

The Human Rights Sector in Colombia

Evidence from the Public



The Human Rights Organizations Project
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The Human Rights Sector in Colombia: Evidence from the Public

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Executive Summary

Despite ongoing peace processes and a longstanding democratic history, Colombia continues to struggle with multiple armed groups and widespread drug trafficking, resulting in mass levels of internal displacement and widespread human rights violations.

As they seek accountability for wrongs and work for peace in this environment, local human rights organizations (LHROs) and activists operate under constant threat. To learn more about public exposure to and perceptions of the human rights movement, we gathered data in November and December 2013 from the general public. This work is one part of a broader study of [local human rights communities](#) and [public opinion](#) worldwide. For details of this project, visit <http://www.jamesron.com/Current-Projects.php>.

We conducted a nationally representative opinion survey of 1,699 adults across Colombia. Like the Colombian public more generally, most had a moderate levels of education and income, were Catholic, and identified as mestizo or white. Respondents indicated they:

1. Often encounter the term “human rights” in their daily lives.

Many respondents hear the term “frequently,” or even “daily,” in their lives, while very few said they “never” heard “human rights.” Higher education and income is associated with more frequent exposure to the term.

2. Have positive association with human rights.

Most often, respondents think human rights means “protecting people from torture and murder.” They also strongly associate human rights with social justice more broadly and with fair elections.

3. Have mixed perceptions of how Colombian LHROs are funded.

Respondents were split in their beliefs about whether local rights groups receive the bulk of their funding from Colombian or foreign sources. They trust LHROs more if they think funds come from Colombian citizens.

4. Rarely participate in human rights groups.

Few respondents knew anyone involved in a local human rights group, and even more rarely had respondents personally participated in human rights activities.

5. Have relatively high levels of trust in human rights groups.

Respondents reported “some” trust in both LHROs and their international counterparts; respondents with greater familiarity with the human rights sector were more likely to trust LHROs. Compared to other domestic actors and international institutions, trust in HROs was high. Despite this generalized trust, their feelings towards Amnesty International were comparatively unsupportive.

Part I: The Context

A History of Violence²

Colombia's history is rife with civil war, insurgencies, and drug trafficking, all of which have led to human rights violations committed by a range of actors. Colombia is an important case in which to study human rights mobilization, not simply due to high rates of violence, but because ongoing violence has persisted for decades in a relatively wealthy and established democracy.³ Human rights activists face nearly constant threats and attacks, the level of internal displacement is unparalleled,⁴ and the country has been labeled "the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of the Western hemisphere."⁵ Colombia's neighbors have also accepted large numbers of fleeing refugees, spilling the conflict and human rights issues across borders.⁶

From 1948 to 1958, Colombia experienced *La Violencia*, a civil war in which 250,000-300,000 people were killed. To end the war, the Liberals and Conservatives formed a National Front, banning all other political parties. This restricted form of democracy helped fuel the instability that continued in the following decades. In the 1960s and 70s, militants founded four major left-wing guerrilla groups, and the production and trafficking of illegal drugs grew exponentially. Paramilitaries, often backed by wealthy landowners and large corporations, increased and became notorious for threatening and attacking union leaders, human rights activists, women's leaders, left-leaning political figures, and anyone suspected of supporting the guerillas.⁷

In 1989, the guerilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) created their political arm, the Patriotic Union Party (UP). A year later, newly formed right-wing paramilitary groups embarked on violent campaigns against the UP, killing many leftist political leaders. Beginning in the 1980s, the government launched an offensive against the drug cartels, and in 2000, President Pastrana introduced "Plan Colombia," supported by over one billion dollars in United States aid, primarily for the military's fight against drug-traffickers and armed groups. Although peace talks officially started in 1998, none have yet been successful. However, at the

² Unless otherwise stated, dates for this historical background are taken from the BBC Colombia Timeline, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1212827.stm>, accessed March 19, 2014, as well as from Livingstone, Grace. 2004. *Inside Colombia: Drugs, Democracy, and War*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

³ Tate, Winifred. 2007. *Counting the Dead: The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

⁴ As of December 2013, Colombia had an estimated 5.7 million internally displaced persons, topping the global list of the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) for the fourth year running. See IDMC resources available here: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/americas/colombia/>, accessed June 26, 2014.

⁵ United Nations. 2004. "Press Briefing on Colombia by Emergency Relief Coordinator." May 10. Available at: <http://www.un.org/news/briefings/docs/2004/OCHABrf.doc.htm>, accessed March 19, 2014.

⁶ UNHCR estimates that new arrivals continue to reach Ecuador at a rate of 1,000 per month. Nearly all (98%) refugees in Ecuador are Colombian. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e492b66>, accessed March 19, 2014.

⁷ Romero, Mauricio. 2003. *Paramilitares y autodefensas, 1982-2003*. Bogotá: IPRI Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Simons, Geoff. 2004. *Colombia: A Brutal History*. London: Saqi Books.

time of writing, the Santos administration was again in peace negotiations with FARC. With three preliminary agreements already in place, Santos has made further progress than any previous Colombian president.⁸

After decades of drug wars and uncontrolled violence, the country's largest paramilitary group, the Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), began demobilizing in 2004, and entered peace talks with the government. In 2005, Colombia enacted the Justice and Peace Law to facilitate this demobilization, but human rights defenders widely criticized the law as too lenient on the worst offenders. Additionally, in 2006, law officials began to investigate credible claims of collusion between government forces and the AUC in what came to be known as the "parapolitics" scandal.⁹ Critics accuse the Colombian



Photo by Nico Crisafulli via flickr.com.

government of committing thousands of human rights violations in conjunction with the AUC. In addition, AUC demobilization was followed by the creation of new, illegal right-wing paramilitary groups, undermining the peace process.¹⁰

Dealing with the country's various armed actors is a major challenge for Colombian presidents, the two most recent of which favored different strategies. While former President Uribe worked to demobilize the paramilitaries, these negotiations were marred by problems and scandal. Uribe was also known for his openly "hard line" military approach against both guerrillas and coca cultivation, partly due to deepening U.S. intervention in Colombian affairs and the War on Terror.¹¹ Uribe was also accused of actively undermining human rights groups.¹² In contrast, President Santos, the current president and Uribe's former defense minister, has publicly condemned threats against human rights defenders.¹³ Santos is now attempting to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the guerrillas, a move that has caused Uribe to label him a "traitor" and ignited a media battle between the two.¹⁴ Despite Uribe's efforts to tarnish Santos, voters re-

⁸ BBC News. 2014a. "Colombia polls give President Santos 'mandate for peace'". June 17. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27882489>, accessed June 18, 2014.

⁹ Brodzinsky, Sibylla. 2008. "Colombia's 'parapolitics' scandal casts shadow over president." *The Guardian*, April 23. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/23/colombia>, accessed July 3, 2014.

¹⁰ Hanson, Stephanie. 2008. "Colombia's Right-Wing Paramilitaries and Splinter Groups." *Council on Foreign Relations, Background*, January 11. Available at: <http://www.cfr.org/colombia/colombias-right-wing-paramilitaries-splinter-groups/p15239#p4>, accessed July 3, 2014.

¹¹ Winn, Peter. 2006. *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean*. 3rd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

¹² Amnesty International. 2011. "Annual Report 2011: Colombia." Available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/colombia/report-2011>, accessed June 26, 2014.

¹³ Human Rights Watch. 2013. "World Report 2013: Colombia." Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/colombia>, accessed March 18, 2014.

¹⁴ Forero, Juan & Marina Villeneuve. 2013. "Colombian ex-president sounds off on his successor's peace talks with the rebels." *The Washington Post*, October 5. Available at:

elected the sitting president in June 2014 after a campaign primarily focused on peace.¹⁵ As a result, negotiations with the FARC will continue, and many now hope that Santos will be successful at bringing peace to Colombia for the first time in decades.



Photo by Ministerio TIC Colombia via [flickr.com](#).

Colombia has ratified a wide range of international human rights treaties,¹⁶ and the Colombian Constitution of 1991 opens with a detailed delineation of the political, civil, social, economic, and cultural rights to which individuals and groups are entitled. The constitution outlines rights for indigenous populations and created a Constitutional Court, where citizens can take direct legal action against the state, as well as posts for human rights ombudsmen.¹⁷ It remains hard, however, to reconcile the country's violence with its formal human rights commitments.

Contemporary Human Rights Concerns

Colombia's framework for addressing human rights concerns has been widely criticized. For example, in December 2013, the Colombian legislature changed the Constitution, giving the military more control over investigations of violations committed by security forces. Amnesty International says this will transfer many human rights cases to the military justice system, contrary to international standards.¹⁸ Both the Colombian police and military were implicated in hundreds of human rights violations in 2012 alone, including many cases of "false positives," in which soldiers killed civilians and then dressed them up as guerrillas to increase body counts and gain promotion.¹⁹

Balancing justice and peace is difficult. For example, in June 2012, the Santos administration introduced a constitutional amendment, the Legal Framework for Peace, to regulate the government's deals with guerrilla groups. Some rights groups, however, fear this will encourage impunity for serious abuses by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the military.²⁰ Others say such

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/colombian-ex-president-sounds-off-on-his-successors-peace-talks-with-farc-rebels/2013/10/05/180583e0-2d2b-11e3-b141-298f46539716_story.html, accessed June 25, 2014.

