

Country Overview Colombia

**VOICE OR
CHATTER?**
STATE OF THE ART

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This report is the outcome of a collaboration between IT for Change and faculty from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences, Federal University of Pará, Brazil, under a research project titled *Voice or Chatter? Using a Structuration Framework Towards a Theory of ICT-mediated Citizen Engagement*.

This research has been produced with the financial support of Making All Voices Count. Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. This Grand Challenge focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. Making All Voices Count is supported by the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, and Omidyar Network (ON), and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

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MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT

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State of the Art: Colombia

This report aims at providing an overview of the normative and institutional state of art of ICT-mediated citizen participation in Colombia. The first section provides an overview of the political and civic liberties framework in Colombia. In the second section the landscape of ICT mediated citizen engagement is mapped. In the third section, the report engages with implications of technology mediations for deliberative democracy and transformative citizenship.

1. Overview

In Colombia, technological modernization coexists with activities supported through obsolete technologies and conservative mindsets. The country is in a permanent struggle between tradition and innovation, so the introduction of technologies and their associated discourses clashes with local idiosyncrasies. As the country is not a technology-creator, technology acceptance involves elements of fashion and psychological dependency from developed countries. Building adaptive technological appropriation is difficult as foreign technological proposals become associated with forms of alienation. Technology is intimately related to economic, political and military domination. Therefore, any autonomous and strategic appropriation is tainted by corporate lobbyists, market pressures and political interests.

The local application of information and communication technologies (ICT) to governance suffers these problems. Information Technology (IT) responds directly or indirectly to the interests of the global elite that created it. Its application to governance is associated with the structuration of a world-system of “distributed capitalism” (Zuboff, 2010), integrated to an industrialist epistemology and a capitalist ideology. Territories like Europe and North America are at the “Centre” of the system while non-industrialized nations are the “Periphery”.

The concept of “development” was attached to the use of ICTs, and associated with discourses that favor this center-periphery order (Breton, 1991; Mattelart, 2002; Rieusset-Lemarié, 1997). This “center-periphery” system reinforces dependency and economic drain in developing countries, as exchange relations favor the “center” due to their technological and productive capacities. International aid programs, commercial marketing and the “cultural industry” also favor the conversion of the “Peripheral” societies to globalization (Dorfman & Mattelart, 1978).

In this scenario, Internet arrived to Latin America through the universities during the 1990s, under a complex symbolic and paradoxical appropriation (De Carvalho, 2006; Tamayo Gómez, Delgado & Penagos, 2009). Complex because it rose from the “center-periphery”, associated with a structure of technical, economic, social, and cultural domination (Di Filippo, 1998; Escobar, 2011; Prebisch, 1984, 1986, 2008). Paradoxical, because IT played a dual role – enabling liberation and supporting authoritarianism and the economic inequality of the region. Technological appropriation in Latin America was a kind of “imitative consumption” (Prebisch, 2008), that is, the acquisition of productive goods impelled by fashion or snobbery, but not by strategic reasons. Latin American countries are extraction economies with poorly educated populations, scarce qualified workers, feudalistic idiosyncrasies and weak Research and Development activities; the conditions of a “knowledge Society” are not in place so ICTs do not live up to possibilities (Berrío-Zapata & Rojas, 2014).

Latin American countries grew through coups and dictatorships into oligarchic technocracies legitimized through bureaucratic rationalism. Authoritarian bureaucracies were local versions of the European enlightened despotism (O'Donnell, 1973, 1978, 2008). Authoritarian bureaucracies are

states ruled by a narrow circle of bureaucrats, aristocrats, and former managers from private firms. They produce political exclusion by weakening participation through repression, state-corporate controls, and economic concentration, reducing and postponing the aspirations of wealth redistribution for the majorities. Social issues are depoliticized, making them “technicalities” that can only be resolved by the government hierarchies. Authoritarian bureaucracies reinforce the dependency of the “periphery” within the global industrial-capitalistic system.

Latin American Authoritarian Bureaucracies embraced the global discourse of digitization at the end of the decade of 1990, as a solution to become “developed nations”. The US supported this narrative during the Clinton-Gore mandate, with the assistance of the G8, the OECD and the UN, turning it into a global policy that gave rise to the WSIS and the Information Society project in 2003 (Avgerou, 2003; Berrío-Zapata, 2015; Mattelart, 2000a, 2000b, 2005). When ICTs were applied to governance in Latin America, the structural conditions of power distribution were hostile to renegotiations, so IT applications were administrated in ways that produced democratic divides. As Internet is not democratic *per se*, authoritarian societies may turn it into a tool for a sophisticated domination, exclusion, or propaganda (Dholakia, Dholakia, & Kshetri, 2003; Norris, 2000). Regardless of the recent flourishing of democracy in the region that has fostered open government, the right to information, and participatory governance, the structural characteristics of these societies and their historical legacy collides with the advances made in e-Participation. Dominant agents feed a context of political authoritarianism and corruption that produce systemic problems of political apathy, mistrust and violence.

1.1 Historical Overview of Policy and Regulatory Architectures.

Studies about Colombian e-Democracy tend to consider the state as a service provider and not as co-governance partner to the citizen. The government’s discourse emphasizes a permanent urgency to IT update, so there is a continuous catch up with the latest technological wave, in spite of the difficulties to interpret such updates effectively and put them to work. Basic limitations such as weak telecommunication infrastructure or limited access due to the costs of computers and Internet persist (Silva, 2003). Nevertheless, the country has made important improvements since 2000.

The development of e-Government initiatives in Colombia can be classified into four stages (Massal & Sandoval, 2010). The first stage began in 2000 with the introduction of online government, which was the first update of the communication infrastructure. This was part of a presidential directive called “*Agenda de Conectividad*”, created by the Andrés Pastrana’s administration (1998-2002). The country’s infrastructure was so overdue that these minimal updates produced huge advances; Colombia made significant leaps in quantitative indicators (Ministerio de Comunicaciones, 2009; WEF & INSEAD, 2009). A strong techno-determinism marked the application of ICT to governance resulting in Internet-centrism (Morozov, 2012; Tamayo Gómez et al., 2009). Pastrana’s government forced all state agencies to go online by the end of his mandate and although the ultimatum worked, the result was a chaotic networked system.

The second stage began with President Alvaro Uribe. *Agenda de Conectividad* was reduced from a presidential directive to a ministry project during his mandate (2002- 2006; 2006-2010). This administration maintained the government’s digitization process in a ten-year plan called “*Plan Decenal*” (MEN, 1996, 2003, 2006). Technical standards were adopted under the coordination of the Ministry of Technology and a technical commission. This produced a substantial improvement in regard to interoperability across government agencies (Massal & Sandoval, 2010).

The third stage began in year 2008 when the role of e-Government gained visibility and the development of a juridical frame for information was launched by the government. In 2010, President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014; 2014-) joined the Alliance for Open Government

(*Alianza para el Gobierno Abierto* AGA) and promulgated law 1712/2014 for Transparency and the Right to Access National Public Information (Colombia, 2014). This Alliance was promoted by the United Nations and US president Barack Obama. Its founder members (US, Mexico, Brazil, Norway, UK, South Africa, Indonesia and the Philippines) pledged for transparency, the eradication of corruption and increasing citizen participation in public affairs through ICT (CLAD, 2011). In September 2011, Colombia initiated its formal participation in the Open Government Partnership with 11 other Latin American countries who joined the initiative between 2011 and 2012 (CEPAL, 2016).

The fourth stage begins in 2012, when Colombia presented its first Open Government plan with the aim of improving public services, increasing public integrity and enhancing the management of public investment (Comité de Seguimiento AGA Colombia, 2015). The goal was to create “mechanisms for citizen participation and control”, for the betterment of direct communication and interaction between the community, public offices, local administrations and the central government. In this new stage, the government discourse included e-Consultation and suggested co-governance. The creation of Crystal Urn (*Urna de Cristal - UDC*) was presented as a central mechanism of multichannel citizen participation (Comité de Seguimiento AGA Colombia, 2011).

Colombia’s achievements in e-Readiness, education, technological capacities and e-Participation were significant in the main cities and amongst privileged classes, however, rural populations and popular classes were left behind (Calderón et al., 2014). Particular experiences such as the use of a web-site of the political party MIRA showed that e-Participation was able to positively impact the ways of political action, achieving the construction of effective communication channels between electors and the candidates (Amaya & Johanna, 2011). Unfortunately these experiences are still rare in Colombia.

This new stage of e-Government in Colombia raises questions about the future (Massal & Sandoval, 2010):

1. How democratic and participative will the political debate be through e-Government environments?
2. Will political and technological change synchronize?
3. Will e-Government environment be able to bind citizens and government in a collaborative way? Would civil society and government actors respond?
4. How would it be possible to measure in a reliable and comprehensive way the impact of these tools to offer a critical feedback?

1.2 Historical Political Context

To fully grasp ICT-mediated citizen engagement in Colombia, it is important to review the issues that characterize the local democracy. Although this is one of the oldest democracies in Latin America, the persistence of elections and universal suffrage cannot be confused with democratization. The political actors have fused voting and elections with corruption and violence. By means of force, manipulation or venality, traditional elites keep control of the democratic decision-making in an attempt to create monopolies of power. Democratic mechanisms were adopted before the country solved its contradictions in ways that were suited to democratic interaction and therefore, those conflicts persist (Posada-Carbó, 1996). Political actors play simultaneously within the elections arena and extra-democratic fields, changing names to give the appearance of novelty: i.e. Federalists against Centralists, Liberal against Conservative, Partido de la U versus Partido de Centro Democrático. In the end, the same personages can be identified under different denominations, making personal presence in the main cities while controlling remote areas through cartels and alliances of convenience.

This political behavior has its roots in the numerous wars that characterized the early Colombian history as a republic. The coexistence of violence and elections was especially strong in the mid 20th century. Between the decades 1940-50, death squads acting under names like *Chulavitas* and *Pájaros* spread terror in small cities and rural areas. This period was called "*La Violencia*". These were armed extensions of the liberal and conservative parties that caused more than 300,000 deaths, and forced the displacement of thousands. In 1948, a popular leader from the Liberal party, Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, was assassinated. Gaitan was a part of a dissident wing within the Liberal party and Liberal party elites did not approve of the rise of his popular movement. His death produced riots and arson in Bogotá, and spread-out to the countryside in the form of bands of poor peasants that took arms and conformed organized groups called "*Bandoleros*". The *Bandoleros* would later become Marxist-Leninist and Maoist guerrillas (Figueroa, 1998; González, 1998; Perea, 2009).

Between 1953 and 1957, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla took the power through a military coup, and became a popular and charismatic leader. The conservative and liberal elites ceased hostilities and joined forces to end the military coup promoted by Rojas Pinilla, and prevent his election to office. This was achieved creating a consociational democracy with the Pact of Benidorm and the Pact of Sitges (Lijphart, 1969; Robert H. Dix, 1980). Both parties agreed to rotate the position of presidency during 16 years. The pact excluded popular movements and the communists guerrillas, that remained hidden in both rural and urban areas, supported by the USSR, Cuba and China.

