Citizenship Scarcity and Weak States:
The Colombian Experience

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A robust civil society is widely recognized as being one of the hallmarks of strong states. The state-society framework that once dominated political science and viewed state institutions and power as dichotomous from civilian organizations and social structures has generally given way to a more inclusive conceptualization of state as incorporating both components. Measurements of stateness that focused exclusively on the coercive and extractive powers of the central government’s institutions are now considered incomplete: a cohesive and activated civil society that participates in the political process, societal practices and beliefs that legitimate state institutions, a unifying sense of national identity that inspires public responsibility and promotes civic-mindedness, and the citizenry’s loyalty to the state are also crucial determinants of overall state strength and performance.

Citizenship, whether understood in legal terms as nationality, as a status associated with a bundle of relational rights and obligations, as civic praxis, or as identity derived from belonging to a particular political community, is closely related to civil society and society’s bond with the state. Current debates on citizenship theory are primarily concerned with how citizenship is responding to profound social changes within the world’s advanced democracies. The liberal (Rawls 1971, 1993; Shklar 1991), communitarian (Walzer 1989, 1995), republican (Arendt 1965; Taylor 1993; Beiner 1995; Oldfield 1998), social democratic (Marshall 1949), national (Scruton 1990), differentiated (Parekh 1991; Young 1990, 1995; Kymlicka 1995), postnational and cosmopolitan (Soysal 1994; Linklater 1998) approaches to citizenship all address domestic challenges to the state-society relationship and the best way for nation-states to adapt to changing global conditions. Nevertheless, these academic debates seem to have largely eclipsed the issue of citizenship in developing countries. Even to the extent that evolving notions of citizenship take into account developments in the global south, such as massive migration, the primary concern is with its effects on citizenship rules and practices among developed, strong states. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman note that advanced democracies can “become difficult to govern, even unstable” without strong citizenship qualities (1995: 284). If so, examining citizenship on the global periphery would seem to be of particular urgency, given weak states’ propensity for ingovernability and instability.

If vigorous notions of citizenship are typically associated with strong states, it seems intuitive that these same citizenship attributes would be feebler in weak and failing states. Still, given the tremendous variation among states, as well as the multiple theories of citizenship, it is not clear what dimension or type of citizenship may be associated with overall state weakness. Many weak states may have insubstantial notions of citizenship as a consequence of incomplete nation-building projects – this may dominate explanations of weak citizenship among certain African nations. Some weaker states may be wracked by the divided and competing loyalties common in plural societies. Multiple ethnicities in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, for example, exemplify how this can pose an obstacle to the formation or maintenance of a strong sense of citizenship and a unified national identity. In Latin America it is not uncommon to find developing states that are incapable or unwilling to fulfill basic obligations to its citizens, undermining society’s loyalty, sense
of we-ness, and patriotism that characterize a strong citizenry. In extreme cases of violent
internal conflict or security emergencies, the citizen-state bond may be ruptured almost
entirely. Still others states are challenged by having a transnational population that has
been permanently dispersed by war or other internal calamity, making the construction of a
citizenship project extremely problematic. Lebanon might be illustrative of this last
dynamic.

What does citizenship look like in relatively weak states, and weak democracies in
particular? Is the idea of the citizenry and the relation between state and society the same
in weak states, only less developed, or are there operative fundamentally different
definitions of what it means to be a citizen? Are weaker notions of citizenship necessarily
one of the markers of weak and failing states? If so, what is the causal relation between the
two? How relevant are current theoretical debates to our understanding of the concept of
citizenship in the developing world?

In this paper I attempt to pose tentative answers to these questions by exploring the
notion of citizenship in the case of Colombia. I first review the principal strains of
citizenship theory and the current theoretical debates. The paper then looks briefly at the
development of citizenship in Colombia, and analyzes each theoretical tradition of
citizenship from the Colombian perspective. I conclude with some preliminary
observations regarding what I consider to be a citizenship scarcity in Colombia, and how
this figures in an assessment of Colombian state weakness.

Citizenship Classification and Theory

The conceptual disarray surrounding the concept of citizenship is familiar territory.
Judith Shklar (1991:1) sums it up this way: “There is no notion more central in politics than
citizenship, [yet] none more variable in history, or contested in theory.” We are all citizens
of somewhere (except for that fellow in The Piano who had the misfortune of being born on
an trans-Atlantic steamer in the 1920’s), but we do not share the same rights and
obligations as citizens. The citizen emerged from democratic philosophy and practices, and
yet citizenship bonds in non-democratic states may be as strong, or stronger, than in
modern democracies. An individual can be a citizen of more than one country at the same
time, yet only enjoy the rights of a citizen in one of those political communities. Many
comply with the formal political and civic duties of being a citizen, yet feel a stronger sense
of association with and loyalty to another type of community. In short, what does it mean
to be a citizen?

In broad strokes, citizenship can be understood in four distinct, yet overlapping,
ways.¹ In its least problematic form it is a legal category related to formal membership in a

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¹ There is no one organizing scheme for citizenship. Kymlicka and Norman (1995) distinguish among three
approaches: citizenship-as-rights, citizenship-as-activity, and citizenship-as-identity, each of which is widely
represented in the literature on citizenship. For my purposes I adopt Bosniak’s (2001) conceptual
organization, which adds a fourth category of citizenship as legal status.
nation-state. Conflated with what is popularly understood as nationality, this definition of citizenship identifies the political community to which an individual belongs. This attribution was historically assigned by virtue of being born in a particular territorial designation, *jus soli*, or as the result of a parent’s nationality, *jus sanguinis*. Just as territorial boundaries sharply demarcate state sovereignty, so nationality laws establish strict criteria for distinguishing between citizens and aliens. Although massive waves of global migration have called for new citizenship rules, the “politics of citizenship” in receptor states in the North is such that rigorous legislation related to naturalization, that determines inclusion in and exclusion from the state, is maintained (Brubaker 1998: 138). This legal definition of citizenship reflects a world order that privileges the state as the primary political unit, denying, in most cases, the possibility of citizenship status deriving from non-political criteria, such as ethnicity or religion, in subnational or transnational communities.

Related to this legal definition is the view of citizenship as identity. This citizenship-as-identity perspective, however, distinguishes formal membership in a state from an individual’s sense of association, belonging, and loyalty to a particular community (Kymlicka and Norman 1995). The collective consciousness traditionally rooted in culturally homogenous ethnonational communities has steadily evolved into a modern national identity based on association with a state organization. Still, for many individuals a civic national identity associated with the modern nation-state exists alongside the persistence of national identities deeply rooted in prepolitical cultural associations. But regardless of the origin, citizenship-as-identity becomes a common denominator that supersedes competing identifications, embodies collective allegiance to the political community, and fosters patriotism to the nation-state, its myths and its symbols (Miller 2000).