¹⁵ BBC News. 2014b. "Colombia vote: Santos re-elected as President." Available at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27862555>, accessed June 25, 2014.

¹⁶ For a complete list, see the University of Minnesota's Human Rights Library, available at:

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/ratification-colombia1.html>, accessed June 26, 2014.

¹⁷ Colombian Constitution of 1991. Available at: http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/colombia_const2.pdf, accessed March 19, 2014.

¹⁸ Amnesty International. 2013. "Annual Report: Colombia 2013." May 23. Available at:

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/reports/annual-report-colombia-2013?page=3>, accessed March 19, 2014.

¹⁹ Comisión Colombiana de Juristas. 2012. "Colombia: sigue esperando la hora de los derechos humanos. Informe sobre la situación de derechos humanos y derecho humanitario 2010-2012." Available

at: http://www.coljuristas.org/documentos/documento.php?id_doc=327&idioma=es&grupo=4, accessed June 19,

2014; BBC News. 2009. "Toxic fallout of Colombian scandal." May 7. Available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8038399.stm, accessed June 29, 2014.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*

agreements are essential for successful peace deals, arguing that without amnesty, leaders of armed groups will not end their violence.²¹

As negotiations with armed groups persist, Colombia's internal conflict continues to drive civilians from their homes. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are the most vulnerable to violence and also lack shelter, education, and basic services. In 2012, Colombia began implementing the Victims and Land Restitution Law, hoping to return millions of acres of abandoned and stolen land to IDPs. Progress has been slow, however, and individuals seeking restitution often face threats.²²



Photo by Alison McKellar via [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/mckellar/).

Successor paramilitary groups continue to multiply and commit abuses against civilians.²³ Both guerrilla and paramilitary groups have engaged in threats, murders, forced displacement, and the use of child soldiers. Gender based-violence is pervasive, especially for IDPs, and perpetrators are rarely brought to justice.²⁴

Threats and attacks on trade unionists are widespread. The National Labor School (ENS), Colombia's lead labor rights NGO, reports that over 2,900 trade unionists have been killed since 1986, and most of these attacks have gone unpunished.²⁵

Finally, human rights activists in Colombia work in extremely challenging conditions, often facing threats and intimidation. Particularly during the Uribe presidency, human rights organizations (HROs) were accused of being either guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers.²⁶ In February 2013, the Black Eagles paramilitaries threatened several human rights groups.²⁷ Human Rights Watch, moreover, documented multiple cases of rape against female human rights defenders in 2011 and 2012. Although the Colombian interior ministry says its programs protect

²¹ The relationships between peace, justice, accountability, and impunity are complex, far beyond the scope of this brief discussion. To read more about transitional justice debates in Colombia, see: International Crisis Group. 2013. "Transitional Justice and Colombia's Peace Talks." *Latin America Report N°49*, August 29. Available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/049-transitional-justice-and-colombia-s-peace-talks.aspx>, accessed June 25, 2014.

²² Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*

²³ Human Rights Watch. 2010. "Colombia: Stop Abuses by Paramilitaries' Successor Groups." February 3. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/02/02/colombia-stop-abuses-paramilitaries-successor-groups>, accessed June 29, 2014.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch. 2012. "Rights Out of Reach." November 8. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/11/08/rights-out-reach>, accessed June 19, 2014.

²⁵ Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS). 2013. "Reparación colectiva del sindicalismo: aportes para la discusión." *Cuaderno de Derechos Humanos*, no. 23. Available at: http://ens.org.co/apc-aa-files/45bdec76fa6b8848ac029430d10bb5a/CUADERNO_DE_DDHH_23.pdf, accessed June 19, 2014.

²⁶ Tate, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Amnesty International 2013, *op cit.*

over 10,000 members of groups vulnerable to attacks, many of these say these efforts are deficient.²⁸ In Colombia, human rights work involves significant physical risk.

Colombia's Non-Governmental Rights Sector²⁹

Early human rights work in Colombia focused on advocacy for political prisoners, and many first generation Colombian rights activists were involved in the militant left.³⁰ One of the first major Colombian organizations to adopt the human rights framework was the Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP) in the early 1970s. The early groups documented mass detentions of urban leftists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as assassinations and massacres in the late 1980s. The term “human rights” entered the political vernacular of Colombian leftists more widely in the 1980s, many of whom were sympathetic to revolutionary struggles and viewed guerrilla violence as a “right to rebellion.”³¹ Many different rights groups emerged in the mid-1980s, including the Centre for Research and Popular Education's (CINEP) human rights office,³² which became one of the most influential and credible rights groups in Colombia.³³

One of first major achievements of Colombia's local human rights organizations (LHROs) was the 1990 establishment of a commission to investigate massacres in Trujillo. A group of NGOs, led by the Catholic Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace (“Justice and Peace”), researched, documented and publicized the killings at home and abroad.³⁴ In March 1992, they brought the case to the InterAmerican Human Rights Commission, which created an investigatory body, the Trujillo Commission. After its findings were released in 1995, then-President Samper publicly accepted state responsibility for specific human rights violations for the first time in Colombian history, marking a shift towards greater state cooperation with the country's LHROs.³⁵ Ultimately, however, many activists and state representatives were disappointed in the results, as the alleged perpetrators were not imprisoned. Many LHRO participants were radicalized as a result.³⁶ In 1999, Justice and Peace closed its Trujillo office due to repeated threats, stating that the government had failed to offer adequate protection.³⁷

In the 1990s, Colombian human rights work aligned with efforts to promote peace. For example, the NGO coalition Redepaz, which utilizes a human rights framework, organized a symbolic

²⁸ Human Rights Watch 2013, *op. cit.*

²⁹ This is by no means an exhaustive history of the Colombian human rights sector. For a thorough account, see Tate, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Tate, *op. cit.*

³¹ Tate, *op. cit.* p.5.

³² Tate, *op. cit.*

³³ Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), a Jesuit organization that produces research, analysis, and activism on human rights, is also an example of the strong influence of faith-based organizations in Colombia's human rights sector. See: <http://www.cinep.org.co/>.

³⁴ Tate, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Tate, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Tate, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Amnesty International. 1999. “Document AMR 23/26/99.” March 10. Available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/026/1999/fr/40201a57-e28b-11dd-abce-695d390ccea/amr230261999en.html>, accessed June 20, 2014.

vote in which 10 million Colombians voted for a negotiated settlement to the guerrilla war.³⁸ In 1999, millions of Colombians in more than 700 cities and towns took to the streets in an unprecedented mass mobilization against the war, kidnappings, and forced disappearances,



Photo by medea_material via flickr.com.

eventually adopting the slogan, “No Mas” (“No More”). However, as the Pastrana administration (1998 to 2002) began to argue that human rights concerns could only be addressed after the war’s end, LHROs became concerned that an exclusive focus on peace would undermine human rights efforts.³⁹

Conflicts over land also continue to undermine work towards lasting peace accords. Agrarian reform is a key FARC priority, and land disputes between indigenous groups and paramilitaries are common.⁴⁰ Grassroots rights groups such as

CESTRA (Centro de Estudios e Investigaciones para el Trabajo) educate displaced people about their land rights and assist them in reclaiming land, often with the support of foreign funding.⁴¹

An unintended consequence of the growing human rights sector in the late 1990s was an increase in paramilitary violence as the Colombian military sought to distance itself from rights violations. Eventually even the paramilitaries began to change their tactics by reconfiguring their violence to avoid responsibility.⁴² For example, to avoid accusations of massacres, the paramilitaries began “disappearing” people, causing homicide rates to drop, but the number of missing persons to grow.⁴³

LHROs in Colombia utilize a range of rights-based frameworks, including women’s rights, children’s rights, indigenous rights, and Afro-Colombian rights.⁴⁴ Many smaller rights groups band together under broader platforms, such as Techo Común, comprised of four coalitions representing some 1,200 separate organizations. One of these coalitions is the Colombian Platform for Human Rights, Democracy, and Development, which unites 110 Colombian social and human rights organizations.⁴⁵

³⁸ Livingstone, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Tate, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ United States Institute of Peace (USIP). 2013. “Land, Conflict and Peace in Colombia: An Interview with USIP’s Virginia Bouvier.” April 10. Available at: <http://www.usip.org/publications/land-conflict-and-peace-in-colombia>, accessed June 20, 2014.

⁴¹ USIP. 2009. “Supporting Alternative to Violence in Colombia.” Available at: <http://www.usip.org/publications/supporting-alternatives-violence-in-colombia>, accessed June 20, 2014.

⁴² Tate, *op. cit.*

⁴³ Human Rights Watch. 2005. “Smoke and Mirrors: Colombia’s demobilization of paramilitary groups.” August 2005 Vol. 17, No. 3 (B). Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/colombia0805/colombia0805.pdf>, accessed June 19, 2014; Nicholls, Kelly and Gimena Sanchez-Garzoli. 2011. “Buenaventura, Colombia: Where Free Trade Meets Mass Graves.” *UNHCR Refugees Daily*, September 8. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=463ef21123&id=4e69a75e5>, accessed June 20, 2014.