After the decade of 1970, new warlords joined the conflict: narcotraffic cartels and paramilitary organizations. All of them, including the guerrilla, raised resources through extortions, kidnapping and drug smuggling. Some of these movements were defeated or weakened, like the *Cartel de Medellín* from Pablo Escobar (1949-1993) or Carlos Castaño's paramilitary group called *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* AUC (1965-2004). Some others came to peace and were incorporated to civil life like the M-19 and EPL guerrillas, but the lack of guarantees for the political action of these deviant actors ended in systematic murders and the return to a clandestine existence, i.e., the systematic assassination of all the members of the *Unión Patriótica* party during the decade of 1980. After this, political violence in Colombia increased its variety of actors, its persistence, and scaled to more complex patterns.

The latest escalation occurred between 2002 and 2010, when the military offensive from President Uribe weakened the guerrillas, at the cost of compromising human rights with a strong discourse of hate and intensifying government corruption, delaying once more the possibility of building a state of trust and coexistence (Perea, 2009). The latest plebiscite to validate the negotiations with the FARC in October 2016, confirmed that the discourse of mistrust and retaliation keeps strong, fueled by propaganda, disinformation, weak education and lack of critical capacities. The rejection of the peace treaty with the FARC won, polarizing the population between those who were ready to make a halt and integrate these movements into civil society, and those who support prosecution and retaliation.

The historically rooted skepticism of citizens has affected the uptake of ICT-mediated engagement initiatives. The political scenario has been contaminated with cases of electronic espionage and the misuse of public databases. Guerrillas, paramilitary groups, drug lords and state intelligence agencies have used data bases to target and threaten citizens with a high level of impunity. Kidnapping between 1970 and 2010 resulted in 39.058 victims with only 10 % of them leading to captures and sentences (CNMH, 2013). In 2006, parliament members were found involved in activities linked with paramilitary groups. The investigation pointed at 33 % of the Senate and 15 % of the House as involved in these criminal networks that included 410 politicians and local authorities. This structure used the paramilitary to guide vote intentions and control the population in exchange for political and legal favors (Claudia López & Oscar Sevillano, 2008). In 2009, officers from the Colombian Intelligence Agency (DAS) were caught running an illegal operation center to

spy on opposition figures, under the command of officers from the Presidency (JPC, 2016; Semana, 2014).

As can be seen, Colombian political history is a collection of non-resolved violent conflicts and criminal activities (Rettberg, 2010). The Colombian government has been involved in several unlawful activities that has weakened the quality of political dialog and undermined citizens' trust in the state. Although, Colombians have a strong democratic vocation and voting is considered important in Colombian society. The Political Behavior Survey from 2008 (DANE) found that 83.2 % of the population considers voting as very important, and 79 % thinks that democracy is the best government system. In contrast, 44.1 % of the voters are unsatisfied with democracy; the population do not trust political actors such as political parties (56 %), the Congress (41.9 %), the Courts (40.7 %) and the President (33.6 %) (DANE, 2015). This is the historical backdrop against which ICT-mediated citizen engagement has evolved in Colombia.

1.3 Policies Regulating ICT-mediated Citizen Engagement

Policies for citizen engagement¹ are recent in Colombia. This explains the confusion between "citizen administrative participation", that intends to achieve the technical optimization of bureaucratic procedures, and "citizen political participation", that seeks to affect the balance of power in the governance framework, making citizens co-responsible actors in public policies (Prieto-Martín & Ramírez-Alujas, 2014).

The legal frame for turning bureaucratic activities digital came from Law 2150 for Paperwork Reduction in 1995, and the national policy produced by President Andres Pastrana and the National Council for Economic and Social Planning CONPES in 2000 (Cardona Madariaga, Cortés Sánchez, & Ujueta, 2015). The regulation of the Right to Information came simultaneously, based on the "*Derecho de Tutela*" or Guardianship Action Right. This right was established as part of 1991 Constitution, and was designed to enforce the basic rights of the citizen, including the Petition Right or "*Derecho de Petición*":

"Everyone has the right to present respectful petitions to the authorities for reasons of general or individual interest, and to obtain prompt resolution" (Colombia, 1991, 2015).

With the Petition Right, the right to ask government officers for information and data became a fundamental right of the citizen. The Guardianship Right enforced the Petition Right returning to the citizens the confidence in their right to know. Public information supplying ceased to be a favor from the government and became a duty. Nevertheless, the slow change in the government's culture made this legal action routine. Between 1991 and 2011 there were four million Guardianship Rights demands (Carrera Silva, 2011) a fact that shows that information sharing between the state and citizens is still an exercise in non-cooperation.

E-Government was developed in Colombia under the 'service provider state' perspective, so efficiency and technicalities were privileged over deep engagement (Páez, Atencio, & Neüman, 2013). Most achievements produced by these new regulations had to do with access to transparent and open data or information security (Colombia, 2014; Ronderos, 2014), and only very recently, with co-governance.

Citizens' political participation in state decisions were regulated by law 134 of 1994 and law 1757 of 2015 (Colombia, 1994, 2015b), but these laws did not include references to ICT-mediation or e-Participation. The only mention to any technological mediation was the possibility of town-hall

¹ "Engagement" is defined as a co-governance where citizens are active, meaningful, transformative and empowered partners rather than passive recipients of services (Vivier, Seabe, Wentzel, & Sanchez, 2015).

meetings live-casting. Internet or other similar structures of participation remained unexploited. Only until 2011, new policies addressed ICT-mediated participation following the Alliance for Open Government (Comité de Seguimiento AGA Colombia, 2011, 2015), and produced the *Urna de Cristal* project, that focuses on participative exercises and democratic engagement of citizens via ICT.

2. Urna de Cristal Project

The project *Urna de Cristal* (UDC) took its name from an analogy that president Santos made about the transparency of his mandate, very similar to a figure of speech used by US President Obama in 2009 (Obama, 2009). UDC was launched in 2010 as part of the online Government strategy – *Gobierno en Línea* (GEL) (MinTIC Colombia, 2016), whose origins go back to *Agenda de Conectividad*, in year 2000, which was approved by the National Council for Economic and Social Planning CONPES in those days and re-approved in year 2010 (CONPES, 2010).

UDC is part of an action plan for 2015 to 2017 that intends to accomplish transparency, citizen participation and government accountability. This initiative is complemented by Law 1712 for Transparency and Access to Public Information (Law 1712, 2014). UDC is a web platform for citizen-government communication, with the aim of producing effective e-information and e-consultation channels between citizens and the state. In addition to consultation services for the citizen, the government carries out pedagogical initiatives to educate citizens about particular matters and develops participation exercises where citizens have the chance to influence public policies. UDC offers a web channel, a radio channel and a TV channel, that can be accessed via personal computers and mobile. It also uses social networks like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google Plus and Instagram. UDC guarantees that any question or comment placed on the platform will have an official response from the correspondent entity, as the platform is connected directly to all main government agencies.

Although the media welcomed UDC, some journalists expressed doubts. For some of them, the real problem was that part of the government staff were not willing to collaborate with the public, in order to compromise the Presidential plan towards transparency (Newman Pont, 2010). A similar paradox was reported in the US and in Brazil: the presidential initiatives for transparency did not guarantee building a transparency culture in state officials (Peled, 2011; Vaz, Ribeiro, & Matheus, 2010). Other journalists denounced ethical problems in the project. It was said that the coordinator of UDC was receiving preferential treatment from the state due to a personal relation with the Ministry of Telecommunications (Montero, 2011). That same year, another journalist denounced that the IT contractor that created UDC platform was using this project as leverage to sell similar solutions around the country, taking advantage of being the former IT adviser on President Santos' campaign (Lewin, 2011). A final scandal blew up in November 2015, when a comment about corruption posted by a citizen into UDC was answered in UDC's Twitter account with a threatening answer. The message was deleted and qualified as a mistake (LaFM, 2015).

Although, the project could not avoid being affected by its environment, UDC has been recognized as an example for e-Participation policies and IT technical upgrade in the State. Its administration has since then undergone changes and now it is very active in guiding all other government offices towards understanding the socio-technical complexities of e-Governance.

2.1 Surveying UDC Impact: Perception Indicators

In 2013, the government hired a study about UDC with the purpose of finding out what were the perceptions of the citizens about it (Infométrika, 2013). The study was based on interviews applied

to different persons related to UDC, i.e. 26 citizens from different socioeconomic strata and a group of six representatives from NGOs, academics, media, public officers and UDC officers.

The survey characterized the profile of the average Colombian citizen: rarely reads, uses radio not for news but for music, views TV as the central form of family entertainment, and mobile phone as a tool for voice call and texting. Colombian citizens consider Internet as an important tool for amusement and recreation, and they use it predominantly for social networking, entertainment, occasional searches, chats, and e-mail. There is resistance to use the Internet for commercial transactions. Same resistance applies to the interaction with the state, considered a social actor to be avoided by users.

The virtualization of bureaucratic procedures forced many of the interviewed citizens to interact with the state via Internet, although, they preferred the physical interaction, for it gives them assurance of the procedure's completion. The avoidance of virtual interaction with the state reinforced the lack of familiarity with services like UDC. Most of the interviewees were not aware about this project. Their perception of the concept inspiring UDC was positive, but the fact that the government was running it raised doubts about the final use that the collected information would be put to. The interviewees also found it difficult to understand, the idea of participative government and the digital participation culture. The expectations about UDC were associated to the enhancement of bureaucratic processes.

Previous research about UDC made by Datexco (Datexco, 2012) showed that citizens believed the project to have low credibility and perceived the initiative as government's propaganda. This perception softened a year after the report presented by Infometrika came out. On the contrary, public officers knew UDC platform and were convinced about the good intentions of the government. ICT was perceived as a means to ease their work and interact with the citizens, mainly through Twitter and Facebook. Public officers hoped that UDC would remain beyond Juan Manuel Santos' presidency, and extended to reach rural areas and small cities. The interviewed academics, although highly connected, did not have knowledge about UDC. They perceived it as a visionary project, but held doubts about its success due to lack of evidence of impact. Transparency, participation, and inclusion were considered the three major obstacles to the initiative. And there was the fear that the project would not last beyond president Santos' mandate. Interviewees from the telecommunications sector knew about the UDC, but had no interaction with it. The NGOs surveyed were suspicious and indifferent to the project, treating it like any other source of dialog with the government.

Infometrika's survey showed that UDC had problems in various layers;

1. Lack of interest from the citizen in political participation and co-governance, related to the perception of corruption and demagogue from politicians
2. Transparency as a major concern; ensuring the information does not leak, is misused or used to retaliate the critics of the government
3. The digital divide still is a major problem in Colombia
4. Limited promotion about the project and e-Participation.

In 2015, another study surveyed UDC capacity for e-Participation, also based on interviews (Parra Beltran, 2015). The results showed that UDC was capable to support e-participation but unable to create e-empowerment based on Macintosh model (Macintosh, 2004; Macintosh & Whyte, 2008). This research pointed that the project lacked enough promotion, participation, and post-implementation to produce sustainable e-participation, following the Islam model (Islam, 2008). Findings showed a high survival risks for next election in year 2018 due to the perceived association with President Santos. For Parra Beltran, ICT and UDC did not e-empower citizens in themselves but e-enabled citizens towards e-empowerment, due to the context of low awareness

in citizens and public officers, the digital divide, and the lack of trust and credibility in the government.

