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Spanish-Colombia Cultural Orientation   *March 2016*

Spanish-Colombia Cultural Orientation: Contents

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Chapter 1 Profile

Introduction

Colombia's diverse culture has been shaped by a variety of indigenous peoples and settlements. Throughout the country, settlements are divided into separate clusters, partly because of the geography of the Andes Mountains. The mountains bisect the nation and create a barrier between east and west, resulting in settlements in high mountains, remote valleys, jungles, and coastal lowlands.[1] This settlement pattern led social and ethnic groups to develop separately.

Besides being isolated geographically, the Colombian people have been deeply affected by Spanish colonization, which created enduring social division. Under the *encomienda* system, Spanish settlers received land grants while the native peoples were forced to provide labor.[2],[3] The Spanish introduced Catholicism, which has had continuing repercussions for Colombia. Although the various populations blended over time to create the dynamic culture that is now Colombia, it remains a highly stratified society.[4, 5, 6]

Colombia's evolution as a nation has been marked by turmoil and civil war as political factions struggled for power. Alongside the instability caused by ideological warfare, drug trafficking severely elevated the level of violence.[7] Colombia's illegal drug trade, organized by large cartels, became powerful in the 1970s and 1980s, and assassinations of government officials who opposed them became common. Although the largest cartels have disintegrated, many smaller cartels still wield power, often allying themselves with various rebel factions.[8, 9, 10]

Political insurgencies have been reduced as the result of government intervention, which has had a stabilizing effect on the economy.[11] Colombia is experiencing a resurgence. The economy is growing.[12, 13] Tourists are flocking to the nation.[14, 15] A peace settlement with the largest rebel group appears imminent.[16] Although challenges remain, security and political stability have increased, and Colombia is forging ahead.[17, 18]

Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

Colombia is located at the northwestern tip of South America, and is the only South American nation to border the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.[19, 20] Colombia sits in a seismically active zone known as the Pacific Ring of Fire. Many earthquakes have occurred in the mountains and along the Pacific coast.[24, 25]

Part of Colombia's geopolitical territory is found offshore. These island territories include the Isla de Malpelo in the Pacific Ocean, and San Andrés and Providencia in the Caribbean.[21, 22, 23]

Nearly twice the size of Texas, Colombia covers about 1,139,000 sq km (439,770 sq mi). It shares borders with five nations. Its shortest borders are shared with Panama to the northwest and Ecuador to the

River Island
Flickr / Hector Pagi

southwest. Longer borders are shared with Peru to the south-southwest, Brazil to the southeast, and Venezuela to the east.[26]

Mainland Colombia consists of five natural regions. Three mountain chains span the country's interior from southwest to northeast to form part of the Andes. East of the Andes and covering northeastern Colombia is a highlands region known as the Llanos (plains). The rainforests of the Amazon River basin spread across the southeast. The other two principal natural areas are the Pacific coast (western Colombia) and the Caribbean coast (northwestern Colombia).[27, 28]

Andes Mountains

This massive mountain range splits at the Ecuadorian border in southwestern Colombia into three separate chains (Cordilleras) that extend through Colombia.[29] The Cordillera Occidental, the westernmost, is relatively low and its peaks are not covered in snow all year. One of its few passes, 1,520 m (4,987 ft) above sea level, connects the city of Cali with a route to the Pacific Ocean.[30, 31, 32] The 800-km (497-mi) long Cordillera Central is the highest of the three ranges. Volcanoes topped with snow are scattered along these mountains; the highest peak is Nevado del Huila at 5,750 m (18,865 ft). Both the Cordillera Central and the Cordillera Occidental extend as far north as the southern end of the Caribbean coastal region.[33, 34, 35] The eastern range of the Andes, the Cordillera Oriental, extends in a northeasterly direction and turns north along the Venezuelan border. Three large and several smaller fertile basins exist in this range at elevations of 2,500–2,700 m (8,202–8,858 ft), and support economic activities including mining and agriculture. The capital city of Bogotá lies in one of these basins, the Cundinamarca.[36, 37, 38]

Andes Mountains
Flickr / Johana Arias

Caribbean Coast
Flickr / Michele Mariani

Pacific Coast

Marshy lowlands, jungle vegetation, and low, rugged hills and mountains make up the southern part of the Pacific coastal area. Farther east, the low mountains give way to the slopes of the Cordillera Occidental. Most of the streams along this coast flow from the hills west to the Pacific. The Río Atrato is an exception that flows northward as far as the Golfo de Urabá near Panama. It is the largest river in the area and is navigable for much of its length. Near the Panamanian border, the Atrato Swamp forms a 65-km (40-mi) swath of mud and wet ground.[39, 40, 41]

Caribbean Coast

The Caribbean coastal region consists of lowlands that extend north from around the Golfo de Urabá (near Panama's border) to Venezuela. At the northern end, the Guajira Peninsula features dry and semiarid land dotted with lakes and streams. To the south, folded and stratified rock forms a thin branch of the Cordillera Oriental along the Venezuelan border. Near the Guajira Peninsula's southern end, along the Caribbean and inland to the south, stand the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a small, isolated block of granite mountains. This range holds Colombia's tallest mountains, Pico Cristóbol Colón and Pico Simón Bolívar, rising 5,775 m (18,947 ft) in elevation. Most of the region's population is concentrated in the main urban centers.[42, 43, 44]

Grassland Plains (Llanos)

Colombia's plains east of the Andes Mountains are divided into the Llanos region north of the Río Guaviare and south of the Amazon rainforest. The Llanos is an open area of largely flat grasslands. The Río Guaviare and other rivers to its north flow through the Llanos from the interior toward the east, emptying into the drainage of the Río Orinoco, Colombia's largest river.[45] Much of this area was traditionally used for raising sheep and cattle, but has become an oil producing center.[46] The region contains Colombia's largest producing oilfield, the Rubiales oilfield.[47] The area is home to a number of indigenous tribes who continue a hunter-gatherer culture.[48]

Eastern Plains or Llanos
Flickr / CIAT

Amazon Rainforest

Rainforests cross Colombia from the eastern slope of the Andes to the borders of Venezuela and Brazil on the east, and Peru and Ecuador on the south. This area contains the Colombian states of Amazonas, Caquetá, Guainía, Guaviare, Putumayo and Vaupés. Throughout most of this region, which occupies 40% of Colombia's total area, the land is covered with tropical rainforests, called *selva*. In the southeast, the jungles are so dense that they are of little economic importance. But the region has grown in importance because of the cocaine trade and coca cultivation. The forests yield marketable products such as rubber, hardwoods, platinum, and gold.[49, 50, 51]

Rainforest River
Flickr / Orban López Cruz

Climate

The southern part of Colombia straddles the Equator, which moderates a climate that is tropical and unmarked by seasonal changes. Although year-round temperatures hardly vary, rainfall is affected by elevation and wind patterns. Equatorial trade winds can produce storms and intense precipitation. Annual rainfall exceeds 250 cm (98 in) in the Amazonian tropical rainforests to the south, along Colombia's northern Pacific coast, and through the central Río Magdalena Valley. The regional average yearly temperature is 23°C (74°F).[52, 53]

Storm Brewing in Bogota
Flickr / Matthew Rutledge

Dry and wet seasons alternate in the Atlantic lowlands (off the Caribbean Sea). Here and in parts of the Río Magdalena Valley, annual rainfall varies between 100 and 180 cm (40–70 in), mostly between May and October. A dry season characterized by wind and dust occurs between November and April.[54]

Along the Caribbean from the Gulf of Morrosquillo to the Guajira Peninsula, drier climatic conditions prevail. In this region of low plains, two short periods of rainfall occur: one in April and another between October and November. The rains are moderate, usually not exceeding 76 cm (30 in) yearly. Temperatures are warmer, averaging 27°C (81°F). At the northern end of the peninsula, the climate is desert-like.[55]

Amazon River in Colombia
Flickr / Pedro Szekely

Colombia's mountainous climate is affected by elevation. Most Colombians live in either the zone known as the *tierra templada* (900–2,000 m or 3,000–6,500 ft) or the higher zone known as the *tierra fría* (2,000–3,000 m or 6,500–10,000 ft). The city of Bogotá is located in the *tierra fría* zone. Although rain falls an average of 223 days per year, the level of rainfall is low, approximately 100 cm (40 in) yearly, and the average temperature is 14°C (57°F). In the *páramos*, at 3,000–4,000 m (10,000–15,000 ft) elevation, the yearly average temperature is 10°C (50°F). In the higher mountainous zone, snow and ice prevail year-round.[56, 57]

Fisherman with Catch
Flickr / Colombia Travel

Rivers

Río Magdalena

The Río Magdalena is Colombia's most important river in terms of the socioeconomic activity. Most of the nation's people live along this river, which begins in the southern Andes Mountains and flows northward between the Cordillera Central and the Cordillera Oriental. The river forms a narrow valley near its beginning and widens as it proceeds north. The Magdalena combines with the Río Cauca, its main tributary, which flows north between the Cordillera Occidental and the Cordillera Central. The combined river (still called the Magdalena) empties into the Caribbean Sea south of the Guajira Peninsula. The drainage basin of the Río Magdalena and the Río Cauca covers one-fourth of Colombia's surface area.[58, 59]

Río Guaviare and Río Orinoco

East of the Andes, the Río Guaviare is a dividing line, roughly separating the grassland plains (*Llanos*) from the Amazon rainforest. It flows eastward from a point on the southeastern slope of the mountains and drains into the Río Orinoco.

Rio Guaviare
Flickr / Santiago La Rotta

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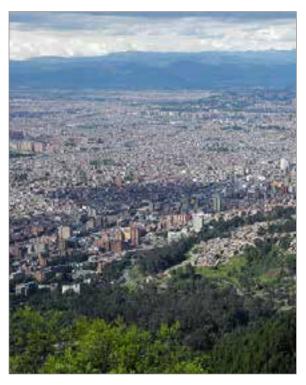DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
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The Orinoco flows in an arc for 2,740 km (1,700 mi) from its headwaters in northern Brazil. It forms part of the Colombia–Venezuela border before shifting into Venezuela and draining into the Atlantic Ocean.[60]

Other rivers lying to the north of the Río Guaviare follow its general west-east pattern. From the eastern-central slope of the Andes, the Río Meta flows eastward, roughly parallel to the Guaviare for much of its journey. The Rio Meta forms part of Colombia's border with Venezuela before emptying into the Río Orinoco.[61]

The Amazon and Tributaries

South of the Río Guaviare, the eastward-flowing rivers empty into the basin of the Amazon River (Río Amazonas). The Amazon begins in southern Peru, flows at least 6,400 km (4,000 mi), and empties into the Atlantic Ocean off northeastern Brazil. For a brief section, it runs along the southern border of Colombia. It is South America's largest river and the world's largest drainage system.[62] Several rivers or streams flow out of Colombia and into the Amazon, including the Río Putumayo and the Río Caquetá. The Río Putumayo begins at the southeastern end of the Andes in Colombia and flows eastward, forming Colombia's southern border with Peru. It joins the Amazon in Brazil. The Río Caquetá begins north of the Putumayo and roughly parallels it, also joining the Amazon in Brazil. Another large tributary of the Amazon, the Río Negro, forms part of the border between Colombia and Brazil before joining the Amazon.[63, 64, 65]

Bogota
Flickr / m.a.r.c

Major Cities

Bogotá

Located in the mountainous region of central Colombia, Bogotá lies 2,640 m (8,661 ft) above sea level.[66] Bogotá is the nation's capital and largest city, with a population of about 11 million in the metropolitan area.[67] It is the site of Colombia's first representative council, which local citizens created in 1810 to oppose the authority of the Spanish government.[68]

Bogotá is a city of contrasting cultural influences (Spanish, Indian, and English), of wealth alongside extreme poverty, and of modern as well as traditional lifestyles. Universities, futuristic high-rise buildings, theaters, and extensive labor *barrios* and slum areas are interspersed in the urban area. Colombia's largest exporters and coffee producers have their headquarters in Bogotá, and business activities include a stock market, industries, and enterprises involved in emerald trading.[69, 70]

Barranquilla Nocturna
Flickr / Conchi Triviño

Barranquilla

Barranquilla lies on the Caribbean coast at the outlet of the Magdalena River. It is the region's main industrial city and seaport. Its economy is driven by chemical and cement factories, textile plants, and shipbuilding facilities.[71, 72] Barranquilla is an important transportation hub handling much of the nation's coffee and petroleum, and a major natural gas terminus.[73] It is home to several universities that offer education in law, medicine, liberal arts, engineering, architecture, and economics. It is also home to a number of international bilingual schools as well as the Academy of Arts. Barranquilla hosts one of the world's largest carnivals, the Carnaval de Barranquilla, each year prior to the start of Lent.[74]

Cali
Flickr/AndrésDavidAparicioAlonso

Cali

Founded in 1536, Cali is Colombia's second-largest city, located in the southwest at 1,014 m (3,327 ft) in elevation. It grew and prospered as a result of sugar and coffee production.[75, 76] Founded in the 16th century, it is the site of rich archaeological and cultural influences and artifacts.[77, 78, 79]

Cali was the operational center of the Cali drug cartel that competed with the Medellín cartel. The Cali cartel leaders operated less conspicuously than did the Medellín leaders and eventually dominated the cocaine trade, but in the 1990s, they were imprisoned, and the Cali cartel was shut down.[80] Although the city's crime rate has dropped, Cali is the nation's most dangerous city.[81] The city is a major tourist destination known for its salsa. Each December the city hosts the Feria de Cali, one of the nation's most important festivals featuring salsa music and dance.[82]

