aligned Countries and of the OAS. She signed the Sanín-Robertson treaty, which consolidated Colombia's jurisdiction in the Caribbean *vis-à-vis* Jamaica. In the first round of the 1998 presidential elections, she obtained 2.8 million votes, compared to Serpa's 3.6 and Pastrana's 3.5 million.³³

Sanín's running mate is the Liberal Fabio Villegas, a former governor of the department of Risaralda, member of parliament (1990-94), general secretary of the Presidency and minister of the interior during the Gaviria administration.

IV. THE CAMPAIGNS

Style, reach and cost of the campaigns, which hit their stride shortly before the March parliamentary elections, clearly reflect individual financial strength and political backing.³⁴ It appears that Uribe has

²⁸ See www.serpa2002.com; ICG interview, Bogotá, 10 May 2002.

²⁹ "Luis Garzón (Presidente de la CUT)", in <http://semana.terra.com.co/970/ZZZLKH4L7GC.asp>; see also Collazos, *El poder para quién*, pp. 61-112.

³⁰ Luis Eduardo Garzón, "Hoja de Vida", in www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2002/candidatos_presidencia/uis_edua.../ and Collazos, *El poder para quién*, pp. 110-111.

³¹ President Samper was accused of having received funds from the Cali drug cartel to finance his presidential campaign in 1993-94.

³² "Noemi", in www.noemi.com.co/noemisanin/6330808.asp; see also Collazos, *El poder para quién*, pp. 115-188.

³³ Mauricio Vargas, *Tristes Tigres*, Bogotá, 2001, p. 136; "Noemí Sanín, una mujer de resultados", in www.moemi.com.co/noemisanin/.

³⁴ According to the electoral calendar, the candidates were allowed to launch their publicity and propaganda campaigns on 26 February 2002. Registraduría Nacional del Estado

spent the most on electoral publicity, followed by Serpa and Sanín. Garzón is running a low-budget campaign, attempting to compensate for lack of funds and virtually no television time with charm and humour in frequent press interviews.³⁵ The April polls show that Uribe has been the most successful in getting his message through to the electorate, 77 per cent of whom stated that they had been exposed to his campaign, particularly on television. In comparison, only 63 per cent, 55 per cent and 16 per cent said this regarding Serpa's, Sanín's and Garzón's campaigns respectively.³⁶ Uribe's publicity style is liked most and Sanín's least.³⁷

In November 2001, the National Electoral Council established that the spending of any one candidate may not surpass 14 billion pesos (approximately U.S.\$6.5 million) during the six months preceding the first round; an additional seven billion pesos (approximately U.S.\$3.25 million) are allowed in a second round. The candidates finance their campaigns through a variety of sources, including personal funds, private donations, loans obtained on the basis of expected state reimbursements and investments made with state reimbursements from previous elections. In 2002, these reimbursements will be 1,250 pesos (approximately 50 U.S. cents) for each valid vote cast for a candidate who wins at least five per cent of the total.³⁸ Probably because of the devastating political impact of the drug-money scandal surrounding the campaign of Ernesto Samper in 1993-94 as well as the recent infiltration of a number of parliamentary campaigns by illicit funds, it appears that the candidates are being extremely careful in screening private donations.

The campaigns of the four main candidates are focussed, with differing emphases, on the following broad themes: political reform, war/peace, economic recovery, social equity, citizen security and justice. The candidates have made their written programs public only recently, and none of them has taken a

clear and strong stance regarding international affairs. It is important to note, however, that the greater part of the election campaign has involved tactical adjustments to important domestic developments, such as the breakdown of peace negotiations in February 2002 and the massacre committed by the FARC in Bojayá in May.

In a recent open-ended polling question, permitting a list of up to ten issues, voter concerns ranged across all forms of violence – from the insurgents (21 per cent), paramilitaries (2 per cent), kidnapping (4 per cent), violations of human rights (5 per cent), internal displacement, (4 per cent) and drug trafficking (3 per cent). However, the single concern most frequently named by respondents was unemployment (79 per cent).³⁹

The majority of the electorate clearly perceives its survival – economic or physical or, in many cases both – to be at stake. A recent report by the Colombian weekly *Semana*, entitled “A Time Bomb” and based on reliable national and international data, highlights the grave aspects of life in Colombia today.⁴⁰ Homicide and extreme poverty levels went up from 24,358 per annum and 19.7 per cent in 1999 to 27,841 per annum and 23.4 per cent in 2000, respectively.⁴¹ In 2001, the number of newly internally displaced persons was 190,454 as compared to 128,843 the year before. Open unemployment afflicts 3.3 million (approximately 18 per cent of the work force). A recent World Bank report highlights that despite a 40 per cent growth of GDP and a twofold increase in social expenditure during the 1990s (from 8 per cent to 16 per cent of GDP), 70 per cent of children under the age of thirteen live in poverty. One reason for this apparent paradox, the report states, is corruption and an increasingly inequitable pattern of income distribution.⁴²

Civil, *Calendario electoral presidente – mayo de 2002*, in www.registraduria.gov.co/cal_electoral.htm.