A third interpretation of citizenship is as a status, derived from an individual’s possession of a set of rights and obligations with relation to the state. This rights-based notion of citizenship has its origins in the emergence of the modern nation state and the social contract. The French Revolution marks a turning point in the development of citizenship models, where for the first time the conception of citizenship came to mean the rights of citizens against the absolutism of the monarch, the arbitrariness of state power, and the legal and political privileges of aristocratic society (Castle and Davidson 2000). Implicit in this idea of legal rights was the equality of these protections, and participation in the democratic process. Indeed, Kant equated citizen rights with citizen involvement. Thus, freedom from the state meant a right to the state as well. Citizen status involves, then, a fundamental set of freedoms, democratic participation, and the obligation to comply with the directives that emerge from the democratic process (Habermas 1992: 4).

Lastly, citizenship is conceived of in terms of praxis. The earliest notion of the citizen, and what remains for many the ideal (Pockock 1995) or the myth (Ignatieff 1995) of citizenship, is the Aristotelian view of public service. That is, citizenship refers to the active participation in political and civic life. One is a citizen by virtue of vigorous involvement in the polity and commitment to the exercise of those rights and duties (Beiner 1995: 19; Habermas 1992: 3). Service to the polity and the communal principle, indeed, amounted to one of the highest virtues attainable in the Greek model. Within this
framework of “high citizenship” (Flatham 1995), the “citizen transcends the limits of his private interest” (Ignatieff 1995: 53) through participation in public life and deliberation with fellow citizens. In both classical and modern communitarian and civic republican variations on this citizenship-as-activity theme, the emphasis is on the collective practices of membership in the life of the polity with the stated goal of bettering the common good and fostering public-mindedness and civility.

These traditions for classifying citizenship form the arena within which contemporary theoretical debates take place. Certain philosophical positions regarding citizenship neatly coincide with these categories, while others traverse them in a rather complex web. Below I will provide a thumbnail sketch of the principal theories and controversies regarding citizenship, of concern to political theorists and practitioners alike, followed by my observations on the relevance of the issue for the institution of citizenship in Colombia. I begin with the liberal and republican views, and continue with the critiques from the social democratic, communitarian, national, differentiated, and postnational perspectives.

**Liberalism**

Citizenship viewed through the lens of liberal theory is largely about safeguarding personal liberty. Liberalism’s emphasis on the freedom to pursue private values conceives of the citizen not in public, civic terms, but rather as an autonomous individual who is to be protected from government interference. The prerogative of the citizen is to enjoy his inalienable rights and pursue his own welfare in the private sphere against the imposition of centralized authority, in exchange for minimal political obligations and civic responsibilities such as voting, paying taxes and compliance with the law. “The role of politics in this approach remains negative” according to Gershon Shafir (1998: 10), where the function of public institutions is to protect private self-interest, enhance private privileges, and guarantee equal treatment under the law. The freedom valued in the liberal citizenship paradigm is essentially passive: freedom from excesses of the state, the right to accumulate property, religious freedom and freedom of expression (Ignatieff 1995: 53). A contractual liberal view is that the state provides a public good in the form of institutional mechanisms that protect liberty and order valued by the citizen, in return for compliance. Charles Taylor concludes that liberalism offers what is essentially an individualist model of citizenship, in which public institutions “have an entirely instrumental significance” and “no value is put on participation in rule for its own sake” (1989: 178). Shafir is even more blunt: “citizenship, in the liberal view, is an accessory, not a value in itself (Shafir 1998: 10).

**Republicanism**

Republican citizenship is perhaps that most readily distinguished from the liberal model, with the opposing visions between each tradition remaining one of the central

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2 Richard Flatham (1995) distinguishes between “high citizenship”, or robust civic involvement associated with the republican tradition, and “low citizenship”, which refers to liberalism’s more restricted conception of rights and entitlements.
debates that concern citizenship theorists. If the liberal theory of citizenship gives pride of place to citizen rights, status, and the private sphere, the republican perspective stresses citizen duties, practice, and the public sphere. Civic republicanism, largely inspired by Rousseau, inevitably invokes images of the involved, active citizen with a strong sense of civic duty — again in sharp contrast to liberal individualism. In the civic republican tradition, the test of citizenship is “performance of the duties” required of the citizen related to involvement in public issues and, more to the point, assuming public office. Aristotle’s definition of citizen as expressed in Politics as one who both rules and is ruled depicts this enmeshment of the public and private spheres and the idea that the complete citizen also takes part in governing. To be fulfilled as an individual means to participate in the life of the political community. In modern contexts, this tradition, in Kymlicka and Norman’s words, “is an extreme form of participatory democracy …[with] emphasis on the intrinsic value of political participation for the participants themselves” (Kymlicka and Norman 1995: 293). There is only one kind of citizen, the “active citizen”, whose identity and sense of worth is derived from civic participation within the political community. Republicanism exalts a citizen’s involvement in public life, which for Adrian Oldfield “is not only the most inclusive, but also the highest, form of living-together that most individuals can aspire to…” (Oldfield 1998: 79).

Communitarianism and Civil Society

Few would dispute that the civic republican conception of citizenship and the good life is out of step with attitudes and practices in modern democracies. The liberal critique would be that individuals are more often than not indifferent to an alienating political process in which they participate only minimally, preferring to direct their energies toward private economic interests (Ignatieff 1995). Civil society theorists, however, point to a different deficiency of the republican ideal. While sharing a belief in the importance of civic virtue and community involvement to a healthy democracy, they are skeptical about the republican single-minded insistence that “politics is our highest calling” (Walzer 1995: 155). Citizen virtue is not cultivated through political participation, and human fulfillment is not found in political life, but rather through membership in the voluntary associations that make up plural societies. “Because we are by nature social, before we are political or economic, beings”, we realize our status as citizens by associating with others in organizations that represent society: neighborhood associations, churches, schools, ethnic associations, social movements, support groups, or other single interest associations (Walzer 1995: 162). Involvement in political organizations or party chapters may be one among a wide range of citizen activities. Although rejecting liberalism’s emphasis on the private good and on citizen rights at the expense of civic-mindedness and community responsibility, the civil society view nevertheless favors its non-ideology of letting preferences reign. Just as society is understood as being complex and plural, so should citizens have the “associational freedom” to choose their causes (Walzer 1995: 163). Citizenship requires active involvement in civil society, for it is here that citizens learn the tolerance, responsibility, self-restraint, civility, and public-spiritedness necessary to a

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3 The debate is nicely encapsulated in Gutmann (1985) and Thigpen and Downing (1987).
4 Enrique Peruzzotti (2002) considers the possibility of citizen activities, associations and social movements as also having a highly political content and being the source of a renovated Latin American democracy.
vigorous political and social community, and which are suggested as being increasingly absent from liberal societies (Kymlicka and Norman 1995; Walzer 1995; Galston 1991).

