

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION AS A RESPONSE TO STATE IMMOBILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL BLOCKADE IN COLOMBIA

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Abstract

The study analyzes social mobilization as a response to state immobility and institutional blockade in Colombia. It has been posited that a significant proportion of the popular struggles and social mobilizations that transpired in Colombia during the twentieth century were responses to the social and political challenges engendered by state immobility and the institutional blockade that was perpetuated by this situation. To this end, the genesis of these issues is traced to the nineteenth century, wherein the Treasury, the ecclesiastical institutions, and the political parties are identified as the forces that effectively subjugated the State and monopolized the political space for decades. The focus will be directed towards elucidating the democratizing essence of social mobilizations. This approach aims to demonstrate that these phenomena cannot be perceived as rudimentary responses to the immediate circumstances of their proponents. Instead, they should be regarded as dynamic processes of political transformation that have exhibited resilience in the face of violence. These mobilizations have facilitated the expansion of rights and the evolution of the political system.

Keywords: Social mobilization, Political parties, Church, finance, state immobility.

Introduction

Until the 1980s, scholars discussed the continued presence of the three powers that characterized the so-called seigneurial republic during the nineteenth century within the Colombian political organization. These powers included the religious power, embodied by the Catholic Church; the economic power, materialized by the Treasury; and the political power, embodied by the liberal and conservative bipartisanship. The three powers under scrutiny have been shown to have played an antagonistic role in the context of any type of popular mobilization. This is because such mobilizations "implied the risk of undermining the foundations of the edifice of society" (Gonzales, 1997, 37). Furthermore, the prevalence of these powers until much of the twentieth century, in conjunction with the subsequent state immobility, has been identified as the origin of a series of social and political problems. These problems have ranged from the concentration of property and the unequal distribution of land to the preservation of a social order based on the monopoly of institutions by the political elites. These issues subsequently precipitated the mobilization of various social actors and the emergence of numerous popular struggles during the twentieth century.

As will be demonstrated subsequently, within the framework of these struggles, the mobilizations of the rural peasantry for land rights in the 1920s are particularly salient. These mobilizations not only involved the rural peasantry and settlers, but also indigenous populations and African Americans. In addition, there was an urban popular mobilization

that began in the 1940s and was led by workers and trade unionists. The state's apparent reluctance to engage with these mobilizations has resulted in a significant divide between the various social actors advocating for the democratization of the political system and the state itself. The state, being subordinate to the established powers, has historically declined to acknowledge the demands expressed by these actors and has demonstrated an inability to mediate conflicts through non-violent means.

1. The singularities of the Colombian context

As Fernando Guillén Martínez has noted, the Hacienda model persisted in Colombia until the 20th century as a unifying social structure. In conjunction with the Church, which oversaw the cultural socialization of the populace, the Hacienda system fostered the development of a compliant collective, thereby enabling the endurance and perpetuation of the colonial Hacienda model of loyalty and social subjugation, which served the interests of the prominent landowners. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the emergence of large latifundios among the encomenderos was attributed to the dispossession of indigenous lands (Arango, 2014, 74). However, in the nineteenth century, the advent of independence led to a shift in the relations between landowners and the empire. Nevertheless, this shift did not alter the power structure between latifundistas and white and mestizo laborers.

"As in the encomienda, in the Treasury no written law regulated the laborer-landowner relationship. Consequently, during the sixteenth century, the characteristics of the relations of tribute and mita underwent decomposition, manifesting in the hacienda structure through the medium of sharecropping and devotion to the all-powerful patron (Wills, 1990, 16).

In the aftermath of independence, the lower strata of the population, excluded from the decision-making processes concerning land distribution, remained subject to the whims of landowners seeking to obtain legal title to the land. In this context, a specific type of peon-landowner relationship was established, whereby the peon pledged his loyalty and veneration to the "patron" (Ranch owner) in exchange for labor or the bestowal of a parcel of land. This indicated that the land persisted as a symbol of power in the hands of the landowners throughout the decades following the break with Spain. This was in contrast to the ethnic groups for whom the territory functioned and continues to function as the spatial dimension within which identity is constructed and reconstructed, as well as the peasants for whom it was their only means of survival. It also signified an excessive concentration of property, and consequently, an unequal distribution. Between 1827 and 1869, the Gini index was 0.839. By 1964, it had grown to 0.889 (Arango, 2014, 112).