Cartagena
Flickr / Manuel Villafañe

Cartagena

Since its founding in 1533, Cartagena has been an important seaport in northwestern Colombia. It lies on the Caribbean Sea and was a shipping point for silver and gold sent to the coffers of the Spanish king. Cartagena was also a trade center for the slaves shipped into the country. Because the city was subject to looting by pirates, residents built a wall around it for protection. The historic walled section of the city, known as Ciudad Amarullada, still exists. Along with the resort city's other historic attractions (old churches, colonial buildings, museums), the walled city is a popular site for tourists.[83, 84]

Medellin
Flickr / laloking 97

Medellín

Colombia's third-largest city, Medellín, is located in the Cordillera Central mountain range, northwest of Bogotá. Dating to the 1600s, Medellín experienced economic growth during the country's coffee boom and later became a textile manufacturing center. Today, it is an industrial area, as well as a region where flowers, especially orchids, are commercially grown. [85, 86, 87]

Medellín became well known as the center of Colombia's drug traffickers in the 1970s. The leader of the Medellín cartel, Pablo Escobar, was eventually killed by the Colombian police, and Medellín has since betransformed itself as a tourist destination.[88] Today, Medellín is one of the world's safest cities.[89]

History

Early History

The earliest people came to the region around 20,000 B.C.E., but some scientists suspect that the area around the Andean Highlands was populated even earlier. Early people arrived from Central America, the Caribbean nations, and the Amazon region. These original Colombians belonged to one of three major linguistic groups: the Arawak, the Carib, and the Chibcha. The groups failed to unite and form a single culture, instead remaining relatively separate. When the first Europeans arrived, these groups had developed social stratification and political systems.[90, 91]

The first European to arrive was Alonso de Ojeda, who explored the Guajira Peninsula of modern-day Colombia in 1499. Interested primarily in gold, pearls, and other wealth for the Spanish crown, Ojeda quickly left the region. Although the Spanish continued their explorations of the Colombian coast during the next few years, they remained uninterested in colonization. It was not until 1525 that the first Spanish settlement of Santa Marta was founded on the north coast and, in 1533, the city of Cartagena was established. Bogotá was founded five years later and, by 1539, most of the inland colonial cities had been created. By the mid-16th century, the Spanish had completed most colonization of Colombia.[92, 93] The Spanish conquest of Colombia was a violent one. Millions of indigenous people were enslaved to work in the mines and agricultural fields. Many more fell victim to the diseases contracted from

Indigenous Civilization Artifact
Flickr / Alma Apatrido

Europeans, and soon most of the indigenous cultures were destroyed.[94]

The Colonial Era, Independence, and the Republic of Colombia

The ensuing years saw the expansion of Colombian territory, followed by independence, loss of territory, and the seeds of future political division. This chain of events began in 1719 when Bogotá became the capital of New Granada, which included the region that is now Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador. A century later, New Granada won its independence from Spain. Revolutionaries overthrew the Spanish viceroy in Santa Fé de Bogotá and established a governing body that consisted of creoles (people descended from Spaniards and born in the Americas). It was not until nine years later, in 1819, that a complete break with Spain was achieved through military victory by General Simón Bolívar. The Republic of Great Colombia (Gran Colombia) was formed, with Bolívar as president (1819–1830) and General Francisco de Paula Santander as vice president. Soon after, Bolívar and Santander became divided in their political goals, "setting the stage for the country's long history of political violence."[95, 96]

Simon Bolivar
Flickr / Renaud Camus

Bolívar and his supporters wanted a centralized, authoritarian government allied to the Catholic Church and continued slavery. Santander favored a decentralized government with weaker ties to the Catholic Church, along with expanded voting rights. In 1830, Ecuador and Venezuela broke away from Gran Colombia, and the Republic of New Granada emerged with Santander as its first president (1832–1837). The ideological split continued for the next 150 years, with the country swinging back and forth in continuing political and military struggle.[97, 98]

A constitution favoring the Conservative Party, adopted in 1886, restored government centralization and church influence and renamed the country the Republic of Colombia. The ensuing War of a Thousand Days (La Guerra de los Mil Días) between 1899 and 1902 "devastated the country and cost at least 100,000 lives."[99] In 1903, Panama broke away from Colombia and proclaimed its independence. After the parties in Colombia

changed power, a civil war known as *La Violencia* (1946–1958) claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in the country.[100, 101, 102]

The Era of Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, and Narcotrafficking

Although Colombia's modern political history "began in the late 1840s with the delineation of the Liberal and Conservative parties," modern Marxist guerrilla groups did not appear until the 1960s and 1970s.[103, 104] From then until the early 21st century, drug cartels proliferated and combined their activities with both the paramilitary right-wing

War of a Thousand Days
Flickr / Carlos Chahin

groups and leftist rebel organizations, which used the drug trade for funding. Leftist groups included the M-19 (May 19th Movement), FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and ELN (National Liberation Army). Between the 1980s and the early 2000s, around "3 million Colombians were displaced by political and drug-related violence."[105, 106]

Juan Manuel Santos Campaigning
Flickr / eltietempo.com

The Colombian government fought back and by early 2004 had reduced some of the violence, pushing the rebels into the countryside. With the assistance of the U.S. government, Colombia was able to decrease cocaine production. Negotiations with paramilitary forces led to disarmament in exchange for reduced punishments and shielding from extradition.[107, 108]

Recent Events

Although paramilitary groups had been partly demobilized by 2006, leftist rebels continued their activity against the state. FARC was responsible for most attacks. The government responded

Presidential Palace
Wikipedia / Cargnym

with military and police operations that reduced FARC's power in urban areas and restricted their operations to the remote countryside. The government of then-President Uribe, working closely with the United States, extradited a number of fugitives to the U.S. for prosecution, including leaders of cartels and rebel groups. In Colombia's rural areas, attacks by illegally armed groups decreased significantly between 2002 and 2005. Between 2002 and 2007, kidnappings and violent attacks decreased countrywide.[109, 110]

The Colombian Supreme Court ordered the arrests of a number of congressional members with ties to right-wing paramilitary groups. Investigations into these activities concluded in 2008. Some military leaders and high government officials were found to be involved in unlawful activities, including illegal wiretaps and links to drug cartels and rebel groups.[111, 112]

The 2010 national elections were the least violent in recent history. Juan Manuel Santos was elected president and has continued his hard line against the militant groups.[113, 114] Santos was reelected in 2014 and in September 2016, Santos and the FARC agreed to the terms of a peace treaty.[115, 116] Despite Santos' commitment to human rights, abuses by the national intelligence service continue. Paramilitary groups continue to commit documented atrocities.[117] Nevertheless, the security situation in Colombia continues to improve.[118, 119]

Government

Colombia is a constitutional republic with a popularly elected president who is the official head of the government. The president can serve two consecutive four-year terms.[120, 121, 122] Many of the government's powers are vested in the president, who is the supreme administrative authority and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Members of the bicameral legislature may serve unlimited four-year terms and are

Armadillo Media
Flickr / Colores Mari

popularly elected. The Congress convenes only twice each year but can be called into special session by the president.[123, 124, 125] The Judiciary consists of a Supreme Court, a Constitutional Court, a Council of State, and a Superior Judicial Court. The Supreme Court elects a Prosecutor General from three nominees made by the president. The Supreme Court elects its justices, who serve non-renewable eight-year terms.[126, 127, 128]

Media

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press, but attacks against media institutions and journalists continue, especially in the provinces.[129] In 2015, Colombia ranked 128th out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index.[130] Since 2010, the government has stepped up efforts to ensure a free press and has launched inquiries into and made arrests surrounding the deaths of several journalists. Still, the country remains dangerous for journalists. Terrorists continue to threaten a free press by attacking journalists and bombing media offices.[131, 132, 133]

Many media outlets are concentrated in the hands of private investors, and print media are privately owned. The government operates several television and radio stations throughout the country. Local radio stations occasionally come under pressure from government agencies or terrorist organizations.[134, 135] Colombia ranked as "partly free" on the "freedom of the net" index in 2015. Infrastructural issues have limited access in some areas. Access in rural areas is more problematic and unreliable than in urban centers. The government does not normally block access or take down websites.[136] About 52% of Colombians accessed the internet in 2015. No official restrictions exist on internet use, although there have been reports that the government does access e-mail accounts of government opponents.[137]

Economy

Colombia's modern economy rests mainly on the export of petroleum products, coffee, and cut flowers.[138] Agriculture continues to be an important part of the national economy even though much of the land remains uncultivated.[139] Colombia ranked 28th in the world on the Index of Economic Freedom and is the second-freest in South and Central America.[140] In 2014, the World Bank declared that Colombia was the top economy to do business in Latin America.[141] Reforms continue to strengthen the economy and promote growth.[142, 143] Although unemployment has dropped in recent years, it continues to hover around 9%.[144, 145, 146] Unemployment varies significantly by location, however. The cities with the lowest unemployment were Monteria (7.2%), Barranquilla (8.7%) and Cartagena (8.7%). On the other hand, the highest unemployment rates were in Cucuta (18.1%), Armenia (16.9%) and Quibdo (15.6%).[147] Poverty rates have also declined. The percentage of Colombians living on less than USD 1.25 per day has fallen from 50% to 34%.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the industrial, services, and energy sectors assumed greater importance within Colombia's private enterprise economy. In 1991, oil became the leading export, replacing coffee.[148, 149] In 2015, the economy continued to depend primarily on energy and mining exports. Colombia is the world's fourth-largest coal producer and Latin America's fourth-largest oil producer.[150] Between 2002 and 2007, Colombia's economy grew steadily. But as a result of the global financial crisis, it slowed by mid-2008 and plunged into a recession in 2009. By 2011, it rebounded to grow by nearly 6%.[151, 152] Between 2011 and 2015, the nation averaged 4% GDP growth each year. [153, 154]

NP Coffee Farmer3
Flickr / CIAT

Colombian Exports
Flickr / Ted McGrath

Oil Refinery
Flickr / Javier Guillot

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Ethnic and Linguistic Groups

Colombia is an ethnically diverse nation. Of the total population (approximately 46.7 million), an estimated 1% are indigenous. Most of the population is mestizo (49-60%), people of mixed Indian–European blood.[155, 156] Mulattos, persons of mixed European and African ancestry, compose 20% of the Colombian population. They live primarily along the coastal regions and in areas where sugarcane is cultivated. Approximately 3% are Amerindian. The remaining 17% are white, mostly of European ancestry.[157, 158, 159]

Although Spanish is the national language and is spoken countrywide by the major ethnic groups, several indigenous languages exist. They are found in pockets throughout the country.[160]

Awa-Cuaiquer

The Awa-Cuaquier, whose name means "people," were traditionally hunter-gatherers. Today, they are farmers who grow maize, plantains, and sugarcane. Many also raise chickens and pigs. Their numbers are estimated at about 21,000.[161] Speakers of the Awa-Cuaiquer language live north of the Ecuador border in the Andes foothills, on the side facing the Pacific Ocean. The Awa-Cuaiquer language is sometimes referred to as "Awa" or "Cuaiquer." Many of the men in this group also speak Spanish, but the majority of women and children speak only Awa-Cuaiquer.[162]

Emberá

The Emberá are the third-largest indigenous group in Colombia with a population of approximately 71,000. These primarily nomadic people are spread throughout the country but about half live in the coastal basin of the department of Choco.[163] This linguistic category includes several sub-groups: Northern Emberá, Emberá-Baudó, Emberá-Catío, Emberá-Chamí, and Emberá-Tadó.

Inga Ritual
Flickr / eltiempo.com

Comunidades Indígenas Embera
Flickr / UNHCR/ACNUR Américas

Some of the Emberá dialects are spoken in Panama and are mutually intelligible to speakers in Panama and Colombia.[164] The Emberá distinguish themselves not only by language but by location. The *Eyebida*, or mountain people, live in the western mountain range. The *Dobida*, or river people, reside mostly in Choco. The *Pusabida*, or sea people, live along the river tributaries of the Pacific Ocean near Buenaventura.[165]

Guahibo Mother and Son
Flickr / Christian Delgado Bejarano

Guahibo

The Guahibo, numbering about 20,000, were traditionally nomadic hunters and fisherman who rarely stayed more than three days in a single location.[166] Today, most Guahibo are sedentary farmers. The Guahibo are skilled artisans known for their pottery, weapons, and clothing.[167] Guahibo speakers live in central-northeastern Colombia. Their territory includes part of the border with Venezuela.[168] Throughout much of this region, they have established primary schools and some secondary schools that conduct instruction in the Guahiban language. The language is codified in its own dictionary and grammar sources, and some newspapers are printed in Guahiban.[169]

Inga and Jungle Inga

Some scientists believe the Inga are descendants of the ancient Inca, but others suggest the Inga are a distinct people brought to the Sibundoy Valley by the Spanish during their domination of Southern Colombia. The Spanish forced the Inga to adopt Quechua, the language the Spaniards used to communicate with native tribes throughout Peru and Colombia.[170] Several Quechua languages are spoken in southern Colombia in the Sibundoy Valley. Many Inga speakers are craftspeople who live in and near San Andrés, Santiago, and Colón.[171] The Jungle Inga occupy the lower river regions of southern Colombia in areas of tropical forest, where they practice intensive cultivation.[172]

Abuela Paez
Flickr / Ronald Hurtado

Wayúu Women
Flickr / Tanehaus

Páez

The Páez, numbering nearly 200,000, rely on subsistence agriculture, growing mainly potatoes, wheat, and coffee. The Páez were often enslaved to work on Spanish colonial farms but their rebellion led to an early-18th century agreement that gave them autonomy. It created indigenous reservations in exchange for a promise to adopt Catholicism.[173, 174] They are known for their handicrafts, in particular pottery, weaving, and basketry.[175] Páez-language speakers inhabit central-western Colombia in the central range. They speak and write Páez for religious services and in business transactions. Many people in the area are bilingual, speaking Spanish as well as Páez.[176]

Wayúu

The Wayúu, also known as the people of the sun, sand, and wind, number about 144,000 (20% of Colombia's Amerindian population), according to the 1997 census. The Spanish were never able to subjugate the Wayúu, and they remained at war for more than 300 years.[177] Wayúu live in the desert areas of the Guajira Peninsula in northern Colombia. About 30 clans make up this matrilineal people, and their lands include parts of Venezuela and Colombia, giving them dual citizenship. The Wayuú live in settlements of five or six houses (*ranchería*) rather than in towns.[178, 179, 180] This ethnic group, often victimized by discrimination and the paramilitary groups, is in danger of becoming extinct.[181, 182]

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Overview: Chapter 1 Assessment

1. **The Andes Mountains have had little influence on the patterns of settlement in Colombia.**
    False

    Settlements in Colombia are divided into separate clusters, partly because of the geography of the Andes Mountains. The Andes bisect the country and create a barrier between east and west, resulting in settlements in high mountains, remote valleys, jungles, and coastal lowlands. This settlement pattern led social and ethnic groups to develop separately.