**Social Democracy**

T.H. Marshall’s influential, postwar reformulation of citizenship rights gave birth to the idea of the social citizen, and opened up a new debate on the relationship between state and individual. Against the backdrop of class struggles that emerged in postwar Britain and the establishment of the welfare state, Marshall made the case that formal political equality alongside the persistence of economic and social inequalities was a fundamental contradiction. In fact, given that the conditions of poverty and insecurity prevented full participation as a citizen in the community, political and legal guarantees should be extended to include social rights as well.

Basing his theory of citizenship on the social-welfare conditions in Great Britain from the 18th to the 20th century, Marshall identified three dimensions of citizenship privileges that had emerged in historical progression: civil, political and socioeconomic. Civil rights of individuals were designed to provide protection from the state, and guaranteed basic provisions such as freedom of speech and right to trial that were defended through the legal system. Civil liberties guarantees were followed in the 19th century by a growth in political rights. Political citizenship in Britain referred to the active participation in the democratic process through the development of electoral rights and the formation of political parties. The third leg of citizenship was established in the twentieth century with the expansion of social rights that guaranteed basic standards of economic and social well-being through access to employment or claims to social security provisions. These social rights were critical to permit members of the working class genuine participation in society as citizens (Marshall 1965). This shift toward a liberal socialist theory of citizenship reflected the view that equality of political rights was impossible in the face of inequality in social and economic and cultural conditions (Castles and Davidson 2000: 105). That is, citizenship went beyond civil and political rights to encompass a third generation of rights in the form of socioeconomic claims.

For Byron Turner, at this historical juncture citizenship shifted from a notion of political participation to “a form of entitlement” associated with the welfare state (Turner 1990: 211). Habermas echoes the common New Right critique of the social model of citizenship - that dependency on welfare leads to a clientelist attitude in regard to what the state can offer (Habermas 1992: xx?). Kymlicka and Norman also question whether this form of “passive” or “private” citizenship, stressing rights and the relative absence of obligations and responsibility, can be considered a full citizenship (1995: 286).

**Nationalism**

The national citizenship model is closely associated with the idea of a single, unifying identity derived from an uncertain blend of political community, nation-state, society and culture. More than any other citizenship framework, the nationalist perspective goes to the heart of what it means for an individual to feel the sense of attachment and belonging to a particular community.
One version of national citizenship is decidedly “nationalistic”. Roger Scruton (1990), bucking current multicultural trends, argues that citizenship derives from belonging to a group whose identity is unambiguously sociocultural. This perspective rejects the notion that citizenship is a political artefact, as liberalism would have it. Instead, one dominant national idea born of social and cultural commonalities inspires loyalty and allegiance to the country. Nationalism based on shared history, culture and language creates a sense of belonging that is the essence of citizenship. A nationalist spirit isn’t necessarily ethnic, but it is prepolitical. Thus the national consciousness that inspires a citizen to commit what Rogers Brubaker calls “sacred acts”, such as dying for one’s country, (Brubaker 1998: 132), may be linked to visions of national greatness and glorification of the past. It is the shared sanctification of and loyalty to this single vision that is the essence of national citizenship. The absence of this national idea is, conversely, the downfall of the multinational state (Scruton 1990).

Modern political nationalism, on the other hand, seeks to reconcile the persistence of identities inscribed in a common cultural heritage with the replacement of the nation by the nation-state. Jurgen Habermas argues that the gradual formation of an identity linked to the sovereign state paralleled the change in the meaning of “nation” in post-French Revolution Europe “from designating a cultural entity to something that was supposed to play a constitutive role in defining the political identity of the citizen within a democratic polity” (1992: 3). The modern national identity is formed by attachment not to an ethnocultural community, but rather to a “nation of citizens” (Habermas 1992: 3). This experience of citizenship as identity and solidarity with a political collectivity is, in fact, frequently in contrast to competing identities related to region, ethnicity, race, clan, religion, or even other nationalities. While articulated national identities may evoke historical myths that relate to common cultural origins (Miller 2000: 29), what distinguishes a secular citizenship identity is its basis in a “political culture and not…an ethical-cultural norm of life as a whole (Habermas 1992: 17). Habermas, one of the most vocal proponents of the “denationalized” national citizenship model, insists that the “nation” is not a requirement to form a political community and inspire patriotism, pointing to Switzerland and the United States as examples. Nevertheless, it remains a matter of debate if democratic principles and practices are enough to generate and sustain powerful citizenship feelings of belonging in the absence of a prior sense of “we-ness”.

**Multiculturalism and Differentiated Citizenship**

A differentiated citizenship model has two essential characteristics: it questions liberalism’s claim to guarantee universal rights to free and equal individuals, and it seeks to provide for the growing cultural pluralism of many national communities. The basic argument is that citizenship rights and protections in diverse societies be bestowed on distinct cultural, religious, national, or even social groups, leading to differentiated citizenship. Largely motivated by the relentless waves of immigration that continue to transform the demographic landscape of much of the global north, this position proposes that the best way to unify a heterogeneous citizenry is not through imposing a monocultural model, but by accommodating different nationalities within an inclusive, multicultural society. Will Kymlicka suggests that a group-based model of citizenship rights that affirms
and formalizes its plural character is the basis of social unity in a multinational states (1998: 179). Liberalism’s unitary citizenship scheme based on notions of common values and a shared conception of justice (Rawls 1971, 1993) is incapable of overcoming persistent feelings of loyalty and association that immigrant groups feel toward their nationality of origin. “If there is a viable way to promote a sense of solidarity in a multinational states”, argues Kymlicka, “it will involve accommodating, rather than subordinating, national identities (Kymlicka 1998: 182). The way out of the trap in which many multicultural democracies find themselves today, is by embracing cultural pluralism’s common values of tolerance, mutual respect and self-restraint, and the shared identity of commitment to diversity. Shafir concludes that Marshall’s scheme appears to have been extended to the fourth-generation by “adding cultural citizenship rights to the congeries of civil, political and social citizenship rights” (Shafir 1998: 19).