As will be demonstrated subsequently, the demands for access to land articulated in the peasant struggles reflect political content, since the necessity to modify the prevailing property regime entailed an alteration in the class system (Zamosc, 1981, 68). These demands, which threatened to transform the dynamics of large landowners, prompted a repressive response from the State.

In addition to its repressive character, Colombia's political and economic elites have historically underestimated popular mobilizations and struggles. This tendency can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when significant segments of the population, including indigenous people and peasants, were often viewed as uneducated and dispersed crowds, comprising minors who lacked the capacity to make decisions and fend for themselves. In this sense, plebeian mobilizations have been regarded as mundane reactions associated with

the sphere of necessity, lacking the capacity to exert influence on the political sphere (Leal, 1990, 215).

The Catholic Church played a significant role in shaping this perception of the popular classes as lacking in capability and submissive. In this manner, the religious power structure enabled the revitalization of the hierarchical and estate relations that characterized nineteenth-century society. It functioned as a pivotal actor in the construction of the nation, a project that was promoted by the Creole elites. This project was marked by a centralist, homogeneous, and monocultural vision that inherently excluded significant groups, such as indigenous peoples and Black individuals, from the process of establishing and exercising political power from the outset. This exclusion was further compounded by the denial of their citizenship and the attribution of an inferior status, effectively marginalizing them within the societal structure. The church was also responsible for establishing the boundaries between good and evil, employing a language that accentuated the attributes and representations of the predominantly mestizo nation and demonized difference. This ultimately led to the development of an organic and hierarchical societal structure, in which indigenous populations were regarded as nothing more than savages who had been baptized into eternal bondage (Sánchez, 1991, 48; Samper, 1984, 63). In this sense, within the civilizing project promoted by the elites and by the Catholic Church, the future of the Nation consisted of integration and miscegenation. In this context, the only way for both Indians and blacks to integrate into the Nation was to dilute their cultural identities through cross-racial interaction. The social stratification system that emerged from the colonial period, characterized by the delineation of racial groups based on the color of one's skin—white, mestizo, black, or indigenous—persisted throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The amalgamation of these groups had formed during the colony's establishment as a caste society, in the sense of lineage, a phenomenon that was perpetuated during the following centuries (Jaramillo, 1989, 160). In this sense, Colombian society remained a highly fragmented society, organized on a system of privileges, primarily determined by the degree of mixing between ethnic groups. Consequently, the descendants of white Europeans enjoyed a greater status and social position. This social order established moral and political standards that were antithetical to the recognition and inclusion of ethnic and cultural minorities, effectively excluding various groups that constituted Colombian society. This is an element that should not be overlooked, as scholars have recently emphasized (Archila, García, Parra, 2021). When examining contemporary social struggles and mobilizations, it becomes evident that the protest the construction of a dam is not merely a response to a specific development project, but rather a manifestation of the ongoing struggle of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities against the social exclusion, invisibility, and neglect perpetuated by a classist society.

At the level of political power, the subordination of the state to the dominant elites has caused it to act in a manner that is indifferent to broad sectors of the population, which have also been excluded from the benefits of economic growth and modernization. In essence, it is crucial to acknowledge that, within the context of their political structure, the bipartisan elites that have historically dominated the State have exhibited an initial reluctance to acknowledge the heterogeneity of actors and popular organizations that constitute Colombian society. This has led to a subsequent refusal to embrace their initiatives and demands as integral

components of the political agenda, particularly with regard to the expansion of rights and social prerogatives.

The two-party system persisted as a predominant characteristic of Colombian politics throughout the twentieth century. Its persistent confrontations, alliances, coalitions, and the exclusion of majorities delineated the political regime until the 1990s. These elements serve as pivotal variables in elucidating the constraints on social mobilization and the circumscribed nature of democracy. Indeed, the early emergence of the liberal and conservative political parties – circa 1840 – is indicative of a distinctive phenomenon when contrasted with other Latin American countries, where these parties manifested subsequently and did not come to dominate the political landscape. In Colombia, the two-party system emerged as a vehicle for the articulation of elites' interests rather than as a conduit for the articulation of popular demands. Instead of representing the voices of the people, it served as a platform for the expression of conflicts and interests among local and regional oligarchies. As Fernán González observes, these social gatherings emerged in the aftermath of the dissolution of the centralized authority of the Spanish monarchy, serving as a response to the societal fragmentation into regionalisms, localities, and neighborhoods. These gatherings assumed the role of traditional intermediaries between the state and the ruling classes of civil society (Gonzales, 1997, 26).