2.2 Governance Indicators in Colombia

During the decades of 1990 and 2000 Colombia went through important changes, marked by the implosion of the economy due to a crisis in two of the main economic activities: coffee production and cocaine smuggling. The apparent opulence produced by these exportations created a bubble that concealed instability, and its collateral damages in terms of inflation, costs of violence and the creation of a culture of corruption that drained resources of the country and produced institutional instability. The nucleus of this system was fueled by social inequality and deprivation of opportunities for social mobility (Betancourt & García Bustos, 1994; Sevilla Soler, 1999; Urrutia, 1990)

To describe the situation of Colombia through the last decade, we have chosen several indicators: (1) Political culture and democracy, produced by DANE²; (2) Corruption Index from Transparency International; (3) the World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders, and (4) the Human E-Government Readiness Index from the United Nations. The UN Human Development Index, UN Education Index, the World Bank Poverty Statistics and the World Bank Gini Index would be used as a context to the four indicators mentioned. Indicators 1 to 3 refer to governance, political culture and the conditions for free expression. Indicator 4 states the penetration of ICT mediation in government. These elements related the conditions of human capital that allow the effective use of ICT, the situation of economic development, and the distribution of wealth that determines access to ICT, will complete the analysis.

The indicators for political culture and democracy (DANE, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2015) show that the population believes democracy is the best government system although this perception seems to be dropping³(Figure 1; Annex 1); half of the population keeps on voting but the doubts about the quality of Colombian democracy increased from 64.27% in 2007 to 71,20% in 2015 (Figure 2; Annex 1). Citizens' knowledge about governance participation mechanisms tends to increase while effective participation is decreasing (Figure 3; Annex 1). Thrust in political institutions such as the President and the Political Parties is decreasing while the Congress is recovering credibility at low pace, and the Army has a high prestige (Figure 4; Annex 1).

Corruption affected the citizens' confidence in democratic institutions and the efficiency of the state's bureaucratic machinery. It undervalued dialogue as the best way to solve differences. Although Colombia has improved in corruption, its achievements compared to other countries are not satisfactory (Figure 5; Annex 2). Corruption weakened democratic practices and coexistence, prompting confrontation between the country's political actors and the population. The systematic violation of Human Rights is a consequence of escalating corruption towards violent ways that jeopardize freedom of expression that grows as impunity reigns.

A free press could serve as an indicator of protection of civilian rights and freedom of speech. The comparative evolution of Colombia in freedom of speech places the country below 40% of the index, closer to the worst qualified countries that keep within the lowest 10% of the index. Colombian ranks have been always within the lowest 30% of the surveyed countries, without significant improvements in more than a decade, meaning the country is stuck in a culture of free speech violation. Organizations like Human Right Watch, although they do not have ranks or indexes, continuously name Colombia as a systematic transgressor of Human Rights (HRW, 2016).

² Colombian National Statistical Department.

³ Unfortunately data is incomplete for years 2013 and 2015.

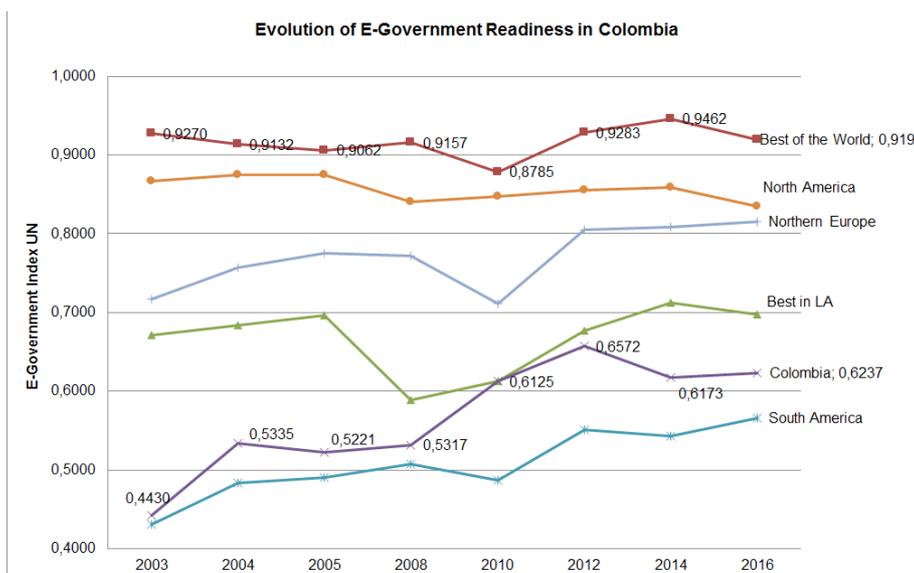
These indicators lead to conclude that citizens have objective reasons for being suspicious about the government as an information trustee. Colombian authorities have breached Human Rights using data-bases, and electronic interception have been used in the past to restrain citizens who opposed the government, both situations that have been catastrophic for the image of ICT-mediation in the government. To this lack of trust and the debilitated participative behavior we must also add three contextual situations:

1. Human Development improvements (UNDP, 2016) were insufficient and fell down between 2007 and 2014 (Figure 7; Annex 3).
2. Colombia’s education system has ceased to improve its conditions since year 2005, maintaining an average scores of 0.6 while developed countries stand around 0,9 (UNDP, 2016). This deepens the Knowledge Gap and prevents getting near to the model of Information Society that e-Government needs to flourish (Figure 8; Annex 3).
3. Poverty reduced in Colombia after the economic crisis of 2006 (World Bank, 2016), but the recovery is recent and has left the country behind its regional neighbors (Figure 9; Annex 3). E-Government requires conditions that exceed the elimination of poverty, as the infrastructure required to connect access broad band services like these are not provided under the Universal Service Model, so it remains expensive for the average Colombian citizen. And the abilities required to take advantage of e-Government such as information literacy and data literacy require investment in an education that may offer more than just reading-and-writing (Berrío-Zapata, 2012).

Colombian GDP improved from USD 86,186 billion in year 2000 to USD 282,08 billion in 2015. But such an increase has not implied improvement on the quality of life of the average Colombian, as wealth is highly concentrated (World Bank, 2016) (Figure 10; Annex 3). The surplus produced by technological productive enhancement has not resulted in nurturing a well-educated and informed citizenry, synergistic with an e-Participative democracy.

In contrast to such neglecting of its human capital, Colombia made continuous efforts to be distinguished as a world leader in e-Government and e-Participation (Figure1).

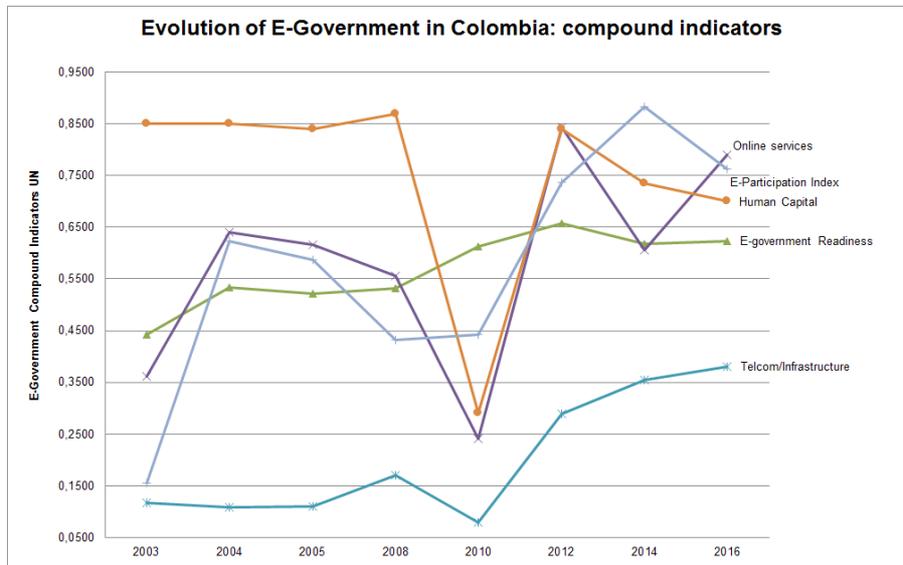
Figure 1: E-Government Index-Colombia



Source: (UN, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016)

The weakness of Colombian e-Readiness comes from its fragile infrastructure and the low income of most of its population, which turns IT into a luxury. Human capital was not enhanced due to stagnation in education. These flaws are compensated with a massive offer of online services from the Government and some recent e-Participation exercises (Figure 2)

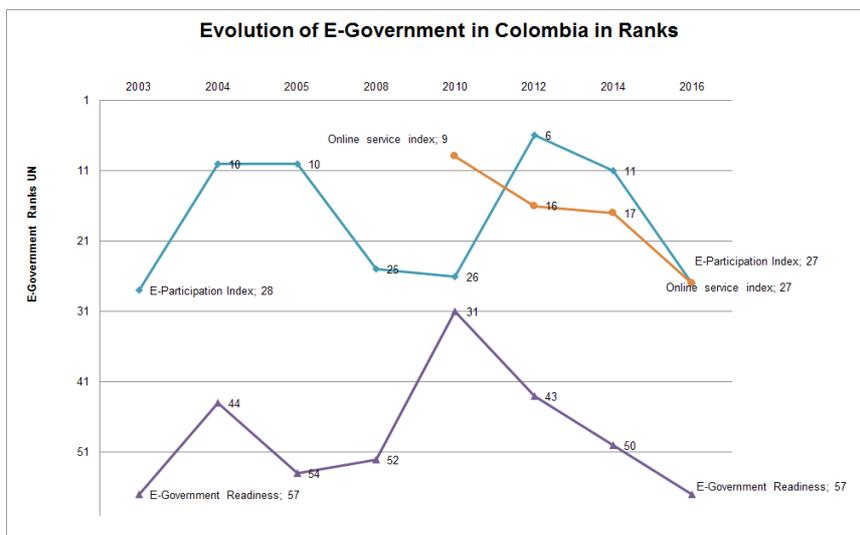
Figure 2: E-Government Readiness Index-Colombia



Source: (UN, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016)

The implementation of e-Government mediations in an economically restricted population with poor education, in a context stained by human right violations, restricted freedom of expression and corruption, explains why Colombia, in spite of its meaningful efforts, keeps losing positions in the e-Government Readiness rankings (Figure 3).