⁴⁴ Tate, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ See the Plataforma Colombiana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo’s website for further information: <http://www.pcdhdd.org/>

Many groups in these coalitions, including CINEP, are faith-based. The Catholic Church in particular has had an enormous influence on LHRO formation from the early days of prisoner advocacy. Church leaders have also been vocal advocates for peace and have played key roles in various peace negotiations, acting at times as mediators, facilitators, and observers.⁴⁶ Because of military-paramilitary links and collusion between high-ranking politicians and paramilitary commanders, LHROs have been wary of working with the government,⁴⁷ often preferring religious institutions. For example, Human Rights Watch has repeatedly accused both the Uribe and Santos administrations of undermining human rights efforts, and has recommended that international aid be channeled through the Church and human rights groups rather than the government.⁴⁸

While the Colombian situation may have improved slightly over previous decades, human rights abuses and internal displacement continue, and rights advocates are still victims of targeted attacks.⁴⁹



Photo by nmarritz via [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/nmarritz/).

⁴⁶ Catholic Peacebuilding Network. 2014. “The Church’s Role in Peacebuilding in Colombia.” Available at: <http://cpn.nd.edu/conflicts-and-the-role-of-the-church/colombia/the-churchs-role-in-peacebuilding-in-colombia/>, accessed June 20, 2014.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch. 2000. “The Ties that Bind: Colombia and Military-Paramilitary Links.” February, Vol. 12, No. 1 (B). Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/colombia/>, accessed June 20, 2014; Romero, Simon. 2007. “Colombian Government is Ensnared in a Paramilitary Scandal.” *The New York Times*, January 21. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/world/americas/21colombia.html?_r=0http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/world/americas/21colombia.html?_r=0, accessed June 26, 2014.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch 2000, *op. cit.*; Human Rights Watch, 2014. “World Report 2014: Colombia.” Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/colombia>, accessed June 20, 2014.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch 2014, *op. cit.*

Part II: Colombian Public Opinion

We use a nationally representative survey to learn how the Colombian public views human rights language, issues, and activism. We begin with a methodological overview, and then describe our findings. We discuss the extent to which ordinary people are exposed to human rights language and organizations, their perceptions of human rights, their participation in LHROs, and their trust in both local and international HROs.

Methodological Overview

A total of 1,699 respondents participated in our 2013 survey, conducted in collaboration with *The Americas and the World* project⁵⁰ and Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá). The target population was residents of Colombia aged 18 and older. The sample is nationally representative.

To select the sample, we used stratified multi-stage cluster random sampling and data from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE). The number of respondents drawn from each of Colombia's five regions was proportional to each region's share of the total national population. Within each region, municipalities were randomly selected to be included in the sample, such that larger municipalities, which contain greater proportions of the population, had a greater chance of appearing in the sample. The number of interviews was fixed in each municipality so that more interviews were conducted in more populous municipalities. Respondents were selected according to a sequential procedure in which city blocks were chosen from selected municipalities, with more blocks allocated to larger municipalities. Then, five households were selected within each city block. Finally, one respondent was selected to be interviewed in each household. Selection was random for all stages.⁵¹

The polling company organized research teams in the regional hubs of Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Pasto. From there, interviewers moved to cover all points of the sample, conducting the surveys in-person in respondents' homes. See Appendix A for details.

⁵⁰ *The Americas and the World*, based at CIDE in Mexico City, conducts and centralizes public opinion surveys on international and domestic affairs throughout Latin America. For more information visit: <http://mexicoyelmundo.cide.edu/home2010english.swf>.

⁵¹ The margin of error for calculations based on the entire sample is +/- 3%, with a confidence level of 95%.

Respondent Characteristics⁵²

Table 2.1 provides respondents' major socio-demographic characteristics, and Appendix B provides details about their economic, social, political, and religious lives.

Table 2.1
Respondent Characteristics

Sex	50% female
Age	
Mean	40 years
Range	18-93 years
Primary economic activity	
At home	16%
Working	65%
Monthly household income⁵³	
Less than \$274 (minimum wage)	21%
\$275-\$825	56%
More than \$826	23%
Median income range	\$275-\$825
Feel their income can cover household expenses	56%
Education⁵⁴	
Primary or no formal education	17%
Secondary	45%
Post-secondary	38%
Ethnicity	
Mestizo (mixed)	54%
White	25%
Black	5%
Indigenous	4%
Religion	
Catholic	71%
Protestant, Evangelical, or other Christian	21%
Mean importance of religion on a 0-10 scale ⁵⁵	8
Politics	
Does not support a political party	51%
Supports the Social Party of National Unity	17%
Voted in 2010 presidential election	67%
Mean political orientation on a 0-10 scale ⁵⁶	6

⁵² Unless otherwise noted, all figures given are valid percentages that exclude missing values and non-applicable responses.

⁵³ Converted to USD at exchange rate of 1 USD to 2,032.80 COP; obtained March 17, 2014.

⁵⁴ The education figures in Table 2.1 indicate respondents who completed at least one year of education at each level. For example, 45% of respondents had completed at least one year of secondary school.

⁵⁵ Where 0 means religion is "not at all important" in the respondent's life and 10 means it is "very important."

Our sample was gender-balanced and aged 40, on average, with some 65% working outside the home. Their mean household monthly income was \$275-\$825 USD, and approximately 56% felt that their income could cover their monthly expenses without major difficulties. Sixty percent of respondents had completed their *bachillerato*, or high school diploma.

Over half self-identified as *mestizo*, or mixed race, while another 25% self-identified as white.⁵⁷ A significant majority identified as Catholic and said religion was a very important part of their life. Over half did not support any particular political party, but 67% had voted in the last political election. Most placed themselves in the middle of the political Left and Right.

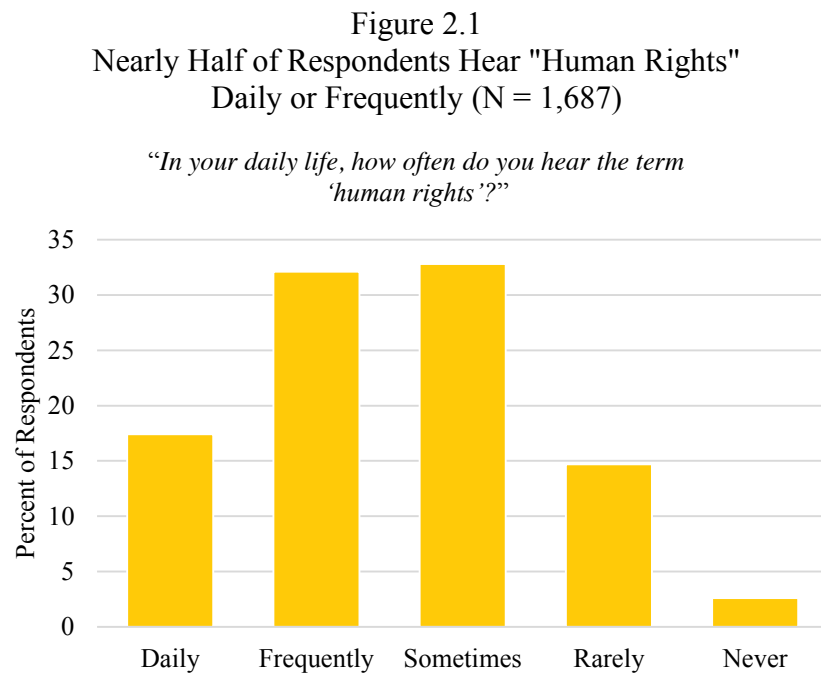
Human Rights’ Resonance and Reach

Many adults in Colombia were highly exposed to the term “human rights,” but far fewer had personal contact with human rights workers. Most had positive associations with term.

To assess respondents’ exposure to human rights language, organizations, and activists, we began by asking, “*In your daily life, how often do you hear the term ‘human rights’?*”

Figure 2.1 indicates that a significant number heard the term often; about half heard the term “daily” or “frequently,” while only 17% heard it “rarely” or “never.” The human rights discourse, in other words, has made significant inroads into Colombia’s public consciousness.

In addition to measuring the discursive spread of human rights, we gauged the physical reach of Colombia’s LHROs by asking, “*Have you ever met someone that works in a human rights organization?*” As Figure 2.2 shows, 18% of respondents reported they had indeed done so, representing a substantial number of Colombian adults with some direct contact with the local human rights movement.



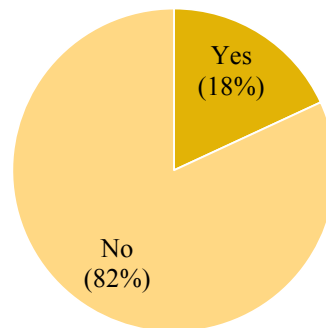
⁵⁶ Where 0 means political Left and 10 means political Right.

⁵⁷ However, Tate points out that race is a “slippery concept” in Colombia, where many Afro-Colombians do not self-identify as such. See Tate, *op. cit.*

Moreover, we found some respondents were more likely than others to have contact with human rights language and activists:⁵⁸

Figure 2.2
Many Respondents Had Met a Human Rights Worker (N=1,667)

"Have you ever met someone that works in a human rights organization?"



1. **Respondents with more education were much more exposed to human rights:** Those who had not attended school had a 28% chance⁵⁹ of hearing human rights “daily” or “frequently” and a 9% chance of having met a human rights worker. By contrast, respondents with 21 years of education had a 63% and 21% chance, respectively.
2. **Urban residents heard “human rights” less:** Respondents from urban areas had a 38% chance of hearing the term often, compared to a 45% chance for rural residents.
3. **Wealthier people heard “human rights” and met human rights workers more:** Respondents with a higher income⁶⁰ had a 52% chance of hearing “human rights” often and an 18% chance of meeting a human rights worker. Those less well off had a 37% and 10% chance.
4. **Using the web was associated with more exposure to human rights:** Using the internet increased the chance of hearing “human rights” frequently from 45% to 59%, and it increased the chance of meeting a human rights worker from 14% to 23%.
5. **Older men were most likely to hear “human rights”:** Hearing the term frequently was most common among men and older respondents.

