



# Organization of American States, 1997 (OAS)

# MUNUC 34



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## CHAIR LETTER

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Organization of American States at MUNUC 34! Olivia and I are excited to host you all in committee for some spirited and respectful debate. I hope reading through this Background Guide will provide you with a strong foundation for your own research and preparation for conference. About me, at UChicago I'm Pre-Med and I am planning on double majoring in Neuroscience and Chemistry. After being a delegate on my high school's MUN team, I decided to continue staying with the MUN crowd by serving as Moderator on the Pacific Island Forum at MUNUC 33. Outside of MUN, I'm a board member of the UChicago Philosophy Review, (hopefully soon will be) a research assistant at a neuroscience lab, and an involved member of Jewish life on campus.

For this year's committee we will be traveling back to 1997 to discuss two highly prevalent topics for the OAS: the Situation in Colombia, and the El Niño Event. In Colombia, decades of unresolved armed conflict have precipitated death and destruction and are perpetuated by greed and hunger for power. With hundreds of thousands still suffering and impoverished, the OAS may take this session as an opportunity to not only improve Colombians' welfare but perhaps to also offer a roadmap for countries in similar tragic circumstances. On the other hand, the impending El Niño disaster will certainly prove to be one of the most devastating climate catastrophes experienced by the region in modern history. With limited infrastructure and general lack of preparedness by countries who will be most affected by the coming floods and hurricanes, the OAS possesses the grave responsibility for readying the region for a fatal calamity by proposing practical solutions to diminish the damage from the coming storms. These topics are both particularly complicated and thus demand nuanced solutions founded by dedicated research and refined by thoughtful debate. But I know you'll be equipped for the task and this Background Guide will help you in the process.

If you have any questions about committee, the topics, or anything else, please feel free to reach out by emailing me at [jbrosen@uchicago.edu](mailto:jbrosen@uchicago.edu). Can't wait to meet you!

Best,

Koby Rosen

Co-Chair, OAS

To the members of the OAS:

Like Koby, I'd also like to welcome you all to the Organization of American States for this year's MUNUC conference! We are very much looking forward to running this committee this year, and I personally can't wait to run this committee. We have some really interesting topics set up, and I'm very excited to hear all your ideas! Here at UChicago, I'm also on the Pre-Med track, and I'm planning to double major in Biology and Spanish literature. I'm in my second year at UChicago, and I am an alumnus of Li Po Chun UWC in Hong Kong. In high school, I did Model UN for three years, and I decided to continue being involved with MUN in college on the side of the dais. Last year, I was an assistant chair for the Organization of American States. It was a great experience, so I'm super excited to be chairing this committee and to be involved for a second time! Outside of Model UN, I work for a lab in the radiology department and was also involved with the Oriental Institute here on campus.

Koby and I have put together this Background Guide, which is a really great place to start with your research! Our two topics, while based in the same time period, touch upon very different aspects of what international organizations aim to discuss. The Situation in Colombia deals with violence and power dynamics within a state, and the El Niño Event of 1997-1998 is a clear indication that the climate has changed to involve more extreme weather events, many of which particularly impact American states to an alarming degree. Both topics should open some very interesting debate, and I am looking forward to hearing everyone's perspectives and plans!

If you have any questions, comments, concerns, or just want to tell me something interesting, please feel free to email me at [odegen@uchicago.edu](mailto:odegen@uchicago.edu). I can't wait to see everyone in February!

Take care,  
Olivia Degen

Co-Chair, OAS

## SENSITIVITY NOTE

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Dear Delegates,

We would like to take a moment to acknowledge that this committee will be discussing topics which continue to affect people to this day. While the committee takes place in a setting over twenty years ago, many developments have been made in political, social, and climate awareness since. While it's easy to feel distant from these issues, both in time and space, we hope that all delegates can treat the topics with empathy and compassion. These problems are very real, and while a Model UN committee creates a new version of events, it is important to consider the real impacts of your plans and take care in drafting them. To conclude, we hope you can approach the set topics with the respect they deserve.

Additionally, while we don't anticipate having any problems in this regard, we would like to point out that MUNUC is a conference which focuses primarily on learning. We expect that all delegates will treat each other with respect and avoid saying inappropriate or inflammatory remarks as members of this committee. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to one of the chairs. We're looking forward to learning from you all!

Best,

Koby and Olivia

## HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE

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The charter for the Organization of American States (OAS) was first signed in 1948 between 21 countries all seeking to promote four main principles: democracy, human rights, security, and development. By this year, 1997, the OAS has 34 member states and dozens of countries with permanent observer status. The OAS General Assembly convenes annually to discuss how regional cooperation can improve dire immediate and chronic issues encountered by individual member states and the region as a whole. At the same time, one of the core tenets of the OAS is respecting each member state's national sovereignty, which means that the OAS cannot explicitly compel a country to commit to any specific actions. Nevertheless, the OAS has achieved significant progress in promoting the aforementioned four central pillars and has especially succeeded in calming tensions between member states.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Our History." OAS, 2021, [http://www.oas.org/en/about/our\\_history.asp](http://www.oas.org/en/about/our_history.asp)

## TOPIC A: THE SITUATION IN COLOMBIA, 1997

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### Statement of the Problem

*Note: The Background Guide on Topic A is written as if the present day is 1997*

#### ***Introduction to the problem***

Three primary instigators fuel the current chaos in Colombia: left-wing **guerillas**, the Colombian government and military, and right-wing **paramilitaries**. Each involved organization has its own ideology and agenda. Yet, in the course of the conflict, the different parties have often perpetrated, or at least indirectly supported, the same crimes the others committed.<sup>2</sup> This unrelenting series of attacks and retaliations has produced a state of seemingly permanent instability, or as President Samper, the current president of Colombia, declared early on in his term, “a state of internal commotion.”<sup>3</sup>

The consequences of this three-sided fighting include hundreds of thousands of lives lost, millions forcibly displaced, numerous acts of terror, international drug trade, political assassinations, kidnappings, and other tragedies. Take note that these crimes are not independent of each other. One example of this interconnection is the transformation of FARC from sparse guerilla units to a centralized, expanding, military force through supporting **coca** farming and exports.<sup>4</sup>

Another point to recognize is that in the last five years, the Medellín and Cali **cartels**, the two most prominent Colombian cartels, both disbanded after many of their leaders were captured or killed by the Colombian government. However, their legacies, manifest in their drug trafficking networks, still shape the present-day conflict, especially as successors prepare to seize their vacuum.

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<sup>2</sup> “Human Rights Watch World Report 1997 - Colombia.” *Human Rights Watch*, January 1, 1997. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a8b138.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Cook, Thomas R. “The Financial Arm Of The FARC: A Threat Finance Perspective.” *Journal of Strategic Security*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 19–36., 2011. doi:10.5038/1944-0472.4.1.2.



A better understanding of the mechanics of the present day conflict will be facilitated through an overview of the motivations and operations of specific organizations that fit under each category of the three sides of the conflict (more information on the development of the different groups will be provided in the “History of the Problem” section below). Following that, there will be a review of some of the disastrous consequences caused by the conflict.