This form of party structuring, from its inception, effectively excluded the political participation of the majority of the population. Consequently, the oligarchs who exercised control over the State operated in a manner that was not aligned with the interests of the popular classes. In the twentieth century, the establishment of the political pact that gave rise to the National Front (1958 to 1974) resulted in the adoption of a restricted democracy as the prevailing political regime. The state's loss of autonomy to represent and manage the collective interests of the majority and mediate social conflicts is attributable to its subjugation to the private interests of the dominant elites through the two-party monopoly. Consequently, the state has become privatized and immobile.

The term "state immobility" is generally used to describe the resistance or inability of a government to adapt or implement necessary changes due to established interests or a lack of political will. In the case of Colombia, this immobility is attributed to the pervasive influence of entrenched power groups that have consolidated their control over the state apparatus. These groups have demonstrated a strategic reluctance to acknowledge or counteract the shifts in both the political and economic landscapes that have enabled their sustained dominance. The consolidation of elitist power groups within the state apparatus, coupled with the government's limited autonomy, resulted in an institutional blockade that impeded the progress of societal transformations that were deemed necessary.

In this study, we posit that the elites that have traditionally wielded monopolistic control over the State apparatus, perpetuating its stagnant nature through the implementation of institutional barriers, have maintained their political dominance not only by neutralizing adversaries and consolidating a clientelist political system, but, most significantly, by perpetuating the conditions that have historically enabled their economic, religious, and political ascendancy during the nineteenth century. These elites have exhibited a staunch opposition to any form of transformation that could potentially jeopardize their political hegemony. The limitations of the political regime became evident in the State's inability to

address the social and political problems that had afflicted the country since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The period of time in which the National Front took place (1958-1974) coincided with the belated, but accelerated process of development in which Colombian society and economy were immersed (Vásquez, 1992, 74). The demographic transition precipitated a precipitous disintegration of the prevailing mechanisms of social integration that had previously governed societal structures (Sánchez, 1991, 87). Concurrently, the process of urbanization, driven by economic modernization and sectarian violence, engendered chaotic conditions within cities, a phenomenon to which the state exhibited minimal response. A salient feature of this period was the state's strategic withdrawal from urban areas, a move that was aimed at addressing the escalating fundamental needs of the populace in terms of housing, public services, health, and education. This phenomenon is not solely attributable to the inability of the state to address it, nor is it an urban-specific occurrence. As Consuelo Corredor warns, it is a policy of privileges promoted by the state to the owners of capital and land. By the 1980s, this policy had subsumed about 88% of the rural population into poverty (Corredor, 1997, 279). This alarming imbalance in the allocation of resources has persisted to the present day. According to the 2017 report on Latin America and the Caribbean by the international non-governmental organization OXFAM, which includes Colombia, the economic model has primarily benefited the wealthiest segment of the population. Over the past twenty-five years, the wealthiest one percent of the population has accumulated greater financial resources than the combined total of the poorest half of the population. As indicated by Oxfam (2017, p. 3), both income and wealth have been increasingly concentrated among the highest income brackets of the population at an accelerated rate.

However, the 1980s witnessed significant societal transformations, which, in conjunction with the prevailing political crisis, gave rise to novel forms of social organization. These organizations sought to diversify the political landscape and expand the representation of citizens. In urban areas, individuals began to recognize the significant economic and social disparities, and, distancing themselves from the ideological influence of the Catholic Church, they commenced the interrogation of the prevailing order's legitimacy. The erosion of confidence in the established powers signaled a departure from the sectarian political paradigm that had been the hallmark of Colombian politics for decades. Concurrently, shifts in the social structure promoted the social ascension of groups that subsequently constituted the middle classes, thereby affording a greater proportion of the population access to higher levels of education. These transformations played a significant role in the promotion of popular struggles and social mobilizations, thereby becoming an integral component of Colombian political life. Contrary to the circumstances of the nineteenth century, during which the involvement of the subordinate classes in politics was largely confined to their participation in civil wars, in which they were regarded as mere clientele of party caudillos and not as proponents of their own cause (Sánchez, 1990, 11), the twentieth century, particularly in its latter half, has been marked by a transformative process. This process has witnessed the evolution of various actors, including peasants, students, and workers, into social subjects who have pursued the vindication of their rights and the attainment of political freedoms associated with citizenship (Zamosc, 1990, 317).