2. **The eastern range of the Andes, the Cordillera Oriental, is highly conducive to settlement.**
    True

    Three large and several smaller fertile basins exist in the Andes at elevations of 2,500–2,700 m (8,202–8,858 ft). These basins support economic activities such as mining and agriculture. The capital city of Bogotá lies in one of these basins, the Cundinamarca.

3. **The second-largest city in Colombia, Medellín, became well known as the center of Colombia's drug cartels that began operating in the 1970s.**
    True

    Although Medellín became well-known as the center of Colombia's drug traffickers, the cartel's leader, Pablo Escobar, was eventually killed by the Colombian police, and Medellín has transformed into a tourist destination and safe city.

4. **Colombia's independence from Spain was achieved through a military victory by General Simón Bolívar.**
    True

    Independence from Spain was achieved through military victory by General Simón Bolívar. The Republic of Great Colombia (Gran Colombia) was formed, with Bolívar as president (1819–1830) and General Francisco de Paula Santander as vice president.

5. **Oil production in Colombia has continued to decrease in spite of government efforts.**

   False

   The Colombian government instituted regulations in the industry designed to attract and increase foreign investment, and it partially privatized Ecopetrol SA, the state oil company. These changes, combined with a decrease in attacks against energy infrastructure by insurgent groups, have led to increased oil production.

Christian Cross
Flickr / Maqroll

Chapter 2 Religion

Introduction

Christianity in the form of Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion, practiced by as much as 90% of the population.[1, 2] Because the Colombian government does not statistically track religious affiliation, a more precise percentage is unknown.[3] What is certain is that the Catholic faith dominates the country. Catholics in Colombia, particularly the clergy, are commonly acknowledged to be the most conservative in Latin America.[4, 5] In some isolated regions, the indigenous Amerindian people have nominally adopted Catholicism but continue to practice their traditional religions.[6, 7, 8]

Besides Catholicism, a number of other organized religions are active in Colombia. The Colombian Evangelical Council estimates that 15% of Colombians are Protestant.[9] Pentecostal Churches are becoming increasingly popular and some estimates suggest that as many as 50% of Colombian Protestants are members of Pentecostal denominations.[10, 11] Other sources estimate that 1.3% of the population follow religions such as Judaism (approximately 5,000 members) or Islam (approximately 10,000 members). Jewish people often reside in large cities, and many Muslims live on the Caribbean coast. [12, 13] Compared to those two groups, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (150,000) and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (261,000) in Colombia are considerably larger.[14]

Catholicism in Colombia

Virtually all Colombians are Christians, with the majority being at least, nominally Catholic.[15] Colombians are particularly devout and regularly attend church services.[16] Colombian Catholics have a strong religious faith, although rural Catholics are more devout than their urban counterparts. Rural Catholicism is more likely to be a blend of traditional indigenous practices, and each village often has a patron saint to whom residents pray. In smaller villages, local priests or other religious practitioners often function as the main authority figures.[17, 18, 19]

Symbols and representations of religious figures are an important part of Catholicism in Latin America.[20] Saints play a central role in Latin American Catholicism where each nation has its own patron saint. The patron saint of Colombia is the Virgin of Chiquinquirá (*Nuestra Señora de Chiquinquirá*).[21, 22] In Colombia, individual churches are frequently dedicated to a single saint and iconic images and shrines of that saint fill the church building. Many individual towns have patron saints and a festival honoring that saint.[23, 24, 25]The most important of the Catholic saints is the Virgin Mary. In Colombia, churches tend to honor a specific incarnation of Mary.[26] The Virgin of

Catedral Primada, Bogotá, Colombia
Flickr / Edgar Zuniga Jr.

Candelaria (*La Virgin de la Candelaria*) came to Colombia from the Canary Islands in the 1700s. It became the patron saint of Cartagena, Magangué, and Medellín. The Virgin of Carmen (*La Virgin del Carmen*) is the patron saint of Colombia's military, national police firemen, and truck and bus drivers.[27]

Religion and Government

The Catholic Church has long played a significant and powerful role in the Colombian government.[28] In 1973, Catholicism ceased to be Colombia's official state religion, according to an agreement (the Concordat) between the Vatican and the government.[29, 30] In 1991, the

Church Attendees
Flickr / Víctor Hugo Hernández D.

new national constitution declared Colombia a secular state with no official church or religion and guaranteed freedom of religion.[31]

The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for overseeing religious institutions in Colombia, including conferring legal recognition to religious entities and churches. To date, other than the Catholic Church, 13 religious organizations have legal status. Religious weddings conducted by these agencies are recognized as legal by the government. Members of unrecognized religious organizations must have civil weddings in order to be legally married.[32]

Although the government does not recognize an official religion, it does recognize the significance of the Catholic Church in Colombian culture. According to the constitution, the government "is neither atheist nor agnostic, nor indifferent to Colombians' religious sentiment."[33] This statement is open to interpretation; many take it to mean that the government unofficially privileges the Catholic faith. This interpretation is given credence by a public law agreement (adopted in 1997) between

the government and non-Catholic religious groups. In order for "non-Catholic groups to minister to military personnel, public hospital patients, and prisoners, and to provide religious instruction in public schools," the government grants access to those institutions, and such permission is required.[34] Some non-Catholic groups have claimed that their members have experienced problems in acquiring positions as military chaplains and in securing and carrying out other religious functions.[35]

The Catholic Church continues to have an active role in Colombian politics. For example, in 2011 the Church fully supported a constitutional amendment that would outlaw abortion in all cases and prohibit the "morning-after" pill, euthanasia, and contraceptive patches.[36] In 2012, the Church offered to help with the peace negotiations between the government and the leftist rebel group FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).[37] Protestant groups have also entered the political fray, although they are most likely to focus on issues of human rights and an end to the armed conflict.[38]

Religion in Daily Life

The Colombian people practice their religions without fear of consequence. Although religious discrimination occasionally takes place, the government opposes such acts. Missionaries have the right to spread their religion among indigenous groups as long as they have the approval of that indigenous people. The Supreme Court has ruled against forced religious conversions.[39]

Holy Week
Flickr / Patton

About 85% of Colombian Catholics attend mass and observe the Catholic sacraments. Practicing Catholics' beliefs are especially strong in some rural areas. Many rural people pray only to a patron saint that they also honor yearly or periodically with a fiesta.[40]

Other examples of religion often find their way into daily practice. Many common phrases have religious undertones. One example is "*que Dios le pague*" often used to say "thank you." The phrase can literally be translated as "May God pay you."[41] Many Colombian homes have special niches in the wall which hold religious icons representing specific saints.[42]

Religious Events and Holidays

This historically Catholic nation celebrates 12 religious public holidays each year.[43, 44] The first is the Day of the Epiphany, *Día de los Reyes Magos*, which in 2016 falls on 11

January.[45] It commemorates the visit made by the three wise men to the baby Jesus. This is traditionally the day when many exchange gifts. Parties with friends and families are common, often with the *gallete des rois*, a flat, round cake.[46, 47] Next is Saint Joseph's Day, *Día de San José* (21 March 2016), honoring Joseph as the husband of Mary and patron saint of the universal Church.[48, 49]

Sagrado Corazón de Jesús 21_Valladolid 2011
Flickr / Iglesia en Valladolid

Holy Week

The next set of holidays is collectively known as *Semana Santa*, or Holy Week, which is the week before Easter. It includes Palm Sunday (*Domingo de Ramos*), Holy Thursday (*Jueves Santo*), Good Friday (*Viernes Santo*), and Easter Sunday (*Domingo de Resurrección*). During these eight days, all normal activities come to a halt as people celebrate the holiest and most significant religious festival of the year.[50, 51, 52]

May through November Observances

Ascension Day, *La Ascensión del Señor* (9 May 2016), commemorates the day that Jesus ascended into heaven.[53, 54] Corpus Christi Day (30 May 2016) commemorates Jesus' last supper.[55, 56] Approximately one week later (6 June 2016), Colombians celebrate Sacred Heart Day (*Sagrado Corazón de Jesus*), a day reinforcing the religious devotion of Catholics to the physical heart of Christ. Many Colombians attend special religious services.[57, 58] The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (4 July 2016) commemorates the martyrdom of the two saints.[59, 60]

Assumption Day, *La Asunción de Nuestra Señora* (19 August 2013), celebrates the day that the Virgin Mary ascended into heaven. It is the main feast honoring Saint Mary.[61, 62] All Saints Day, *Día de Todos Santos* (4 November 2013), is a special occasion for families to honor the deceased as well as the saints. Also known as Day of the Dead, *Día de los Muertos,* it is an occasion to reaffirm the lives of those who have died and to affirm life in general. People visit gravesites with their families, bringing flowers and sharing food, music, and prayers.[63]

December Observances

December is the time for two religious observances. The first is Immaculate Conception Day, *La Inmaculada Concepción* (8 December 2013), honoring the conception without sin by the Virgin Mary. It is a day of special church services and attendance.[64, 65] The final religious holiday of the year is Christmas, *La Navidad*, on 25 December.[66] Observant Colombians enter the spirit of the Christmas season (which starts on 7 December) by lighting candles, displaying nativity scenes in their homes, and putting up Christmas trees. They may line parks and sidewalks with candles, often illuminating large parts of a town or city. On 16 December, a *novena* (ritual prayer using a rosary) begins, lasting for 9 days. Midnight mass on Christmas Eve is heavily attended.[67, 68]

Carnaval

During the 40-day period (Lent) that precedes Easter, which falls in March or April, different events take place. *Carnaval*, an elaborate festival complete with music, parades, and street dancing, precedes the start of Lent. *Carnaval* is an important event in certain cities, such as Barranquilla. UNESCO has declared this four-day Barranquilla event a World Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.[69, 70]

Exchange 1: Will you be celebrating carnaval?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating carnaval?	estaaraan selebraando el kaarnaavaal?
Local:	Yes!	see

Carnaval Mask
Flickr / Michele Mariani

Buildings of Worship

Many Colombian Catholic churches are old, and reflect architectural styles of Spain's Medieval and Renaissance churches.[71] Colonists created religious altarpieces and intricately decorated baroque churches and monasteries. Many of these buildings still exist throughout Colombia. At the Capilla del Sagrario, a 17th century colonial church in Bogotá, the stone construction is well preserved. The interior reflects a Spanish-Moorish style of decorating, and paintings by Gregorio Vasquez de Arce y Ceballos, a famed colonial artist, adorn the walls.[72, 73, 74] Bogotá's largest church is the Catedral Primada, which many believe occupies the site of the city's first mass in 1538. The church has been reconstructed several times, most recently between 1807 and 1823. It is plainly decorated and holds the tomb of the city's founder, Jiménez de Quesada.[75, 76]

Bogotá's oldest church is the Iglesia de San Francisco, in use since 1556. It is plain on the outside but elaborately ornamented on the inside, containing a gilded altar built in the 17th century.[77] Another church of historical interest in Bogotá is the Iglesia de La Veracruz. Because many patriots executed by the Spaniards during the independence struggle are buried there, the church is also called the National Pantheon.[78, 79] Renowned scientist José de Caldas is one of the martyred patriots buried beneath the church.[80]

Famous Catholic churches are found in other cities and the countryside. In the town of Buga (outside Cali), stands the Basilica del Señor de los Milagros. Sources estimate that around 2 million people travel there on pilgrimage annually.[81] In the colonial city of Popayán, between Quito and Bogotá, several churches were built in colonial style. In 1983, an earthquake destroyed all but one. Major reconstruction of the city followed, and churches and other historical sites were rebuilt.[82]

Church and Religious Art
Flickr / Juan Francisco Vargas Gómez

Near the border with Ecuador, outside the city of Ipiales, is the Las Lajas Cathedral, built high across a gorge of the Guaritara River. This 20th century cathedral replaced an older chapel on the site where a young Amerindian is reported to have seen a vision of the Virgin Mary on a rock slab.[83]

Behavior in Places of Worship

Dress modestly and avoid wearing skimpy, revealing, or dirty clothing. The dress code includes clean shirts and trousers for men, and skirts or long pants with blouses or sweaters for women. Women's clothing should be loose-fitting, and skirts should not be above the knee.[84, 85]

Exchange 2: Must I take off my shoes?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the church?	debo keetaarme los zapatos dentro de laa eegleseeya?
Local:	No.	no

Exchange 3: May I enter the church?