### ***Left-wing Guerillas***

The left-wing guerilla groups active today emerged as a response to the peace deal achieved after the Colombian civil war and the period known as *La Violencia* (The Violence). The political peace agreement that ceased the fighting, known as the National Front, established specific time periods in which each party (the Liberals and the Conservatives) would hold each government position, thus constricting democracy.<sup>5</sup> Notably, the agreement ostracized the Colombia Communist Party (PCC-- *Partido Comunista Colombiano*), leading the party to bolster rural peasant guerillas. These peasant guerillas had already formed during *La Violencia* as part of a self-described “self-defense of the masses;”<sup>6</sup> most of the hundreds of thousands of victims of *La Violencia* were rural peasants. In 1964, the PCC created the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-- *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) as its military arm.<sup>7</sup> Although the FARC was established through the PCC, the group mainly functioned autonomously.

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<sup>5</sup> Turel, Adam. “Colombia’s ‘La Violencia’ and How it Shaped the Country’s Political System.” March 20, 2013. <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/20/colombias-la-violencia-and-how-it-shaped-the-countrys-political-system/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “FARC.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 12, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/FARC>.



*FARC soldiers march through the streets*

At first, the FARC focused on rural guerilla warfare attacks. However, following the Seventh Guerilla Conference of the FARC-EP (EP-- *Ejército de Público*, the People's Army, was added at that conference) in 1982, the FARC changed their strategy to more regularly involve urban areas by committing acts of terror.<sup>8</sup> Yet, three years later, members of the FARC and PCC developed the Patriotic Union party (UP-- *Unión Patriótica*), demonstrating that at least some members of the FARC were still committed to engaging in the established political system.<sup>9</sup>

The FARC secured funding for themselves through the drug trade (acquiring money by facilitating drug trafficking and from mafia-esque "protection" costs), kidnapping ransoms, and targeted operations aimed at oil pipelines or other infrastructure by demanding money to stop the sabotage. As it stands, the FARC has over 10,000 members, more than it has ever had in its history, and access to hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Taylor, Lee E. "Case Analysis: The FARC in Colombia." *Small Wars Journal*, March 5, 2020. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/case-analysis-farc-colombia>

<sup>9</sup> "FARC." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 12, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/FARC>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Another prominent left-wing guerilla that emerged around the same time as the FARC was the National Liberation Army (ELN-- Ejército de Liberación Nacional). Like the FARC, the ELN was a Communist group, but while the FARC began as the PCC's military arm, the ELN was started by academics and students before quickly morphing into a religious organization led by Catholic priests. Yet, despite an early aversion to kidnappings and the drug trade for funds on religious grounds, the ELN eventually began to participate in both kidnapping and drug trafficking.

After an attempt by the Colombian military to eradicate the ELN in its nascent stage (killing nearly two-thirds of the members, including the principal leaders), the group has since rebounded to include several thousand members.<sup>11</sup> Though not as influential as the FARC, the ELN still represents a powerful force in the Colombia conflict.

In the early 1990s, left-wing guerilla groups developed contentious relationships with the prominent Medellín and Cali drug cartels. In response, leaders of the cartels sponsored right-wing peasant paramilitary groups to combat the guerillas. Even after the fall of the cartels, those paramilitaries remain, enjoy at least tacit support, if not direct backing, from the Colombian government, and present a violent threat to all of the left-wing guerillas.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Colombian Government/Military***

Since *La Violencia* and the formation of the National Front, the government (which controls the military) has been set on maintaining political stability through rigid, organized control. Extremist left-wing guerillas challenge that stability. The Colombian government, in conjunction with the United States (U.S.), began intelligence operations on the PCC and budding guerilla groups in the late 1950s. The first military operation against a left-wing guerilla (and at that point it would be generously called a guerilla) was the attack on Marquetalia in May 1964; 1,000 Colombian troops attacked the guerilla holdout, in which only 48 of the several thousand civilians were armed. However, after the attack, all those who were armed escaped to the mountains and founded the

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<sup>11</sup> "National Liberation Army (ELN)." *Mapping Militant Organizations*, 2019, [https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/national-liberation-army-el#highlight\\_text\\_15728](https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/national-liberation-army-el#highlight_text_15728)

<sup>12</sup> Vargas, Ricardo. "The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Illicit Drug Trade." *Transnational Institute*, June 1999, <https://www.tni.org/my/node/1464>

FARC.<sup>13</sup> This battle at Marquetalia represents the general fighting between the Colombian government and the left-wing guerillas in two crucial ways: first, the extent of the asymmetry between the parties, and second, the fact that prominent left-wing guerillas avoid eradication despite the asymmetry.

In 1982, the same year as the aforementioned seventh FARC-EP guerilla conference, President Betancur reached out to the FARC and other guerillas to attempt to begin a process for promoting peace. Two years later, the government and the FARC agreed to an indefinite ceasefire under the Uribe Accords. Though that agreement was essentially broken three years later after a FARC attack in Caquetá, the government has continued to primarily pursue negotiated peace. That being said, the government has also participated in direct military attacks and counter-attacks against the different guerillas, including one raid on the Simón Bolívar Guerilla Coordination Board (CGSB-- Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar) in 1990 as well as at least condoning right-wing paramilitary attacks against left-wing guerillas.<sup>14</sup>

Along with combatting the left-wing guerillas throughout the 1990s, the Colombian government perhaps dedicated even more resources to eliminating the prominent drug cartels. The Colombian government simultaneously received significant support and pressure from the United States to quash the drug trade. By the mid-1990s, both Medellín and Cali cartels were dismantled, but with coca still in high demand and other cartels on the rise, the issue of the drug trade continues to hold the Colombian government's attention.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned before, despite the Colombian government dissolving the drug cartels, the government continued to bolster the right-wing paramilitary groups to more directly attack the FARC. The advantage for the government of using the right-wing paramilitaries to perpetrate the violent operations they desired, such as executing local labor leaders believed to be collaborating with the guerillas, was that the Colombian government would not be blamed for such blatant human

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<sup>13</sup> "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-- People's Army." *Mapping Militant Organizations*, August 15, 2015, [https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print\\_view/89#note1](https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print_view/89#note1)

<sup>14</sup> Posso, Camilo G. "Negotiations with the FARC: 1982-2002." *Conciliation Resources*, February 2004, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/colombia/negotiations-farc-1982-2002>

<sup>15</sup> "The Growth of Drug Trafficking and Guerrilla Warfare." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Colombia/Colombia-in-the-21st-century>

rights abuses and would thus avert the ire of the United States. However, with more evidence building that revealed a connection between the Colombian government and the paramilitaries (with the paramilitaries sometimes referred to as the unofficial “sixth branch” of the Colombian military), clearly this callous strategy will not work in the long-run.<sup>16</sup>

Now, the Colombian military has approximately 233,000 members with a budget of nearly three billion dollars, 2.8 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, Colombia receives aid from the United States with the purpose of combating the guerillas, though the relationship has recently been strained by the U.S. government “decertifying” Colombia for not sufficiently cooperating in the limitation of drug trafficking.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Right-wing Paramilitaries***