Figure 3: E-Government Readiness Ranks- Colombia



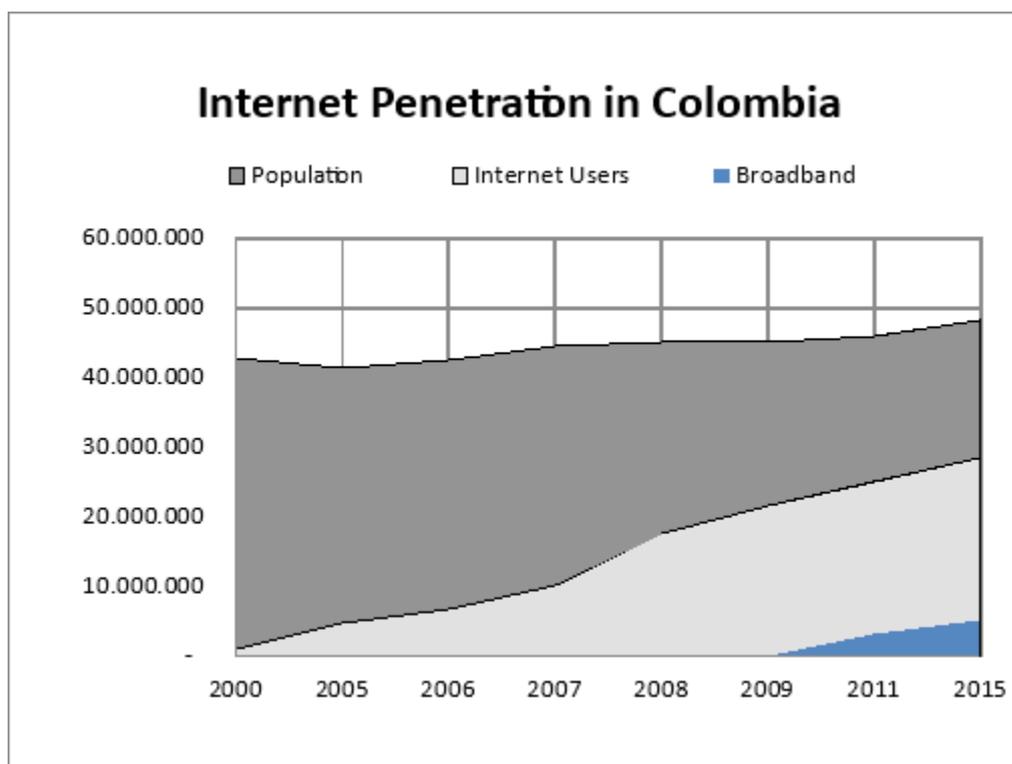
Source: (UN, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016)

2.3 The Context of ICT-mediated Citizen Engagement and UDC

ICT-mediated citizen engagement in Colombia has not achieved the desired impact mainly for three reasons:

1. The existence of a significant digital divide on broadband (Figure 4), a knowledge gap regarding education, and information flows in the population. The education system, especially in post-graduation levels, is excluding. Lack of education and economical means have produced a population with weak information and data literacy.
2. After 50 years of dirty war and mistrust, political disinterest has become part of the Colombian political culture. Co-governance is an alien idea for citizens and governing actors, that within an authoritarian non-participative perspective, stick to the idea of a messianic figure that will lead the country to change the current state of things (García, 2010).
3. The reproduction of state-of-the art information architectures that do not consider the state of deficit in infrastructure, access, and knowledge in the population. In this manner, ICT-mediation produces additional difficulties to the citizens, who are not prepared to face what these systems demand from them.

Figure 4: Internet and Broadband Penetration in Colombia



Source: *InternetWorldStats.com, 2016; MinTIC Colombia, 2016*

On the other hand, there is a promising increase in e-Consultation. UDC has conducted 38 exercises between 2012 and 2015 (Colombia, 2015). Advances in e-Information have been a constant as per the UN e-Readiness survey. But modifying the culture of political disinterest, messianic expectations and mistrust about the government will be a long term process. E-decision is still weak as citizens do not see that their contributions have real impact on governmental decisions, and e-Participation exercises lack of sufficient publicity.

E-Readiness jumped into the Colombian political scenario before the necessary conditions were present, and the technological dependency of the country induced an imitative consumption. The tools were imported but the social practices that could improve democracy and guarantees civil rights have not been developed adequately to produce a breakthrough towards the Information Society. The profit obtained from betterments in productiveness were appropriated by a minority and did not contribute to improvements in education, infrastructure, or access to IT.

Perez describes the struggle for technological advance as a race against a moving target (Perez, 2001). Technology can change human routines and social structures, but at the same time, pre-existing structures deeply affect it. ICT-mediation structures changed in Colombia, at a pace that the institutional mediation structures could not match. Being already overdue, Colombia is not improving at the required pace in comparison to the rest of the countries, so its society is not integrating with the discourse of connectedness, responsible informed decision, shared governance, transparency, and accountability. The legacy of bureaucratic authoritarianism, clashing of warlords and political messianism became obstacles for ICT-mediated democratic inclusion.

The prevalence of violence in Colombia makes trust to be a major issue. In nations like Saudi Arabia, Jordan or Argentina with similar “dirty war” problems, the population became cautious about technologies that can capture private information. Traditional elites in these kind of countries may accept e-Participation plans but not necessarily assume them, backing-up actions that are critical for significant impact⁴ (Al-Quraan & Abu-Shanab, 2015; Alrashedi, Persaud, & Kindra, 2015).

The discourse of e-Government is strongly accepted by the authorities and people as an engine of progress, but the local apathy and lack of confidence mix with the global tendency of banalization of Internet and the hedonistic use of social networks, both phenomena stimulated by consumerism and affecting e-Participation. This situation even affects strong participative democracies like UK, Sweden, or Iceland (Åström et al., 2013; Owen, 2011; Netchaeva, 2002).

The influence of the US e-Government perspective on Colombia may be another problem. As such it is a service model inspired from the financial industry, whose focus is efficiency and not participation (Páez, Atencio, & Neüman, 2013). It applies market logic and confuses transparency with participation. Offering rich and diverse information menus is considered “democratic openness” while in fact, no substantial changes are produced within the power relations between citizens and government. In contrast, Europe tends to focus on democracy, participation, confidence and amicable IT systems for dialog (Prieto-Martín & Ramírez-Alujas, 2014; Scott, 2006).

3. E-Participation and the Current Political Situation in Colombia

E-Government and e-participation plans have assumed the pre-existence of an Information Society in developing countries like Colombia, overlooking the existent problems of social inequality, connectivity barriers and educational flaws (Arboleda, 2006). ICT tools have proven their capacity to mobilize people and coordinate efforts, but their impact in building participatory democracies is not clear yet in Latin America. Research in Argentina and Chile show that ICT has been used more in protest and mobilizations than in co-governance. Political mobilization with social networks has

⁴ This is referred in the literature as the “Middleman Paradox”: e-Democracy is supported and included into the official discourse but, fear of change affects politicians, so those same actors responsible for introducing these new forms of participation end up opposing to them (Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005)

had a stronger relation with fashion, homophily and social pressure, than with a participative political culture (Bavoleo, 2009; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012;2014).

3.1 Politics (As Always)...

Governance in Colombia has changed at a slow pace. The traditional political elites succeeded in avoiding new military coups, but they also excluded popular parties from democratic participation and attacked them using regular and irregular means. This combination between political exclusion and violence fueled of popular groups of outlaws that lately became pro-communist guerrillas like the Fuerzas armadas Revolucionaria de Colombia (FARC), the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) and Movimiento 19 de abril (M-19).

Peace attempts had been many. In recent history, the latest efforts for a treaty with the guerrilla began in 1984 between President Belisario Betancourt, the FARC and the ELN. These guerrillas created a political party called *Unión Patriótica*. The treaty failed as the members of *Unión Patriótica* were systematically assassinated between 1986 and 1994: two presidential candidates, 8 congressmen, 13 camera representatives and an approximate number of 5,000 political militants (El Tiempo, 2013). In 1990, the M-19 and EPL came to terms with the government of President Virgilio Barco. That same year the M-19 presidential candidate Carlos Pizarro Leongómez was murdered in public.

A new negotiation with FARC was made by President Andrés Pastrana in year 2002 but failed again as the guerrilla did not follow the treaty. The next president, Alvaro Uribe, negotiated the pacification of 30,000 paramilitary right-wing corps and their commanders, but fought a relentless war with the leftist guerrilla. The latest peace attempt with the FARC occurred in October 2016 and initially failed as the plebiscite on whether or not to validate it resulted in its rejection (FCM, 2012). All negotiation had to be revised from zero under the attack of the leader of the opposition, former president Uribe. The international pressure gave new air to the process but still, rebel dissidences in FARC, denouncements of corruption in the process, and permanent disinformation from the opposition about the treaty, make the process of demobilizing a complex and delicate path.

The mixture between drug traffic, guerrilla and the paramilitary began in the decade of 1970 with the marijuana cartels. These organizations succumbed to new drug lords that smuggled cocaine. These cartels entered into politics, became latifundists and created their private armed corps called "paramilitary", to fight the leftist guerrillas for the control of political and economical activities in their areas of influence, and respond to kidnapping activities that some of these groups dared to run against their families (Perea, 2009). This war produced innumerable civil casualties and used all kind of dirty war techniques for more than a decade, feeding a culture of mistrust and corruption. Nowadays, political methods of interaction had become less violent but still, activism in Colombia is an activity of risk (Figure 16).

Political parties are built around personalities and not ideologies. The two traditional parties from the times of *La Violencia*, the Liberal and the Conservative, still hold 38% of the parliament. The three new dominant parties are spill-offs from the latter and follow the leadership of presidents Uribe and Santos: *Partido de Union Nacional (U)* and *Centro Democrático* that control 37% of the parliament's seats; an independent party created by outcast members from these majoritarian parties, *Cambio Radical*, holds 9%. These five parties that can be considered as reorganizations of the same traditional political groups, control 83% of the legislative and were created responding to the evolution of the relation Uribe - Santos. As it can be seen, political parties in Colombia are a reorganization of traditional groups that keep the customary political behavior and reconfigure around the personal ambitions of new dolphins (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Parliament Seat per Party

| Political Parties | Senate | Chamber | Total | % |
|-------------------------------|--------|---------|-------|------|
| Liberal | 17 | 39 | 56 | 21% |
| Conservador | 18 | 27 | 45 | 17% |
| Partido de Union Nacional | 21 | 37 | 58 | 22% |
| Centro Democrático | 20 | 19 | 39 | 15% |
| Cambio Radica | 9 | 16 | 25 | 9% |
| All other (Senate; 9 Chamber) | 17 | 28 | 45 | 17% |
| TOTAL seats in Parliament | 102 | 166 | 268 | 100% |

Source: (CongresoVisible.Org, 2014)