In a more radical rejection of the “myth” of universal citizenship, Iris Marion Young (1990, 1995) suggests that group rights be assigned not only on the basis of ethnocultural heritage, but also to any disadvantaged or oppressed group that has a coherent identity. The “politics of difference” principle seeks equal protection under the law for groups such as women, gays and lesbians, blue collar workers, senior citizens, and the disabled (Young: 1990). According to Young, the particularities of such groups establish near insurmountable barriers to full access to equal rights, impeding the liberal citizenship ideal. Echoing the multicultural position, true equality in diverse societies requires that citizenship guarantees be made on the basis of group identity.

Postnationalism and Cosmopolitanism

The postnational perspective is the newcomer to the citizenship debate, whose essential argument is that notions of citizenship linked to the sovereign state have lost meaning in a globalized world. The international order constructed on the nation-state and that assigned individuals according to these territories is no longer in place. Yasemin Soysal argues that “a new and more universal concept of citizenship has unfolded in the post-war era, one whose organizing and legitimating principles are based on universal personhood rather than national belonging” (Soysal 1994: 1). Using the trend toward transnational citizenship as established in the European Union as the best example of the disjuncture between national citizenship and universal rights and laws, Soysal proposes a model of “post-national belonging” in which citizenship is linked to global governance schemes (Soysal 1994; Muetzelfeldt and Smith 2002). Human rights and entitlements established in international law and supranational organizations such as the U.N. and the International Criminal Court essentially supersede national authorities and constitutional arrangements.

The notion of cosmopolitan citizenship (Appadurai 1996; Linklater 1998) also emphasizes the ongoing reconfiguration of the territorial-based political community, but places the emphasis on universal citizenship entitlements versus global citizenship’s claim to a universal structure of authority and rights. Linklater proposes a normative theory of citizenship that is both thicker than transnational citizenship schemes, and more modest than postnational citizenship: “…cosmopolitan citizenship…argues that member states and non-state actors within post-Westphalian structures have additional obligations to ensure
just treatment for the rest of humanity” (Linklater 1998: 206). Migration theorists contribute to the discussion with their notion of translocal (Soguk and Whitehall 1999; (Mandaville 1999) or transnational identities that form from communities of transnational migrants that create dense networks of social, economic and political relations spanning the spaces between the country of origin and their countries of residence (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Baubock 1994; Portes 1996; Guarnizo and Smith 1998). All these perspectives suggest not only the formation of postnational identities, but also of the necessity to reconceptualize citizenship’s exclusive link to the territorial state.

Citizenship in Colombia

Many of the recurring themes of today’s citizenship tensions in Colombia can be traced to the earliest stages of its history. Like many newly liberated colonies in South America, Colombia had a fairly narrow conception of democracy and citizenship upon gaining its independence from Spain in 1819. Direct, democratic participation was limited to free, literate males, and by the middle of the century property requirements were added to the education restriction such that the right to vote became little more than an aristocratic privilege (Tirado 2000: 19-20). A new constitution in 1863 was designed to “reconquer democracy” through liberal reforms consisting of drastically reducing the political and social power of the Catholic Church (Abramson 1999). The restructuring involved separation of church and state, limits on executive powers, the adoption of a loose federal system, freedom of religious expression, and freedom of speech. Interest in freeing the state from the Church’s conservative influence also resulted in radical reforms aimed at providing universal, free, and secular education for the purpose of “constructing citizens …to serve the Republic” (Jaramillo 1989: 228). Colombia’s flirtation with liberalism was short-lived however. A reactionary backlash undid the modest reforms, replacing them with a return to centralism, greater presidential authority, new limits on voting rights, and the reestablishment of the Catholic Church in the seats of power. Indeed, the 1886 constitution of the Nuñez government established the Republic of Colombia as a Catholic state, ushering in a period of official repression and political exclusion.

A bitter civil war that lasted 1000 days was the outcome of “la regeneración” of the conservative state-church regime. The political pendulum did swing back toward liberalism again in the 1930’s, when civil liberties related to voluntary associations and the right of labor unions to organize were granted, along with full male suffrage. But this progress was outweighed but increasingly conflictual social relations between Bogotá’s ruling elite and the working and agrarian class in the rest of the country. The government’s incapacity to politically integrate the regionally and socially fragmented nation through a modern democratic project, the state’s institutionalized mechanisms of exclusion and repression, and the economic downturn that that had begun in the 1920’s, planted the seeds for a period of violence that, some would argue, continues today (Ramírez 2000: 25-33).

The assassination of Jorge Elicier Gaitan in 1946, a liberal presidential candidate who had been the hope of Colombian urban masses and rural poor, sparked a vicious period of violence between Liberal and Conservative factions in rural areas where poverty, marginalization, and agrarian conflicts only served to heighten the mayhem. A power
sharing agreement, in which in an interesting twist on modern democracy the two leading
parties agreed to alternate the presidency and to share all elective and appointive positions,
finally put an end to a decade of brutal violence and economic hardship during which
200,000 lives were claimed. Although the bipartisan pact reduced sectarianism, by its very
nature it provided for the barring of third parties from political power, and did little to
address underlying social discontent (Gomez 2000: 265). The persistence of entrenched
economic, social, and land disparities during the 1960’s and 1970’s were seized on by
leftist revolutionary movements that had a series of grievances against the rules of the
political game that favored landowners, the economic elite, and the political oligarchy. The
very weakness of political institutions let to “new political violence in the form of class
struggles…to defend rural property rights threatened by official violence” (Ramirez 2000:
47).

Colombia limped its way through the 1980’s, plagued by a political model that
didn’t work, widespread insecurity, violence, and human rights abuses, the growth of armed
subversive and para-institutional groups, corruption and crime related to the drug industry,
poverty, and inequality. The adoption of a new constitution in 1991 was intended to
establish an effective democratic state based on the principles of inclusion and
representation, and through the granting of extensive human, socioeconomic, and civil
protections.