³⁵ The available data on campaign financing is inconclusive. For a rough guide see “Informe financiero”, in www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2002/cubrimiento_especial/financiacion.../nota53376.htm.

³⁶ *Gran Encuesta*, in <http://semana.terra.com.co/1043/actualidad/encuesta3.asp>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ “Financiación de campañas”, in www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2002/cubrimiento_especial/financiacion.../nota53380.htm.

³⁹ *Gran Encuesta Semana-El Tiempo-RCN*, April 2002, in <http://semana.terra.com.co/1043/actualidad/ZZZ5CI4WIoDa.asp>.

⁴⁰ “Bomba de tiempo”, in *Semana*, 6-13 May 2002, pp. 29-36.

⁴¹ Over the same period, poverty plus extreme poverty increased from 56.3 to 60 per cent. Following World Bank methodology, this encompasses all Colombians living on less than U.S.\$2 per day (poverty) or US\$1 per day (extreme poverty).

⁴² See “El problema no es de plata”, in *El Tiempo*, 8 May 2002, pp. 1-10.

In such circumstances, it is not altogether surprising that the concerns of the electorate encompass many issues related to socio-economic welfare as well as citizen security and the conflict. The relative absence of interest in the serious threat to the state and society posed by the paramilitary forces, however, is striking. On the other hand, it may reflect the sense of impotence with respect to violence in general.

The war/peace issue has, however, clearly moved to centre stage since fall 2001. As the peace process began to experience serious trouble and finally broke down in February 2002, growing sectors of the electorate began turning to Álvaro Uribe, who had been campaigning from the beginning on the themes of re-establishing the state's authority and subduing the irregular armed organisations.

The candidates' campaigns have both reflected their views toward national issues and their sensitivity to voter attitudes about those issues. Serpa was generally perceived to emphasise social equity, political and economic reform and a negotiated solution to the armed conflict; Sanín employment, economic recovery and gender; Garzón social reforms and a political solution to the armed conflict; and Uribe citizen security and state authority, political reform and the fight against corruption. In reaction to apparently changing voter preferences, two to three months ago, Serpa, Garzón and Sanín began to focus on a number of Uribe's issues, in particular strengthening of the state against the insurgent and paramilitary forces, the abolition of obligatory military service and corruption.⁴³

In their program statements, all four candidates express the conviction that a negotiated solution to the armed conflict is possible. However, they differ considerably in their approaches. While Uribe, Serpa and Sanín emphasise the need to strengthen and professionalise the military and police forces, Garzón radically opposes any escalation of the war and proposes reducing defence expenditure and redirecting resources towards social investment.

Uribe's proposals on peace and security are both controversial and at the centre of his rise in popularity.⁴⁴ The core of his program is recovery of state authority: "A continuation of negotiations with authority will weaken the insurgents and the paramilitary forces", he argues.⁴⁵ To achieve this, he proposes to strengthen the military, doubling combat forces to 100,000, abolishing obligatory military service once that has been achieved and inviting more international military co-operation. Plan Colombia, the controversial joint Colombia-U.S. program designed in 1999 to combat drugs and foster development, he says, ought to be widened to cover additional areas such as terrorism, kidnapping, massacres and attacks on the civilian population. Uribe's proposal to create a Colombia "peacekeeping" force – composed of Colombian soldiers vetted by the UN – to protect communities that have peacefully resisted guerrilla incursions has received significant media attention. Furthermore, the front runner plans to ask for international mediation in future peace talks with the insurgents, but only after there is a complete halt to acts of terrorism and a ceasefire; to pass an antiterrorist statute that facilitates detention, capture and house searches; to privatise the prison system partly; and to use alternative conflict resolution methods for intra-family violence.