Soldier:	May I enter the church?	pwedo entraar en la eegleseeya?
Local:	Yes.	see

In general, when visiting any church or building of worship, follow the protocols posted or do what the locals do. Once inside, remain silent if people are praying or meditating, because talking can interrupt prayers or be interpreted as rude behavior. Do not bring food or drink into a church, synagogue, or mosque, and do not take photographs inside places of worship without permission.[86, 87, 88]

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Religion: Chapter 2 Assessment

1. **Approximately half of Colombian Protestants are members of Pentecostal denominations.**
   True

   The Colombian Evangelical Council estimates that 15% of Colombians are Protestant. Approximately 50% of Colombian Protestants are members of Pentecostal denominations.

2. **Less than 2% of Colombians practice religions other than Christianity.**
   True

   Other sources estimate that 1.3% of the population follow religions such as Judaism (approximately 5,000 members) or Islam (approximately 10,000 members).

3. **In the 20th century, Roman Catholicism ceased to be Colombia's official national religion.**
   True

   In 1973, Catholicism ceased to be Colombia's official national religion, according to an agreement (the Concordat) that the Vatican and the Colombian government signed. In 1991, the new national constitution declared Colombia a secular state with no official church or religion.

4. **Carnaval is an elaborate festival associated with Christmas.**
   False

   Carnaval, an elaborate festival complete with music, parades, and street dancing, precedes Lent and the Easter holiday. Carnaval is an important event in certain cities, such as Barranquilla.

5. **Elements of religion and religious practices are evident in the daily life of most Colombians.**
   True

   About 85% of Colombian Catholics attend mass and observe the Catholic sacraments. Other examples of religion often find their way into daily practice. Many common phrases have religious undertones. Many Colombian homes have special niches in the wall which hold religious icons representing specific saints.

Colombian Cowboy
Flickr / Tomás Castrillón

Chapter 3 Traditions

Introduction

Colombians are a generous, courteous, outgoing, and friendly people who take great pride in their country. The persistent violence in Colombia has left people with a passion for life with their feet squarely rooted in the here and now. Colombians have a sense of humor and enjoy joking with each other. The most recent Happy Planet Index rated them as the third-happiest people on earth.[1,]

The country has strong class divisions and regional distinctions. Spanish colonizers passed on to the New World a worldview in which white citizens of Europe were privileged and all others were accorded status by their race and position in the hierarchy. These ideas of social order mingled with those of indigenous and immigrant peoples (many of whom arrived involuntarily), and were fundamental in shaping the enduring cultural values of the new colony. Geographically isolated indigenous groups protected their traditions and standards, reinforcing the stratified class system that became so entrenched.[2, 3] Although Colombians are often referred to by their regional origins, and they are sometimes classified by their color, dress, diet, speech, and social class. These social divisions are a major part of the culture of Colombians, whose societal inequality is one of the highest in the world.[4, 5, 6]

Honor and hierarchy are important values in Colombian culture. *Culto*, a Colombian code of conduct, requires that people behave in certain formal ways if they wish to show or gain respect. Colombians, in general, highly value formal manners and appreciate hierarchy as it is interpreted in Colombian society.[7, 8] *Culto* requires the appropriate use of titles or formal address when speaking to others in order to avoid loss of face. It is important in Colombian culture to not presume intimacy in ways that are inappropriate; people are expected instead to hold to a higher standard of formality. To violate this precept communicates disrespect.[9, 10]

Greetings, Politeness, and Communication

Greetings

Colombians, both women and men, customarily greet foreigners the first time with a firm handshake. Women who are close friends may grasp each other's forearms and offer a kiss on the cheek.[11, 12] Between men who are friends, an embrace, a hug, or a kiss on the cheek is often customary.[13, 14] More formality is required among people who do not know each other well. Colombians tend to take their time and extend the greeting

Colombian Politeness to Tourist
Flickr / dfinnecy

by following it with pleasant comments and questions. It is considered bad form to rush too quickly through a greeting. Showing only slight interest in the people one meets is a sign of disrespect.[15, 16]

Colombians tend to be reserved and formal during first introductions.[17] Conversational exchanges should always be polite and not overly direct, with speakers taking care not to offend by the way in which they speak. It is important to maintain harmony through nonverbal or indirect communication.[18, 19]

Exchange 4: Good evening!

Soldier:	Good evening!	bwenaas taardes
Local:	Good evening!	bwenaas taardes

Exchange 5: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	komo aanda laa faameeleeya?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	todos estaan byen, graaseeyaas

Avoid criticizing aspects of Colombia or its culture. Visitors should not talk about politics, drug cartels or drug dealing, or terrorism. Avoid talking about the Panama Canal or how the United States acquired it, since many Colombians believe that Panama was taken from them illegally. Refrain from making critical remarks about things of which one may disapprove, such as bullfighting.[20]

Eye Contact, Personal Space, and Titles

It is appropriate to maintain close but relaxed eye contact. Looking away conveys disinterest or rudeness.[21] Compared to North Americans, Colombian people tend to stand closer to those with whom they are speaking. Backing away may be perceived as impolite.[22, 23] Touching is not common among people in more formal settings such as business meetings. In more informal situations, however, and among friends or family members, touching is more common.[24]

Exchange 6: Good afternoon.

Soldier:	Good afternoon.	bwenaas taardes
Local:	Good afternoon.	bwenaas taardes

Exchange 7: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	komo estaa oosted?
Local:	Fine, very well.	byen, mooy byen

Rely on formal address (the equivalent of Mr. and Mrs., along with the family name) when meeting and conversing with Colombians. Professional titles such as doctor (*doctor/doctora*), professor (*professor/profesora*), architect (*arquitecto/arquitecta*), or lawyer (*abogado/abogada*), should be used preceding the surname.[25, 26] The terms "*Don*" (for men) and "*Doña*" (for females) are still in use, even though many regard them as old-fashioned. *Doña* should only be used before a first name.[27]

Exchange 8: Hi, Mr. Martinez.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Martinez.	ola senyor maarteenes
Local:	Hello!	ola
Soldier:	How are you? All is well?	komo estaa? todo byen?
Local:	Yes.	see

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Gift-Giving

Colombians invite guests whom they trust into their homes, a courtesy that a visitor from another culture should appreciate. Most sources say that punctuality is not too important, and it is acceptable to be between 15 and 30 minutes late for a social event.[28, 29]

It is customary, but not expected, for visitors to bring a gift when invited into a Colombian's home.[30] Gifts should be modest and nicely wrapped.[31, 32]

Exchange 9: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	este Regaalo es paara oosted
Local:	Thank you.	graaseeyaas

Suitable gifts include chocolates, nuts, good quality pastries, and fruit. Potted plants and flowers are also thoughtful gifts, with the exception of marigolds and lilies, which are used for funerals. Roses are usually well received. If a child is in the home, bring a present that is age appropriate, such as candy or a game manufactured in the United States. Generally, the recipient will open the gift privately rather than in front of guests.[33, 34]

Exchange 10: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	en verdaad le aagredesko soo ospeetaaleedaad
Local:	Don't mention it.	nee lo mensyone

Dining Etiquette

At a Colombian table, guests are often served first. At the dinner table one should wait to be seated by the host or hostess. Guests are often seated to the right of the host, who commonly sits at the head of the table. The host extends an invitation to start eating after everyone has been served by announcing "*buen provecho.*" During the meal, guests should keep their hands visible, try all the food that is offered, and refrain from putting elbows on the table. Diners follow the continental style of holding utensils, holding one's knife in the right hand and the fork in the left. All food, even fruit, is eaten using utensils, although lettuce is

never cut. Instead, fold lettuce leaves with the knife and fork so that they can be eaten with a fork. During the meal, the utensils do not switch hands. It is impolite to leave the table before everyone has finished. Politeness dictates that one should politely refuse offers of second helpings. When offered again, diners should accept if they are still hungry.[35, 36, 37]

Exchange 11: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	komo se yaama este plateeyo?
Local:	This is Sancocho.	esto es sankocho

It is considered good manners to leave just a little bit of food on the plate. This communicates satisfaction with the food to the host or hostess. To signal that one is finished, lay the knife and fork across the plate. Finally, do not use toothpicks at the table.[38]

Exchange 12: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	la komeeda saabe taan Reeka
Local:	Thank you.	graaseeyaas

Exchange 13: What ingredients are used?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make Ajiaco?	ke eengredeeyentes se oosaaron paara aaser el aahyaako?
Local:	Chicken, potatoes, garlic, cream and capers and pieces of tender corn on the cob and an aromatic herb guasca.	poyo, paapaas, aaho, krema de leche ee aalcaapaaRaas enkoorteedaas, ee maasorkaas de maayees tyerno ee la yerba aaromaateeka yaamaada gwaaskaa

Eating and Types of Food

Eating Patterns

Colombians eat three meals a day. Breakfast (*el desayuno*) may be light consisting of juice, coffee, and bread, especially in cities. Popular options for more substantial fare, particularly in rural regions, include *caldo de costilla* (rib soup), *calentado* (a mixture of rice, red beans, eggs, and plantains), and *changua* (potato and egg soup).[39, 40, 41, 42] Families rarely breakfast together, except on weekends.[43, 44, 45] Lunch (*el almuerzo)*, the

main meal of the day, is generally eaten between noon and 2 p.m. Many Colombians bring their lunch from home although inexpensive serving full fares are popular. A traditional lunch involves soup, salad, a main protein dish, a drink, and a dessert.[46, 47] Cold lunches are not common.[48] Dinner (*la cena*) is generally served between 7—8 p.m. Families usually eat dinner together. For many Colombians, dinner is the least important meal of the day. Dinners are often light and may consist of bread and cheese accompanied by a cup of coffee. More substantial fare consists of rice paired with meat, chicken, or fish and a salad. In urban centers, dinner may be the main meal.[49, 50, 51]

Ajiaco Soup
Flickr / Adriana

Types of Food

Colombian cuisine reflects the diversity of its immigrant populations and regional variations.[52] Colombian food often contains meat served with rice and potatoes.[53] In spite of the tropical climate, soups are often eaten with a meal or as a meal.[54] Typical dishes include *bandeja paisa*, grilled steak, fried pork rinds, and chorizo sausage on a bed of beans and rice, topped with a fried egg garnished with avocado and fried banana chips. *Ajiaco* is a soup made from several kinds of potatoes, corn, chicken, and a local spice called *guasca*.[55, 56] *Cocido* is a traditional stew that includes up to 20 varieties of vegetables and various types of potatoes.[57]

Coastal foods include fish and seafood, often served with rice flavored with coconut milk. A*rroz con chipi-chipi*, a rice dish with tiny clams, is popular. In the Llanos region, whole roasted calves are often cooked over an open spit for several hours. *Lechona*, or roast suckling pig, is a common meal in rural areas.[58, 59]

Common desserts include sweet stewed figs (*brevas*) served with *ariquipe*, made from sugar dissolved in milk and cooked to the consistency of toffee.[60] Other popular desserts are *natilla*, a custard-like dessert, *torta María Luísa* (a citrus-flavored layer cake), and *dulce de leche flan*, a custard dessert with a layer of caramel.[61, 62, 63]

Exchange 14: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	la komeeda estaa mooy saabrosa
Local:	It's Ajiaco.	es aahyaako

Common beverages include coffee, beer, bottled water, carbonated drinks, and juices. Coffee is prepared in a number of ways: *tinto* (strong coffee served in a small cup), *café con leche* (with milk added), or *pintado* (half coffee and half milk).[64, 65]

Dress Codes

Colombians generally dress conservatively and are well groomed. Residents in coastal towns often dress less formally than inland urban residents.[66, 67] In the cities, people usually wear fashionable clothing and do not usually dress casually for social events. Suits with white shirts and ties (not bow ties) are common for men. Coastal residents wear lighter-colored suits and may also wear the traditional *guayabera* (embroidered dress shirts). Women normally wear dresses and often wear more makeup and jewelry than women in the United States. Younger people dress more casually, preferring jeans. People generally wear footwear at all times, unless they are walking on the beach.[68, 69, 70]

Indigenous people often wear traditional clothing. The traditional hat, the *sombrero hvueltiao*, was originally worn to protect farmers from the sun. Today it is a national symbol.[71] [72] Men and women in cooler regions wear a wool cape known as a *ruana*. Traditionally, peasant women wear *pañolones* or fringed shawls. Skirts, called *polleras*, are made from either cotton or wool, depending on the season, and feature embroidery and ruffles. Large ribbons embellish the

Little Girl Smartly Dressed
Flickr / Louis Vest

waist. These *polleras* are often regarded as a family heirloom passed from generation to generation.[73]

Exchange 15: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	pwedo oosaar esto?
Local:	Yes.	see

If the occasion is a business event, then a higher level of formality is necessary. Both men and women try to dress expensively on these occasions. Women wear suits or slightly more casual dresses, making sure their accessories match the outfit. They avoid skirts that are short, instead wearing them at or below the knee, and typically choose closed-toed shoes over sandals. Their hair is styled and their makeup skillfully applied.[74, 75]

Exchange 16: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	komo debo de vesteer?
Local:	Wear modest comfortable clothing.	pongaase Ropaa komoda ee modesta

Ibero-American Theater Festival
Flickr / Felipe Chavez

Non-religious Celebrations and Holidays

Colombia celebrates a number of civil public holidays marked by closures of banks and government offices. The first official holiday of the year is New Year's Day (1 January 2016). This is followed by Labor Day (1 May), Independence Day (20 July), Battle of Boyacá Day (7 August), Columbus Day (17 October), and Cartagena Independence Day (14 November 2016).[76] Battle of Boyacá Day commemorates the day in 1819 when Colombia achieved a complete break with Spain through a military victory led by General Simón Bolívar.[77] Colombians celebrate Columbus Day (*Día de la Raza*) on 12 October in recognition of the first European visit to the Americas. The date of the actual celebration can change to accommodate a Monday celebration. The purpose of this flexibility is to create a holiday of three days—a weekend followed by a public holiday.[78, 79] Cartagena Independence Day honors independence for Cartagena, which was the first

city to break with Spanish rule. In Cartagena, this historic event is marked with street fairs, parades, and general celebrating.[80]

Each year, Colombia sponsors many public celebrations in which Colombians and visitors from other countries participate. The Ibero-American Theater Festival of Bogotá is one of the world's largest performing arts festivals. The biannual festival attracts thousands of people and a large number of theater and performance companies from around the world. Started in 1988, the festival features dancing, classical music concerts, lectures and workshops on the arts, circus, pantomime, and puppet shows.[81, 82] Other fairs and music festivals take place throughout the country, featuring salsa dancing, bullfighting, masquerades, parades, and other events.[83, 84, 85]

Dos and Don'ts

Do be aware of all official regulations or laws and follow them.