Poor Protection of Citizen Rights

The current Colombian constitution is arguably one of the most progressive and
“liberal” in Latin America (Dugas 1993: 28). It establishes an impressive political, civil
and human rights package, offers legal mechanisms for the citizen to seek redress from the
state, creates an independent constitutional court, establishes political privileges for
historically under-represented minorities, and limits the power of the military. These
institutional protections and guarantees, taken in conjunction with periodic elections that
have insured civilian rule, result in Colombia being hailed as one of the oldest democracies
in the South America. The reality of Colombia’s democracy, however, is somewhat
different. The weakness of state institutions, the presence of illegal actors who compete
directly with state power and authority, and pervasive violence and insecurity have all
seriously eroded the freedoms and equality associated with a liberal citizenship model.
Bejarano and Pizarro point out a contradictory trend in the Colombian democratic model, in
that “a greater tendency toward democratization – which includes the elimination of prior
restrictions and the broadening of the space for political participation and competition” has
paralleled “a tendency toward [the] deterioration of the indicators of ‘civility’, or respect
and protection of basic rights and liberties” (Bejarano and Pizarro 2001: 8).

See Bejarano and Pizarro (2001) for a full discussion of the various ways of classifying, and qualifying,
democracy in Colombia. Among the most relevant for this discussion is the Mainwaring “semi-democracy”
classification, defined as a “civilian government elected under reasonably fair conditions, but with significant
restrictions in participation, competition and/or the observance of civil liberties” (Mainwaring 1999: 14).
Collier and Levitsky (1997) rate Colombia as an “illiberal democracy” due to the lack of a rule of law to
protect individual liberties. Bejarano and Pizarro (2001) prefer the label “besieged” to refer to the external
constraints placed on Colombian democracy.
In spite of extensive individual protections provided for in the constitution, state institutions have been unable to ensure these rights and civil liberties. Freedom House’s analysis of political and civil liberties in Colombia reveals a steady decline in performance in the area of civil freedoms in particular during the last three decades.\(^6\) The levels of violence and the human rights situation in Colombia are nothing short of alarming and are directly linked to this deterioration in rights. Violence from the extreme right and left has become a routine part of Colombian life: human rights activists, politicians, judges, journalists, and academics are among the most frequent victims of “political” violence in the form of assassinations and disappearances. The internal conflict is directly responsible for about 3,500 deaths annually, two thirds of which are citizens. In 1999 there were 22,300 violent deaths in Colombia, representing a homicide rate of 53.66 per 1000 individuals (Camacho 2000: 116-117). Colombia also has the dubious distinction of having the highest kidnapping rate in the world, with 2,304 cases being officially reported in 2001.\(^7\) Citizens in rural areas are also the victims of land seizures, forced conscription, and displacement.\(^8\) In practice, then, fundamental civil liberties in Colombia, while guaranteed formally, are highly constrained. The press and public figures are silenced by the threat of assassination, individuals do not have complete liberty to form associations and organizations, freedom of movement is drastically curtailed for fear of kidnapping, and the notion of the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is simply ludicrous for Colombians living in conflict zones.

In this sense the state has failed to fulfill one of its most elementary duties to its citizens – the provision of internal order and security. The government’s defensive military strategy that increasingly prioritizes protection of the regime and urban centers has left large regions of the country to fend for themselves. Vast areas of the country have no central government presence as drug producers, guerrilla forces, and paramilitaries violently vie for control of strategic regions. The FARC is considered to have a controlling presence in about 200 municipalities throughout the country where they have effectively replaced the state’s provision of law, order, and social services (Rangel 2000: 580). The strategies of the guerrilla, paramilitaries and self-defense groups, and narco-mafias to essentially replace the state and control territory, markets, and political structures increasingly resemble “warlord politics” (Reno 1990), where political violence and violent conflict resolution have replaced the state of law. In this regard the Colombian state also shows serious deficiencies at providing justice systematically and equitably. Not only do may areas in conflict operate according to extra-legal criminal codes and systems of justice, but an average impunity rate of 96% is indicative of the state’s incapacity to respond to

\(^6\) On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being the best, Freedom House ranked civil liberties in Colombia a 2 in 1972, but this had fallen to 4 by 1990, and remains at that level of performance today. In combination with the ranking of 4 in the area of political rights, Freedom House classifies Colombia as partly free. See http://freedomhouse.org

\(^7\) This figure is according to Pais Libre, a Colombian NGO dedicated to the problem of kidnapping. See http://www.paislibre.org.co/el_secuestro_colombia.asp#, “Total Secuestros en Colombia 1997-2002”, mayo 14 de 2002. See also Semple (2001).

\(^8\) The current internal refugee population is 2,700,000 according to the NGO Consultoria para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (Codhes), cited in Campos (2002). A report by Humans Right Watch five years ago estimated that 15,000 children under the age of 15 were actively involved in the conflict, with some militia units being composed of up to 85% children (Human Rights Watch 1998).
A liberal analysis would conclude that the Colombian state exhibits a manifest failure to comply with its part of the liberal democratic social contract of providing the basic public goods of liberty, order, and justice. This dismal picture is made worse however, by the fact that many of the violations of civil and human rights in Colombia involve the state apparatus. Direct complicity in human rights violations by Colombian security forces, including the involvement of high-ranking military officers, is well documented by Amnesty International.9 A more aggressive policy of severing ties between the state and rural self-defense units in recent years has resulted in some military actions against the paramilitaries, although without completely erasing the age-old maxim that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”. The state maintains a shamefully permissive record regarding paramilitary violence. Although important strides have been made toward trying and punishing members of the armed forces responsible for human rights abuses in recent years, impunity remains high, reinforcing the idea that such behavior is tolerated. The country’s internal security crisis also serves to justify state-imposed limits on civilian freedoms and protections. In August of this year, for the sixth time in the last decade, a national state of emergency was declared which established sweeping restrictions on the press, the right to privacy, and freedom of movement (El Tiempo 2002: 3).

Another crucial dimension of the liberal notion of basic private rights is that these protections be universal. Again, the Colombian citizenship model falls short. Government institutions are notoriously corrupt and biased, and the protections that do exist are not provided equally. The entrenched system of clientelism and patronage in Colombian democracy subverts the principle of equal access and protection (Leal 1984; Leal and Dávila 1990). Such practices, in the words of Francisco Gutiérrez, convert “rights into favors”, or citizens into clients (Gutiérrez 1998: 33). Without extremely poor mechanisms of accountability and vertical legitimacy, corruption is rampant in nearly all branches and levels of government.10 60% of the Colombian Congress is estimated to have received illicit contributions to their campaigns during the 1990’s to buy cooperation on such issues as extradition (Bagley 2000). For Michael Mann, the patron-client networks and corruption that characterize Colombian democracy pose an insurmountable obstacle to what he considers “genuine citizenship” (Mann 2002: 11). Such institutional arrangements mediate between the individual and the state, disrupting the citizenship bond.