To assess respondents’ attitudes towards human rights, we asked, “*In your opinion, how strongly will you associate _____ with the term ‘human rights’?*” prompting respondents to rank their associations on a seven-point scale (1 is “not at all,” 7 is “a lot”). As Figure 2.3 suggests, respondents most often saw “human rights” in a positive light, associating the term with promoting both civil-political and socioeconomic rights.⁶¹

⁵⁸ These multivariate findings are statistically significant at the .10-level in an ordinal logistic regression. For full results, see: Ron, James, David Crow, and Shannon Golden. 2014. “Human Rights Familiarity and Socio-Economic Status: A Four-Country Study.” *Sur – International Journal on Human Rights*, forthcoming.

⁵⁹ Those with no formal education had a .28 predicted probability of hearing the term daily or frequently; this means that among 100 people with no education, we could expect about 28 people to hear “human rights” daily or frequently.

⁶⁰ This is a measure of perceived income. The highest category was those who said their “income can cover expenses and savings” and the lowest category was those who said their “income cannot cover expenses and I have major difficulties.” For more information, see Appendix B.

⁶¹ All differences between means in Figure 2.2 are statistically significant at the .05-level.

Figure 2.3
Most Respondents Had Positive Attitudes Towards "Human Rights"

"In your opinion, how strongly will you associate _____ with the term 'human rights'?"

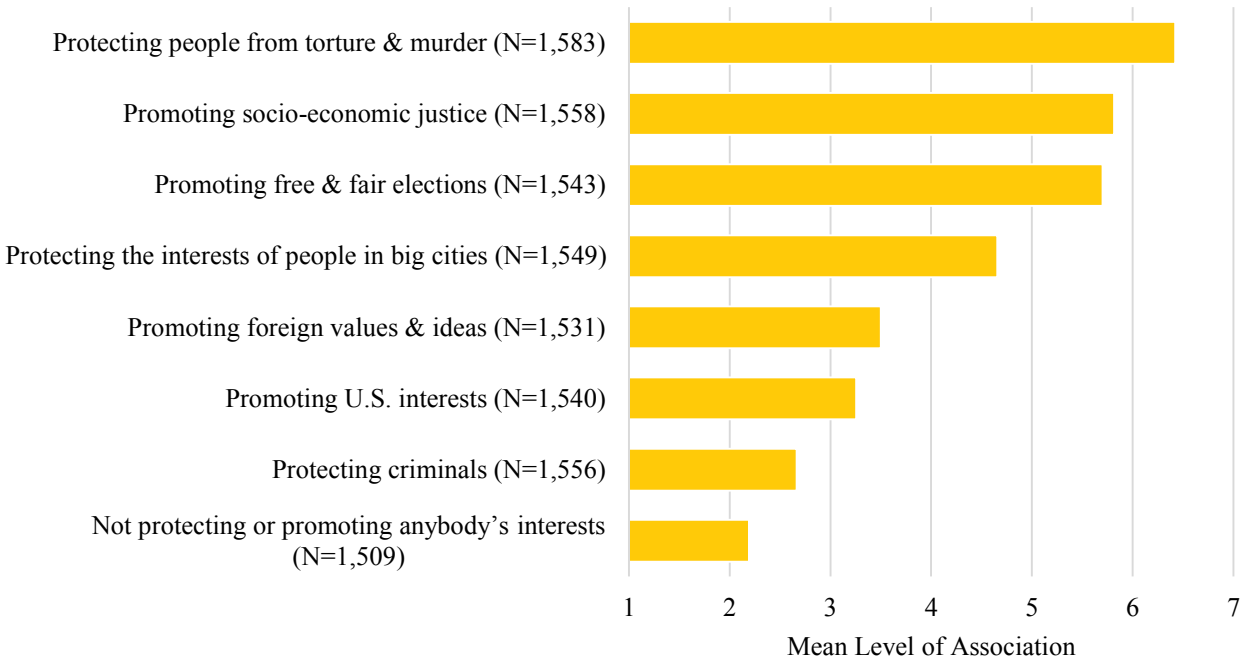


Figure 2.4 demonstrates that most respondents reported strong associations with the positive phrases.⁶² Eighty-five percent strongly associated human rights with “protecting people from torture and murder,” and over two-thirds had strong associations with “promoting socio-economic justice” and “promoting free and fair elections.”

Figure 2.4
Respondents Strongly Associated Human Rights with Positive Phrases

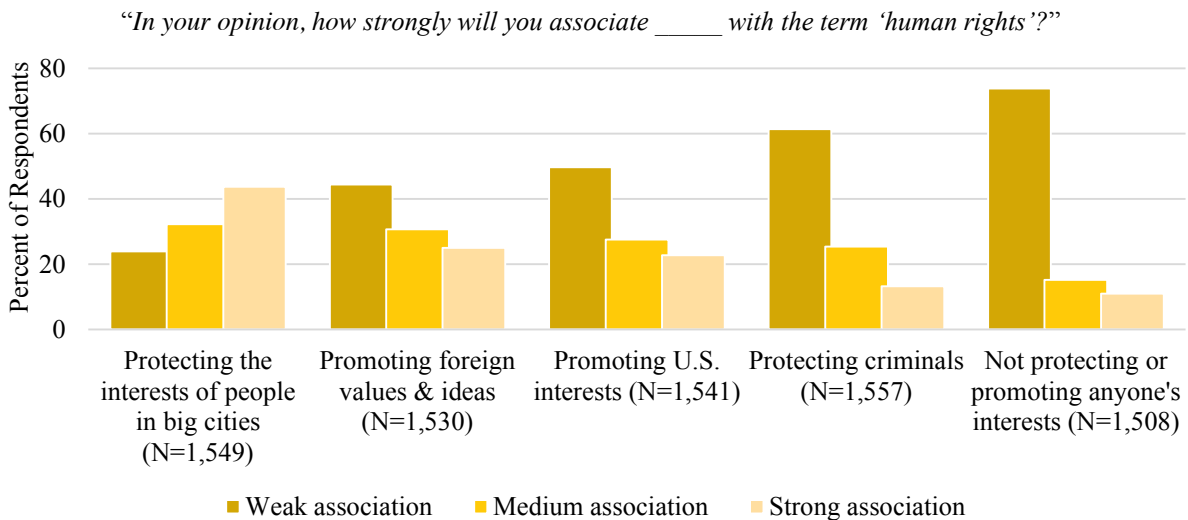
"In your opinion, how strongly will you associate _____ with the term 'human rights'?"



⁶²A strong association here refers to respondents who selected a 6 or 7 on the scale; a medium association refers to respondents who selected 3, 4 or 5; and a weak association refers to respondents who selected 1 or 2.

Yet as Figure 2.5 shows, a sizeable minority had equally strong *negative* associations, including “promoting the interests of people in big cities” (44%),⁶³ “promoting foreign values and ideas” (25%), “promoting U.S. interests” (23%), “protecting criminals” (13%), and “not protecting or promoting anything” (11%).

Figure 2.5
Some Respondents Had Strong Negative Attitudes Towards Human Rights



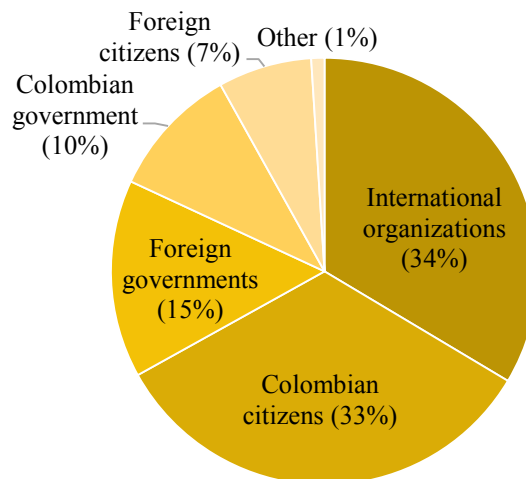
Resourcing LHROs

Respondents were split on whether LHROs received their funding from domestic or international sources.

Funding sources can impact the activities, priorities, reputations, resilience, and strength of organizations. When asked, “*In your opinion, where do you think that non-governmental human rights organizations in Colombia receive most of their funding from?*” respondents had quite divergent responses.

Figure 2.6
Respondents Were Split on How LHROs Are Funded (N=1,478)

“In your opinion, where do you think that non-governmental human rights organizations in Colombia receive most of their funding from?”



⁶³ Rural respondents were slightly more critical: 49% of rural respondents strongly associated human rights with protecting urban interests, compared to 43% of urban respondents.

About 43% thought LHROs were primarily locally funded, while about 56% thought that Colombia rights organizations received the bulk of their funds from abroad. Most often, they thought that funding came from Colombian citizens (33%) or international organizations (34%).