Do beckon using your whole hand, palm down, rather than pointing.

Do try to sample everything on your plate.

Do maintain direct eye contact when speaking with another.

Do accept invitations to bullfights.

Do not criticize or show disrespect to Colombian officials, citizens, or their country.

Do not criticize or show disrespect to the Roman Catholic Church in Colombia.

Do not use two fingers to indicate the length of an object. This is an obscene gesture in Colombia.

Do not make the "OK" sign because it is considered vulgar in Colombia.

Do not yawn in public because it can be seen as rude.

Do not stare at or engage in overt expressions of affection with the opposite sex.

Do not make the A-OK signal, the circular curling of the thumb and forefinger. Its meaning in Colombia differs from that in the United States.

Do not point upward with the middle finger. It is obscene in the United States and equally so in Colombia.

Do not use obscene or indecent language within earshot of Colombian citizens. Many may be familiar with American slang.

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Traditions: Chapter 3 Assessment

1. **Colombians are a shy, serious, and introverted people who find little to enjoy in life.**
   False

   Colombians are a generous, courteous, outgoing, and friendly people. They appear to have a passion for life with their feet squarely rooted in the here and now. The most recent Happy Planet Index rated them as the third-happiest people on earth.

2. **Social divisions remain an important element of Colombian society, making it one of the most unequal in the world.**
   True

   Colombians are often referred to by their regional origins and are sometimes classified by their color, dress, diet, speech, and social class. These social divisions are a major part of the culture of Colombians, whose societal inequality is one of the highest in the world.

3. **Colombians are generally reserved when meeting strangers.**
   True

   Colombians tend to be fairly reserved and formal during first introductions. Conversational exchanges should always be polite and not overly direct.

4. **Titles are rarely used when meeting and speaking with Colombians.**
   False

   Formal address (e.g., Mr. and Mrs. and family name) should be used when meeting and conversing with Colombians. If a professional title is known, the visitor should use the title before the surname.

5. **Arriving up to 30 minutes late for a social event is considered appropriate.**
   True

   Colombians have a more relaxed view of time, and punctuality is not particularly important. It is acceptable to be between 15 and 30 minutes late for a social event.

City Street Musicians
Flickr / Omar Uran

Chapter 4 Urban Life

Introduction

Colombia was a predominantly rural nation until recently.[1] At the beginning of the 20th century, Colombia's population was only about 4 million, whereas its current population is approximately 46.7 million.[2, 3] By the late 1960s, much of the transition to an urbanized nation had been completed and today, 76.4% of the population lives in cities.[4, 5] Colombia is now one of Latin America's most urbanized nations.[6] Most of the urban growth occurred in Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla, which now contain 30% of the entire population and are Colombia's primary industrial centers.[, 7, 8]

Little of Colombia's population growth was the result of immigration.[9] Much of the rapid urban growth was caused by the armed conflict and guerrilla wars in the countryside, which fueled a major rural to urban migration. Colombia has nearly six million registered displaced persons.[10, 11, 12] The urban areas most affected by IDP influxes are Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla.[13] This uncontrolled growth has created a number of social, economic, and environmental challenges for the nation and its cities.[14]

Urban Problems

The problem of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing the violence in the countryside has placed particular strains on Colombia's cities. Between 7% and 11% of Colombians are IDPs. Most IDPs live in informal settlements or shantytowns built on the urban fringes. Unemployment, which is already among the highest in Latin America, is worsened by these forced migrants, many of whom are unable to find work.[15, 16, 17]

Housing shortages and poor quality housing are a serious concern. Many new immigrants are poor, illiterate, and forced to live in informal settlements. Informal settlements occupy 15% of the land area in Bogotá, 21% in Medellín, and 28% in Barranquilla. Nearly 67% of the residents live in slums.[18, 19, 20, 21]

Personal safety and security are among the most significant worries faced by urban residents. As the armed conflict between the rebel groups, paramilitary groups, and the government escalates, it often spills over into the cities in a variety of forms of urban violence.[22, 23] Crime rates in Colombia's cities are escalating rapidly. More than 1,300 criminal gangs operate in Bogotá.[24] Homicide rates are rising in other cities including Cali.[25]

Displaced Persons
Settlement Flickr / chiaramar

Pollution of all types is growing in the urban areas. Roughly 20% of urban residents lack access to proper sewage. Garbage is often thrown into water channels and is a major cause of urban flooding.[26, 27] It also contributes to water pollution. Only tap water in the nation's largest cities is potable.[28] Other significant sources of water pollution include mining and pesticide runoff.[29] Air pollution is serious, particularly in Bogotá. One of Latin America's most polluted cities, Bogotá's altitude worsens the air pollution, of which 70% comes from vehicles. Traffic congestion in the city is so bad that it can take as long as 1 hour to go five miles.[30, 31, 32] In 2010, Colombia's environment minister reported that each year, 6,000 Colombians die from air pollution.[33] Other sources of pollution include fossil fuels and natural gas burned to heat residential and commercial dwellings.[34, 35, 36]

Coffee Company in Bogota
Flickr / Jack Zalium

Urban Economy

Industry and manufacturing account for approximately 36% of Colombia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ about 21% of the labor force.[37] Manufacturing is heavily concentrated in five principal cities that account for more than two-thirds of all manufacturing output.[38] The service sector dominates the economy, accounting for nearly 58% of GDP and employing 62% of the population.[39]

Exchange 17: Are you the only person who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	es oosted la ooneeka persona en soo kaasa ke traabaaha?
Local:	Yes.	see

Although the number of urban poor has declined in recent years, approximately 27% of urban residents lived below the poverty line in 2010.[40] Many of the urban poor are IDPs, who account for as much as 12% of the urban population. Most of them are rural people with little experience living in cities. Their education levels are low, averaging about 5 years, but about 11% have received no formal schooling. Their skills are often a poor match for the needs of the urban economic sector, and unemployment rates for them are higher than for the urban population in general. The work that IDPs do find typically pays 30% less than other jobs, rarely comes with benefits, and is commonly part-time.[41, 42, 43]

Colombia's urban unemployment, which reached 10.5% in 2015, is driving Colombians into informal employment.[44] The rate of informal employment is between 40% and 60%.[45, 46] The cities with the highest rates of informal employment include the northern cities of Cucuta (72%) and Monteria (63%). Bogotá (44%) and Medellín (47%) have the lowest rates.[47]

Urban Healthcare

Colombia's healthcare system provides universal coverage. All formal-sector employees are required to buy national health insurance. Health insurance for the poor and unemployed is funded by a federal and local tax structure.[48] Increased healthcare access has raised life expectancy to 79 for women and 72 for men and lowered infant mortality, but maternal mortality levels remain among the highest in Latin America.[49, 50]

Young Patient
Flickr / Global Opportunity Garden

Exchange 18: Is the doctor in, sir?

Soldier:	Is the doctor in, sir?	estaa el doktor, senyor?
Local:	No, he's not here.	no, no estaa

Urban medical care is adequate although with significant variations in quality. There are approximately 14 doctors for every 10,000 people, and most doctors are located in the cities.[51, 52, 53] Emergency rooms are often overcrowded. Private healthcare facilities require payment before treatment, and though some urban facilities accept credit cards, many doctors require cash payments.[54, 55] Among the urban poor, there are sometimes outbreaks of infectious diseases including dysentery, cholera, and typhoid. Malaria, dengue fever, dengue hemorrhagic fever, and yellow fever are not uncommon.[56, 57]

Exchange 19: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	saabe ke paasa?
Local:	No.	no

Three levels of hospital services are available. The primary level includes hospitals and health centers in small towns and large cities. They provide outpatient care; basic surgical, x-ray, and laboratory services; and sometimes limited emergency care.[58]

Exchange 20: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	aay ospeetaal por aakee serka?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	see, en el sentro de laa syoodaad

The secondary level of service includes specialized healthcare and a higher level of diagnostic equipment. Tertiary facilities, located in cities, have the highest level of infrastructure and the most modern equipment.[59, 60]

Education

Although 95% of the population is literate, the quality of public education is low.[61, 62] Public education in kindergarten, primary education (grades 1–5), and the first 4 years of secondary education (grades 6–9) are free and mandatory. Optional secondary school, referred to as vocational school, offers a selection of specialized training in industrial education during 2 additional years.[63, 64] After completing this course of studies, students receive a high school diploma (*bachillerato*). They can then complete technical or business studies, which usually last 3 years, or attend university through the graduate level.[65, 66, 67] Only 62% of those entering primary school completed sixth grade. Students in urban areas completed an average of only 3.7 years of schooling.[68]

Bogota Schoolyard
Flickr / Tijs Zwinkels

Exchange 21: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to this school?	soos neenyos vaan aa esta eskwela?
Local:	Yes.	see

Colombia has a 198-day, two-semester academic year. For most of the country, the school year begins in February and the first semester ends in June. The students have June off and resume in July. The second semester ends in November and the students are off during December and January. In the southern states of Valle, Cauca, Nariño, and Putumayo, the first semester runs from September to December and the second semester from January to June.[69]

Most universities in Colombia are located in Bogotá, although some have been established in other large cities. Public universities in Bogotá include the Francisco José de Caldas District University and the National University of Colombia. Among the private universities, 35% are Catholic and the remainder are nonsectarian.[70, 71]

Private schools are generally of higher quality. Although most secondary students historically enrolled in private schools, today only between 33% and 40% do. Nearly 18% of primary students, 40% of secondary students, and 60% of higher education students attend private schools.[72, 73, 74]

Restaurants and Marketplaces

Restaurants

Colombia has exploded onto the gastronomical scene with world-class chefs and restaurants featuring a variety of international cuisine.[75, 76] Typical Colombian fare, *comida criolla*, is available at restaurants, sidewalk cafes, and street vendors.[77] Each region has local specialties ranging from seafood on the coast to guinea pig in the Andean regions.[78, 79]

Ajiaco Soup
Flickr / Adriana

Exchange 22: I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some hot soup.	me goostaareeya oona sopa kaalyente
Local:	Of course.	klaaro ke see

Exchange 23: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	todaaveeya seerven desaayoono?
Local:	Yes.	see

Popular drinks include coffee, fruit juice, soft drinks, and tea. Alcoholic beverages include beer, wine, and the rum cocktail, *canelazo*.[80, 81]

Exchange 24: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	ke teepo de kaarne es esta?
Local:	Beef.	kaarne

Exchange 25: I would like coffee or tea.

Soldier:	I would like coffee or tea.	me goostaareeya oon kaafe o te
Local:	Of course.	segooro ke see

Table service is the typical eating arrangement. It is customary for diners to personally thank chefs and waiters for their service.[82, 83] To catch the waiter's attention, politely make eye contact because waving or calling is impolite.[84] The person making the invitation normally pays.[85]

Restaurant Meal
Flickr / CrossMedia Colombia

Exchange 26: Put this all on one bill.

Soldier:	Put this all on one bill.	pongaalo todo en laa meesma faaktooraa
Local:	Very good.	mooy byen

Exchange 27: Please bring me the total bill.

Soldier:	Please bring me the total bill.	me daa el totaal de lo ke debo en laa faaktoora, por faavor
Local:	Yes, of course.	see, por soopwesto

Leaving a tip of at least 10% is a standard practice in restaurants. The tip may already be included in the bill.[86, 87, 88]

Exchange 28: Where is your restroom?

Soldier:	Where is your restroom?	donde estaa soo serveesyo?
Local:	That room to your left, just over there.	es aakel kwaarto aa soo eeskyerda aayaa no maas

Street Vendors

Inexpensive food is available at street stalls, which offer a variable quality of food. These stalls may be convenient for employees who do not have time to go home for a meal. One can purchase hardy fare such as tamales and plates of *arroz con pollo* (chicken with rice), often sold as a *comida corriente* (quick meal) for a set price. Popular cornmeal cakes (*arepas*), hotdogs, empanadas, and fruit are readily available from street vendors. Shoppers can also purchase drinks here.[89, 90, 91]

Exchange 29: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	tyenen postre?
Local:	Yes, we have rice with cocoa.	see, tenemos aaRos kon koko

Marketplace

Many markets, small shops, and outdoor selling stalls can be found in large cities. They sell a wide range of products and handicrafts, including carvings of soapstone, crafts made by Indian tribes, silver, gold, leather, and souvenirs. Precious stones, including emeralds, are also available for sale, especially in Bogotá.[92, 93, 94]

Exchange 30: Do you sell leather?