Serpa maintains that social, political and economic reforms are necessary steps toward peace: "I believe in the political negotiation of the conflict despite all the adversities and the dangerous language talked by those who strongly favour war and polarisation. But my solidarity with this alternative does not imply that I will close my eyes to its real implications or to its harsh logistical and military realities".⁴⁶ He aims to double and professionalise the army and to abolish obligatory military service gradually. He advocates international cooperation in the mediation and verification of any new peace process and the joint reformulation of Plan Colombia, transforming it into a partnership for social development between Colombia and the U.S.; creation of a presidential advisory office for the internally displaced population (IDP); improved access to the justice system through community

⁴³ Once the armed forces have reached a strength of 100,000 professional troops, Uribe plans to substitute the obligatory military service with an alternative social service for all male Colombians. He emphasizes that this alternative service should be directed at providing education for the poor. "El Compromiso Social", in www.serpa2002.com; "Alvaro Uribe sustituirá el Servicio Militar Obligatorio", in www.alvarouribevelz.com.co/que_propone/programa.htm

⁴⁴ On the controversy surrounding Uribe, see below.

⁴⁵ Álvaro Uribe, "La Colombia que quiero", in www.alvarouribe.net.

⁴⁶ Horacio Serpa, "El Compromiso Social", in <http://208.221.140.115/paginas/programa.php?id=33#1>.

justice centres; professionalisation of justice sector officials and inclusion of human rights education in the curriculum for administrators and practitioners wishing to enter the judiciary.

Sanín states that “only a strong state capable of showing the violent ones that their weapons are not going to bring them victory will achieve peace”.⁴⁷ She proposes several changes to the format of any future peace talks, including strengthening the role of international mediators and establishing a concrete negotiations agenda with the participation of civil society. Regarding citizen security, she highlights the importance of reinforcing the existing special anti-kidnapping units (GAULAS) and strengthening state institutions. One of her main goals regarding the justice sector is to expand the capacity of the penitentiary system. Unlike her competitors, Sanín does not refer specifically to the abolition or reform of obligatory military service.

Garzón’s program is based on “reconciliation” and social and political reform to “pressure both the Establishment to give up their privileges and the insurgents to transform their military project into a political project”.⁴⁸

With the escalation of violence during the Pastrana administration, the breakdown of negotiations with the FARC in February 2002 and the widespread repercussions of 11 September 2001, the election now pivots on the voters’ sense of how the candidates will address the war/peace issue. Uribe’s critique of the peace process and his proposal to recover state authority coupled with frustration with the traditional parties and with corruption/inefficiency within the state, have gained him much support, and Serpa, after leading by 18 per cent in September 2001, now trails badly. A week from the elections, voter intentions seem to have stabilised. After winning the campaign battle over security issues, the front runner appears once again to be a step ahead of his opposition, enhancing his image by, for example, publicly criticising the army for inefficiency and emphasising socio-economic and political reforms.

Uribe still is perceived by many Colombians to hold controversial positions. Above all this has to do with his past as governor of Antioquia, when he strongly fostered expansion of the *Cooperativas de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada*, the so-called *Convivir*.⁴⁹ These were groups of civilians organised and trained by departmental authorities to protect their neighbourhoods against crime and violence committed, in particular, by the insurgent groups. Uribe’s political opponents denounced *Convivir* as a paramilitary prototype.⁵⁰ In the heat of the campaign, in late April, Serpa played this card, accusing Uribe of being the candidate of the paramilitaries.⁵¹ The controversy surrounding Uribe is also related to his pledge that as president he would deploy one million citizens as unarmed, voluntary vigilantes across the whole of Colombia. The mission of this force would be to provide early warning of any movements of armed irregulars – insurgent and paramilitary. Again, critics see in this a possible curtailment of

⁴⁹ Uribe did not mastermind the creation of the *Convivir*. Law 356 of 1994, which established them nationwide, was formulated by Rafael Pardo, Liberal President Gaviria’s minister of defence. Of more than 600 *Convivir* in the whole of Colombia, about 70 were established in the department of Antioquia. After a couple of years, the *Convivir* degenerated and increasingly linked themselves to, or were taken over by, the paramilitary forces. The constitutional court prohibited the government from providing them with weapons restricted to the armed forces and barred them from invading the law enforcement and security jurisdiction reserved to the state; under President Pastrana (1998-2002), they were finally abolished. Joseph Contreras, *Biografía no autorizada de Álvaro Uribe Vélez*, Bogotá, 2002, pp. 120, 124; Wilson Cabrera, “No propongo la guerra.-Álvaro Uribe”, in www.reforma.com.parseo/printpage.asp; Equipo de Alternativa, “Convivir, embuchado de largo alcance”, in www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/doc/convivir.html.