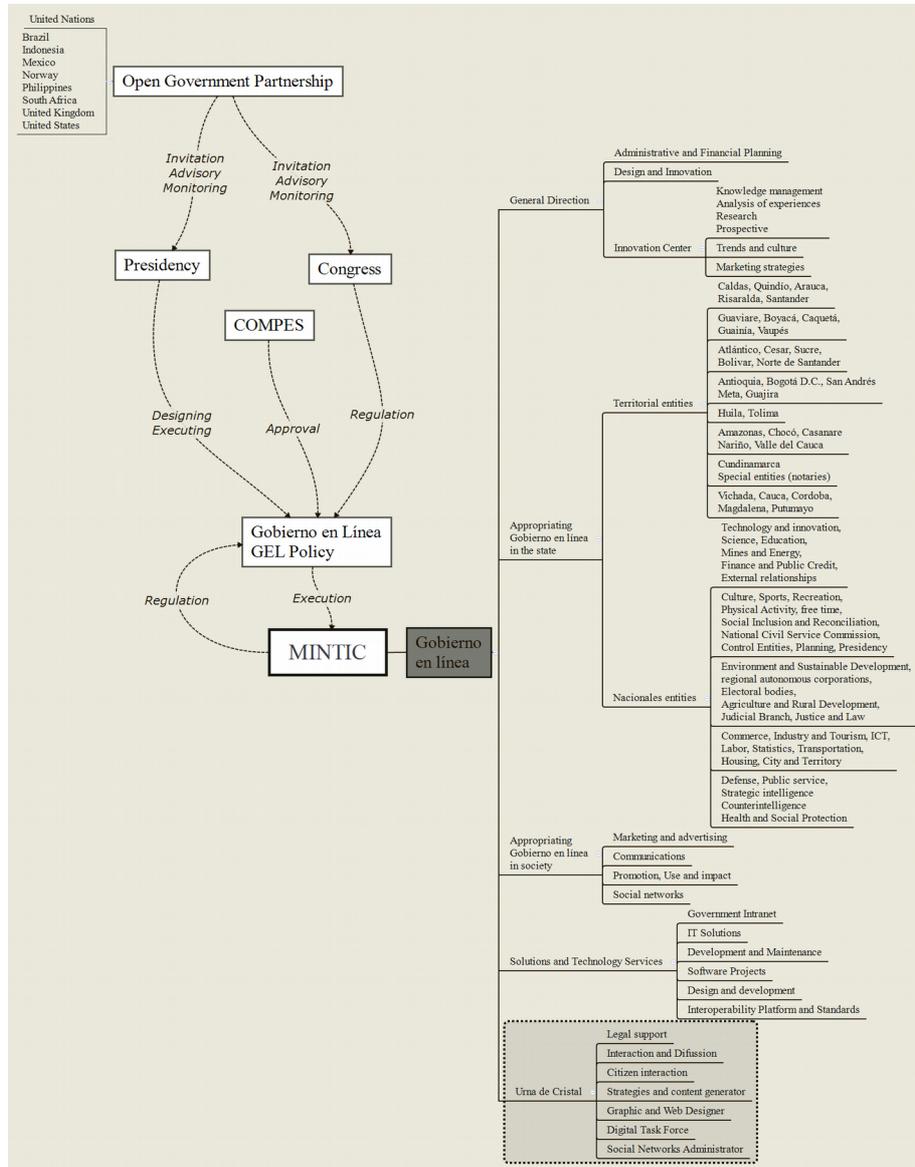
3.2 Classification of Colombian e-Government Actors

Colombia can be classified under Buckley's e-Government actors' structure as follows (Buckley Owen, 2011):

1. Policy-makers and government decision makers: President Santos and CONPES; no party is particularly fond about leveraging e-Government policies or laws. ICT or the Digital Divide has never been a central part of campaign discourses neither at national nor at local level. Seems to be a matter of constituted governments that follow international guidelines.
2. Policy implementers: MinTIC is the general coordinator through the General Direction for Online Government (*Dirección de Gobierno en línea*). All national and regional authorities must have plans and coordinators in liaison with the central government. The National Commission for Telecommunications will monitor infrastructure.
3. Policy regulators and advisers: The Congress launched the law for transparency and access to information; MinTIC produced decree 2693 to regulate the Online Government policy, which guides all national and regional entities and monitors advances. The National Commission of Telecommunications monitors infrastructure and telecommunication operators and reports about Colombia's advance towards the Information Society. *Alianza para el Gobierno Abierto* (AGA) monitors the plans and achievements through a commission conformed by *Secretaría de Transparencia de la Presidencia de la República*, *Asociación de Fundaciones Empresariales- AFE*, *Corporación Excelencia en la Justicia*, *Corporación Somos Más* and *Corporación Transparencia por Colombia*.
4. Academic researchers working on the policy: Universidad Externado with *Observatorio de Sociedad, Gobierno y Tecnologías de Información*. This university also has a strong research group in political communication that works on topics related to ICT-mediation. The National University of Colombia opened a Specialization on E-Government in year 2014 in collaboration with MinTIC. Although, local research on the subject is recent and scarce.
5. Information professionals that support the policy: The IT contractor for the UDC platform became quite notorious in the newspapers as already stated. On the other hand, MinTIC has a work team of professionals that specialize in different areas of e-Government.
6. Lobbyists implicated in information issues: The latest Free Commerce Treaty (TLC) signed between USA and Colombia included rigorous copyright directives about IT products that were

pushed by the pressure of IT multinationals. Colombia remains totally dependent on the USA and its corporations, reinforcing its vocation of a basic commodity exporter. This structure of government actors has been summarized in the next figure (Figure 5), based on the information available in the webpage from MinTIC – *Gobierno en Línea* (MinTIC, 2016).

Figure 5: e-Government ICT actors



Source: (MinTIC, 2016)

3.3 Asymmetries in E-capabilities

Colombia is trying to increase the amount of Internet and broadband users with the plan *Vive Digital* (Live Digital). MinTIC launched this plan on 2010 after a consulting call with citizens. Broadband penetration was inferior to other Latin American average. The first measure was to reduce VAT tax for this service. That year, MinTIC made a diagnostic of computer and Internet penetration, as well as perception about Internet and broadband in the population and businesses (MinTIC, 2010).

The results of this survey (Table 2) showed that 66% of the population with an income less than USD 500 per month had 10% or less penetration of Internet at home. This group corresponds to the two lowest levels of income in the country (Low and Very Low income as per table 2). In 96% of all Colombian companies, that correspond to micro enterprises like family businesses and initiating enterprises, where only 7% had Internet access. The most striking finding in this report was not to find that the first reason for limited Internet access was lack of economic means, but that the second reason for not using Internet, is that citizens and enterprises did not perceive any benefits in doing so. The survey also found that the number of IT professionals was insufficient and not increasing at all (MinTIC, 2010).

Table 2: Statistics from MinTIC program Vive Digital (MinTIC, 2010)

| Population (Millions) | Strata | Income USD | Internet | PC | Enterprises | Number | Internet | PC |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------------|----------|-----|-------------|--------|----------|------|
| 2 | 6.HIGH | More than \$2.500,00 | 83% | 92% | Big | 0,1% | 100% | 100% |
| | 5.MEDIUM-HIGH | | | | Medium | 0,5% | 99% | 100% |
| 3 | 4.MEDIUM | \$ 2.500,00 | 56% | 70% | Small | 3,0% | 79% | 96% |
| 10 | 3.MEDIUM-LOW | \$ 850,00 | 26% | 47% | Micro | 96,4% | 7% | 13% |
| 17 | 2.LOW | \$ 500,00 | 8% | 15% | | | | |
| 12 | 1.VERY LOW | \$ 250,00 | 2% | 5% | | | | |

Source: Program Vive Digital MinTIC Colombia 2010.

In the macro economical context, the Observatory for Science and Technology (OCYT) showed that in Colombia, investment in ICT made by organizations is dropping and there is a huge dependency on imported goods in this area (Table 3).

Table 3: Investment in ICY by firms and ICT import/export balance

| ICT investment and trade balance | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 |
|--|-----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Firm's investment in ICT for innovation* | 1.034.333 | 699.343 | 780.291 | 964.196 | 513.824 | 771.142 | 165.191 |
| ICT goods exports (% of total exports) | 1,5% | 2,2% | 1,5% | 1,0% | 1,2% | 1,5% | no data |
| ICT goods imports (% of total imports) | 10,1% | 8,8% | 9,6% | 8,5% | 9,0% | 10,0% | no data |

* Million colombian pesos

Source: Observatorio de Ciencia y Tecnología (OCYT, 2015)

In 2014 the Interamerican Development Bank reported that Colombia had a moderate increase in Internet penetration but still had long way to go in regard to the "last mile" (Marín, Barragán Martínez, & Zaballos, 2014); half of Colombian territories have no access. Small cities have an average penetration of 4% and big cities average is just above 12%. Bogotá, the nation's capital, is the city with the highest penetration (16,5%). The IDB report recommended to increase the capacity of broad band and to enhance the digital literacy of the population. These asymmetries in ICT infrastructure, income, and education weaken citizen's voice in the e-Participation field.

Such situation contrasts with the efforts made to improve e-Government information services and bureaucratic online automation. Colombia has a judicial framework for paperwork reduction complemented with the legal validation of digital documents exchange, zero paper policies, and the digitalization directive for bureaucratic services (AGA, 2013; AGN, 2011, 2014; MinTIC & AGN, 2012). Since 2010, MinTIC and UDC increased the number of ICT-mediated consultations (Colombia, 2015). Colombia is part of the UN's top 20 most developed countries in e-information and e-services, but, when this blend with the context, the culture, the attitudes from the public and the politicians, the tradition of a not truly participatory citizen engagement, and access limitations, the impact of these efforts is drastically reduced.

The strategic guide that supports the implementation of e-participation, transparency and openness in Colombia comes from the Alliance for Open Government. *Gobierno en Línea* defines the government e-Services, and CONPES monitors their socio-economical articulation. The discourse states that ICTs would lead the country to a state of enhanced democracy, peace and prosperity, expectations framed in the idealistic perspective of the Clinton-Gore narrative (Berrío-

Zapata, Valentim, Sant'Ana, & Umaña, 2015). The problem is that such perspective is built on unrealistic assumptions, so it produces overstated expectations (Dada, 2006).

The global discourse of e-Government is presented as beneficial *per se*, without requiring further social, economic and cultural changes. When e-Government initiatives are based on these idealizations, supported by economic-and-technological-centered rationalities, it is assumed that the less fortunate will benefit without doubt. These populations are taken as passive objects with little agency. They are not asked or surveyed about their reality. In the end, the priority is to accomplish the goals and instructions from the institutions that furnish the financial resources and technical expertise, which almost always are external to the community or the country that they want to favor (Kvasny, 2009; Kvasny, Kranich, & Schement, 2009).

Although MinTIC has a well suited team of young and committed officers, the passage from face-to-face bureaucratic processes to digital-remote e-Government services involved a brutal change for both the citizens and officers, within an infrastructure, knowledge, and culture that do not match such a paradigm. This paradox was resolved by force, compelling citizens and officers to follow the government's ICT plans and policies in by any means. In the end, the top hierarchies at the government and society were not affected, but the commoner and low rank or peripheral public officers, who had to deal with the gap between their resources and what the digital systems demanded from them. This rationale is what Mintzberg has criticized as the "authoritarianism of plans" (Mintzberg, 1994). Such rationality produces paradigms of action and thought that become abusive;

- Planned policies will always lead to desired and beneficial results.
- Policies are legitimized by experts, coming from developed countries or the Central Government, so there is not a chance of discussion or negotiation.
- The reason is always on the side of the machine, its creators and those who operate it.
- The citizen has no possibility for correcting algorithms or contents. Quality and satisfaction feedback are absent, inefficient or not monitored, so the burden of demonstrating any malfunctioning weights on the citizen-side.
- The costs of making a case out of e-Government service flaws always exceed the citizens' resources in terms of time, money, legal, bureaucratic, and technical knowledge.
- Once personal information is placed into the systems, the citizens' privacy becomes a matter of faith on the government.
- The Government and political actors support the digitalization discourse coming from developed countries, but the process falls into the Middlemen Paradox when real changes in the domination structure have to be faced (Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005).