This year, 1997, saw the formation of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC-- *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*), a collection of right-wing paramilitaries whose claimed goal is to combat the violence incited by the left-wing guerillas. However, to achieve that goal, the right-wing paramilitaries regularly commit acts of violence, including the infamous Mapiripán massacre during which at least forty-nine civilians were tortured and murdered by members of the AUC. Colombia military leaders later admitted that they commanded their troops to avoid the area while the massacre was occurring.<sup>18</sup>

On top of the violence, the AUC also have helped facilitate the drug trade, and as mentioned before, were financially supported by some drug cartel leaders. The fall of the Medellín and Cali cartels left control of the market for “protecting” (taxing) coca growers to smaller cartels, left-wing guerillas, and right wing paramilitaries. The right-wing paramilitaries that would go on to become the AUC

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<sup>16</sup> Vargas, Ricardo. “The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Illicit Drug Trade.” Transnational Institute, June 1999, <https://www.tni.org/my/node/1464>

<sup>17</sup> Serafino, Nina M. “Colombia: The Problem of Illegal Narcotics and US-Colombia Relations.” *CRS Report for Congress*, May 11, 1998, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/98-152F.html>

<sup>18</sup> “Mapiripán Massacre v. Colombia.” *Loyola Law School*, 2005, <https://iachr.lls.edu/cases/mapirip%C3%A1n-massacre-v-colombia>

capitalized on the open market and experienced a financial boom, enabling them to recruit more members and gain influence.<sup>19</sup>

As expected, the government has not publicly commented on the AUC. This silence is likely because the government is either directly supporting, or at a bare minimum condoning, the human rights abuses committed by the AUC, despite unlicensed right-wing paramilitaries being declared illegal in 1989.<sup>20</sup> Before the AUC formed in 1997, the government sponsored a legal paramilitary program known as CONVIVIR, allowing civilians to self-defend against guerillas in neighborhood watch groups. Although individual CONVIVIR groups are supposed to require approval from the government to operate, they often lack oversight, avoid disciplinary action, and sometimes skirt the approval process altogether.<sup>21</sup> CONVIVIR groups were found responsible for at least 35 cases of homicide or torture, not including attacks on left-wing guerillas in which it is also suspected that those killed were in fact combatants.<sup>22</sup> The government's controversial and bloody history with supporting right-wing paramilitaries sheds light on its relationship with the AUC today and demonstrates that the government cannot be relied upon to accurately depict AUC human rights abuses and illegal activities, let alone to curb them.

## **Violence**

Violence in the Colombian armed conflict takes the form of brutal massacres, forced disappearances, kidnappings, political assassinations, terrorism, and outright warfare. As such, the rise in paramilitaries has prompted an unprecedented rise in massacres and kidnappings.<sup>23</sup> Just in the last year, around 1,000 people were killed from direct conflict and an estimated 1,000 civilians were extrajudicially killed by right-wing paramilitaries or government forces.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the thousands of confirmed deaths, hundreds of civilians were also "disappeared" by paramilitaries and guerillas. Rural unarmed peasants continuously find themselves caught in the guerilla and

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<sup>19</sup> "AUC." *InSight Crime*, May 25, 2011, <https://insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/auc-profile/>

<sup>20</sup> "War Without Quarter." *Human Rights Watch*, 1998, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/spanish/informes/1998/guerra3C.html>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Basta Ya!" *Historical Memory Group*, 2016, <http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2016/basta-ya-ingles/BASTA-YA-ingles.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> "Amnesty International Report Colombia- 1997." *Amnesty International*, January 1, 1997, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a9f92c.html>



paramilitary fighting and may become compelled to participate.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned before, these numbers constitute the reported casualties, and the actual numbers are likely significantly higher.

As described above, the Mapiripán massacre was the largest reported massacre in years. A few months later, 15 people were killed in the El Aro massacre in addition to dozens raped and hundreds forcibly displaced.<sup>26</sup> In terms of overall massacres (defined as an incident in which over four people are killed outside of an armed conflict) over the past year, right-wing paramilitaries have been responsible for over 80 (about 80% of total), whereas left-wing guerillas have been responsible for just under 20 (about 15%). Security forces and unidentified groups are responsible for the rest.<sup>27</sup>

Each year of the last decade has also seen a few thousand politically motivated assassinations, with the UP being the main target, as they have even lost two presidential candidates.<sup>28</sup> The majority of these assassinations have been found to be perpetrated by right-wing paramilitaries against left-wing candidates.<sup>29</sup>

Kidnappings this year skyrocketed to an estimated 3,000 people. Left-wing guerillas are the main offenders, with some estimating that the FARC alone abducted over 1,200 people; the ELN are estimated to have kidnapped 700 people as well. The main purposes of the abductions were to obtain ransom money to fund operations as well as to demonstrate dominance, especially as the government seeks to eliminate the guerillas.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Basta Ya!" *Historical Memory Group*, 2016, <http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2016/basta-ya-ingles/BASTA-YA-ingles.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Aristizabál, Jorge J. "La Masacre de El Aro." *Kadist*, 2017, <https://kadist.org/work/la-massacre-de-el-aro-the-massacre-of-el-aro/>

<sup>27</sup> "Basta Ya!" *Historical Memory Group*, 2016, <http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2016/basta-ya-ingles/BASTA-YA-ingles.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Acosta, Luis J. "Murder of hundreds of Colombian activists casts shadow over peace process." *Reuters*, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-peace-feature-idUSKCN1VFoIK>

<sup>29</sup> "Basta Ya!" *Historical Memory Group*, 2016, <http://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2016/basta-ya-ingles/BASTA-YA-ingles.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> "Una Verdad Secuestrada." *Historical Memory Group*, 2013, <https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Una-verdad-secuestrada-Cuarenta-a%C3%B1os-de-estad%C3%ADsticas-de-secuestro-1970-2010.pdf>

## ***Drug Trade***

Colombia has nearly 80,000 **hectares** of farmland dedicated to coca, the fundamental ingredient needed to produce cocaine.<sup>31</sup> As a result, economists have estimated Colombia's total revenue from the drug trade to be hundreds of millions or billions of dollars.<sup>32</sup> However, with the fall of the Medellín and Cali cartels, the Colombian drug trade has faced structural setbacks, reducing its importance in the grand scheme of the western hemisphere drug trade. At the same time, the Clinton administration has nevertheless been disappointed with the Colombian government's efforts to reduce narcotics production, as expressed through the administration's "decertification" of the Colombian government as a partner for policing drugs. This perceived lack of commitment by the Colombian government to fighting the "**war on drugs**" might be at least in part due to right-wing paramilitaries' increased control over the coca fields previously managed by the cartels.

Although peasant growers were able to largely increase their wealth for a short period while coca was booming (sometimes referred to as La Bonanza), shortly after the boom, with coca in high supply and food crops in low supply, coca prices fell and food crops prices soared. Peasants were left with less valuable coca and unable to afford food. Whereas Peru and Bolivia, other coca growing countries, had a "crop-alternation" plan to promote growing food crops, Colombia had no such plan, and as a result, thousands of peasants are severely food insecure.<sup>33</sup>

In summation, the Colombian drug trade finances the organizations which perpetrate the aforementioned violence, erodes Colombia's key alliance with the United States, and leaves peasants impoverished.