As will be demonstrated in the following section, the political constitution of 1991, by recognizing actors and groups that had historically remained excluded from the political

scene, encouraged social mobilization. Nevertheless, despite these transformations, the elites who monopolized the State continued to maintain the old economic structures based on the large estates and concentrate power in the traditional parties. This dynamic hindered the accommodation of emergent social and regional forces and interests within the political sphere, thereby exacerbating the prevailing imbalance between the economic, social, and political domains (Corredor, 1997, 324). The political elites that controlled the parties continued to subordinate the state to their interests, resulting in a remarkably weak state and institutions. These institutions acted as mere spectators, indifferent to any attempt to channel and process the demands expressed by citizens through social mobilizations. In this sense, the transformations that had been taking place in Colombian society and that had brought new social forces to the fore collided head-on with an immobile state, which continued to leave no spaces or means for these new forces to channel their demands and make their platforms for political action visible.

As previously mentioned, this scenario exemplifies the challenges posed by the integration of technology into the workplace. This phenomenon has been observed to result in the subordination of the State to the interests of these elitist groups, leading to a subsequent process of privatization. The privatized state, situated between economic liberalism and political conservatism, faces significant challenges in establishing itself as a public sphere for conflict resolution and community interest management" (González, 2016, 270).

The problems that have been identified and explained thus far, along with the limitations inherent in any schematization, can be synthesized as follows: The concentration of property and the unequal distribution of land represent two salient issues. The systematic denial and exclusion of ethnic minorities and their culture is another significant problem. The permanence of a system of privileges guaranteed by the state itself on the basis of marked social differentiation is a third problem. So is inequality, exclusion, and abandonment of large sectors of society. Finally, the monopoly of institutions by the political elites led to different and broad demonstrations of social mobilization and popular protest. These demonstrations involved different actors—peasants, workers, students, and ethnic groups—and in most cases had a lukewarm or repressive response from the state. This period of mobilization and protest spanned from the 1940s to the end of the last century.

Popular struggles, social mobilization and violence

A historical analysis of social mobilization in twentieth-century Colombia reveals two distinctive types of collective formations. On the one hand, there were the peasant struggles for land demands, and on the other, the urban popular mobilization promoted by workers' organizations that carried out relevant union actions. In both cases, these mobilizations configured practices of resistance throughout successive governments and periods of time, aimed at the recognition and expansion of rights. In the context of peasant struggles, these movements are driven by the pursuit of two fundamental demands: the equitable distribution of land and the establishment of improved production conditions. The pursuit of these demands is intricately linked to the consolidation of the agrarian sector and the empowerment of its proponents, the peasants. As previously mentioned, the first peasant organizations emerged in the early twentieth century. By 1920, the role of the peasant as a productive subject had already been vindicated and demands for the right to land had emerged. Consequently, the National Agrarian Party was established, solidifying its position by 1928

in conjunction with the National Revolutionary Left Union and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, which managed the Colombian Communist Party. As mobilizations increasingly represented the interests of the grassroots peasantry, the political landscape underwent significant shifts.

A significant landmark in the peasant movements was the establishment of the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC) in 1950. This organization pioneered the establishment of a structured framework for the peasant movement in Colombia, thereby providing a unifying entity and a platform for the collective expression of peasant interests. The ANUC was established in accordance with the legal framework established by Law 975 of 1967, complemented by Decree 755 of May 2 of the same year and Resolution 061 of 1967. Consequently, it was granted the legal status issued by the Ministry of Agriculture with resolution 649 of July 30, 1970, during the presidency of Carlos Lleras Restrepo. The organization's objective was to effect a transformation in the mentality of the peasantry and to break with the nineteenth-century concept of the incapable minority, a concept that was propagated by the landowners. Peasants evolve into political subjects, endowed with the capacity to formulate proposals for their well-being. They engage in organized efforts to secure a more productive and dignified relationship with the land.