It is no wonder then, with citizen rights being so limited and so unevenly distributed, that the average Colombian routinely searches for ways to avoid compliance with his obligations to the state, and even toward society in general. At the same time, suspicion that class privileges, corruption, and clientelist practices are such that other Colombians are able to avoid their public responsibilities leads to a vicious circle in which

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10 According to the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index for 2001, Colombia was ranked 3.8 on a scale from zero (highly corrupt) to ten (highly clean), placing it 50th out of 91 countries on the ranking. See http://www.transparency.org.
the unequal fulfillment of rights and duties creates a payoff structure that encourages cheating or non-compliance. This lack of civic-mindedness can be observed in many facets of Colombian public life, from tax evasion to traffic violations. Perhaps most illustrative of the avoidance of citizenship duties involves the entrenched practice of circumventing mandatory military service. Not only do the rules of military conscription having to do with exemptions for higher education facilitate avoidance of military service that involves active combat by sons of the upper class, but these same individuals also have the contacts and the resources to shirk military duty. The Colombian elite takes for granted both that they are exempt from having to meet this obligation, and that defense of the nation, and their privileges, will be provided by the lower stratum of Colombian society. Perhaps the most elementary feature of the social contract – universal rights and suffrage in exchange for universal military service – does not exist in Colombia. This practice of unequal rights and duties involving combat duty generates extraordinary ill-will within society, undermines the expectation of public responsibility, encourages further non-compliance, and is an egregious violation of the citizenship contract.

**A Paucity of Participation**

Republican civic idealism, for its part, is glaringly absent in the practice of Colombian citizenship. With a formal democracy that is broadly seen as functioning to the benefit of a select few, as a means to personal power, or the privilege of an oligarchic elite, public service in Colombia is, not surprisingly, rather discredited. The alienation of Colombian civil society from political life is also associated with the high levels of violence to which politicians, candidates, judges, and even civil servants are exposed. Participation in Colombia is largely limited to a minimal citizen role as depicted in the liberal model of citizenship, principally through voting in elections. Although the national abstention rate in the 2002 congressional election was 58% (Garcia 2002) would suggest citizen apathy, this electoral participation is actually noteworthy given the extraordinary climate of violence in which many Colombians made their way to the polls. Political reforms initiated in the 1980’s that dismantled historical barriers to political representation and competition have indeed increased the opportunities for broad

11 It is estimated that 35% of Colombian taxpayers evade fully paying their tax obligation. See Hernández et. al. (2000).
12 The FARC currently are holding hostage 19 elected officials at various levels of government, including the governor of Antioquia state, an ex-presidential candidate, and an ex- Minister of Defense. See *La Insignia*, 16 Abril 2002, http://www.lainsignia.org/2002/abril/.
13 A new controversial form of citizen participation is currently in the making in Colombia, in the form of “citizen spies” who voluntarily assist the hard-pressed intelligence services by providing information on subversive groups. Although undertaking such a role involves enormous risks of retaliation by the guerrilla, who have already branded these civilians as “snitches”, it would appear that a combination of monetary incentives and a spirit of citizenship help explain the decision to cooperate with the government. In a recent interview, one such citizen collaborator explained his decision to join the network in these terms: "I'm trying to do a little for my country." (Wilson 2002: A01).
14 Colombia’s rate of abstention, even in the midst of a violent internal conflict, does not compare that unfavorably with other democracies. Abstention in the 2000 parliamentary elections in the United States was 48.5%. See: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), http://www.idea.int. According to Freedom House, the average rate of abstention in “partly free” democracies between 1945 and 1997 averaged 41%. See http://freedomhouse.org.
participation characteristic of full democracies (Bejarano and Pizarro 2001: 11). Nevertheless, the ongoing theme of violence has increasingly constrained the electoral process, particularly in local and regional jurisdictions. On the one hand citizens are discouraged in their bid to run in local elections by the presence of armed actors who “control” certain areas and political forces. The citizens’ right to vote freely is also jeopardized by direct threats of violence. In certain departments in Colombia with a strong guerrilla influence, abstention was much higher than the national average. As Bejarano and Pizarro conclude, “violence distorts democracy’s participatory and competitive dimensions, both before and after elections” (Bejarano and Pizarro 2001: 8).

**Social Inequality**

Marshall’s social democratic critique, although widely criticized and generally considered to have been superseded by more current theorizing, seems especially relevant to an understanding of citizenship in Colombia. One might say, in fact, that the Colombian citizenship problematic is closely bound up with the persistence of oppressive poverty, deplorable living conditions, and lack of socioeconomic opportunities experienced by the majority of Colombian “citizens”. The radicalness of the Constitution of 1991 lay in part with the adoption of extensive economic, social, cultural, and human rights, with the stated goal, echoing Marshall, of establishing the minimum conditions necessary for full and equal access to civil and political rights (Sarmiento 2001: 27). Indeed, public spending in Colombia has increased during the last decade, with important gains made in the areas of education and health coverage (Orjuela 2002).

But again, the sharp contrast between formal guarantees and reality is instructive. High levels of inequality that characterize Colombian society, even ten years after adoption of the new constitution, mock the possibility of true equality of socioeconomic rights. The concentration of income continues to worsen: the Gini Coefficient for 2001 was 57.1, slightly above the Latin American average for the same period, and up 5 points from 1990. Simultaneously, the concentration of wealth in Colombia has also increased, with the wealthiest 10% now earning 78.4 times what the poorest 10% earn, an increase of 25%

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15 In the 2002 elections threats of violence by the FARC specifically against mayors throughout the country resulted in the resignation of 15. 8 mayors were assassinated in the first 6 months alone of 2002, and there were repeated actions of violence against family members of local office holders. In one particularly notorious case the 3-year-old daughter of the mayor of Colon in Putumayo State was kidnapped in order to force his resignation from office. He complied. See the website of the Ministerio de Interior and Federacion Colombiana de Municipios, http://www.municipios.org.co/  
16 The rate of abstention was 65% in Putumayo and 73% in the case of Caqueta, departments with high rates of violence and a strong guerrilla presence (Garcia 2002). Garcia hypothesizes that the correct correlation is actually between abstentionism and the type of violent actor that operates in areas of conflict. While the FARC dominated areas present a very low voter turnout, in paramilitary zones voter turnout tends to be even higher than the national average.  
17 For a review of the standard objections to Marshall’s theory of citizenship, see Turner (1990).  
in less than ten years.  

In the year 2000 61.5% of all Colombians lived below the poverty line, with an astonishing 84.9% of urban dwellers classified as poor.  

The official unemployment rate from 1999-2000 hovered around 17%, although in certain municipalities 20-25% of the population is without work.  