## ***Displaced People***

Paramilitary and guerilla fighting has prompted the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, primarily rural peasants, in just the last couple of years. While some of the displaced people

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<sup>31</sup> "Coca/Cocaine." *UNODC*, 2006, [https://www.unodc.org/pdf/WDR\\_2006/wdr2006\\_chap3\\_cocaine.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/WDR_2006/wdr2006_chap3_cocaine.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> O'Connor, Dermot. "The Political Economy of Colombia's Cocaine Industry." *Papel Politico*, March 20, 2009, [https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/192876/1/20090000\\_oconnor\\_the\\_pe\\_of\\_colombias\\_cocaine\\_industry.pdf](https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/192876/1/20090000_oconnor_the_pe_of_colombias_cocaine_industry.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Schemo, Diana J. "Colombian Peasants Seek Way Out of Drug Trade." *New York Times*, February 28, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/28/world/colombian-peasants-seek-way-out-of-drug-trade.html>



become refugees in neighboring countries, the majority stay in Colombia instead, becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>34</sup>

IDPs are an extremely vulnerable population. Usually IDPs travel as either family or extended-family units. A larger group means that more support is needed. Without proper housing or work, this need puts tremendous strain on parents and has a ripple effect on their children and the rest of the family. Moreover, paramilitaries and guerillas will often seek to recruit IDPs, either by tempting them with the prospect of increased income and protection or by threatening their lives. Minors especially have been recruited successfully by both the paramilitaries and the guerillas. Additionally, even if IDPs can avoid directly associating with either the paramilitaries or the guerillas, they are often caught in the crossfire between the warring groups.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Current Situation***

The decades-long, multifaceted conflict in Colombia has seen a sharp increase in violence over the past year. With the drug trade starting to recover after the fall of the cartels, it seems inevitable that the armed paramilitaries and guerillas will increase their funding, enabling them to recruit, expand, and terrorize more. On top of that, Colombian civilians, especially rural peasants, are ostensibly defenseless as the government has been practically silent on the rise of the pernicious right-wing militaries.

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<sup>34</sup> "Internal Displacement in Colombia." *Brookings institution*, May 1999, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/19990527\\_ColombiaReport.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/19990527_ColombiaReport.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## History of the Problem

### ***Introduction to the Problem's History***

While the present armed conflict in Colombia between left-wing guerillas, the government, drug cartels, and right-wing paramilitaries has been waged over the last 30 years, there also exists a greater conflict - a more vague, lingering violence - that has persisted for more than 150 years. This timeline of the evolution of hostilities may be split into five distinct sections: post-independence political tumult, *La Violencia*, the National Front, the rise of left-wing guerillas, and the counter-rise of right-wing paramilitaries. What should become clear after reading through this history is that none of the elements described in the last section appeared spontaneously; rather, there is a clear sense of cause and effect. Moreover, as was outlined in the last section, those effects have been disastrous.

### ***Post-Independence Political Tumult***

Starting in 1549, the Spanish ruled Colombia as a colonial territory with fairly secure control, despite some disdain over economic affairs, disapproval of Spanish royal family politics, and discord between the Creoles (Whites born in South America) and the Spanish. That all changed in 1810 when years of Spanish and French wars provided a political opening for Colombians to revolt against local Spanish rulers.<sup>36</sup> The commemorated spark of the revolution, Colombian Independence Day, honors the Bogotá Uprising on July 20th, a rebellion which saw the Spanish viceroy of Bogotá cede independence to the protesters.<sup>37</sup> After nearly a decade of war, Colombia finally gained independence with its own government in 1819 (though at that point, Colombia did not have its modern borders and was not even called Colombia). Simón Bolívar, the man who led the rebel army against the Spanish, became the first president of the Gran Colombian government. Bolívar ruled until he resigned in 1830. The next leader who had a stable hold of power was Francisco de Paula Santander, who was elected president of New Granada (renamed after borders changed in 1830) in 1832 and served until 1837. Though Santander ostensibly served as Bolívar's deputy for nearly a

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<sup>36</sup> Gilmore, Robert L. "Revolution and Independence." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 29, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Colombia>

<sup>37</sup> Minster, Christopher. "Colombia's Independence Day." *ThoughtCo*, July 16, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/colombias-independence-day-2136390>

decade, he differentiated himself from Bolívar by being a proponent of significantly more liberal policies.<sup>38</sup>



*A depiction of Simón Bolívar*

However, it was three years after Santander ended his term that a significant development in regional politics ensued: the creation of the Liberal and Conservative parties. The original ideological divides between the parties included the role of the Catholic Church in Colombian society (Liberals for separating Church and State) and the concentration of power in either the federal government or in the different states (Conservatives for greater federal power).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Bushnell, David. "Santander, Francisco de Paula (1792-1840)." *Encyclopedia.com*, 2001, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/santander-francisco-de-paula-1792-1840>

<sup>39</sup> Kline, Harvey F. "Conservative-Liberal Struggle, 1840-80." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 29, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Colombia/Conservative-Liberal-struggle-1840-80>

During the 19th century, two civil wars were fought by the two factions. The first, in 1860, was won by radical Liberal forces, led by Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera, who transformed New Granada to the United States of Colombia.<sup>40</sup> 30 years later, in 1899, Colombia underwent another political civil war, this time with the Liberal forces being undone by the Conservatives; at one point, the Liberal army was so broken it could only muster guerilla attacks, a strategy that would be passed down generationally. Though the Liberals lost the war, the Conservatives suffered so many casualties in the fighting that it could hardly be called a victory for them.<sup>41</sup> This loss is highlighted by the fact that almost immediately after the war, Colombia had to give up the region of Panama, which became its own independent state.<sup>42</sup>

From 1860 to 1886, the Liberals dominated politics after their military success. However, from 1886 to 1930, the Conservatives maintained control in an era that is referred to as the Conservative Hegemony. While this period had relatively lower rates of violence, the Conservative presidents actively pursued measures to limit opposition by prohibiting Liberal newspapers and meetings. Additionally, in 1886, the Conservatives created a new constitution, which most notably tethered Colombia to the Catholic Church and renamed the country the Republic of Colombia (what the country is known as to this day). In terms of national development, during the Conservative Hegemony, Colombia began creating a national railroad, increased coffee exports, and established a national bank. Lastly, as Communism started to rise, the Conservative party made clear its opposition to Communism; the question of support for Communism would also play a key role in future political tensions.<sup>43</sup>

The Conservative Hegemony came undone in 1930 when the Conservative party had two competing candidates running in the presidential election whereas the Liberals had just one. As a result, despite having fewer cumulative votes than the Conservative candidates combined, Enrique Olaya ascended to the presidency and began what is now known as the "Liberal Republic," a period which lasted

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<sup>40</sup> "Tomás Cipriano de Mosquera." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tomas-Cipriano-de-Mosquera>

<sup>41</sup> Minster, Christopher. "The Thousand Days' War." *ThoughtCo*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-thousand-days-war-2136356>

<sup>42</sup> "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, Since 1776: Panama." *Office of the Historian*, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/countries/panama>

<sup>43</sup> Hutber, Jenna. "Conservative Party." *Colombia Reports*, March 3, 2014, <https://colombiareports.com/conservative-party-colombia/>

from 1930 to 1946. This era saw a significant secularization of Colombia in addition to liberal reforms, which included granting women the right to become citizens as well as allowing workers to unionize.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, 1930 saw the creation of the Colombia Communist Party, a group which did not have significant political influence at the time, but would go on to play a larger role in the later armed conflict as a bridge between guerilla groups like the FARC and the government.