The ANUC's organizational structure entailed comprehensive implementation across the region, with the establishment of centers extending from the village level to the departmental level. These centers were further equipped with village committees and municipal associations, which collectively constituted the National Board of Directors. The members of the Board elected the Executive Committee, thereby ensuring a systematic and inclusive governance framework within the ANUC. This political initiative, promoted by the Lleras presidency with the objective of containing any attempt at a revolutionary movement, was terminated with the arrival of Misael Pastrana to the presidency in 1970. This represented a setback that persisted and was consolidated during the presidency of López Michelsen.

This shift in national politics is a response to an international context that, deepened by the Cold War, sought political, economic, and military strategies to contain the spread of communism. For the Latin American context, the program promoted by the United States is of relevance. The Alliance for Progress was solidified at the Punta del Este Conference in 1967, where it was emphasized that the redistribution of land should be supplanted by the promotion of a stimulus to private investors willing to transform the countryside into agricultural enterprises and become allies of the state against communism. According to this perspective, any agrarian reform was regarded as financially burdensome due to its potential to result in a decline in production, which could lead to widespread discontent and the emergence of subversive movements against the prevailing system of private property.

Consequently, due to the prevailing tensions and the stance adopted by the Pastrana administration, the Chicoral Pact emerged as a conduit for agrarian counter-reform, advocating for land tenure provisions that favored landowners. In response to this overt intervention in the peasant movement, the ANUC adopted a counterstrategy, formalizing its First Peasant Mandate in 1974. This political initiative represented a departure from its traditional stance as an autonomous entity, aligning instead with the existing political landscape. Concurrent with this initiative, a campaign was initiated—as an action and political strategy—involving land invasions throughout the country. The objective of this

campaign was to generate pressure on the government to implement programs for the acquisition and distribution of land to the peasant sector.

Confronted with the organization's escalating political influence, the government responded with vehement measures, including the cessation of all forms of assistance and financial support, the closure of numerous offices, and the disregard of the "peasant letter." In response, the ANUC mobilized throughout the country, organizing peasant marches and garnering popular support from teachers, workers, students, and other sectors. This mobilization achieved international solidarity to defend the organization, compelling the government to engage in dialogue. As a result, the organizational process, which had been met with resistance, was respected.

Urban popular mobilization emerged in the early 20th century, with notable instances including the 1918 strike by carters and port workers in Cartagena and the 1928 strike by United Fruit Company workers in Ciénaga Magdalena, which culminated in the massacre known as the "Banana Plantations Massacre." The 1930s witnessed the emergence of the first workers' organizations as a response to the government's repressive policies and the enactment of laws restricting the right to assemble and mobilize, such as Law 21 of 1920, Decree 707 of 1927, and Law 69 of 1928. The Central de Trabajadores de Colombia CTC was established on August 10, 1935, and the Union of Workers of Colombia UTC was founded eleven years later. However, the UTC was banned in 1948 by the government of Mariano Ospina Pérez following the National Strike that was called by the CTC that same year.

The State's swift and forceful response to these conflicts, characterized by repression, served to accentuate the pronounced distinction between the domain of social unrest and the realm of politics. This divergence had been attempts to be ameliorated during the presidential term of López Pumarejo (1936-1937) through initiatives to modernize the State and society through the implementation of social interventionism. However, the period of violence between 1946 and 1966 demonstrated the failure of this attempt to present the state as the arbiter of social conflicts over private interests (Gonzales, 1997, 53). Consequently, the use of violence intensified in the definition of power relations and political actors. In addition to the points, the political organization's incapacity to mediate social conflicts and its inability to reconcile contradictory interests—such as those of the peasants and the large landowners, or the workers and the industrial bourgeoisie—resulted in a process of deinstitutionalization. This process can be defined as "one of the expressions of the crisis of legitimacy not only of the State, but also of the State. But of the political regime, and the exercise of force, one of its highest costs" (Corredor, 1990, 342).

Daniel Pecault has emphasized that violence, as a systematic practice of the ruling classes against popular mobilizations of a peasant character, is not the result of the progress of capitalist agriculture. Rather, it is the result of the forms of traditional political domination with which this progress is accompanied. In this particular case, Latifundia functions as a surrogate for a political order in the midst of a crisis. However, their role merely serves to legitimize the prevailing fragmentation of power" (Pecault, 1998, 185).