Given that there is no government safety net for those who lose their source of income, unemployment in Colombia can be catastrophic, often affecting an extended group of people who may all depend on one employable family member. According to UNICEF, in 2000 36% of children did not receive constitutionally guaranteed education, and 58% of Colombian minors had no access to health care.  

Another report indicates that 4 million children were forced to work in violation of labor laws in the same year (Sarmiento 2001: 29). These statistics, when coupled with lack of potable water and electricity for many of Colombia’s poor, present a dismal picture indeed.

Marshall’s fundamental insight that the full exercise of citizenship is impossible when there is socioeconomic exclusion seems appropriate to understand the Colombian case. The individual Colombians who make up the statistics presented above are certainly less likely to access the set of civil and political rights that privileged Colombians enjoy. The impossibility of receiving the rights and protections as stipulated by the state, in turn impedes that these individuals comply with the obligations of the citizen, exhibit a spirit of civic-mindedness, or feel a sense of belonging to the larger sociopolitical community. On the contrary, the resentment, anger, and disillusion born of inferior treatment and lack of opportunity are precisely those characteristics found among citizens who join criminal gangs, urban vigilante groups, the paramilitaries, and the guerrilla. The citizenship project in Colombia is thwarted, then, by a system that provides socioeconomic opportunities to only a small minority.

**Violence and Civil Society**

There is an ongoing debate in Colombia regarding the effects of the conflict on civil society, and what this may mean for Colombian citizenship. The conventional position is that the persistent levels of violence since the late 1940’s have in effect hindered the consolidation of a national citizenship project. Under conditions of sustained, collective, organized violence, neither the state nor the individual has the capacity to fulfill the respective citizen functions and duties that are the foundation of a liberal democracy.

Drawing on democratic theorists’ emphasis on the indispensability of civil rights to the democratic process (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Dahl 1989; Karl 1995), Carlo Nasi considers the violence in Colombia to have prevented the state’s fulfillment of liberal and collective guarantees which protect opposition and dissent (Nasi 2001). Without such citizen rights and the rule of law to competently resolve conflicts among and provide protections for competing societal groups, democracy has floundered, civil society has splintered, and citizenship has been incapacitated.

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20 Sarmiento 2001: 29. Source: Colombian Bureau of Statistics (Dane) and DNP-UDS-DIOGS calculations.


22 Source: [http://www.unicef.org/colombia/03a.htm](http://www.unicef.org/colombia/03a.htm)
Conversely, other Colombianists point to the strengthening of civil society as one of the unintended or counterintuitive consequences of the armed conflict (Leal 1999: 111-115). The state’s incapacity to adequately respond to the numbing violence and insecurity with which citizens live on a daily basis has, according to this view, resulted in a more activated and engaged citizenry. Exasperated with the state’s incompetence, citizens have looked to surrogate means of expressing collective interests and resolving conflicts. The explosion in the number of cooperatives, NGO’s, civic organizations and new social movements in the last decade is evidence of how citizenship in Colombia is increasingly expressed through civil society as an antidote to a fractured political community and constraints on civil freedoms. Communitarianism in Colombia can also take very different forms, however. The construction of “alternative social contracts” (Ramirez 2000: 61) and “alternative political orders” (Uribe 2000: 458) has been a recurring theme in Colombian history. Subversive groups, although an author of contemporary violence, were also in part born out of a closed, exclusionary political system and the repeated cycles of violence. These armed actors traditionally responded to local and regional civil society, provided some sort of representation, and are now “negotiating” an alternative social contract with the Colombian state (Ramirez 2000; 61-62).

The Colombian experience with communitarianism is perhaps symbolic of one of the weaknesses of the civil society theory of citizenship—what is the “community” and what is that community’s notion of the common good that can replace the civic republican vision? Colombian civil society is at once unified against the violence and insecurity, but fractured and subsumed by that very violence. Colombians are increasingly active in “civil” associations, but many of these, such as the paramilitaries or vigilante groups, are a substitute for the lack of political order, hardly a “social” complement to public life where civic virtues are inculcated. No one would disagree that effective citizenship in Colombia must involve a growing sense of community and civil involvement, but the results of this model will continue to be highly varied so long as profound disagreement persists within Colombian society regarding the collective good.

**Colombian Nationalisms**

Very much related to the issue of civil society is that of Colombian national identity. Like many nationalisms, Colombia’s is not easy to nail down. Catholicism (Wills 2000) and the ideologies of the liberal-conservative party system (Sánchez 1990; Perea 1996) are credited with having articulated an “imagined” (Anderson 1983) Colombian nation(s) at different moments in the historical consciousness, and yet both are obsolete to an understanding of modern Colombian national identity. Is there a notion of citizenship linked to belonging to a community of Colombians? If so, on what is that sentiment based? What is that unifying idea of Colombia that bonds citizen to nation? Or in the words of Ronald Beiner, what is it that prompts a Colombian “to feel that [he] belongs to this political community rather than to that political community”? (Beiner 1995: 19). At the

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23 This debate parallels another controversy in Colombian political science, over whether the internal conflict is a force for state creation in the long run in the tradition of Tilly (1990), or on the contrary a structure that has ritualized violence and fragmentation as a “normal” part of Colombian political and social life.
risk of doing disservice to an enormous literature on this topic, I think it is fair to say that there is probably no single notion of Colombian nationalism, but rather multiple, overlapping, and competing identities. What’s more, these identities are in an ongoing process of change and becoming.

Important differences related to territory, class and ethnicity have been a constant in Colombian history and in the difficulties in constructing a single, unifying national project (Bushnell 1993; Palacios 1995; Gonzalez 1999). In this regard Colombia exhibits a striking absence of a nationalism rooted in a shared ethnocultural heritage. Entrenched regional attachments and identities stand out as one of the primary challenges to the notion of a single national identity. At the same time, the extreme inequalities in the country have created a nation so socially stratified, that a university educated Bogotano most certainly identifies more with a professional from any other major Latin American or even American city than she does with the poorest of the poor in Colombia. Other significant fault-lines in Colombian society include the urban-rural divide, and the white European versus the Andean indigenous and the coastal black communities.

With the 1991 Constitution, Colombia acknowledged its cultural diversity for the first time. Indigenous groups that had long been organized at the regional level were now granted collective rights and were articulated as political actors on the national stage (Wills 2000: 397-398). At the same time, social movements of women, youth, and religious practitioners have gained a new prominence in Colombian society, giving weight to the notion of Colombia as a plural society. Still, Colombia’s commitment to diversity has not been put to the test by massive waves of immigration by different ethnocultural groups, but rather has had to adjust to the multiculturalism that has always existed, but never been recognized, within national territory. There is no mass clamoring for collective rights by specific groups, and the notion of a differentiated identity seems rather limited in the Colombian context.