In 1946, although Conservative (Mario Ospina Pérez) was president once again, the Liberals retained control of Congress. In a reversal of the dynamics of the 1930 elections, this time it was the Liberals who had two competing candidates for president (Gabriel Turbay and Jorge Eliecer Gaitán). In this instance, however, while Ospina ruled, Gaitán, as the face of the opposition, soared in popularity. It was Gaitán's assassination that would trigger the next pivotal period in Colombian history: *La Violencia*.<sup>45</sup>

### ***La Violencia***

April 9, 1948 was one of the most impactful days in modern Colombian history. The assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, the Liberal populist mayor of Bogotá and presumed next president, inspired dramatic civil unrest in the capital, with the ensuing riot later labelled as the *Bogotazo*.<sup>46</sup> An estimated 3,000 people died as heartbroken working-class citizens incinerated Bogotá. Gaitán had campaigned on seeking harmony between Liberals and Conservatives through moderate nationalism and the improvement of the welfare of the lower-classes through economic reforms; Gaitán's assassination was not only seen as the death of the politician but the death of his ideas as well.<sup>47</sup>

Immediately following the *Bogotazo*, civil war broke out, with Colombians divided between the Liberals and the Conservatives. While Conservatives held the presidency, winning the 1950 election, radical Liberal groups who identified as Communist began forming guerillas. Though some of the

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<sup>44</sup> "Liberal Party." Colombia Reports, November 22, 2018, <https://colombiareports.com/liberal-party-colombia/>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Braun, Herbert. "The Assassination of Gaitán." *The University of Wisconsin Press*, March 1986, <https://uwpress.wisc.edu/books/o800.htm>

<sup>47</sup> Begue, Michelle. "Colombia, 1948: 'Bogotazo'." *China Global Television Network*, May 21, 2018, <https://america.cgtn.com/2018/05/21/colombia-1948-bogotazo>

fighting was regional, even including neighbors attacking neighbors, the bulk of the war was fought between the Liberal-Communist guerillas against the Conservative-controlled government and military. Experts have estimated that as a result of nearly a decade of violence in *La Violencia*, approximately 200,000 people perished, 2 million were forcibly displaced or felt compelled to immigrate, thousands were raped, and millions of dollars were lost in property damage. While the fighting in *La Violencia* occurred throughout a decade, most of the brutality was concentrated throughout the first years of the conflict (from 1948 to 1953).<sup>48</sup>

In 1953, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla ousted Conservative president Mariano Ospina Pérez in a coup supported by Liberal and Conservative party politicians. This bipartisanship in the midst of a civil war signified that five years into *La Violencia*, the fighting centered less on a political schism and more on socioeconomic standing. This shift was clearly seen in the eventual resolution to the conflict that saw the political elites unite to form the National Front government, which guaranteed a rotation of power between both parties (the Liberals and the Conservatives) in controlling the presidency. As war ceased between the different party establishments, the peasants, lacking significant representation in government, continued to feel embittered. Though peasant guerillas at first largely surrendered to the government in exchange for amnesty, the Communist guerillas would return.<sup>49</sup>

### ***The National Front***

After four years of dictatorship under General Pinilla, the elite and the public began protesting Pinilla's refusal to cede power, censorship of the press, outsized national debt, and perhaps most importantly, Pinilla's inability to quell the violence (despite using bombs and napalm). The protests culminated in Pinilla fleeing to the United States in May 1957; he assigned a military junta to maintain control while he was abroad.<sup>50</sup>

Behind the scenes, prominent Liberals and Conservatives began negotiating a political end to *La Violencia*. On July 20, 1957, party leaders released the Declaration of Sitges, which outlined the

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<sup>48</sup> "Colombia: La Violencia." *World Peace Foundation*, December 14, 2016, [https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2016/12/14/colombia-la-violencia-2/#\\_edn11](https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2016/12/14/colombia-la-violencia-2/#_edn11)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Rennebohm, Max. "Colombians overthrow dictator, 1957." *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, December 6, 2009, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/colombians-overthrow-dictator-1957>

National Front agreement. For four election cycles (4 years per president, 16 years total), the Liberals and Conservatives would switch off control of the presidency. Additionally, all the ministerial and national legislative positions would be equally split.<sup>51</sup> Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo was elected as first president under the National Front power-sharing agreement in 1958, beginning 16 years of national political stability.<sup>52</sup>

While the National Front agreement certainly calmed some of the violence, rural peasants still felt ostracized and left behind by the “new order.” As a result, guerillas did not ultimately cease. In fact, the emergence of stronger, more organized guerillas came to define the next period in Colombian history and the start of the present armed conflict.

### ***The Rise of Left-Wing Guerillas***

After the end of *La Violencia* in 1958, the Colombian Communist Party was frustrated that the National Front agreement neither focused on the plight of the peasants nor acknowledged the PCC. As a result, the PCC encouraged outraged peasants to gather across Colombia in rural areas to form like-minded communities. One of those communities was started by Manuel Marulanda in Marquetalia.<sup>53</sup>

On May 27th, 1964, about 1,000 Colombian militants, along with helicopters and fighter planes, attacked Marulanda’s community; only 48 of the people in the community were armed and defended against the army.<sup>54</sup> Marulanda and all of the guerilla combatants escaped. Later in 1964, Marulanda and 350 other local guerillas organized the First Guerilla Conference and formed the Southern Bloc. There, Marulanda, Jacobo Arenas (who would go on to become the ideological leader of the FARC), and the conference declared their goal to fight on behalf of the peasants and pursue legislative reforms to better rural society. With members coming from the PCC, the group also self-

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<sup>51</sup> “Declaration of Sitges.” *Cengage*, [https://college.cengage.com/history/world/keen/latin\\_america/8e/assets/students/sources/pdfs/119declaration\\_sitges.pdf](https://college.cengage.com/history/world/keen/latin_america/8e/assets/students/sources/pdfs/119declaration_sitges.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Goldberg, Maren. “Declaration of Sitges.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 10, 2009, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Declaration-of-Sitges>

<sup>53</sup> “Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).” *Center for International Security and Cooperation*, 2019, [https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/revolutionary-armed-forces-colombia-farc#\\_ftn3](https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/revolutionary-armed-forces-colombia-farc#_ftn3)