Similarly, the efforts of the dominant elites to impede popular mobilization garnered attention, particularly with their support for the preservation of agrarian structures during the 1950s. The proliferation of latifundia in certain regions, such as Tolima and Cauca, signified a regression in the agrarian struggles of the peasantry concerning land rights. Despite notable

efforts to address this issue, including Law 200 of 1936, which aimed to eliminate unproductive latifundia by establishing a more equitable land distribution system, these efforts proved unsuccessful. By 1956, the Law had not been fully complied with, and due to the action or inaction of the government, most peasant organizations had been completely dismantled and destroyed. In addition to its ineffectiveness, Law 200 led to the escalation of agrarian conflicts, with the intended solution to a problem ultimately resulting in the onset of a new stage of struggle for land (Marulanda, 1998, 203).

These efforts exposed the State's inability to effectively translate legislation into action, a phenomenon that persists to the present day. As posited by Mauricio García Villegas (2000), the government's response to its inability to meet societal demands and the escalating uncontrollability of violence has been through the legal dimension. This response has entailed an institutional emphasis on the legitimization and symbolic use of the legal apparatus (Villegas, 2000, 28). In this manner, the instrumental incapacity of the State has been intended to be resolved through the production of law, which has rarely managed to concretize what has been established outside the paper and materialize in accomplished facts. Despite the implementation of various agrarian reform initiatives, including Law 135 of December 13, 1961, under the administration of Lleras Camargo; Law 1 of 1968, also known as the Law of Tenants and Sharecroppers; and Law 160 of 1994 during the Samper administration, the outcomes have been limited, and the concentration of land and the substantial accumulation of property have persisted.

According to data from the National Land Agency, by 2014, 52% of the land was in the hands of the richest 1.5% of the population. The findings of this study demonstrate a correlation between the implementation of agrarian reforms and the absence of concomitant reforms. The absence of such reforms indicates that the agrarian reform initiatives failed to ensure the alignment of the rural sector with other economic and societal sectors. This outcome can be attributed to the absence of a comprehensive societal transformation, which resulted in the reform initiatives being impeded by the political and economic elites. These elites sought to maintain the status quo and the prevailing economic structures, thereby ensuring their own permanence (Machado, 2001, 43). In this sense, the majority of these reform attempts can be considered "the expression of a model of growth and development" (Machado, 2005, p. 34). However, these reforms are not autonomous or neutral; rather, they are subordinated to macroeconomic policies and conditioned by the interests of powerful groups. As previously mentioned, the demands for access to land articulated in the peasant struggles encompassed not only a more equitable distribution of land but also a transformation in the social structure. This is because the necessity to rectify the prevailing property regime entails an alteration in the class system.

In this context, however, the peasantry and other groups, such as indigenous people and Afro-descendants, evolve as social actors. These groups begin to express additional types of claims, in addition to the claim for land and the defense of territory. These other claims include claims of identity type and their recognition as citizens. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a shift in the nature of the struggle and conflict over land, marking a new dynamic in the region's political landscape. In the dispute between the landowning oligarchy and the peasants, which implied the discrepancy between a rentier economy model and a subsistence economy, other actors joined against the peasants, mainly multinationals and drug traffickers,

who used violence excessively in order to continue concentrating on land. This persistent use of violence led to the systematic dismantling of efforts to mobilize society.

In Colombia: The presence of a multitude of perplexing enemies—both social and institutional—in conjunction with the devaluation of democracy as a political alternative, has led to the dissuasion of endeavors for social mobilization and the reduction of social practices to the individual strategy of "every man for himself." This phenomenon has been both the cause and the effect of the delegitimization of the system (Villegas, 2004, 24).

The decade of the nineties was accompanied by significant changes. The Political Constitution of 1991 emerged because of substantial social mobilization, which demanded an end to the prevailing violence and sought to establish peace in the nation. This constitutional document facilitated the inclusion and protection of groups that had historically been marginalized and excluded from the political landscape. For instance, indigenous communities, including the Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquera populations, experienced a significant increase in visibility and recognition. These demands were accompanied by the development of political discourses, organizations, and political formations, and were expressed in terms of the demand for incorporation into the Nation, thereby ensuring the protection of certain rights, including the preservation of culture, the right to territory, administrative autonomy, and legal pluralism. Colombia was not an exception to this phenomenon; other Latin American countries, including Mexico (1992), Peru (1993), Argentina (1994), and Bolivia (1994), also incorporated the multiethnic and multicultural character of their societies into their respective constitutions. (Assies, 2000; Cott, 1995, 2000). This fact is responsible for a reinvention of identity in Latin America and the formation of "new ethnicities" (Hall, 1991a), which permitted, among other things, the discussion of the concept of rural development within a new vision (Pérez and Farah, 2004) and the proposal of a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to rural development. This led to new commitments, such as rural territorial development (Damiani, 2008), which greatly favored the struggle and mobilization of various actors for land and territory in the region.