Soldier:	Do you sell leather?	vende oosted kwero?
Local:	Yes, of course.	klaaro ke see

Family Market Stall
Flickr / Juan Diego Velasco

Bargaining is an expected practice in the marketplace. It is a form of social interaction and should be conducted cheerfully yet not carried on too long. It is always possible to walk away from a transaction and either come back later if still interested, or not at all if the price seems greater than the value.[95, 96]

Exchange 31: Is the market nearby?

Soldier:	Is the market nearby?	aay oon merkaado serka?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	see, por aaya aa la derecha

Store hours in the cities are generally between 11 a.m. and 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday, although in the warmer climates, shops may open as early as 9 a.m. Stores are commonly closed on Sunday.[97, 98] Outdoor flea markets, on the other hand, are open every day of the week including public holidays.[99]

Exchange 32: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	kwaanto maas va estaar aakee?
Local:	Three more hours.	tres oraas maas

Money and ATMs

Colombia's official unit of currency is the Colombian peso (COP). In December 2015, USD 1 was approximately equal to COP 3,315.[100] Carrying large amounts of money is not advisable. ATM machines are readily available. U.S. dollars are not widely accepted for purchases. As much as 25% of the world's counterfeit U.S. dollars probably originated in Cali. The large number of counterfeit bills available throughout the country makes it a bad idea to purchase from money changers on the street. Instead, it is best to change at banks or the numerous *casas de cambio* (authorized money changers) throughout the cities.[101]

Credit cards, particularly Visa and MasterCard, are widely accepted throughout the nation. Even some street vendors accept them, as do most hotels. Be vigilant when using ATM machines because they have been a favored spot for robberies. To reduce the risk of robbery, use an ATM in a protected location, such as inside a shopping mall. Be aware that credit card fraud, including cloning, is relatively common.[102, 103]

Exchange 33: Do you accept U.S. dollars?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. dollars?	aakseptaan dolaares?
Local:	No, we accept only pesos.	no, solo se aakseptaan peso

Exchange 34: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	me da senseeyo por esto?
Local:	No.	no

Transportation and Traffic

Buses

Riding the buseta
Flickr / Eli Duke

Within the cities, public transportation is one option for getting around. U.S. government personnel, however, are prohibited from using any public transportation in Colombia due to security concerns.[104] Thefts and assaults are frequent occurrences on urban buses.[105] Both public and private-sector buses and minibuses operate in the cities, including outlying areas.[106, 107] The main cities in Colombia are well served by buses.

Busetas are the cheapest option but often travel at high speeds, increasing the likelihood of accidents. *Colectivos* are small buses that depart only when full. TransMilenio buses carry 160 passengers, although only 42 can be seated at any time.[108, 109] Buses have a history of accidents and of being attacked by terrorists, particularly the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).[110] U.S. officials and their families are not allowed to use bus transportation within or between Colombian cities.[111]

Exchange 35: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	vendra oon bus pronto?
Local:	Yes.	see

Taxis

Taxis are another option for travel in urban areas. Although generally safe, passengers should remain alert and avoid hailing taxis on the street.[112, 113] Shared taxis are an option for travelers in the cities. Passengers should check to be sure the taxi has a meter running for their trip. Never enter a taxi if another passenger is onboard because this may pose a risk of robbery. Use only licensed taxis with an official badge in the window or on the dashboard.[114, 115, 116]

Taxi Accident
Flickr / Juan Felipe Rubio

Exchange 36: Where can I get a taxi?

Soldier:	Where can I get a taxi?	donde pwedo konsegeer oon taaksee?
Local:	Over there.	aaya

Cars

Colombia has a well-developed road system, but the terrain is difficult and driving is slow in the mountains.[117] Because of heavy traffic, driving uncertainties, and hazards, this is not a recommended means of travel in either the cities or the countryside.[118] Because of security concerns, U.S. government officials and their families are prohibited from traveling by road between most major Colombian cities.[119] In case of an accident, drivers must remain at the scene and refrain from moving their vehicles because either action may be regarded as an admission of guilt by the police.[120, 121]

Exchange 37: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	donde pwedo aalkeelaar oon koche?
Local:	Downtown.	en el sentro

Many roads are unpaved or in poor condition. Driving is dangerous because drivers generally do not follow speed or safety laws, which are largely unenforced. Drivers often drive aggressively and without lights turned on at night. Pedestrians as well as drivers are at risk from these conditions.[122]

Exchange 38: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	ke kaaReteraa yegaa aal aaeropwerto?
Local:	The one heading east.	laa ke vaa aal estey

Planes and Trains

The most efficient way to travel in Colombia is by air. Air travel is safer and more convenient, with most domestic flights taking less than an hour. Seats on many routes are in high demand so travelers should always book in advance.[123] There is no passenger rail service in Colombia. The only rail metro system is in Medellín. There are, however, several sightseeing rail excursions. One route runs into the savannah country outside of the capital. The Tren Touristoco Café y Azúcar transports day passengers from Cali to Buga, La Tebaida, and Cumbre.[124]

Exchange 39: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	aay estaasyon de tren serka?
Local:	No.	no

Domestic Air Travel
Flickr / Joao Carlos Medau

Street Crimes and Solicitations

Crime and Security

Crime is a problem throughout the nation. Petty crime, including pick-pocketing and purse snatching, are common.[125, 126] Most nonviolent crime includes theft, burglaries, and credit card theft.[127]

Violence is a serious concern, particularly in urban areas including the capital. The most common types of crime include muggings and assaults, often involving guns or knives. Criminals sometimes pose as police officers and rob victims. Food or drinks in nightclubs or bars are sometimes spiked with drugs, after which victims are robbed. Criminals sometimes spray paper handouts with chemicals that can disable travelers. This tactic has been used on public buses, in restaurants, and in bars. Passengers in taxis have been victims of robbery, especially when traveling alone or hailing a cab on the street.[128]

Colombia has the highest rate of kidnappings in the world and many are often carried out by the rebel groups FARC or the ELN (National Liberation Army). Such crimes are more common in rural areas but they do occur in cities. Foreigners are often preferred targets because the ransom to be gained is generally higher than for a Colombian.[129, 130, 131]

Dealing with Beggars

Many beggars live in the large cities of Colombia. They often move from poor, rural areas to cities in search of jobs, and end up begging for food and money when they cannot find work. It is common for people of all ages, including women and young children, to approach visitors riding in taxis or walking on the street and ask for money.[132, 133] Beggars in Colombia tend to be polite, except on the Caribbean coast, where they are more aggressive.[134]

To avoid attracting the attention of beggars, visitors should avoid wearing flashy jewelry or expensive watches or clothing. It is best to ignore the beggars if possible and not give out money. If other beggars are around, they may quickly congregate if they see someone handing out money.[135]

Unauthorized Entry
Flickr / David Gómez

Homeless Family
Flickr / Trevor Schwellnus

Even after a visitor communicates disinterest in buying something, a beggar or seller may continue to insist on making a sale. If this happens, just decline the offer. The best solution can be to simply say "I'm sorry, I have no money" and just keep walking, avoiding eye contact.[136]

Exchange 40: Give me money.

Local:	Give me money.	deme deenero
Soldier:	I don't have any.	no tengo

Exchange 41: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	por faavor, kompreme aalgo
Soldier:	Sorry, I'm clean out.	lo syento, estoy leempyo

Urban Life: Endnotes

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Urban Life: Chapter 4 Assessment

1. **Much of Colombia's urban growth stems from a rural to urban migration of internally displaced persons (IDPs).**
    True

    Much of the rapid urban growth was caused by the armed conflict and guerrilla wars in the countryside, which fueled a major rural to urban migration. Most IDPs live in informal settlements or shantytowns built on the urban fringes.

2. **Criminal activity in Colombian cities has declined in recent years with the end of the big drug cartels.**
    False

    Crime rates in Colombia's cities are escalating rapidly. More than 1,300 criminal gangs operate in Bogotá.

3. **In Colombia, the government provides free healthcare to all citizens.**
    False

    All formal-sector employees are required to buy national health insurance. Health insurance for the poor and unemployed is funded by a federal and local tax structure.

4. **Within the cities, public transportation is one option for getting around.**
    True

    Both public and private-sector buses and minibuses operate in the cities, including outlying areas. But U.S. officials and their families are prohibited from using buses within or between Colombian cities because of security concerns.

5. **Bargaining should be avoided, even when purchasing from street vendors.**
    False

    Bargaining is an expected practice in the marketplace. It is a form of social interaction and should be conducted cheerfully yet not carried on too long.

Chapter 5 Rural Life

Introduction

Approximately 24% of the people in Colombia live in rural areas.[1] Rural life cannot be described without referring to the political conditions that have created economic hardship and instability throughout the country, especially in rural areas. Large numbers of small farmers have been driven off their land by the armed conflict that has prevailed since the 1970s, and many farmers have been pushed into the risky prospect of growing coca to ensure their economic survival.[2,3,4] Caught in an armed conflict that involves paramilitaries, guerrilla groups, and other illegal forces, the rural poor in Colombia have seen their village life severely interrupted for decades. Many villagers have migrated to cities, hoping to find jobs, safety, and stability.[5,6]

Despite significant gains in Colombia's fight against poverty, 43% of the rural population in 2013 lived in poverty.[7] Some estimates suggest that current rates of rural poverty may run as high as 60%.[8] Poverty is most extreme in the remote regions and in those areas where armed conflict is most active. Armed conflict and extreme poverty, combined with social injustices and serious inequity in land distribution, make sustainable progress extremely challenging. Poverty is not primarily caused by rural unemployment, which is relatively low (5.1% in 2014).[9,10] It is caused by the neglect of agricultural

resources (e.g., disused vast tracts of arable land), the armed conflict, and the unequal distribution of wealth and land.[11, 12]

Although approximately 48% of rural people still depend on agriculture for a living, it has lost its place as the primary income source in rural areas.[13, 14, 15] Many have given up their small plots of land to start their own microenterprises. New programs are assisting the development of rural entrepreneurs.[16, 17]

Rural dwellers have much more limited access than their urban counterparts to virtually all services, including healthcare, education, and social services. Persistently terrorized by armed conflict and narcotraffickers, rural residents live in fear, often being displaced and forced to abandon their land.[18, 19, 20, 21]

Land Tenure

Colombia's constitution is one of Latin America's most progressive in terms of rural and indigenous land reform but land tenure is considerably unequal.[22] More than half of the land is controlled by less than 1% of the population.[23] Efforts at redistribution remain mired in colonial legacy and civil violence. Policy changes have had little real impact and land tenure remains insecure, particularly for women and displaced persons.[24, 25]

Spraying Pesticides
Flickr / CIAT

The initial inequality of land distribution began when the Spanish colonization gave large tracts of land to influential families. During the early years of independence, significant tracts of land were controlled by governing elites. These large haciendas (*latifundos*) survived on cheap labor supplied by tenant farmers. By the early 20th century, this model failed and smaller farms became more prevalent.[26, 27] But by 2007, land ownership had become increasingly concentrated. In 2005, 22% of the land was state-owned, 52% under private ownership, 3% under the control of Afro-Colombian groups, and 23% under the control of indigenous communities.[28]

Since 1948, rural lands have changed hands violently because of the armed conflicts. The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) was created, in part, as a means for farmers to defend themselves against paramilitary units created by landholding elites. Between 1985 and 2005, more than 3 million peasants lost their land to the violence.[29, 30] Tribal groups have collective land use rights of as much as 30% of Colombia's land in *resguardos* (indigenous reserves), areas officially designated as indigenous lands. Whether they actually own the land or simply have access rights is unclear.[31] In 2012, there were nearly 4 million registered displaced persons and nearly 10 million acres of land that had been abandoned.[32]

Exchange 42: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	oosted es dwenyo de estey teReno?
Local:	No.	no

The government believes that peace depends on the restitution of abandoned or illegally seized land. Projects to return the land to previous owners and strengthen title for current small-farm holders are underway.[33, 34]

Brick Making Factory
Flickr / momentcaptured1

Rural Economy

Since 2000, agriculture has given way to a growing manufacturing sector. Agriculture, which made up nearly half the economy in the mid-20th century, now accounts for 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).[35, 36] Nevertheless, agriculture dominates the lives of rural Colombians, 65% of whom are involved in agriculture.[37] About 1.3 million rural Colombians are landless peasants. Approximately half are employed by medium- and large-sized farms.[38] But the low wages mean that agriculture is no longer the primary source of rural income.[39] Some experts agree that Colombia's economic woes stem from problems in the agriculture sector,

plagued by an underutilization of land. Only about 23% of land is currently under cultivation.[40] Colombia is the world's second-largest exporter of cut flowers and third-largest coffee producer in the world.[41, 42, 43] Other major crops include palm oil, cocoa, cassava, bananas, cotton, sugarcane, soybeans, rice, tobacco, and timber.[44, 45] Fisheries and aquaculture farms provide some work but this industry is underdeveloped.[46, 47, 48]

Among the rural population, 6% are engaged in manufacturing, 12% in tourism and commerce, and 12% in services.[49] Industry is growing and now accounts for approximately 21% of GDP.[50] Important products include beverages, cement, chemicals, electrical equipment, machinery, textiles, and pharmaceuticals. Colombia has a wealth of minerals including gold, silver, and platinum. Colombia is one of the world's top emerald producing nation.[51, 52] Colombia also has significant reserves of coal, natural gas, and petroleum.[53, 54, 55]

Rural Transportation

Rural land transportation in Colombia is affected by its diverse terrain, including rugged mountains and tropical rainforest. The extreme geographical divisions divide the country, making passage difficult between the regions. Although Colombia has a large network of roads, they are not always passable; only 12% of them are paved.[56, 57] Landslides frequently block the roads in mountainous areas, creating another difficulty.[58]