<sup>54</sup> Bargent, James. “The FARC 1964-2002: From Ragged Rebellion to Military Machine.” *InSight Crime*, May 26, 2014, <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/the-farc-1964-2002-from-ragged-rebellion-to-military-machine/>



identified as Communist. Two years later, the guerillas met for the Second Guerilla Conference and officially changed their group's name to the FARC. More substantively, the FARC then decided to not only be on the defensive with the government but to train combatants and head on the offensive, while at the same time expanding community care to include medical and educational services.<sup>55</sup>

With increased militarization and social programs came increased costs. The FARC's solution? Kidnappings. Specifically, they kidnapped the wealthy and politicians for ransom. Later during the 1970s, the FARC introduced itself to the drug trade.<sup>56</sup> Peasant farmers would either grow coca and then prepare the crops to become cocaine or sell the raw coca leaves, which were then prepared by drug labs run by traffickers.<sup>57</sup> The FARC, with expanding farmland control, saw profits in "protecting" coca growers for a fee, although the FARC did not engage with trafficking the drugs; that job was left to drug cartels like the nascent Medellín and Cali cartels.<sup>58</sup>

In 1982, newly elected President Belisario Betancur Cuartas took careful notice of the FARC's increased influence and militarization and decided to reach out early in his term to guerilla leaders about pursuing negotiated peace. That same year, the FARC's seventh guerilla conference (from then on FARC-EP) affirmed that the group would now go on the offensive and move in on urban areas. Surprisingly, two years later, Betancur's administration and the FARC reached a ceasefire under the Uribe Accords. The Uribe Accords also paved the way for the FARC to have political representation by allowing the group to run in elections as the Patriotic Union (UP) party.<sup>59</sup>

The UP were first eligible for elections in 1986. While the party only claimed 4.6% of the vote in the presidential elections, the UP won 6 Senate seats, 9 House seats, 23 deputy positions in departments, and 350 local council seats. This political victory for a third party was unexpected and unprecedented, and it did not go unnoticed.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia— People's Army." *Mapping Militant Organizations*, August 15, 2015, [https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print\\_view/89#note1](https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print_view/89#note1)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> "Colombia's drug trade." *Colombia Reports*, January 12, 2019, <https://colombiareports.com/colombia-drug-trafficking/>

<sup>58</sup> "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia— People's Army." *Mapping Militant Organizations*, August 15, 2015, [https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print\\_view/89#note1](https://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/print_view/89#note1)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> "Patriotic Union." *Colombia Reports*, January 13, 2014, <https://colombiareports.com/patriotic-union/>



Drug cartels and right wing paramilitaries saw the UP, especially with the party's quick ascent in the political arena, as a threat to their operations and the government itself. As a result, both the cartels and the paramilitaries began targeted assassinations of UP politicians.<sup>61</sup> In 1987, after hundreds of UP politicians and candidates were killed, the FARC decided to reignite military tensions by ambushing a military truck in Caquetá filled with dozens of soldiers. At least 32 soldiers were killed and more were injured.<sup>62</sup> Defense Ministry spokesman Colonel Eduardo Arevalo called it "the worst guerrilla attack on the army in 15 years."<sup>63</sup>

While throughout the 1970-1980s the FARC saw a significant expansion in land and influence, the ELN, another guerilla group that was founded at around the same time as the FARC, nearly saw its demise. The ELN was founded by Fabio Vásquez Castaño as a Communist guerilla group inspired by "liberation theology," a niche, often radical, Catholic belief that focuses on saving the oppressed, the meek. This emphasis on ideology also saw the ELN take an early hard stance against perpetrating kidnappings or associating with the drug trade, although this strong stance would erode.

Whereas the FARC was composed from the start of just rural peasants, the ELN strongly attracted university students and Catholic priests as well as rural peasants. At the start, the ELN had only a couple hundred members (although there were more non-member supporters).<sup>64</sup> The ELN at first tried to emulate the Castros' strategy in Cuba by starting small and under the radar, but with the ultimate goal of toppling the government once the group had enough members and arms. This strategy clearly did not work with the ELN, because in 1973 the military attacked the guerilla group in Operation Anorí and killed an estimated 135 of 200 members. This near eradication prompted Castaño to abdicate his position as leader of the ELN, allowing priest Manuel Pérez and peasant-turned-guerilla Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista ("Gabino") to take charge.<sup>65</sup>

Though the FARC would focus on expanding geographically, the ELN decided to control a smaller area and develop more. However, the guerilla group still needed funds to survive and thus

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Gorriaran, Ramon. "Mueren 32 soldados en una emboscada de la guerrilla comunista colombiana." *El País*, June 17, 1987, [https://elpais.com/diario/1987/06/18/internacional/550965616\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/1987/06/18/internacional/550965616_850215.html)

<sup>63</sup> "Colombian Guerrillas Ambush Troops, Killing 32." *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1987, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-06-18-mn-7991-story.html>

<sup>64</sup> "ELN." *InSight Crime*, October 27, 2020, <https://insightcrime.org/colombia-organized-crime-news/el-n-profile/>

<sup>65</sup> "The ELN." *WOLA*, April 12, 2020, <https://colombiapeace.org/the-el-n/>

compromised on its founding moral principles, turning to kidnapping for ransom starting in the late 1970s. Another stream of revenue for the ELN came after an unexpected oil discovery in Arauca, a region near the ELN's control. While the ELN did not have the resources to excavate the oil, the ELN did make money by sabotaging oil companies' rigs and pipelines and demanding money in order to stop the attack. Despite engaging in kidnapping and infrastructure sabotage, the ELN, at this point, still refrained from the drug trade because the group saw it as a blatant surrender to capitalism, and to the ideologues, that acquiescence would be too much hypocrisy to stomach.<sup>66</sup>

The last key guerilla group that emerged after the National Front and wielded significant influence throughout the 1970s and 1980s was the 19th of April Movement (M-19-Movimiento 19 de abril). M-19 started, perhaps ironically, as a response to former dictator Pinilla's loss in the 1970 presidential election to Conservative and National Front candidate Misael Pastrana Borrero. M-19 was not a Communist group. Instead, M-19 focused solely on improving democratic reforms and did not seek to create independent communities run by the organization. Yet, similar to the Communist guerillas, M-19 believed the National Front denied the peasants proper representation in the national government.<sup>67</sup>

Right from the beginning, the M-19 funded themselves through kidnapping ransoms. Instead of targeting the elite like the FARC, M-19 instead focused on drug traffickers and their families. In turn, this prompted drug cartels to increasingly arm their members and, as will be discussed later on, eventually fund a paramilitary organization targeting kidnappers like M-19 members.<sup>68</sup>

M-19 first gained mass awareness when the group stole Simón Bolívar's sword from the Bolívar House museum and left behind a note declaring, "Bolívar, your sword returns to the fight". After that first heist, M-19 continued to perpetrate high-profile attacks.<sup>69</sup> On February 27th, 1980, M-19 combatants invaded the Dominican Republic embassy in Bogotá and held hostage 58 people, including ambassadors from the Dominican Republic, the U.S., Venezuela, and elsewhere. The siege ended two months later on April 27th after M-19 was able to secure safe passage for the hostage-

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> "M-19." *Colombia Reports*, March 22, 2018, <https://colombiareports.com/m-19/>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

takers to escape to Cuba, an agreement from the Colombian government to expedite trials for jailed M-19 members, and potentially a couple million dollars in ransom.<sup>70</sup>