The regulation of e-Information, e-Consultation, and e-Decision initiatives arose from presidential initiatives, a tendency that began in year 2000 with president Pastrana and survived different governments, with the exception of the Uribe mandate, when TIC policies were placed on the hand of the Ministry of Communication MinTIC. These plans are inspired or produced in global strategies for digital government, created by developed countries, and impulsed by the US in association with the UN. Unfortunately, there is little assessment about the impact at the local level in relation with the peculiarities of the different regions of the country, in spite of which, the Congress, the Ministry of TIC, the National Archives and other government bodies produce these legal frames. This is in contrast with the US or the UK, where there is a strong IT community of practitioners and scientists who are permanently discussing about what is happening with the Information Society. Colombia follows the waves that come from the outside. Citizens' initiatives regarding ICT-mediated political engagement are rare. These proposals are a monopoly of hierarchies at the government and few IT contractors, with enough leverage to reach these circles. Traditional

governance does not change, and participative democracy remains an advanced legal frame with interesting strategic plans, but weak impact on the power structures (Bustamante Peña, 2011).

E-Government coding in Colombia has been built on no other voices besides the government's. If code turns programming into civic routine and law (Lessig, 2000), the lack of education, technical knowledge and civic organization of the citizens on this matter, lead to policies based on no discussion, no negotiation, no significant questioning about where the Colombian e-Government code is standing in terms of regulation, privacy, inclusion, impact or surveillance. Hackathons are recent and have been dedicated to commercial problems, but not to public e-Government issues or e-Participation. Knowledge gaps between the citizens and the government, in the presence of a frail IT community not involved in public policies, left the development of e-Participation in the hands of an elite of politicians and bureaucrats. This lack of competences and knowledge in the grassroots turns into symbolic violence (passive acceptance and alienation), and even physical violence, i.e. the riots caused in Bogotá by taxi drivers chasing out Uber drivers, and the incapacity of the local government to call for a civic negotiation that would provide solutions (El Tiempo, 2016).

4. Shifts in Meanings, Norms, and Power

From what has been observed in the previous sections, the problem in Colombia seems to be that new institutional structures of signification, legitimation, and domination have not been able to gain space due to paradoxes. ICT-mediated structures have changed the practices in regard to bureaucratic services and the interaction citizen-state, but they have failed in changing the legitimation and domination structures. Legitimation comes from the conviction shared by the Colombian people that democracy and the state-of-law are the best governance system. Although such convictions remain, the performance of the system, enacted by elected governments have been worn-out by decades of authoritarianism, abuse and corruption. An economy restrained by wealth concentration, mediocre education, lack of opportunities, and political opportunism, has produced apathy and mistrust. Information and data literacy were not enforced, neither investment in research about the local reality of e-Governance and e-Participation. The consumption of IT goods is limited by these restraints, same as the aggregate value that citizens can obtain from them. ICT-mediated government structures have produced no significant change in the relation of domination between the government and citizens.

Citizens need to have means to deconstruct their political culture and its messianic perspective to promote cooperative views. The elites are resistant to cooperative models as they include full transparency and accountability, but citizens on their side, are also resistant to involve and assume responsibilities within their relation with the government. Technology for engagement is not seen yet as an opportunity for participation, but as toys to be used for entertainment. Thus, they do not fit in the traditional economic or political representation that the Colombian society has about governance. From a gratification point of view (Cho, De Zuniga, Rojas, & Shah, 2003) Internet does not cover the economic or political demands of people, but just the social.

Although, isolated groups of citizens foresee the construction of active citizenship supported by efficient and secure IT information architectures. These groups are "think-tanks" like ONGs or institutes, i.e. Dejusticia, Proyecto Antonio Nariño, ObservaTIC, ONG Salud, Asociación de Usuarios de Internet, etc. These groups, although not specifically concentrated on e-Participation, are producing information, sharing experiences and fighting for basic rights and alternative ways of governance. These are the seeds of change. MinTIC and *Gobierno en Línea* play a central role, acting as consultants for all government agencies and producing the first e-Participation experiments such as the UDC. They have come to welcome researchers to look at their work and

comment on it. But there is a lack of diffusion, so public opinion is not yet aware about the possibilities or prompting collaborative open dialog with government and experts.

It is early to see e-Participative processes turning into stable institutions in the structural frame. There is a breach between the online political conversation and the offline political behavior. Although ICTs have enabled the raise of unheard political voices through the Internet, grievance and discussion in Facebook does not produce effective movements in the streets, legal collective actions, or traceable changes in law (Rojas & Puig, 2009). Mobile technology is a promising space for political participation but it has not developed yet. There is limited access to ICTs and Internet, but there is also a significant number of citizens and organizations that do not see the use of Internet as important.

Colombia is a society with multiple gaps in different layers: digital divide, economic inequalities, educational exclusion, urban centralization, rural oblivion, multi-level corruption, and violence. Impelling online participation is a must for the government and the corporate world, but an alien requirement and a new difficulty for many citizens and small enterprises. Colombian e-Government exists in the stages of information and service provision, but not yet in participation. In politics, e-mail and social networks are means for publicity and propaganda, tools for mobilization, but not yet a spaces for debate and negotiation. Significant shifts in meanings and norms of participation still need to come.

Since the adoption of the 1991 Constitution, Colombia developed a legal frame that was a state-of-the-art for popular consultation and citizen participation at various levels. But the benefits of the technological developments of these laws were restricted to the minority with IT access, and capacities to operate and create discourses that mobilize democratic mechanisms in their own interest. An example is the popular consultation undertaken in 2016 to promote a plebiscite to decide whether LGBT community members could adopt children. Catholic radicals flooded Facebook with disinformation and rage messages. Another example, already cited, was the Facebook disinformation campaign about the plebiscite that would validate the peace treaties with the FARC in October 2016. As Colombian society is still learning to be tolerant, ICT and e-Government enhancements are exploited by powerful minorities to manipulate public opinion, turning technology from a conversation tool to a mechanism of propaganda.

Although Colombia seems to be marching towards peace, core contradictions that produced the original confrontations still prevail. The peace treaty with the FARC brought hope but has not been able yet to erase the tradition of violence, propaganda and political opportunism, or create a sentiment of inclusion in the public. On their side, political elites still have difficulties about accepting popular movements and share their power. War and violence were especially destructive to the basic fabric of social trust. Democratic and inclusion discourses still tend to stay on paper.

Citizen engagement subverts the traditional political exclusion by creating alternative information systems and fluxes that support the coordination for civil action, and enhances citizens' monitoring on governance activities. When states have a full monopoly of information, it is easy to fall into agency problems of moral and technical nature, that is, developing an opportunistic behavior that focus in protecting personal interest (moral risk), or covering personal incompetence (technical risk). Both scenarios support the misuse of information, which results in corruption and impunity. When citizens have alternative and multiple information systems and channels, they can balance official versions with different perspectives, preparing the way to an informed dialog and negotiation. Democracy in Colombia is still subject to information monopolies, although advances in e-delivery services and e-consultation experiments are contributing to the education of a new generations of young leaders that seem to have a clear mind on this regard.

Decades of oligarchic authoritarian bureaucracies, mixed with a radical religiosity and warlordism, coming from politician, criminals or latifundists, taint the political culture with a messianic view of democracy that atomizes the citizen self-confidence on its own capacity for defending individual rights. The challenge is to make citizens understand that democracy is built on the permanent action at the grassroots, and that ICT adds efficiency to such processes, but it does not change its nature. ICT would not produce participation *per se*, neither solve the citizen's apathy or the flaws of governments. These matters shall be dealt with education, economical fairness and political dialog.

Case studies like those carried in Chile, Argentina and Colombia (Bavoleo, 2009; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012, 2014; Rojas & Puig 2009) capture bits and pieces of the complexity of the public voice in the digital Latin America. We face the interaction of local and worldwide discourses at different narrative levels. The urgency discourse about "digital inclusion" is producing "clients" rather than citizens, so, it is imperative to abandon the commercial epistemology of the IT discourse. Local reality must be researched to understand its particularities and then, ICT must be shaped accordingly.

Colombian e-Government is the example of a reductionist epistemology dominating a technological intervention in information (Berrío-Zapata, 2004, 2011). Colombia has re-engineered its bureaucracy with ICT, but the flaws of its democracy maintain the power equation unaltered. Technological issues typical to developing countries also restrain, as well as global tendencies like planned obsolescence. The technological advance in governance and political systems is turning into a democratic divides that favor dominant "extractive elites" (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Considering that information systems corresponds to a power structures, dominant groups who benefit from the information asymmetries in place turn participative efforts into means to support their privileges. Visible and collaborative processes of ICT-mediation to decentralize information and governance, stand as the main antidote to this situation. But the main question remains answered: would those who benefit from the *status quo* will allow it to change? (García García, 2014; Prieto-Martín & Ramírez-Alujas, 2014). Elites must be reeducated.

Over these considerations, UDC case confirms that in Colombian e-Participation achievements are blocked by extra technical elements:

1. The knowledge gap: information and data literacy flaws.
2. The digital divide: infrastructure weakness and high penetration differences between socioeconomic strata and geographical locations.
3. Sociocultural issues: a historical concentration of income and power that built an autocratic governance, legitimated by an authoritarian bureaucracy. Such governance abandoned dialog and assumed physical and symbolic violence as a naturalizing way of relation, unleashing a political culture of corruption, opportunism and mistrust. Privileges and exclusion were violently institutionalized disintegrating the relation of trust between citizens and government. The result has been a messianic, non-participate, and anomic democracy, that serves as a superficial legitimation of the *status quo*.

Although, Colombia maintains hopes for change. The Constitution of 1991 proved that traditional power monopolies could be dismantled, i.e the Concordat. This same Constitution planted the seeds for citizen participation mechanisms, that have not flourished yet in the day-to-day routines of the citizens. A participation culture has to be built, but the legal pillars are in place. A new generation of civil leaders and state officers are working for the change. Though following a deterministic view, the state has introduced an interesting technological dynamic in regard to e-Participation. The big challenge will be turning these efforts into a different governance culture of non-partisan-democratic-enacted routines produced by the people, for the people's benefit.