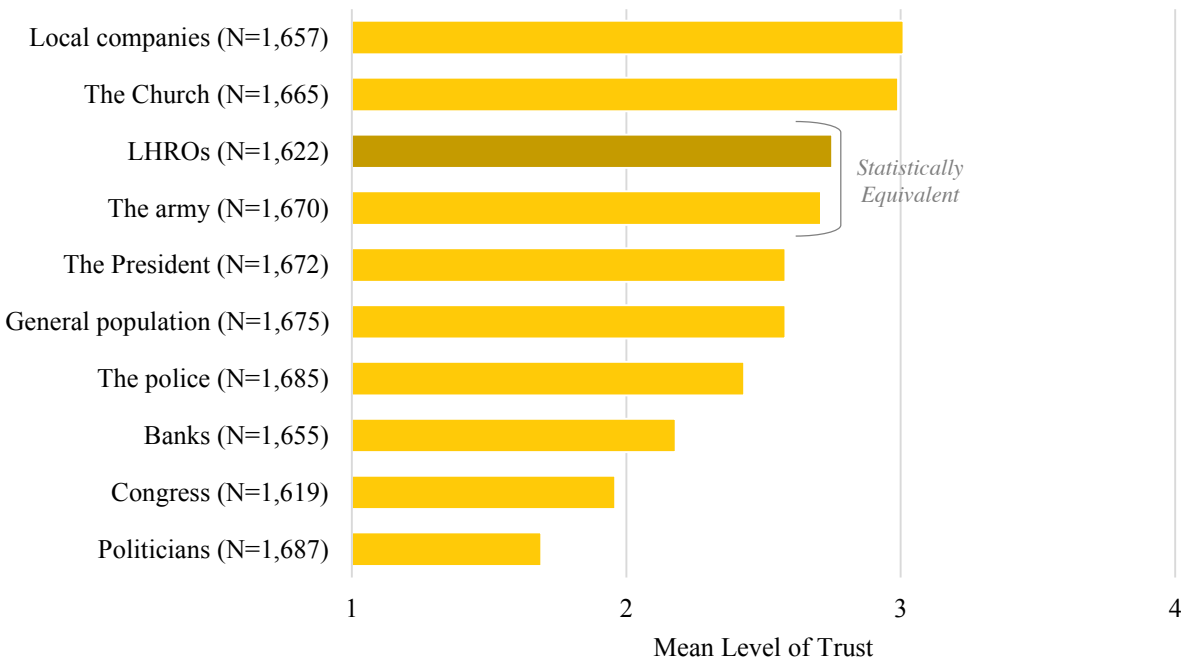
Trust in Local Rights Groups

The Colombian public trusts LHROs more than many other domestic groups or institutions.

To place public perceptions of human rights groups in comparative perspective, we asked about respondents’ trust in a wide range of social actors: “Please tell me how much trust you would place on the following institutions, groups or persons...” Ranking their trust on a four-point scale, where 1 was “no trust” and 4 was “a lot of trust,” respondents said they most trusted local businesses and the Church, followed by Colombian rights groups and the army (see Figure 2.7).⁶⁴ In contrast, they trusted politicians and congress less than all other domestic institutions.

Figure 2.7
Compared to Other Domestic Institutions, Trust in LHROs is High

“Please tell me how much trust you would place on the following institutions, groups or persons...”



⁶⁴ The difference between the mean levels of trust in LHROs and the army is not statistically significant (sig.=.141), as depicted by the box in Figure 2.6. The difference between trust in LHROs is significantly different than trust in the Church (sig.=.000) and trust in the president (sig.=.000).

We found some key factors to be associated with trust in Colombian rights groups:⁶⁵

1. **Respondents more familiar with the human rights movement trusted LHROs:** Hearing “human rights” more frequently and meeting a human rights worker were both associated with increases in trust. The biggest effect was associated with participating in HRO activities: those who had participated in rights-based activities trusted LHROs 13% more than those who had not.
2. **Trust in politicians means less trust in rights groups:** For each one point increase (on the seven-point trust scale) in trust in local politicians, trust in LHROs decreased by 22%. In contrast, trust in the army was associated with *higher* trust in LHROs (as trust in the army increases a point, LHRO trust rises 16%).
3. **If they think LHROs are funded by Colombian citizens, respondents trust them more:** Compared to thinking LHROs are citizen-funded, trust decreases if respondents think the groups are government-funded (11% decrease) or receive support from foreign citizens (6% decrease) or governments (5% decrease).
4. **Ethnicity matters:** Compared to those who identified as mestizo, black respondents had 6% less trust in LHROs, and those who choose no ethnic identity were 7% less trusting.
5. **International connections did not increase trust in LHROs:** Surprisingly, using the internet, speaking a foreign language, and traveling or living outside of Colombia did not increase trust in rights groups.⁶⁶

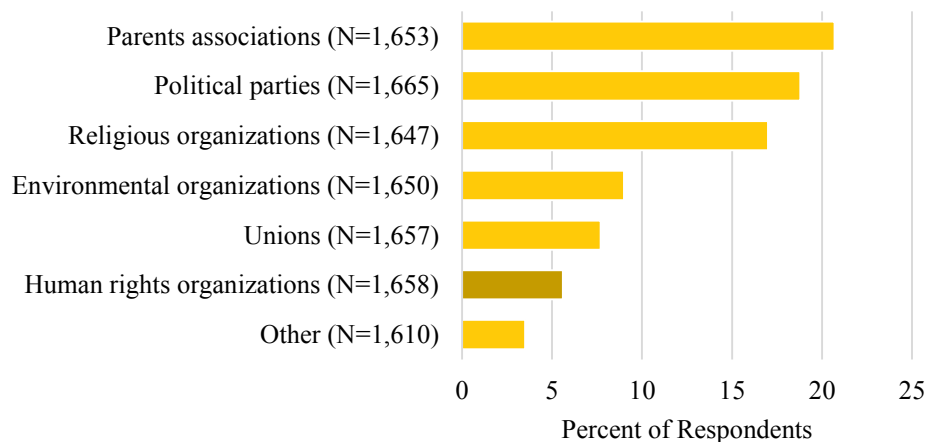
Civic Participation

Despite high trust in LHROs, participation rates were low.

Next, to explore civic engagement in formal organizations, surveyors asked, “*Could you tell me if you have participated in the activities of any of the following organizations?*” Figure 2.8 shows that, at 6%, participation in LHROs was one of the least

Figure 2.8
Respondents' Participation in LHROs Was Low

“Could you tell me if you have participated in the activities of any of the following organizations?”



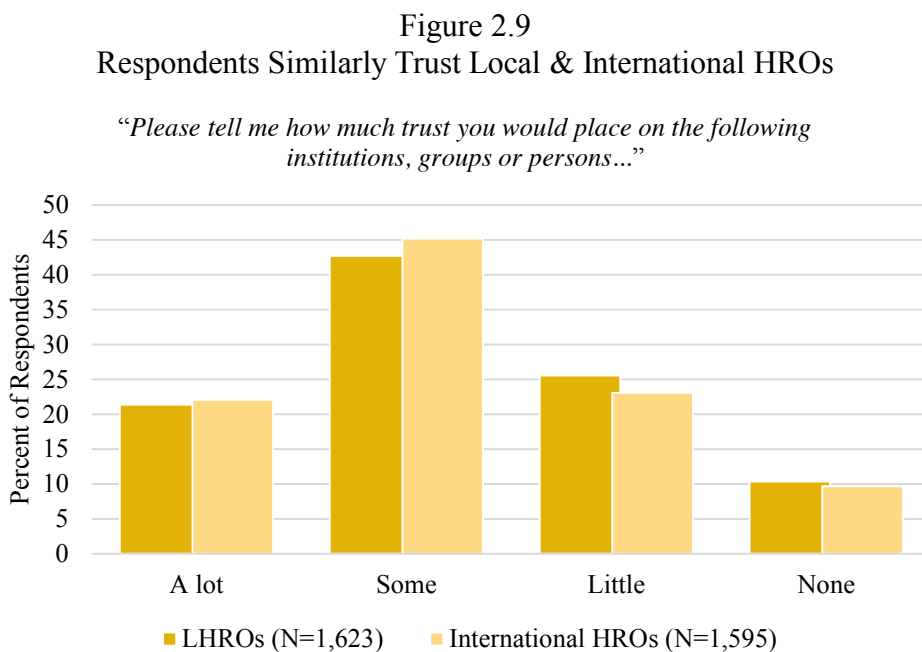
⁶⁵ These findings are statistically significant at the .10-level in an OLS regression. For full results, see: Ron, James and David Crow. 2015. “Who Trusts Local Human Rights Organizations? Evidence from Three World Regions.” *Human Rights Quarterly*, forthcoming.

⁶⁶ The model also accounted for trust in the president, congress, and the police, urban residence, education, income, number of light bulbs in the respondents’ homes, political party, voting behavior, sex, and age. None of these factors were significantly associated with trust in LHROs.

common forms of civic engagement. Instead, respondents were more likely to be involved in parents associations (21%), political parties (19%), or religious organizations (17%). Given past and current threats against Colombian rights activists, however, a 6% participation rate could be considered high.

Views of International Human Rights Organizations

Members of the Colombian public display relatively high levels of trust in international HROs in general, but are more critical of Amnesty International.