Neither does Habermas’s idea of a nationalism related to political community seem relevant in the case of Colombia. As has been stressed throughout this essay, perhaps the greatest “failure” of Colombia lies in its historical incapacity to consolidate a national democratic project on the principles of representation, participation, and universal rights. Neither the ideologies of the Liberal and Conservative parties, nor the bipartisan compromise during the National Front period, were able to unite the country. Politics seems to have done more to divide the polity than it has to unify it. This seems particularly to be the case today where alternative political arrangements directly and violently compete with that of the state.

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24 A telling anecdote: A student of mine who was from Medellin, Colombia’s second city and capital of one of the most prosperous and modern of the country’s departments or states, referred to her coming to Bogota to attend university as “moving to Colombia”. On the regional loyalty issue, Robert Putnam’s (1993) work on regional civic traditions in Italy, with a strong sense of local identity and participation, may be a model for effective citizenship in Colombia.
That said, Colombians certainly exhibit national pride, if not exactly patriotism, and articulate a sense of being Colombian. But if neither a political model nor a shared ethnocultural heritage are responsible for this feeling of we-ness, than what is it? Palacios (2000) and Uribe (2001) suggest that violence and war have emerged as the common denominator of the Colombian experience, providing the core of a modern collective consciousness and sense of nation. Historian Jorge Orlando Melo argues that the Colombian national identity is essentially a discourse constructed and reconstructed by shared language, symbols, myths, stereotypes, and collective images present from the time of infancy and reproduced through the mass media (Melo 1989: 27). Ordinary cultural practices related to food, music, and dance become the shared idiom of the nation. Related to this interpretation of identity as the “everyday”, others point to popular cultural representations that have extraordinary unifying powers within Colombia. For Germán Ferro, Catholic iconography such as the Christ Child has become a symbol of the nation, of urban solidarity, and a cultural rallying point (Ferro 2001). The ritual of beauty contests and the national football team also tend to produce an immediate collective reaction in the national consciousness (Bolivar 2001; Dávila 2001). Colombians collectively take enormous pride in the accomplishments and international recognition of artists as varied as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Fernando Botero, and the popstar Shakira. Colombian nationalism also exhibits a dimension of “topophilia” or “geopiety”, which Daniel Deudney defines as “identity and loyalty based on experience of and feeling of connectedness to a particular place or area” (Deudney 1996: 131). The rhetoric of modern Colombian nationalism is highly naturalistic, and Colombians express almost a reverence for the national geography. Like many nations, identifying negatively with an “out-group” also has the effect of strengthening “in-group” cohesion. In this case the Colombian relationship with the United States and the mix of defensiveness and outrage over American attitudes toward their country and culture tend to create a certain unity. Simultaneously, Colombians speak of the experience of traveling outside national territory and having their awareness of being Colombian “activated”. A national identity or sense of self takes on meaning relative to other nations and how these others define Colombia. It is, curiously, through the act of leaving Colombia and facing a hostile set of stereotypes that a consciousness of national community which transcends internal divisions is triggered.

**The Global Colombian**

Regarding post-territorial models of citizenship, there is incipient evidence to suggest that the Colombian citizen may be beginning to construct new forms of social, economic and cultural connectedness that go beyond the nation-state. The most tangible indication of this move toward the broadening of what it means to be a Colombian is found in current migration patterns. Due to a complex set of reasons related to the internal conflict, violence, and lack of economic opportunities, Colombian is rapidly becoming one of the chief emigrant countries in Latin America. As of 1996, an estimated 8% of the entire Colombian population was residing outside national territory (Guarnizo, Sanchez and Roach 1999: 371), while the Colombian government reports that between 1996 and 2000 alone, 1,015,000 Colombians permanently left the country (Rueda Plata 2000). What is different about this third wave of Colombian migration, however, is that many of the activities and attitudes of newly arriving Colombians in the United States imply the existence of a transnational field of action formed by a complex web of relations that link
both societies. Contrary to previous migration patterns in which Colombians made a
discrete move out of one country and into another, today’s migrants maintain political,
cultural, and socioeconomic relations with Colombia. Colombian migrants in the U.S.
display consistent and complex commercial, financial, cultural and even criminal practices
linking both national domains (Guarnizo and Díaz 1999). Legislation in Colombia and the
U.S. that permits the maintenance of dual citizenship, and possibly dual identities, further
suggests a loosening of the exclusivity of the citizenship bond.

At the same time, new authority relations related to global governance projects also
appear to be modifying the citizen-state relationship in Colombia, along the lines of a post-
national conception of citizenship. New global spheres of authority, involving overlapping
internal and external jurisdictions, a proliferation of new global actors, and changing
authority criteria, all point to the formation of more direct associations between Colombian
citizens and global citizenship schemes. This dynamic is particularly apparent in the case of
global processes and norms related to human rights and the internal conflict. The loosening
of territorial parameters has legitimated nonstate actors within the domestic sphere, and has
also lead to a growing receptivity by Colombian civil society to new actors perceived as
more competent and credible. I have argued elsewhere that such global restructuring has
generated alternate spheres of authority in Colombia by shifting citizens’ legitimacy
sentiments away from the state to international, transnational, and even subnational actors
(Mason 2002). Although I would stop far short of proposing that a postnational citizenship
scheme has replaced a national model, new rules and institutions related to the global
human rights regime in particular have shifted the locus of authority away from the
Colombian state.

Conclusion

Citizenship in Colombia is in short supply. A fractured social contract between
state and citizen, widespread citizen alienation from the political system, a society torn
apart by violence, and an uncertain sense of national identity have frustrated an effective
citizenship project in Colombia. A more complete account of the nature of state weakness
in Colombia necessarily involves a consideration of the poor integration between state and
society. Conversely, any efforts at state strengthening must incorporate the Colombian
citizenry through the implementation of a package of universal, basic rights, through
incentives to participate more actively in the political process and in the community, and
through the articulation of a unified notion of the Colombian nation. Societal initiatives in
response to the devastating violence and insecurity bode well for the future of civil society
and indicate the possibility of citizenship in Colombia. Efforts at enhancing capacity in
Colombia would do well to recognize the crucial role played by society in state
consolidation, and to build on the fragments of citizenship that are still in evidence.
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