Chiva Bus
Flickr / Alejandro Serrano Durán

Road traffic cannot pass north beyond Colombia into Central America. The Pan-American Highway between Alaska and Cape Horn, Chile, breaks for approximately 160 km (99 mi) at the Darién Gap in Panama. On the Colombian side of this region, the land is covered by marsh and swampland created by the delta of the Atrato River. The Panamanian side consists of a rainforest in the midst of rugged, high mountains. Although numerous projects have begun construction of a road across this gap, for many reasons none has ever been completed.[59, 60, 61]

Exchange 43: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	konose mooy byen esta aarea?
Local:	Yes.	see

Driving on country roads can be hazardous and is not advisable for security reasons. Cars are subject, not only to theft, but to attack by rural guerrillas or others involved in conflicts or illegal actions.[62, 63] U.S. official personnel and their families are prohibited from traveling outside urban areas at night.[64] Rural roads are often unpaved, have numerous potholes, or are otherwise in poor condition, especially during heavy rains.[65, 66] Unmarked minefields pose additional risks to rural travel.[67]

Bus service is the main means of transportation between villages since there is no functioning passenger rail service. Travel is safest during the daylight hours.[68] In rural areas, open-air buses known as *chivas* are a common form of transportation, as are three-wheeled motorcycles. Both are often full with people and farm animals.[69]

Rural Healthcare

Colombia's healthcare system relies on government and private support. After the 1980s, the government role in providing healthcare became smaller. This change benefited urban areas more than rural, since most of the resources and training facilities are located in cities. Also, most trained medical personnel live in the cities and there is little reliable access to medical facilities in rural areas, especially for diagnostic services.[70, 71, 72]

U.S. Medical Assistance
Flickr / Official U.S. Navy Imagery

The most remote regions of the country lack access to medical care. Hospitals often lack the equipment, facilities are frequently understaffed, and administrative systems to support the change, and managed care has not been organized efficiently.[73, 74, 75]

Exchange 44: Can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	tengo el braaso fraaktooraado, me aayooda?
Local:	Sorry, I can't.	lo syento, no pwedo

Even where healthcare facilities are available in rural areas, many residents face challenges getting to the facility. Rural areas often lack ambulance service to bring the patient to the clinic or hospital or to transfer the patient. Onsite medical personnel may not have the skills to handle the medical condition, and patients sometimes lack the authorization to allow treatment.[76]

Violence from the drug trade and political fighting have caused the abandonment of many rural healthcare facilities, leaving people in the countryside without access.[77, 78] The armed conflict that has terrorized the countryside has created strong needs for psychological treatment for residents. These physical and psychological injuries have burdened health services and are likely to consume a large share of available resources.[79] In some rural areas, private agencies including Doctors Without Borders have tried to provide limited services including basic, reproductive, and mental healthcare, and occasional emergency medicine.[80, 81, 82]

Exchange 45: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	aay oona kleeneeka serka de aakee?
Local:	Yes, over there.	see, por aaya

Exchange 46: Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	esta hente le aamenasoh?
Local:	Yes.	see

Education

Public education from kindergarten through grade nine is free and mandatory for all children. Optional secondary school (vocational school) offers specialized training in industrial education for two additional years.[83, 84] After completing this course of studies, students receive a high school diploma (*bachillerato*). They can then complete technical or business studies, which usually last 3 years, or attend university through the graduate level.[85, 86, 87] Although Colombia's educational system requires students to attend school through secondary education, attendance often falls short of this goal.[88] Only 18% of

those starting primary school typically finish sixth grade and the average student completes only 1.7 years of education.[89] Rural children, on average, go to school for only half as long as those in urban areas.[90]

Rural students
Flickr / Buena Nota

A shortage of schools in the rural areas means that some families often live far from the nearest schools. Many rural schools suffer from a lack of qualified teachers, contributing to lower quality education.[91, 92] Further complicating the issue is a serious shortage of secondary schools, which are primarily located in urban areas.[93] Civil disorder in the countryside, especially before the recent peace treaty with the FARC rebels, makes it unsafe for children to attend school. Rural people cannot afford to remove their children from disruptive social conditions and send them to private schools.[94]

Exchange 47: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	aay aalgoona eskwela por aakee serka?
Local:	Yes.	see

Many teachers, who are viewed as community leaders, have been targeted and caught in the crossfire between paramilitaries and leftist guerrillas.[95] Between 1998 and 2003 almost 3,000 teachers were displaced and 300 killed.[96] In 2013, nearly 200 teachers from three municipalities reported threats from rebel groups.[97] Kidnapping and extortion have also been ongoing problems, prompting the government to agree to provide greater security.[98] Because teachers belong to unions, they may be seen as labor activists or community organizers, putting them at greater risk.[99, 100, 101] The greatest risk is in rural areas of Colombia. The overall effect of the conflict has included school shutdowns, lowered enrollment, fear of speaking during history or social studies classes, and fewer students entering the teaching profession.[102]

Who's in Charge

Colombia began decentralizing its government and distributing more power to the local level in 1991. The nation is divided into 32 departments (states), which are further subdivided into roughly 1,102 municipalities.[103, 104] Each municipality is headed by an elected mayor who serves one nonrenewable 4-year term. Each municipality also has an elected municipal council (*junta*) whose size varies from 7 to 21 persons. Council

members are elected to two-year terms and are charged with assisting the mayor in planning public projects.[105, 106, 107] The juntas have very limited powers and sometimes do not even bother to hold sessions.[108] Indigenous groups living on *resguardos*, indigenous territories recognized as municipalities, and have the right to make legal decisions within their territories as long as their procedures and rules do not violate the national constitution.[109]

Rural Leader
Flickr / Agencia Prensa Rural

Conflict resolution at the local level is often handled by Justices of the Peace, who are appointed by civic and popular organizations. Although these justices have no formal legal training, they are familiar with the local community, its residents, and their needs. They conduct informal hearings on local matters and make decisions based on community needs. Justices have improved the process of conflict resolution and given local communities more autonomy in solving their issues.[110]

Exchange 48: Your honor, we need your help.

Soldier:	Your honor, we need your help.	soo senyoreeya, le soleeseeto soo aaseestensya
Local:	Yes.	see

The greater decentralization and autonomy for the local governments were threatened by rebel groups, who saw it as an opportunity to increase their influence. Their efforts resulted in "armed clientelism," in which public officials who sympathize with the rebels are hired and a percentage of their salaries retained in exchange for guerrilla services. Beyond this political influence, rebel groups often practice violence and intimidation against local politicians. In some elections, no candidates were on the ticket because of fear or intimidation.[111, 112,] Such threats have diminished somewhat since the FARC and the government have agreed, in principle, to a peace treaty.[113]

Checkpoints

Colombia has easily accessible road crossings with only two countries, Ecuador and Venezuela.[114, 115] Another border crossing with Peru and Brazil is located at Leticia, at Colombia's far southeastern tip.[116] When crossing from Ecuador into Colombia, most vehicles use the Carretera Panamericana crossing, in Ipiales, Colombia. This region is considered unsafe because of the presence of drug smugglers and illegally armed groups.[117] Four crossing points are available between Colombia and Venezuela. The safest one is at Cúcuta, Colombia, on the main road between Bogotá and Caracas. Even

this crossing has recently been labeled "unpredictable" because of the volatile relations between the presidents of the two nations. This crossing is popular with guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and coca growers.[118, 119]

Exchange 49: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	donde keda la gaareeta maas serkaana?
Local:	It's two kilometers that way.	aa dos keelometros de aakee

The military and police have a strong presence along many of the major roads in the country, particularly during weekends and holiday periods. Stopping at police or military roadblocks is mandatory.[120, 121] The potential for violence or unpredictable events is present at police checkpoints. In 2008, police at a checkpoint captured a leader of a drug cartel linked to a paramilitary unit.[122] In another incident, soldiers shot and killed the husband of a prominent activist for indigenous rights. An armed group known as the Indigenous Guard surrounded the soldiers until the attorney general's office arrived to disarm the squadron.[123] In 2012, rebels fired on a police checkpoint, killing one and wounding two.[124]

Roadside Checkpoint
Flickr / Brian Powell

Exchange 50: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	por faavor saalga del kaaRo
Local:	OK.	byen

Exchange 51: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	es esta toda la eedenteefeekaasyon ke yeva?
Local:	Yes.	see

Landmine Warning
Flickr / Luis Pérez

Land Mines

Colombia completed ratification of the Mine Ban Treaty in September 2000. Legislation implementing the Treaty under Law 759 was passed in 2002.[125] But the armed conflict in Colombia has led to continued use of antipersonnel landmines and improvised explosive devices by leftist guerrilla groups and rightist paramilitary units such as the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC). Both the UN Office of the High Commissioner and the Organization of American States filed reports in 2007 stating that paramilitary groups that had been required to disband were still operating. In addition, the FARC guerrilla organization has engaged in widespread use of land mines. The problem worsened in 2008 when FARC leaders ordered that more devices be planted and caused as many as 370 deaths in 2009. Colombia's military continues to seize and discover large caches of mines.[126, 127]

The government stopped production of antipersonnel mines in September 1998. In November of the following year, Colombia destroyed its production equipment. In 2004, the government completed it destruction of more than 18,500 stockpiled mines, although it did keep a small number for training purposes.[128]

Exchange 52: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	estaa meenaada esta aareya?
Local:	Yes.	see

Colombia is one of the world' most land-mine contaminated nations and, in 2013, lagged behind only Afghanistan in the number of landmine casualties.[129, 130] The estimated area contaminated by land mines is unknown; however, reports indicate that at least one event involving antipersonnel ordnance had occurred in 63% of the nation's municipalities and in all but one of the departments (states).[131, 132] Most of the casualties occurred in Antioquia.[133]

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Rural Life: Chapter 5 Assessment

1. **About one-third of the population lives in rural areas.**

   False

   Approximately 24% of the people in Colombia live in rural areas. A large number of villagers have migrated to the cities, hoping to find jobs, safety and stability.

2. **Rural Justices of the Peace have no legal training, but can mediate conflicts.**

   True

   Conflict resolution at the local level is often handled by Justices of the Peace who are appointed by civic and popular organizations. Although these justices have no formal legal training, they conduct informal hearings on local matters and make decisions based on community needs.

3. **Approximately 1% of the population controls more than 50% of the land in Colombia.**

   True

   More than half of the land is controlled by less than 1% of the population. Efforts at redistribution remain mired in colonial legacy and civil violence.

4. **Agriculture is the main source of household income in rural Colombia.**

   False

   Although approximately half are employed by medium- and large-sized farms, the low wages mean that agriculture is no longer the primary source of rural income.

5. **Only Afghanistan has more landmine contamination than Colombia.**

   True

   Colombia is one of the world's most land-mine contaminated nations and, in 2013, lagged behind only Afghanistan in the number of landmine casualties. The estimated area contaminated by land mines involves 63% of the nation's municipalities, and in all but one of the departments (states).

Chapter 6 Family Life

Introduction

Family has long played an important role in Colombian society. Family needs are often placed above those of individual members. Children usually support their aging parents, reflecting the strong family bonds that characterize family life. The nuclear family is the most common form, but Colombians retain strong ties beyond the nuclear family. Kinship ties and networks often extend to second and third cousins. Urbanization has weakened extended family ties in larger cities, but these affiliations remain sturdy in smaller cities, towns, and villages.[1] Although extended families tend to be large, nuclear families are getting smaller. The Colombian woman has on average two children, fewer than in the past.[2, 3] The Colombian system of godparents (padrinos) provides an important source of emotional and financial support for their godchildren.[4, 5]

The church has played a strong role in shaping the family, stressing the importance of family and family ties. Nevertheless, the family is showing signs of stress. Only 58% of households are dual-parent families and nearly 32% of children live in female-headed households. Approximately 62% of children live with both parents; another 27% live with one parent, and 11% live in households where no parent is present.[6, 7,8]

Exchange 53: Does all your family live here?