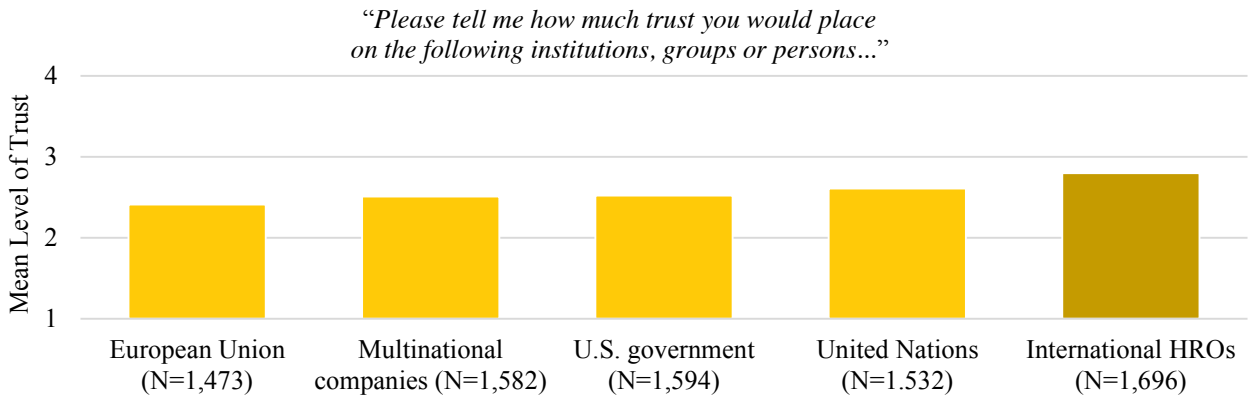
Turning next to popular trust in international institutions, Figure 2.9 shows that Colombian respondents trust international human rights organizations *slightly* more than they do domestic ones, although they most commonly report “some” trust in either HRO variant.⁶⁷

We compared trust in international HROs to other international institutions, and Figure 2.10 indicates that respondents trust international HROs more than all others, including the United Nations and the European Union.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The difference in mean levels of trust in LHROs (2.75) and international HROs (2.80) is small, but statistically significant (sig.=.008).

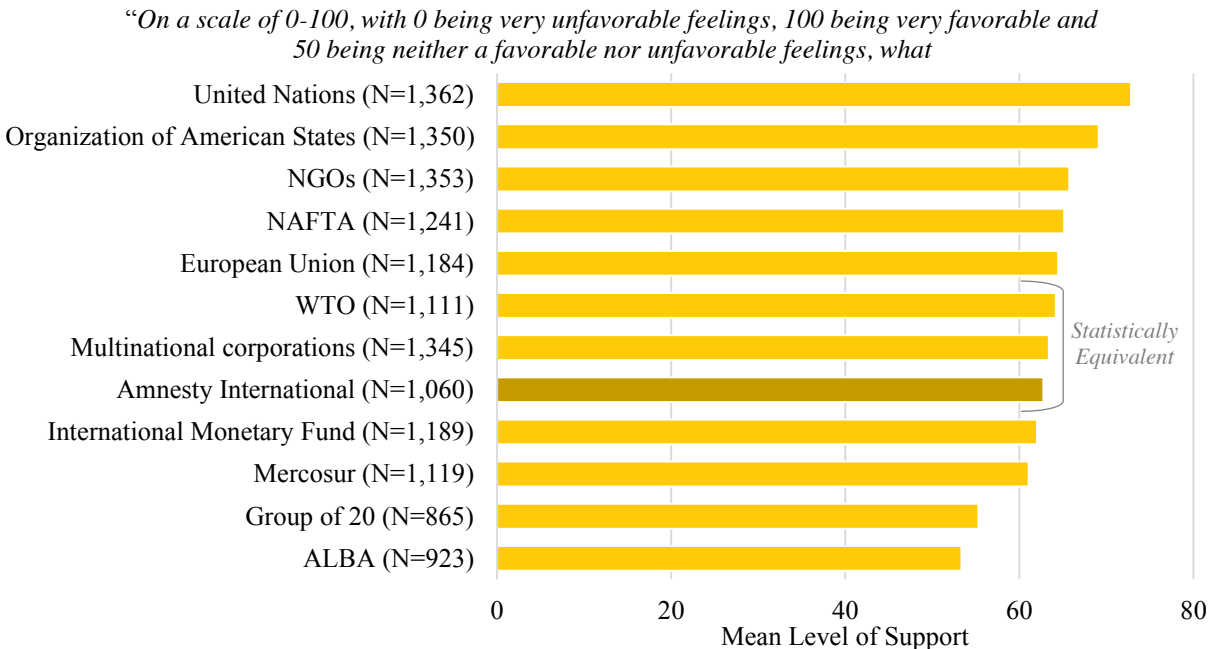
⁶⁸ The difference between mean trust in international HROs and the United Nations is small, but statistically significant (sig.=.000).

Figure 2.10
 Respondents Trust International HROs More than Other International Actors



Finally, to inquire further, we evaluated how favorable respondents’ feelings were towards Amnesty International, one of the best-known international rights groups. We provided respondents with a list of international institutions⁶⁹ and asked, “On a scale of 0-100, with 0 being very unfavorable feelings, 100 being very favorable, and 50 being neither a favorable nor unfavorable feelings, what are your feelings towards the following international organizations?”

Figure 2.11
 Respondents Felt Less Favorably Towards
 Amnesty International than Other International Actors



⁶⁹ NAFTA is the North American Free Trade Agreement and the WTO is the World Trade Organization. Mercosur is the Mercado Común del Sur (the South Common Market), a South American trade agreement; Colombia is not a member state. ALBA is the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America), a Latin and South American IGO; Colombia is not a member state.

As Figure 2.11 indicates, there was a low level of support for Amnesty International compared to other international organizations.⁷⁰ Respondents trusted international human rights organizations in general, but felt less favorably towards Amnesty than the United Nations, Organization of American States, NGOs in general, the North American Free Trade Association, and the European Union.

Conclusions

Overall, the Colombian polling results show that residents have generally positive perceptions of human rights ideas and organizations, are heavily exposed to human rights language, and strongly associate human rights with civil-political and socioeconomic rights. The public has some (limited) concern, however, with the foreign nature of human rights, its association with the interests of urban residents, and its promotion of non-Colombian values or interests.

Respondents also had favorable perceptions of human rights organizations, and compared to domestic and international institutions, HROs ranked high on respondents' spectrums of trust. Although respondents had positive views of human rights organizations, these feelings weakened when presented with a specific group, Amnesty International. Most of the public, moreover, has never met a human rights worker or participated in HRO activities. The Colombian public appears generally open and amenable to the human rights movement, but is not highly involved; LHROs may have a real opportunity for expanding their presence, engagement, and mobilization efforts in Colombia.

⁷⁰ The mean level of support for Amnesty International is not significantly different than the means for the World Trade Organization (sig.=.173) or multinational corporations (sig.=.385). There are, however, significant differences between the mean trust in Amnesty and the European Union (sig.=.006), between Amnesty and the International Monetary Fund (sig.=.069), and between Amnesty and Mercosur (sig.=.016).

Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology

The survey was conducted in November and December 2013 in collaboration with the Department of Political Science at the Universidad de los Andes and *The Americas and the World* project at CIDE, Mexico City.⁷¹ The 1,699 respondents are nationally representative of the adult population in Colombia.

The sample is a stratified multi-stage cluster random sample, collected using data from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE). The number of individuals sampled from each of the five regions in Colombia (Coffee, Atlantic, Central, Pacific, and Territories) is proportional to each region's share of the total national population. Municipalities were selected within each region according to the principle of "probability proportional to size;" since larger cities concentrate a greater share of the population, they are more likely to appear in the sample. Table A.1 indicates the municipalities from each region that were included in the sample.

Table A.1
Municipalities Included in the Sample

Region	Municipality	Respondents
<i>Central</i>	Bogotá	188
	Choconta	50
	Girardot	60
	Villeta	60
	Neiva	49
	Agrado	30
	Pital	30
	Cúcuta	50
	Villa del Rosario	50
	<i>Regional Subtotal</i>	<i>567</i>
<i>Coffee</i>	Medellín	101
	Rionegro	84
	La Ceja	75
	Armenia	90
	Calarcá	53
	Pereira	50
	Dosquebradas	31
	<i>Regional Subtotal</i>	<i>484</i>
<i>Atlantic</i>	Barranquilla	100
	Usiacurí	34
	Montería	50
	Chinú	50
	<i>Regional Subtotal</i>	<i>234</i>

⁷¹ *The Americas and the World* is a project of CIDE, conducting public opinion surveys throughout Latin America. For more information and to access reports, please visit: <http://mexicoyelmundo.cide.edu/home2010english.swf>.

<i>Pacific</i>	Cali	100
	Tuluá	60
	Pasto	50
	<i>Regional Subtotal</i>	<i>210</i>
<i>Territories</i>	Yopal	101
	Monterrey	52
	Tauramena	51
	<i>Regional Subtotal</i>	<i>204</i>
Total		1699

Primary sampling units (PSU) were city blocks (or their rural equivalent), selected systematically with a random start and fixed sampling interval from a list of blocks drawn from the DANE census data (the sampling frame). This procedure allocated more blocks—and more interviews—to larger municipalities. In the next stage, households were enumerated using DANE cartography, and five selected for interviews in each block. Finally, interviewers selected one respondent in each household from a list of household members using a table of random numbers.

The margin of error is +/- 3% for the entire sample; for subgroups (e.g., residents of a given region), the margin of error is higher.