Like with the FARC, in 1984, Betancur was able to hammer out a ceasefire with M-19 in exchange for M-19 being allowed political representation. But the deal broke in 1985, even before the 1986 elections when the Democratic Alliance M-19 (AD/M-19-- *M-19 Alianza Democrática*) party would first be eligible to run, because M-19 leadership did not feel satisfied with the agreement.<sup>71</sup>

On November 6th, 1985, M-19 perpetrated one of the most infamous and jarring attacks in Colombian history. In the middle of the day, a few dozen M-19 combatants stormed the Palace of Justice, home of the Colombian Supreme Court. Swiftly, the armed intruders held hundreds of hostages, including the 25 Supreme Court judges. M-19 alleged that its motivation for this audacious act was severe frustration with President Betancur, proclaiming that he should even face trial. Betancur did not accede to M-19's request and instead called to "restore order, but above all avoid bloodshed." However, Betancur probably did not mean exactly what he declared, because within hours he began surrounding the building with military vehicles and weapons.<sup>72</sup>

Within the span of two days, the government battered the Palace of Justice with rockets and eventually forced the rebels to submit. The siege had massive casualties; more than 100 people died, including the few dozen M-19 intruders and 11 Supreme Court judges (including the Chief Justice). However, nearly 200 people were saved as well.<sup>73</sup>

Although the M-19 fighters declared their goal was to try President Betancur, some have alleged that drug cartel leader Pablo Escobar helped fund the attack, as a fire caused by the siege incinerated many documents that could have helped to incriminate Escobar. On the other hand,

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<sup>70</sup> Goodsell, James N. "Bogota siege ends safely." *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 28, 1980, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1980/0428/042843.html>

<sup>71</sup> "M-19." *Colombia Reports*, March 22, 2018, <https://colombiareports.com/m-19/>

<sup>72</sup> Woody, Christopher. "33 years ago, rebels allegedly backed by Pablo Escobar stormed Colombia's Palace of Justice — here's how the terrifying siege went down." *Business Insider*, November 8, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/colombia-palace-of-justice-siege-2016-11>

<sup>73</sup> "1985 Palace of Justice Siege." *Colombia Reports*, December 15, 2016, <https://colombiareports.com/palace-justice/>

Escobar detested left-wing guerillas for kidnapping drug cartel members and their families (M-19, as was written above, focused on kidnapping drug cartel associates and their loved ones).<sup>74</sup>

The Palace of Justice Siege scarred the national psyche at a large cost to M-19. By 1989, after having been significantly weakened by government attacks and having lost key organization leaders, M-19 finally decided to enter talks with the government to permanently demobilize and receive amnesty. A year later, the AD/M-19 was reborn. Though the party started out as somewhat popular, that was all put to a halt when a Colombian judge signed off on around 30 warrants of arrest for M-19 members' roles in the Palace of Justice Siege.<sup>75</sup>

As the left-wing guerillas in this period started to develop and make their presence known to the greater Colombian society, the government attempted to keep the groups at bay, both by carrying out direct military attacks and always leaving the door open for negotiated peace through demobilization in exchange for entering the mainstream political arena. However, as will be seen in the next stage of the conflict, the right-wing paramilitaries have been much more ruthless than their left-wing contemporaries.

### ***The Counter-Rise of Right-Wing Paramilitaries***

Left-wing guerillas' calls to radically change Colombian society did not sit well with many, including a significant number of rural peasants who just wanted to live in peace. On top of that, with those same guerilla groups targeting drug cartel members and their families for kidnappings, the situation was bound to escalate.

The first stage of modern right-wing paramilitaries was part of "*Plano Lazo*" (Lasso Plan), a U.S.-encouraged counter-Communism endeavor started in 1962 to combat the theoretical threat of increased Communist activity in Colombia. *Plano Lazo* called for arming civilians in self-defense against insurgents but was sold to Colombians as a program to invest in peasant infrastructure. In 1968, the Colombian government officially allowed civilians to fight against armed Communist

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

groups under Law 48. Manuals created by the government and military were even handed out to some of the civilian paramilitaries.<sup>76</sup>

A decade later, after the left-wing guerillas started gaining more followers and territory, the American Anticommunist Alliance (AAA-- *Alianza American Anticomunista*) made waves by bombing the Colombian Communist Party headquarters in December as well as possibly kidnapping and assassinating numerous Communists. Allegedly, the group even had ties to the military, a claim to which five soldiers associated with the plan to prop up the AAA attested in an article in a Mexican newspaper. The AAA stopped operations in 1979, but pioneered a new response to the guerillas: basically, fight fire with fire, fight guerillas with guerillas (paramilitaries).<sup>77</sup>

1981 saw a dramatic change in the nature of the paramilitaries. After M-19 kidnapped Martha Ochoa, sister of prominent Medellín Cartel leaders Juan David and Fabio Ochoa, the paramilitary Death to Kidnappers (MAS-- *Muerte A Secuestrados*) swept across rural Colombia. Though the initial perception of MAS was that it was the Medellín Cartel's private army, a government inquiry in 1983 discovered that more than a third of the known members were in fact police officers or military soldiers.<sup>78</sup> As suggested in the name, MAS was a highly violent organization; in 1988 alone the group was purported to have perpetrated 108 massacres (the government has disputed the number of deaths attributed to MAS, but given that the government backed MAS, its comments on MAS should be taken with more than a grain of salt). Not only did MAS cause significant violence, but by working alongside the Medellín cartel also helped to facilitate the drug trade, especially to counter the FARC's increasing territorial claims through their protection taxes.<sup>79</sup>

Yet, by 1989 even the government realized that something had to be done about ceasing MAS's operations. Liberal President Virgilio Barco explicitly called the out-of-control paramilitaries terrorists. That being said, Barco did not move to outlaw paramilitaries completely, instead proposing that civilian pro-government paramilitaries should be allowed and controlled by the

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<sup>76</sup> "The History of the Military-Paramilitary Partnership." Human Rights Watch, 1996, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1996/killer2.htm>

<sup>77</sup> Evans, Michael. "The Truth About Triple-A." *The National Security Archive*, July 1, 2007, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB223/index.htm>

<sup>78</sup> Atwood, Shaun. "Pablo Escobar: Beyond Narcos." *Publicism*, 2016, <https://publicism.info/crime/escobar/5.html>

<sup>79</sup> "The History of the Military-Paramilitary Partnership." Human Rights Watch, 1996, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1996/killer2.htm>

president and the Defense and Government ministries. This new policy eventually led to the formation of CONVIVIR groups. Although they were not as bloody as MAS, in addition to being more structured and regulated than the original paramilitaries, they still lacked significant oversight and were responsible for dozens of deaths.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, unregistered right-wing paramilitaries did not disappear, and despite the new laws, were still mostly ignored by the government. Perhaps the most glaring example of this negligence is the relative freedom that the Castaño brothers experienced with regard to their exploits. Fidel and Carlos Castaño were both members of MAS before going on to found their own group, “Los Tangüeros.” In a single attack, *Los Tangüeros* killed 42 people in the town of Pueblo Bello after a few of their people were killed there. After the 1989 government decree prohibiting unregistered paramilitaries, the Castaño brothers shut down Los Tangüeros, but would soon revive the group as the Peasant Self-Defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU-- *Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá*). The ACCU is alleged to have been responsible for hundreds of deaths, including those of national politicians like Senator Manuel Cepeda; moreover, contradicting Barco’s 1989 edicts, the group may have been collaborating with the army to carry out some of their violent crimes.<sup>81</sup>