Soldier:	Does all your family live here?	toda soo faameeleeya veeve aakee?
Local:	Yes.	see

Exchange 54: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have brothers?	tyene ermaanos?
Local:	Yes.	see

Family Structure

Modernization and the shift to an urban society have affected family life throughout Colombia. As large numbers of rural residents moved to cities, the extended family became less cohesive and family ties were dislocated.[9] Today, about 55% of children live in extended families.[10]

Mother and Son
Flickr / The Advocacy Project

Although families were traditionally large, today's trend is toward smaller nuclear families. The average household size is four persons and is projected to drop to three by 2020.[11, 12] Consensual unions (cohabitation) and households led by women are more frequent. In 2010, for people aged 18-49, 35% of households were cohabiting compared to 20% composed of traditional marriages.[13] The number of children born to unmarried women is estimated to be 84%.[14, 15]

The Colombian nuclear family has traditionally been patriarchal. If the male head-of-household is absent, his wife usually takes over the role. But when the father is present, he leads the household, protects the women who are part of it, and provides for the family. A woman is expected to show deference to her husband's authority as she manages the domestic activities of the family. Although the family structure began to transform in the 1980s, affected by industrialization and economic changes, the extended family led by a male patriarch remains strong.[16, 17]

Exchange 55: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	kwaantaas personaas veeven en esta kaasa?
Local:	Seven.	syete

Exchange 56: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	son estaas personaas paarte de soo faameeleeya?
Local:	No.	no

The Roman Catholic Church upholds this traditional view of the family, especially among the middle and upper class. For those concerned with social mobility, elaborate church weddings have historically been necessary. Such marriages confer prestige and status upon families who can afford the high cost. Other religious rites accompany important events in family life. Beginning with baptism at birth, Roman Catholic services and activities form the foundation of family life.[18, 19]

Status of Women, Children, and Elderly

Women's Support Group
Flickr / The Advocacy Project

Women

Women have historically been subordinate to men. This patriarchal pattern has marked all social classes, although it is weaker among women of the lower classes because they are less governed by social formalities. Women in the lower class also find themselves less restricted because of their lower economic stability. The husband or father in such families may frequently be absent from the home searching for work, so the women must be wage-earners and in charge of the family. The formal system of male chaperonage available to upper-class women falls apart when males do not or cannot maintain a stable position in the home.[20, 21, 22]

Upper-class women, who are surrounded by greater economic stability, are subject to more firmly established restrictions on their role in society. These women generally do not work outside the home but devote themselves to taking care of children and the family.[23, 24]

Despite these strong patriarchal traditions and the philosophy of *machismo*, the status of Colombian women is gradually becoming more equal. This pattern is more pronounced in cities, where women have more educational and career opportunities. These gains can be seen in the workforce, where women have achieved managerial or executive positions, especially in the government and financial sectors. The number of women enrolling in training programs for executives has increased. In the last few decades, universities have promoted equality between male and female students. Colombia has

one of the highest rates of female politicians than any South American country; nearly 25% of cabinet, congressional, and several mayoralty posts are held by women.[25, 26, 27]

The Elderly

Elderly Woman
Flickr / Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

As the traditional family declined, traditional values suffered. In many cases, values such as respect for the elderly are disappearing. In the capital, as many as 60% of the elderly are victims of abuse.[28] It is increasingly common to find elderly people begging on the street. Among the poor, their elderly parents are often an unwelcome financial burden. In some areas, nearly two-thirds of homeless people are elderly.[29, 30] The elderly in Colombia rarely receive pensions and they depend on relatives to help provide care and support.[31,32] The elderly may live with their children and help with domestic chores, including caring for grandchildren. Many elderly prefer to live in this type of extended household; others prefer to live independently, but are financially unable to.[33] In a recent court case, the Colombian Constitutional Court obligated family members who are able to care for their family members.[34]

Children

According to tradition, parents teach children at an early age to help with household work, cooperate with their peers, and be deferential to their parents. Children, teens, and young adults learn to respect authority, not only in the family, but also in their social interactions outside the home. Traditional values include conformity to collective social values and adherence to Catholic religious beliefs, which are organized around hierarchy and authority.[35, 36]

Colombian Toddler
Flickr / Jorge Pinzón Cadena

Exchange 57: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	son estos soos eehos?
Local:	Yes.	see

The status and fortunes of children depend greatly on their social class. Among the poor, traditional family structures are likely to have broken down, and children live in poverty. Many of these children have to work to survive.[37] Child labor remains an issue of serious concern in Colombia, where youngsters are often recruited into illegal armed groups and narcotrafficking. Between 25% and 44% of FARC and ELN troops are

children who have been forcibly recruited.[38, 39, 40] Child abuse and trafficking in children is a major concern. Young girls are often trafficked as sexual slaves, and children are sold as forced labor for mining and agriculture.[41, 42, 43]

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage

Marriage and family remain important social institutions in Colombia, although the average age of first marriage is rising: about 22 for women and 27 for men.[44] Married and unmarried Colombians organize their lives according to the collective values of their extended families. Adult children who remain unmarried often continue to live with their parents and other family members. Also, children who become widowed can and often do return to live with their birth families.[45]
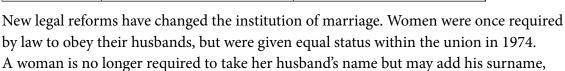

Courting Couple
Flickr / Matt Lemmon
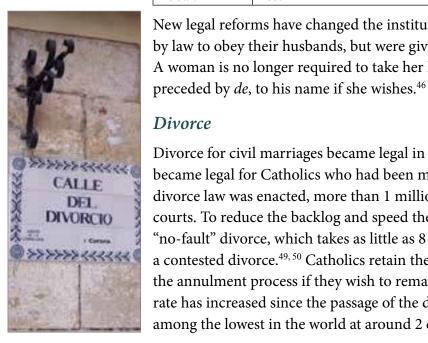
Exchange 58: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	es esta soo esposa?
Local:	Yes.	see

New legal reforms have changed the institution of marriage. Women were once required by law to obey their husbands, but were given equal status within the union in 1974. A woman is no longer required to take her husband's name but may add his surname, preceded by *de*, to his name if she wishes.[46]

Divorce

Divorce for civil marriages became legal in 1976, but it was not until 1991 that divorce became legal for Catholics who had been married in a religious service.[47, 48] After the divorce law was enacted, more than 1 million divorce cases clogged the Colombian courts. To reduce the backlog and speed the divorce process, a 2005 law introduced a "no-fault" divorce, which takes as little as 8 to 10 weeks instead of the 2 to 4 years for a contested divorce.[49, 50] Catholics retain the option of ending their marriages through the annulment process if they wish to remarry in the church.[51, 52] Although the divorce rate has increased since the passage of the divorce laws, Colombia's divorce rate is still among the lowest in the world at around 2 divorces for every 10,000 people.[53, 54]

The Street of Divorce
Flickr / M.

Family Social Events

Weddings

Marriage ceremonies can be religious or civil. A legal notary (*notario*) performs civil ceremonies.[55] Legally recognized religious unions must be performed by either the Catholic Church or one of the other 13 legally recognized religious organizations within Colombia. All other marriages must be conducted by a *notario* in order to be recognized. [56, 57]

Typically, a young man will ask the father of his prospective bride for permission to marry. On the evening before the marriage, the groom will arrange a serenade for her. Colombian weddings are similar to Catholic or Christian weddings in other parts of the world.[58] One religious wedding tradition in Colombia, called the candle ceremony, represents the merging of two bodies or lives. It takes place after the ring ceremony. The bride and groom light separate candles to represent their individual lives. They then use the separate candles to light one candle in unity, after which they extinguish the separate candles. The candle they lit together is left burning, symbolizing their new life together.[59]

Happy Couple
Flickr / Richard Gallagher

After the wedding, guests throw rice at the new couple to signify prosperity and abundance. A reception follows, normally hosted by the bride's family, where there is food and dancing.[60]

Exchange 59: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	le deseyo los ambos feleeseedaad
Local:	We are honored.	nos onraa

Exchange 60: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	feleeseedaades kon lo de la boda
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	sereeya oon onor see oosted aaseesteeyera

Funerals

In most Hispanic cultures and among Catholics in Colombia, once an individual dies, another family member often stays with the body. The body is prepared for the burial and wake, during which the family sits with the body and offers prayers for the deceased. Wakes are social events where family members gather together to share food and remembrances. A rosary is said for 9 days following the death. A special mass is said one month after the death and on the first anniversary. Candles and flowers are an important part of the ritual and also used to decorate the gravesite.[61, 62, 63]

After the funeral services, a procession of vehicles led by a hearse moves to the cemetery where the body will be buried. After the burial, family and friends gather for a meal and to offer condolences and lend support. Family members generally wear dark colors as a symbol of mourning. Close family members may avoid putting on makeup or attending parties for the first nine days following the death. Cremation is becoming more common, and the remains are increasingly likely to be exhumed within 5 years and placed in an ossuary, or the ashes taken to the family home.[64, 65, 66]

Exchange 61: I would like to give my condolences.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	keeseeyeraa daarle el pesaame aa soo faameeleeya
Local:	Thank you.	graaseeyaas

Because Colombia is a multicultural nation, other funeral customs are observed. This is especially true in remote areas; for example, in the tiny village of San Basilio de Palenque, where descendants of slaves have lived for centuries. They declared their region independent from Spain in an 18th-century rebellion, and their culture remains unique. Their language and music are a blend of African (Bantu) and Spanish, with other influences.[67, 68] Within this subculture, death is surrounded by "complex funeral rituals" representing the "distinct spiritual and cultural systems framing life and death in the Palenque community."[69]

Exchange 62: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	por faavor seyaa fwerte
Local:	We will try.	traataaremos

Cemetery
Flickr / Natalia Gómez Carvajal

Quinceañeras party
Flickr / Manuel Gomez

Quinceañeras

One of the most important events in the life of a young woman is the 15th birthday known as quinceañeras. This coming-of-age celebration often includes dancers, musical groups, and copious amounts of food. The ceremony begins with a special mass at the Catholic church, in which the girl receives a blessing from the priest. She leaves behind a doll or other toy as a symbol that she is leaving childhood. Then the party heads to the party site. At the end of party, the father ceremoniously replaces the girl's flat shoes with a pair of heels, indicating that she has officially become a woman. The tradition of the quinceañeras can be traced to the 15th century, when Aztecs performed a ceremonial ritual that signified the young lady was ready and eligible for marriage. Quinceañeras parties today, in which the young lady wears make-up, fancy gowns, and a tiara, can cost as much as USD 3,000 or more.[70, 71]

Naming Conventions

Colombian names often comprise two first names that might be linked by a hyphen. The surname, which may be hyphenated, can be composed of two parts, including the paternal family name followed by the maternal family name.[72, 73, 74]

Young boy
Flickr / Jessica Suárez

When a woman marries, in many cases she retains her dual family name, followed by the preposition *de*, and adds the husband's paternal family name. For example, if Anna Maria Mendez-Padilla married Juan Pedro Sanchez-Ortega, her name would be Anna Maria Mendez-Padilla de Sanchez. Her maiden surname from her father's side is Mendez, followed by her mother's surname, Padilla. When others introduce her, they may refer to her as Señora de Sanchez or simply Señora Sanchez, which is slightly less formal. Other forms are possible. She could also be known by her unmarried name, Anna Maria Mendez-Padilla, or as Anna Maria Mendez de Sanchez.[75, 76, 77] In conversation or writing, it is customary to use both first names.

The appropriate form of address for men or women, is either to Señora Anna Maria Mendez-Padilla de Sanchez as Anna Maria in informal situations in which conversation was on a first-name basis. When it is appropriate to address a man in person using his surname, the only part of the surname that the speaker typically uses is the father's family name. For instance, José Antonio Giraldo-Mendoza would be called Señor Giraldo, leaving out the maternal part of the surname (Mendoza).[78]

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Family: Chapter 6 Assessment

1. **Nuclear family size is decreasing in Colombia.**

   True

   Though extended families tend to be large, nuclear families are getting smaller. The Colombian woman has on average two children, fewer than in the past.

2. **Women in Colombian society have traditionally occupied a subordinate position in authoritarian, male-led family structures.**

   True

   The patriarchal pattern has marked all social classes, although it is weaker among women of the lower classes. Women in the lower class find themselves less restricted because they have less economic stability.

3. **People who marry in the Roman Catholic Church in Colombia cannot legally divorce.**

   False

   Divorce for civil marriages became legal in 1976, but it was not until 1991 that divorce became legal for Catholics who had been married in a religious service.

4. **The Colombian tradition of the quinceañeras arrived with the Spanish.**

   False

   The tradition of the quinceañeras can be traced to the 15th century, when Aztecs performed a ceremonial ritual that signified the young lady was ready and eligible for marriage.

5. **The appropriate form of address for men or women, whether in conversation or writing, includes both first names.**

   True

   Colombian names often consist of two first names that might be linked by a hyphen. The appropriate form of address for men or women, in either conversation or writing, is to use both first names.

Colombian Cultural Orientation: Final Assessment

Answer All: True or False?

1. Spanish colonization of Colombia tended to blur social divisions.

2. The Río Magdalena is Colombia's most important river in terms of the socioeconomic activity in its path.

3. Cartagena has long been an important seaport in northwestern Colombia.

4. Colombia's long history of political violence began when Bolívar and Santander became divided in their political goals.

5. Since 2000, coal production in Colombia has dropped significantly.

6. The Amerindian population has fully embraced Catholicism.

7. In order to be legally recognized, all weddings must be conducted by religious authorities.

8. Local priests are often considered the main authority in rural villages.

9. Colombian Catholics are among the most devout and traditional in South America.

10. The government of Colombia expressly recognizes the special significance of the church in national culture.

11. Marigolds and lilies should not be given as a gift since they are normally associated with death and funerals.

12. Colombians generally dress conservatively and formally, even for social events.

13. It is acceptable to eat food such as fruit with one's hands.

14. When talking with Colombians, it is appropriate to maintain close but relaxed eye contact.

15. Politeness dictates that one should "clean one's plate" when dining with Colombians to show appreciation for the meal.

16. Because unemployment in the cities is relatively low, Colombia has a small informal sector.

17. Most urban residents have completed at least elementary school.

18. Many of the roads in Colombia are unpaved or in poor condition.

19. Train travel is a convenient and relatively inexpensive way to travel within Colombia.

20. Counterfeit U.S. currency is widespread in Colombia.

21. Colombia is one of the world's largest exporters of cut flowers.

22. Driving on country roads can be hazardous and is not advisable for visitors for security reasons.

23. Teachers may be in danger because they are often assumed to be community organizers or even labor activists.

24. Local governments are headed by mayors and elected councils that are endowed with significant powers to run municipalities.

25. The majority of rural students finish at least 6 years of education.

26. The strong influence of religion in Colombian society has resulted in few children being born out of wedlock.

27. In Colombia, women are less likely to hold political office than women throughout the rest of South America.

28. In Colombia, increasing numbers of couples choose to live together before marrying (and sometimes in place of marriage).

29. The rebel groups in Colombia actively recruit large numbers of child soldiers.

30. When it is appropriate to address a man in person using his surname, Juan Samuel Ortega Fernandez should be addressed as Señor (Mister) Fernandez.

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