To conduct interviews, survey teams were organized in the regional hubs of Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Pasto, and interviewers moved from these central municipalities to cover all other selected municipalities in the sample. Surveys were administered as in-person interviews in respondents' homes, with re-interviews and supervisor phone calls to 20% of the interviewed households to ensure accuracy.

Appendix B: Characteristics of Human Rights Perceptions Poll Respondents

Socioeconomic Status

Socio-demographic characteristics of the 1,699 respondents are described in Table B.1.⁷² Half of the sample was female and the mean age was approximately 40 years old.⁷³ The typical household made between \$275 USD and \$825 a month, as a combined income of all individuals who work.⁷⁴ Almost all respondents had several years of education, and 60% of respondents had completed secondary education or above. About 10% of respondents had lived outside Colombia, with work, studies, or family as the three primary reasons. About 29% of respondents had travelled outside Colombia, making two trips, on average. Most respondents had a cell phone, rather than a home telephone.⁷⁵ About 61% of respondents reported using the Internet and 41% of the sample reported using it several times a day.⁷⁶

Table B.1
Respondent Characteristics

Sex	50% female
Age	
Mean	40 years
Range	18-93 years
Monthly income range (median)	\$275-\$825 ⁷⁷
Completed secondary (<i>bachillerato</i>) or above	60%
International experience	
Lived outside Colombia ⁷⁸	10%
Travelled outside Colombia	29%
Number of trips outside Colombia (mean)	2 trips
Physical assets	
Has home telephone	54%
Has cellular/mobile phone	91%
Light bulbs in home (median)	7 light bulbs
Uses the internet	61%
At least once a day ⁷⁹	41%

⁷² Unless otherwise noted, all percentages reported represent valid percent, meaning missing values or non-applicable responses are excluded in calculating the percentage.

⁷³ According to the CIA World Factbook, the median age in Colombia is 29 years. Our survey only included adults, so the average age is expectedly higher; the median age in our sample was 39 years old. See: CIA World Factbook, 2014. "Colombia." Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>, accessed March 17, 2013.

⁷⁴ The GDP (PPP) per capita for Colombia in 2013 was \$11,100. CIA World Factbook, *op. cit.*

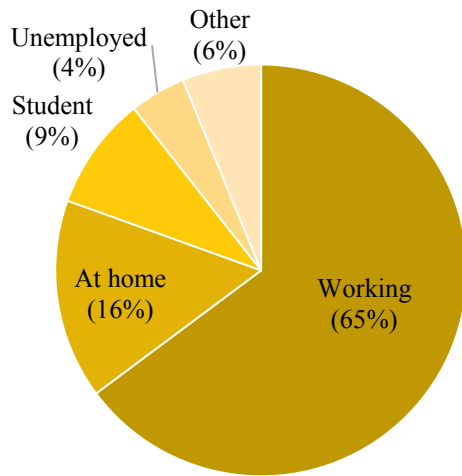
⁷⁵ In 2012 there were about 49.1 million cell phones in Colombia; with a 2014 national population of 46.2 million people, this figure indicates most of the population has at least one cell phone line. There were also about 6.3 million telephone lines in Colombia in 2012. CIA World Factbook, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ In 2009 there were about 22.5 million Internet users, close to 50% of the population. CIA World Factbook, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷ Converted to USD at exchange rate of 1 USD to 2,032.80 COP; obtained March 17, 2014.

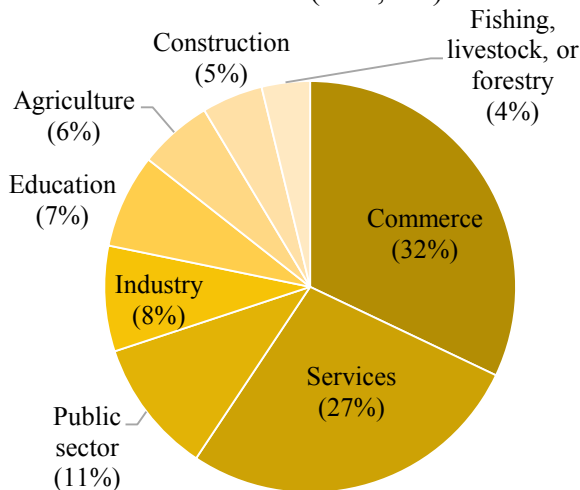
⁷⁸ This figure is not a valid percent, but rather indicates that 10% of the entire sample reported living outside of Colombia.

Figure B.1
Most Respondents Were Currently Working
(N=1,698)



Respondents were asked, “*What was your main activity last week?*” About 65% currently were working (this included respondents who did not happen to be working the previous week, but usually do) while 16% stayed at home, 9% were students, and about 4% were seeking work but were currently unemployed.⁸⁰

Figure B.2
Respondents Worked in Commerce and Service
Sectors (N=1,051)



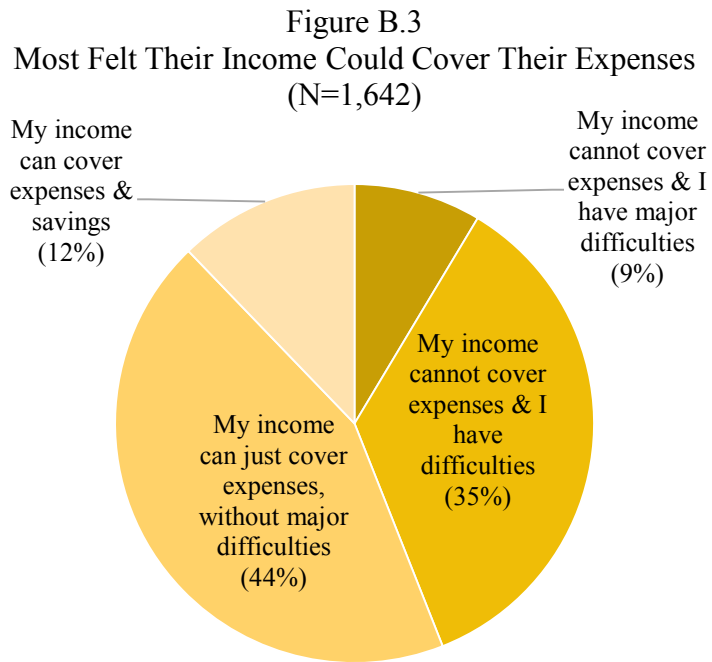
Respondents who worked outside the home were asked, “*What activity is the institution or company you work for involved in?*” As indicated in Figure B.2, of respondents who worked, about 32% worked in commerce and another 27% worked in services. Significant minorities also worked in the public sector, industry, and education.⁸¹

⁷⁹ This figure is not the valid percent; 41% of the entire sample uses the internet at least once a day, but 67% of internet users in the sample reported using the internet at least once a day.

⁸⁰ The 2013 unemployment rate in Colombia was 9.7%. CIA World Factbook, *op. cit.*

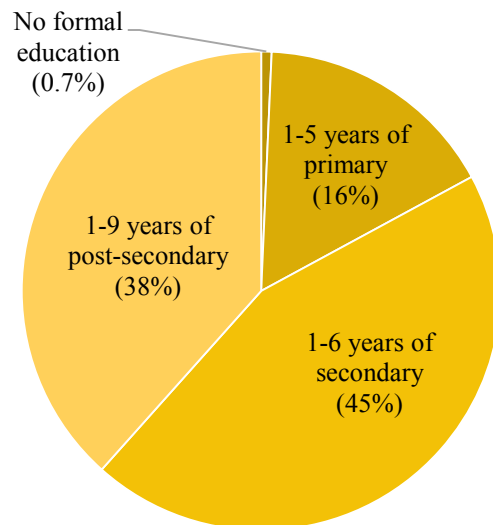
⁸¹ In 2013, the labor force in Colombia according to the CIA World Factbook was 56% services, 38% industry, and 7% agriculture. The World Factbook defines “industry” as mining, manufacturing, energy production, and construction. CIA World Factbook, *op. cit.*

Next, respondents were asked, “*With the total family income, which statement best describes your income status...?*” As shown in Figure B.3, over half of respondents (56%) felt that their household income could adequately cover their living expenses without major difficulties, but only 12% reported that their income allowed them to have enough left over for savings, and 44% stated their income could not cover expenses.⁸²



As mentioned above, a large majority of respondents had more than a primary education, with 83% of respondents having at least one year of secondary level education, 60% having finished their *bachillerato*, and 38% having at least a year of education after secondary school.

Figure B.4
Most Respondents Had Some Secondary Education
(N=1,661)

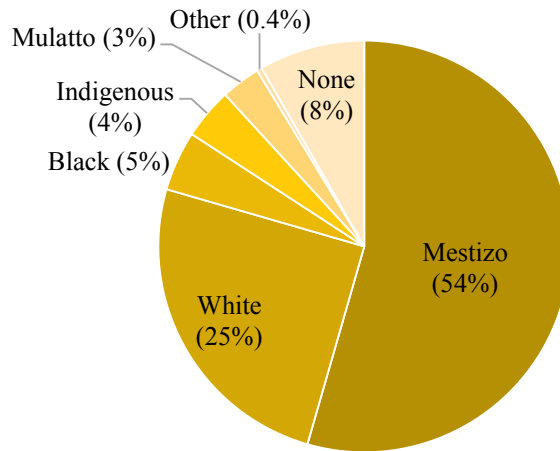


⁸² In 2012, 33% of the population in Colombia was living below the poverty line. CIA World Factbook, *op. cit.*

Ethnic Identity

The majority of the sample (54%) self-identified as “mestizo” or mixed race.⁸³ A further 25% self-identified as white, and 8% did not identify with any ethnicity.