In the context of social mobilizations in Colombia during the 1990s, the 1991 Constitution not only expanded the mechanisms of participation but also opened spaces for the organization and social mobilization of different actors, thereby making them a legitimate development of several of the rights embodied therein. It also posited that, in addition to the actors who had long been the protagonists of the social struggle, other groups and movements—particularly civil resistance, which encompassed feminist and environmental movements—began to oppose not only the policies of the state but also other forces that operated within the political system, such as guerrillas or paramilitary groups. This transformation in societal structure can be interpreted, in Norbert Lechner's terms, as "the emergence of renewed forms of collective action that incorporate new points of view and interests" (Lechner, 1995, 25).

However, a review of the social and political landscape of the nation following more than three decades since its ratification reveals the constricted scope of the 1991 Constitution, most notably evidenced by the absence of adherence and actualization in the implementation of its fundamental principles. For instance, certain rights concerning the communal lands of ethnic groups and the reservation lands enshrined in the Political Constitution have yet to be fully actualized. The Congress of the Republic has not yet passed Law 329, which would put

the territories into operation. However, progress has been made with the passage of Decree 1088 of 1993, which regulates the creation of associations of Cabildos and/or traditional indigenous authorities. Similarly, the ongoing structuring of a social system characterized by inequality, a phenomenon that persisted until 2021, is a contributing factor to these unfulfilled promises and the constrained nature of democracy. This incapacity to advance beyond the mere implementation of legislation is rooted in the enduring presence of political and economic elites who, as Restrepo (2022) asserts, "have undermined the efficacy of the 1991 Constitution through a succession of counter-reforms that are detrimental to its fundamental principles, and have demonstrated an absence of the requisite political determination to nurture its most progressive and transformative elements" (Restrepo, 2022, 03).

This fact poses significant challenges in the context of contemporary social mobilizations, particularly with regard to the capacity of social struggles and the Constitution to transform the prevailing structures of power in society and to counter the ongoing monopolization of the State by these structures. Despite the Constitution of 1991's ostensible inability to accommodate these demands, a significant proportion of the social struggles and mobilizations witnessed over the past five years have invoked a demand for the realization of the rights stipulated in the Constitution.

A cursory examination of the recent social mobilization in Colombia, particularly that which transpired between 2017 and 2020, reveals noteworthy transformations when compared to those witnessed during the preceding century. These include the urban character of these struggles and the diversification of the participating actors, such as peasants, victims, workers, students, ethnic groups, women, and LGBTIQ+ groups. The demands encompass a range of issues, including land rights, labor demands, social services, and rights. Nevertheless, despite the transformations that have taken place in Colombian society in recent decades, especially in relation to the disintegration of the powers mentioned above, these mobilizations continue to be based on the same problems. Some of these problems have not only remained unresolved, but have become more acute, such as the inequitable structure of society and the unequal distribution of land.

Final Consideration

The Colombian political organization demonstrated a notable degree of persistence in its efforts to preserve the established order, which was characterized by the preeminence of institutions such as the treasury, the church, and political parties. This historical phenomenon, which continued until the twentieth century, contributed to the perpetuation of an unequal and exclusive social structure, primarily driven by the monopolistic control of institutions by the political elites. This order, manifested in state immobility, has resulted in the state's loss of autonomy to mediate conflicts and function as a catalyst for social demands. Consequently, violence has become a recurrent resource employed to ensure the perpetuation of elitist groups in positions of authority. In response to this order, various popular struggles emerged during the twentieth century. These struggles expressed themselves beyond the established channels and traditional political powers, thereby creating opportunities for the expansion of rights and the enhancement of the political system.

The present article has identified a series of challenges that are endemic to the Colombian political landscape. These challenges have been shown to serve as a stabilizing factor for the prevailing power structure. In response to these challenges, a multitude of popular

mobilizations and struggles have emerged. However, these mobilizations have often been met with opposition from established authorities, who perceive them as a threat to the prevailing order.

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