⁵⁰ As minister of the interior under Gaviria, Horacio Serpa supported the creation of the *Convivir*. Speaking in the Senate, he explained that they had nothing to do with the paramilitary forces and would provide especially rural Colombians with more security. Equipo Alternativa, *Convivir*, p. 1.

⁵¹ Of course, this was strongly rejected by Uribe, who permitted himself a rare emotional public outburst, counter-attacking and indirectly accusing Serpa of surrounding himself with straw men in the mass media. He also insinuated a Serpa connection to the drug-money scandal involving President Samper. Despite the severity of the mutual accusations, which also involved Sanín, the verbal fireworks did not continue for long. There is definite proof neither of Uribe’s involvement with the paramilitary forces nor of Serpa covering-up Samper’s blunder. See “Pelea de verduleras”, in *Semana*, 29 April-5 May 2002, pp. 36-39 and Collazos, *El poder para quién*, pp. 89-310.

⁴⁷ Noemi Sanín, “Plan de Gobierno, Estado y Sociedad”, in www.noemi.com.co.

⁴⁸ Luis Garzón, “Programa de Gobierno”, in www.luchogarzon.com/plan.php.

fundamental rights and civil liberties. Uribe's concisely argued and powerful denunciations of endemic state corruption and inefficiency and his separation from the official Liberal Party have gained him many enemies in these circles.

In sum, while the "dissident Liberal" Uribe remains controversial, in particular among Colombia's traditional political class, his campaign – based on the slogan "A strong hand and a big heart" – has gained him a clear lead. Serpa's slogan "United we will win", is a catchphrase that appears directed primarily at the divided Liberal Party, of which he is the official candidate. As indicated at the outset, the polls indicate that the electorate is more inclined toward the break-away candidate, Uribe, who has positioned himself outside the traditional political machines and promises to contain rapidly the threat posed by the insurgent and paramilitary organisations and to end corruption.

V. IMPLICATIONS

Whoever is Colombia's next president will assume responsibility for a gravely afflicted country. In addition to the unresolved and intensifying internal armed conflict, Colombia faces the worst socio-economic crisis in its history: poverty and unemployment levels are at an unprecedented high; foreign debt threatens to reduce further the chances of reviving growth; and internally displaced persons have surpassed the two million mark. To make matters worse, relations with neighbours, especially Venezuela, are fragile and with the European Union increasingly distrustful. For several European states, it has not been easy to follow the Pastrana administration's rapid 180 degree switch from supporting peace negotiations with the FARC, to listing that group as a terrorist organisation.

Plan Colombia has proved largely unsuccessful in coping with the narcotics problem. Corruption has increased and the savagery of the irregular armed organisations has become ever more appalling. While the presidential candidates have used their campaigns to play to specific high voter concerns such as unemployment and violence, each recognises that the agenda over the next four years will be much more complex and demanding than their frequently simplistic slogans have suggested.

Colombia historically has looked inward. The crisis in the country underscores that this attitude is no

longer viable, if it ever was. For example, drugs have always been an international issue, though one addressed as primarily the responsibility of the producing country. An effective policy in the next president's term will have to include serious efforts by both Colombians and international actors to establish a more balanced and comprehensive approach to a problem that needs to be attacked from both ends.

At least since 11 September 2001, it is clear that Colombia's internal security problems also have an international dimension. Both drugs and the armed conflict could have a profound negative impact on the stability of neighbouring countries and on efforts to strengthen democracy regionally and throughout Latin America. The two main candidates, Serpa and Uribe, have addressed these matters by highlighting the urgent need to professionalise the armed forces and combat corruption much more decisively. Nonetheless, neither has articulated a clear strategy, in particular regarding how to finance these major reforms.

The next president may have to consider diversifying Colombia's sources for technical assistance, including training of the police and the armed forces, and military equipment beyond the U.S. It is likely that he will also seek to obtain greater Latin American, European and Asian assistance as part of a broader multilateral support partnership. For that, he also will need to take decisive steps on electoral reforms, human rights violations, paramilitary linkages, grave social injustices and taxes. All major candidates have included these points in their campaigns but with little specificity. To foster international credibility and legitimacy, concrete and convincing actions need to follow as soon as the new president is sworn in.