Figure B.5
Most Respondents Self-Identified as Mestizo
(N=1,635)

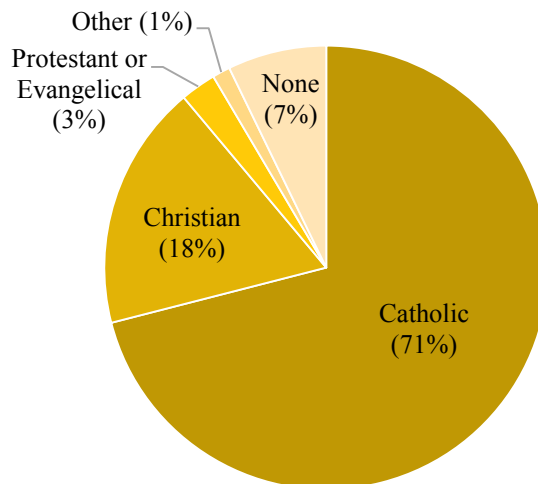


Religious Identity and Salience

Most of the respondents (71%) identified as Catholic, followed by 18% reporting they were Christian and 7% claiming no religious identity.⁸⁴

For most respondents, religion was highly salient in their lives. When asked, “*On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 means not at all important and 10 very important, could you tell me how important religion is in your life?*”

Figure B.6
Most Respondents Were Catholic (N=1,670)

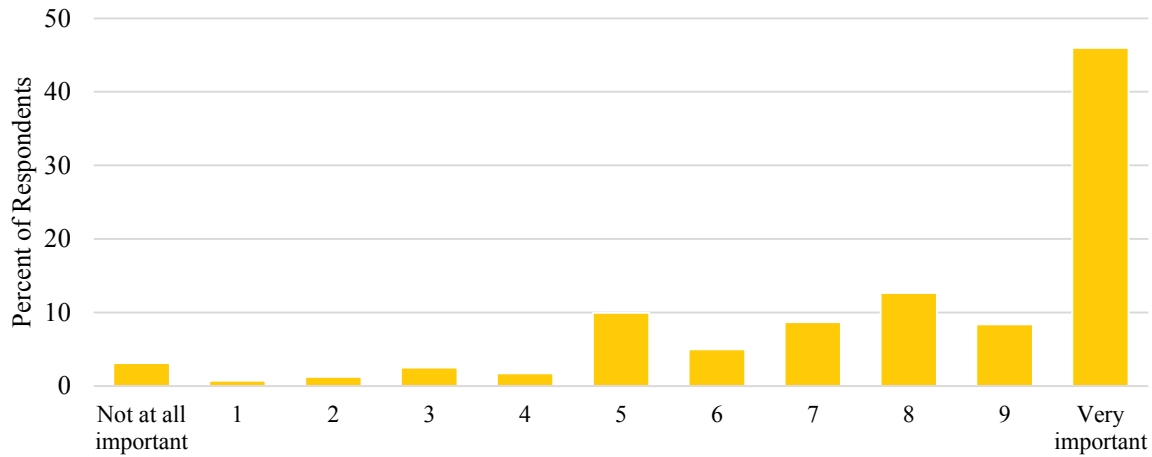


⁸³ This is generally understood as a mixture of white and indigenous, as opposed to “mulatto” which usually refers to a mixture of black and white.

⁸⁴ The World Values Survey reports that, in 2012, 61% of Colombians were Roman Catholic, 13% were Christian, 2% were Evangelical, 1% were another religion, and 21% did not belong to a religious denomination. See Variable 144 of Wave 6 in Colombia, available here: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>, accessed July 8, 2014.

approximately 46% selected 10, and just 3% of respondents said that religion was not at all important to them. The mean ranking was 8, suggesting a high value placed on religion.⁸⁵

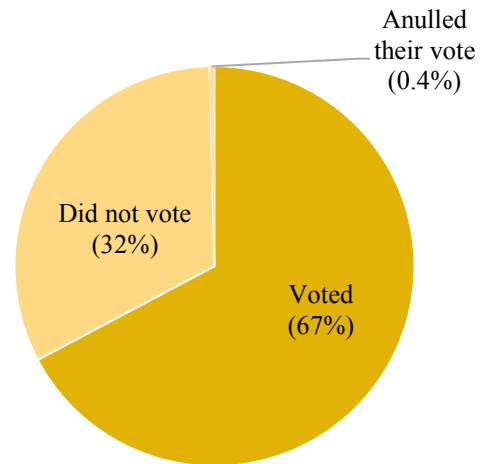
Figure B.7
Religion Was Very Important in Respondents' Daily Lives (N=1,670)



Political Orientation and Participation

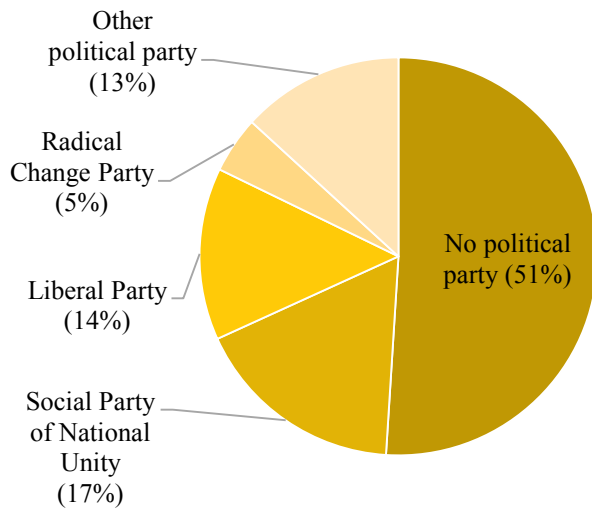
As one measure of political engagement, respondents were asked, “*Did you vote in the last presidential election?*” About 67% of respondents reported that they had voted in the 2010 Presidential election, while 32% did not vote.

Figure B.8
Most Respondents Voted in the 2010 Elections (N=1,694)



⁸⁵ This is similar to findings from the 2012 World Values Survey in Colombia, which found 59% of people claimed religion was “very important” in their lives, 27% said “rather important,” 11% said “not very important,” and just 4% said religion was “not at all important” in their lives. See Variable 9 of Wave 6 in Colombia, available here: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>, accessed July 8, 2014.

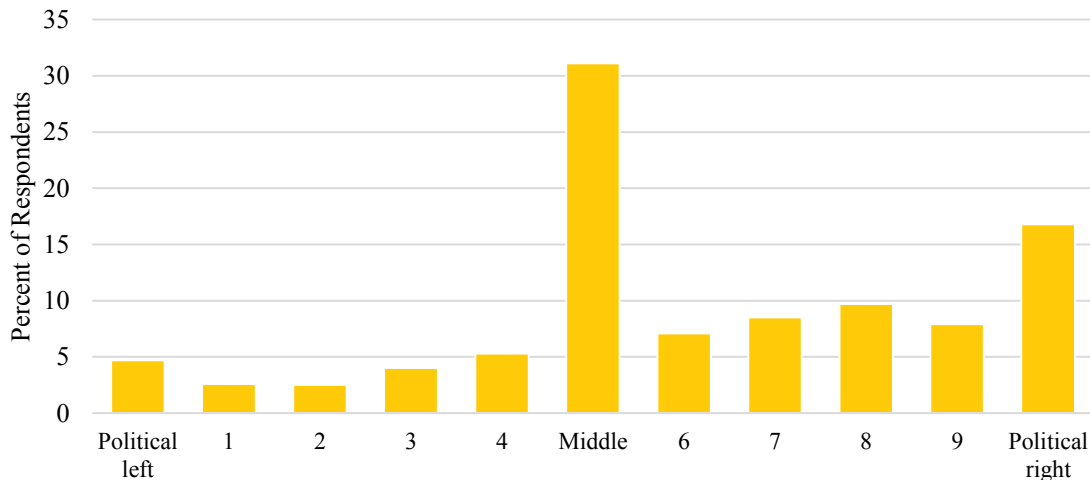
Figure B.9
Half of Respondents Did Not Identify with Any Political Party (N=1,578)



To determine political affiliation, respondents were asked, “Regardless of the party you voted for, do you normally consider yourself as a supporter of [which party]?” The majority of respondents (51%) did not identify with any political party; of those who did, the majority (17% of the total) identified with the Social Party of National Unity, the party of the current president, and 14% supported the Liberal Party.⁸⁶

We then asked respondents, “In terms of your political orientation, where would you place yourself on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘politically left’ and 10 means ‘politically right’?” More respondents identified with the far political right (17%) than the far political left (5%), though the largest group selected 5 and the mean political orientation landed at 6, just right of center.

Figure B.10
Most Respondents Ranked Their Political Orientation as Moderate (N=1,414)



⁸⁶ According to the National Electoral Council, in the first round of the 2010 Presidential election, the Social Party of National Unity candidate (Santos) received 47% of the votes, the Green Party (Mockus) received 22%, and the Radical Change Party (Lleras) received 10%. Data available at: http://www.registraduria.gov.co/imagenes/res_1190.pdf, accessed July 8, 2014.