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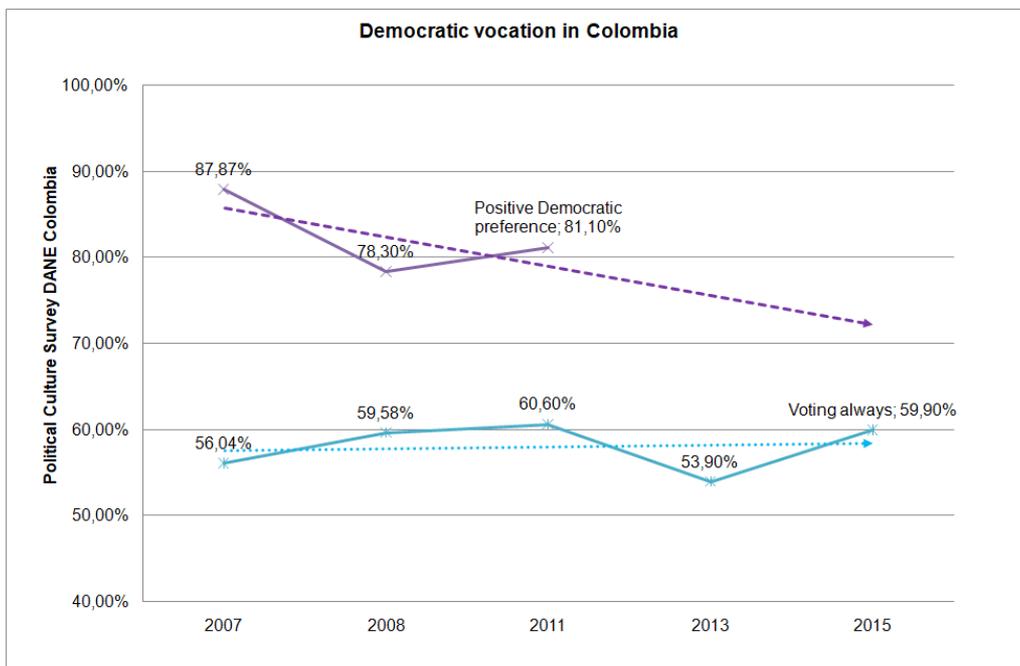
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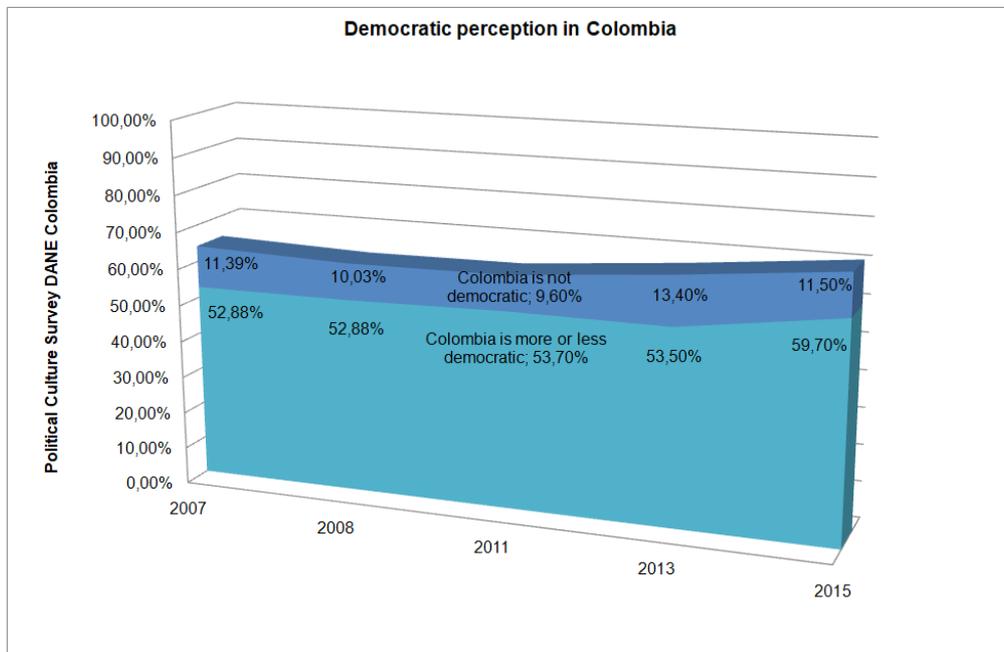
Annex 1: Indicators for Political Culture and Democracy

Figure 1: Perception of Democracy and Voting Behaviour



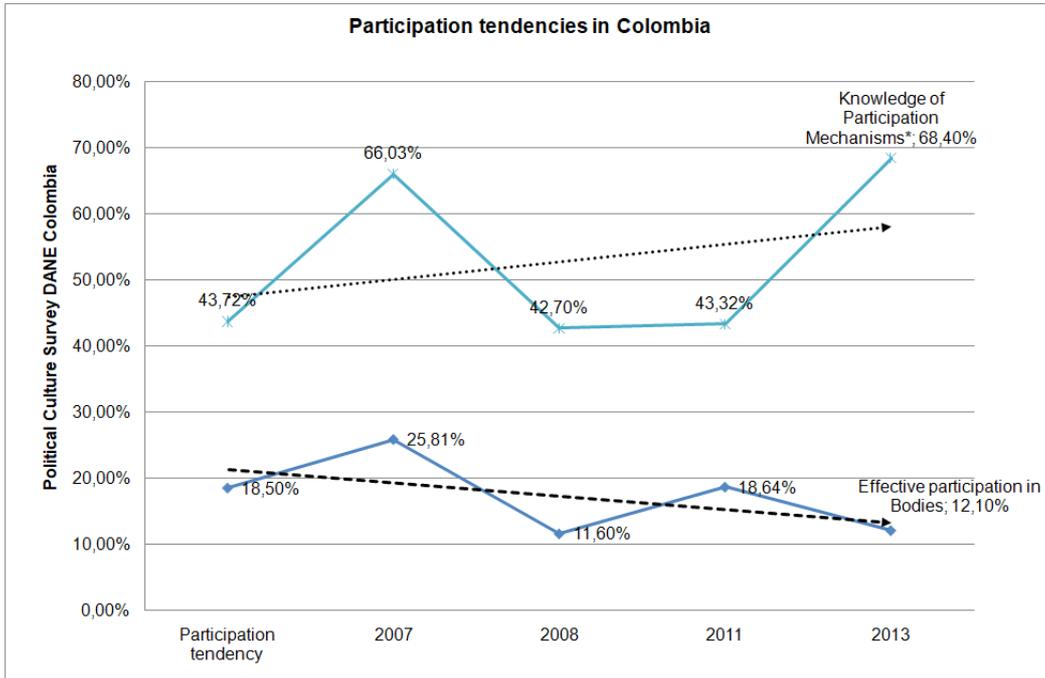
Source: (DANE, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2015)

Figure 2: Perceptions about Colombian Democracy



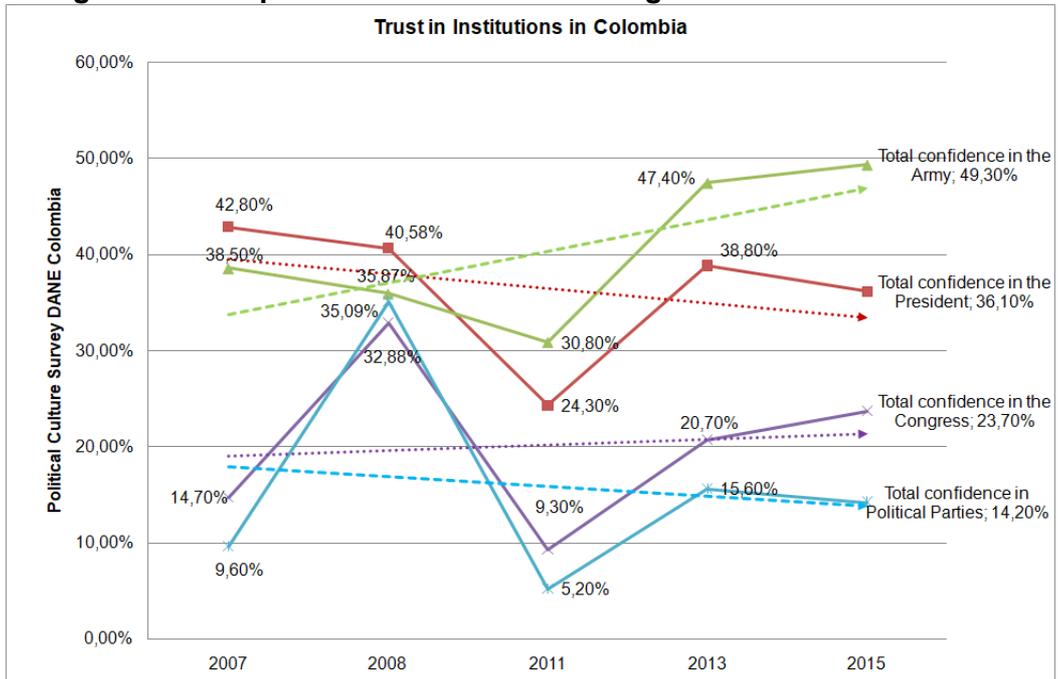
Source: (DANE, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2015)

Figure 3: Participation Tendencies in Colombia



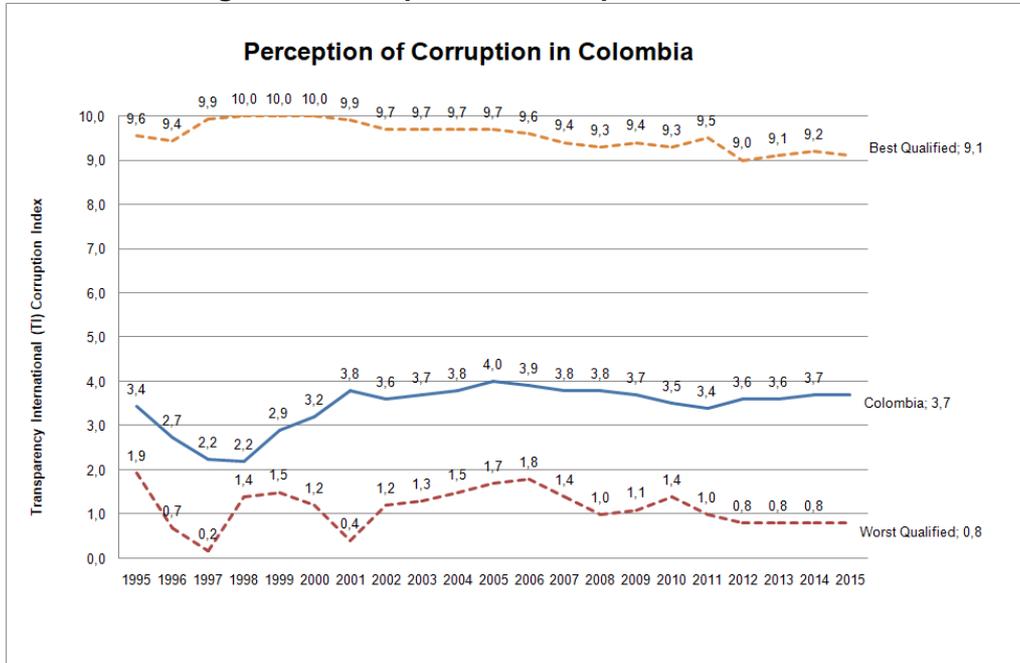
Source: (DANE, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2015)