Pre-eminently, however, the next president will have to define what the lengthy armed conflict is really all about, which path to follow in tackling it and what international support is needed and can realistically be obtained to help break the impasse. The concept of "narcoterrorism", which emerged in the 1980s during the onslaught of the drug cartels and became prevalent once again in the post-11 September context, for example, lacks definition, and its implications and magnitude remain the subject of debate. A significant amount of outside help will be crucial because the strengthening of the armed forces and containment of corruption, both vital to permanent solutions, are at best medium

term if not long term processes. But the international community is likely to be willing to fill the gap adequately only if the next administration presents both a compelling strategy and solid evidence that it will play its part.

If Álvaro Uribe wins in the first round, as appears possible, he will have a stronger mandate than any of his predecessors of the past decade, including a powerful position in the new parliament. By the same token, because of his controversial proposals for re-establishing state authority and his record as a governor, he will be closely scrutinised at home and abroad by human rights groups, NGOs and the left wing. The FARC can be expected to step up its attacks on Colombia's economic infrastructure and, in all probability, try harder to assassinate the new president. If the Pastrana administration is able to conclude the ongoing peace negotiations with the smaller insurgent group, the ELN, before it leaves office on 7 August 2002, Uribe will want to make the agreement work both to pacify one front in the armed conflict and to polish his "warrior" image. One of his big tests would be to protect ELN ex-combatants from paramilitary death squads. That test would be watched closely also by the FARC, which will need similar assurances if it is ever to negotiate seriously.

If Serpa manages to force a second round, all indications are that Uribe would still win in the end though the margin would depend greatly upon what supporters of the first round losers ultimately do, including the significant number who have indicated

they will cast a blank ballot. Uribe's mandate would still likely be strong since some movement of "official Liberal" (Serpista) voters towards him could be anticipated. It can also be anticipated that a campaign between 27 May and mid-June would be shriller, and that the FARC would increase its military actions. The candidates undoubtedly would stress again the main points of their programs related to the conflict, citizen security and economic worries.

There is one further set of events that might have an impact on the immediate post-election environment, and even on a possible second round of presidential balloting. After the massacre of some 110 civilians committed by the FARC in Bojayá in early May, two or three subsequent battles between FARC and paramilitary forces have resulted in the deaths of significant numbers of irregular fighters, but no civilians. Also, since Bojayá, when it was sharply criticised for failing to take preventive action or respond rapidly, the army has attacked both FARC and paramilitary units. It is not clear whether these developments signal a new phase in the military struggle and in the tactics of the three combatants. At least until now, however, Uribe has been the consistent beneficiary of the growing public concerns about the expanding conflict and the adequacy of the government's response, and there is no apparent reason to expect this to change in the immediate future.

Bogotá/Brussels, 22 May 2002

APPENDIX A

Table 1: “If the presidential elections were held tomorrow, for which candidate would you vote?”

Candidate/Month	September 2001	January 2002	February 2002	April 2002	May 2002
Uribe	23.4%	39%	59.5%	47.66%	49.3%
Serpa	41.2%	30.1%	24%	27.43	23%
Sanín	16.2%	16.9%	5.1%	6.51%	6%
Garzón	1.4%	0.9%	1.2%	7.06%	7.8%

Pre-election data obtained by Napoleón Franco & Cia., September 2001-May 2002

Table 2: “If the presidential elections were held tomorrow, for which candidate would you vote?”

Candidate/Month	November 2001	January 2002	February 2002	April 2002	May 2002
Uribe	22%	40%	53%	51%	48%
Serpa	37%	31%	24%	29%	31%
Sanín	25%	16%	12%	7%	9%
Garzón	---	---	1%	4%	6%

Pre-election data obtained by Centro Nacional de Consultoría Ltda. e Invamer S.A., November 2001-May 2002



International Crisis Group

International Headquarters

149 Avenue Louise, 1050 Brussels, Belgium · Tel: +32 2 502 90 38 · Fax: +32 2 502 50 38
E-mail: icgbrussels@crisisweb.org

New York Office

400 Madison Avenue, Suite 11C, New York 10017 · Tel: +1 212 813 08 20 · Fax: +1 212 813 08 25
E-mail: icgny@crisisweb.org

Washington Office

1522 K Street, Suite 200, Washington DC 20005 · Tel +1 202 408 80 12 · Fax: +1 202 408 82 58
E-mail: icg washington@crisisweb.org

Paris Office

51 Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 75001 Paris, France · Tel: +33 1 44 88 60 20 · Fax: +33 1 44 88 24 26
E-mail: icgparis@crisisweb.org

All ICG reports are available on our website: www.crisisweb.org