Figure 4: Perception and Trust in Governing Institutions in Colombia



Annex 2: Corruption indicators and Free Press evolution

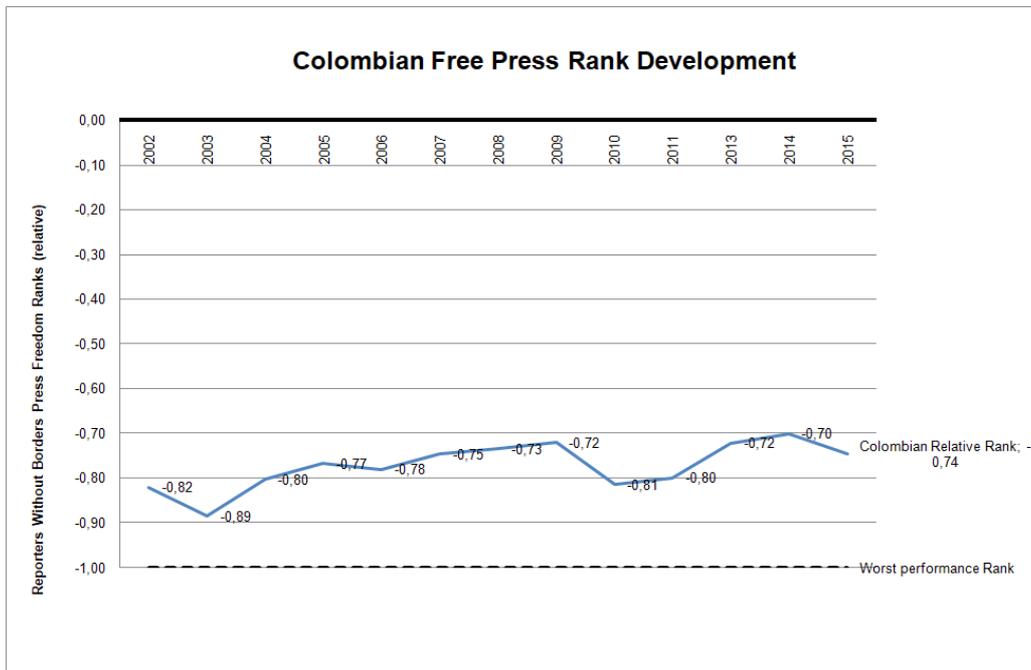
Figure 5: Perception of Corruption in Colombia



Source: (DANE, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2013, 2015)

Note: The lines above the zero axes show the values of the Corruption Index; the line below the zero axis shows the relative rank advance of Colombia over time (TI, 2015).

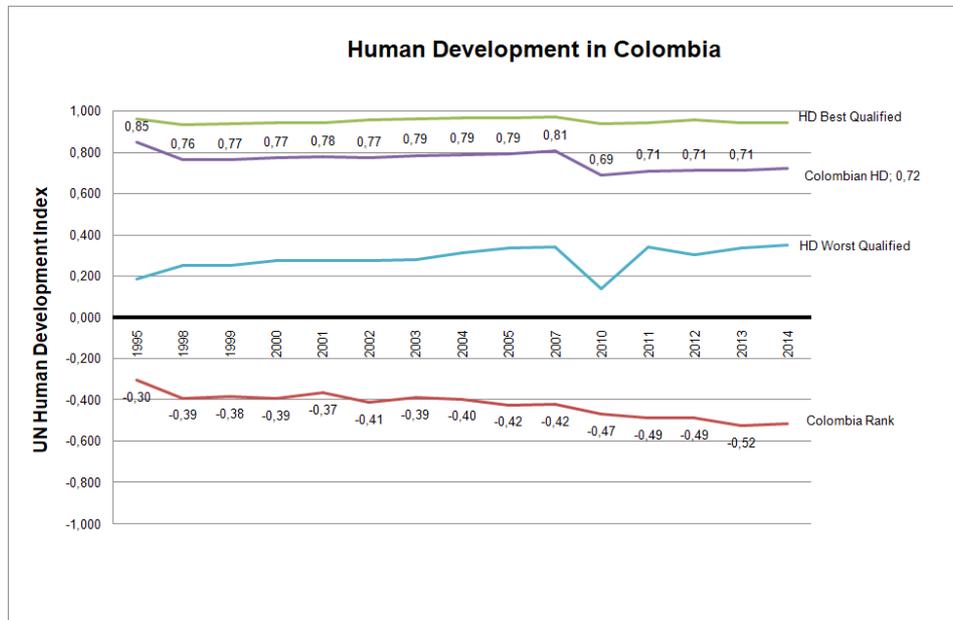
Figure 6: Evolution of Free Press in Colombia



Source: (RSF, 2016)

Annex 3: Context indicators for Human Capital and Economic Development

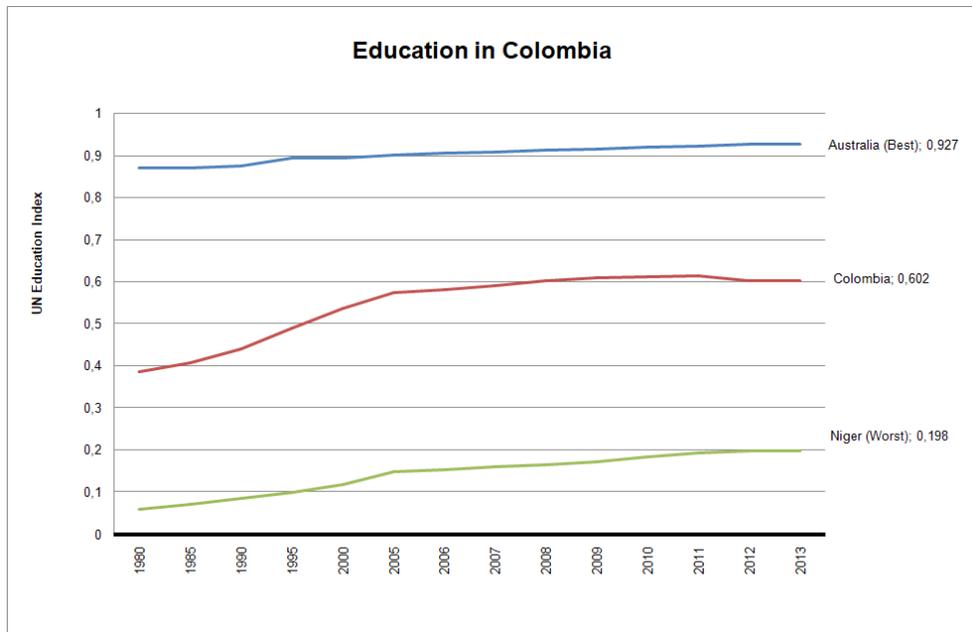
Figure 7: Human Development in Colombia



Source: (UNDP, 2016)

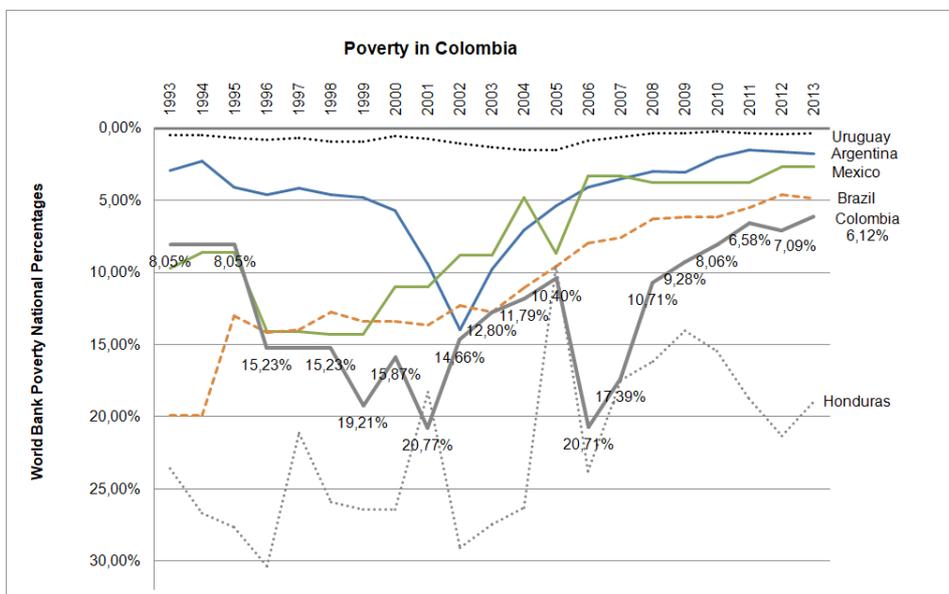
Note: The lines above the zero axes show the values of the HD Index; the line below the zero axes shows the relative rank advance of Colombia over time.

Figure 8: Evolution of Education in Colombia as per the UN Education Index



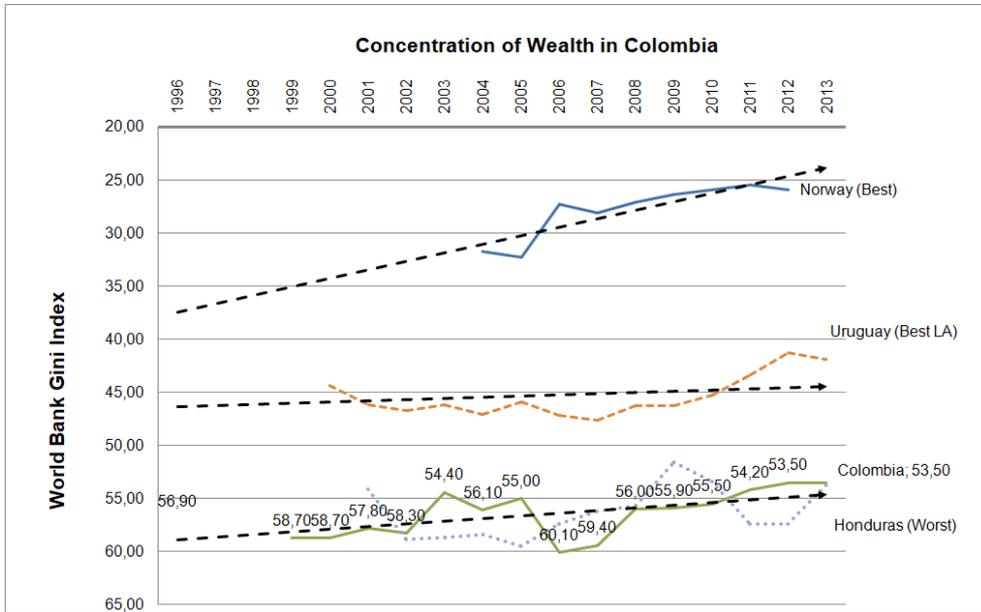
Source: (UNDP, 2016)

Figure 9: Poverty in Colombia



Source: (World Bank, 2016)

Figure 10: Wealth Distribution in Colombia



Source: (WB, 2016)