This year, 1997, the ACCU has expanded and has absorbed other smaller right-wing paramilitaries under the newly-formed AUC. With explicit backing from drug traffickers and at least tacit support from the government (but based on the evidence probably with some direct support as well), the AUC is sure to skyrocket in influence, all the while committing flagrant human rights abuses.<sup>82</sup>

Another major development in 1990s Colombia was the fall of the Medellín and Cali drug cartels. Pressure from the U.S. to encourage allies to take an active role in the war on drugs compelled the Colombian government to harshly crack down on the cartels (despite the cartels generating enormous amounts of money that did make it around the general economy). As more cartel leaders have been rendered incapacitated, either by being killed, arrested, or turning themselves in, the

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<sup>80</sup> “War Without Quarter.” *Human Rights Watch*, 1998, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/spanish/informes/1998/guerra3C.html>

<sup>81</sup> “Paramilitary Violations of International Humanitarian Law.” *Human Rights Watch*, 1998, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/reports98/colombia/Colom989-04.htm>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

paramilitaries and guerillas have been warring over who will fill the void in the drug trade left by the cartels.

### ***Conclusion***

Colombia has certainly had a long history of chaos and violence, albeit with some prospects of peace throughout the years. Now, the OAS will have a chance to debate initiatives outlining how Colombia can achieve a lasting peace. The task is daunting, but perhaps with some care and ingenuity, ending the armed conflict can be accomplished.

## Past Actions

### *Introduction to Past Actions*

For most of Colombian history, the government has tried to reduce violence with more violence. The goal of the OAS engaging in the situation in Colombia is to create innovative solutions to calm short-term tensions and provide a roadmap to long-term prosperity. While some brief ceasefires and demobilization agreements have been reached, they have failed to end the armed conflict. Additionally, regarding the illicit coca trade which has simultaneously funded and fueled hostilities between the conflict actors, government actions have been focused on targeting drug cartels rather than deescalating the drug trade as a whole. This strategy has resulted in practically no progress towards ending the drug trade.

### *The Uribe Accords*

Even before the Uribe Accords were signed, President Betancur decided in 1982 under Law 35 to grant amnesty to all guerilla members who committed, or were accused of, politically related crimes.<sup>83</sup> Betancur campaigned on ending the conflict, and his intention to grant nearly universal amnesty was certainly a bold, untrodden path in pursuing peace. While groups such as the FARC, M-19, and the ELN appreciated this first step from the government, none of the groups had an immediate desire for a ceasefire, let alone demobilization, without more concessions from the government.<sup>84</sup>

Following the implementation of Law 35 in 1982 as well as two years of quiet communication between government officials and FARC leaders, the two parties finally achieved a negotiated

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<sup>83</sup> "Origin and Characteristics of the Internal Armed Conflict in Colombia." *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights*, 2004, <https://www.cidh.oas.org/countryrep/Colombia04eng/chapter3.htm>

<sup>84</sup> Chernick, Marc W. "Negotiated Settlement to Armed Conflict: Lessons from the Colombian Peace Process." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 1988-1989), pp. 53-88, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/166057.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aff570fo73395bf8705796efaob21b4e4>



ceasefire: the Uribe Accords. While they imagined that the agreement would be temporary, the deal never set an end date.<sup>85</sup>

The Uribe Accords called for a bilateral ceasefire, with the government creating a National Verification Commission to ensure the FARC's compliance with the agreement. After a year of peace, the FARC would then be allowed to form their own political party. The Uribe Accords also reiterated that amnesty under Law 35 would continue to be in effect. To try to heal the root problems stemming from a lack of reforms designed to bolster the peasants, the government established a Peace Commission, which focused on democratizing political institutions (for instance, ensuring popular elections for mayors), improving agricultural policies to benefit rural Colombians, and increasing access to education. Finally, the Uribe Accords left the door open for other guerilla groups to make the exact same agreement with the government.<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the FARC's agreement to a ceasefire that pushed M-19 farther away from peace. Before the Uribe Accords, M-19 leaders communicated directly with the office of the president, including with the president himself. With heightened legitimacy gained from this allowed access, the M-19 continued to bargain for more from the government. However, once the president and the national government were able to achieve a ceasefire with the FARC, the government grew impatient with M-19 and decided to dissociate with the group, a move which in turn prompted M-19 to be more aggressive. M-19 conquered the town of Garzón and rapidly moved to conquer Forencia, the capital of the department of Caquetá. Despite this move, a few months after the FARC signed their ceasefire agreement with the government, M-19 signed their own ceasefire with the promise of eventually being allowed political representation too. Less than two years later, however, M-19 perpetrated the Palace of Justice Siege, which could not have been a clearer sign that the ceasefire was over.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> "Acuerdos De La Uribe." United Nations Peacemaker, March 28, 1984, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO\\_840328\\_Acuerdos%20De%20La%20Uribe.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO_840328_Acuerdos%20De%20La%20Uribe.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Chernick, Marc W. "Negotiated Settlement to Armed Conflict: Lessons from the Colombian Peace Process." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 1988-1989), pp. 53-88, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/166057.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aff570fo73395bf8705796efaob21b4e4>

The FARC, on the other hand, stuck to the agreement despite continued suspicion of the government. By 1986, after fulfilling the year of calm outlined in the Uribe Accords, the FARC debuted their legal political party, the Patriotic Union. With surprising election victories enough to give the FARC influence but not substantial power, drug cartels and right-wing paramilitaries were still sufficiently motivated to launch a broad political assassination campaign against Patriotic Union candidates. In turn, this pushed the FARC out of the ceasefire.<sup>88</sup>

While guerilla groups initially agreed to a ceasefire, lack of acceptance from the military and other anti-guerilla groups made the agreements untenable. Moreover, because the Peace Commission failed to improve the welfare of the peasants as the government desired it would, guerillas maintained a strong base of support, a group which was perhaps even more incensed than before the Uribe Accords were enacted.

### ***The Demobilization of M-19***

The transformation of M-19 from executing the Palace of Justice Siege to demobilizing and becoming a significant third party in national politics was astonishing. Right after the Palace of Justice Siege, top members of M-19 were assassinated by the Colombian army. The losses left Carlos Pizarro in charge of the guerilla group. Pizarro fundamentally changed the strategy for M-19, as he believed that the best way to make the Colombian government more democratic (the core mission of M-19) would be through leveraging change by a negotiated peace agreement.<sup>89</sup>

In order for M-19 to demobilize, the government agreed to let M-19 run as a political party (AD/M-19) as well as to earmark funds for rural development. Additionally, M-19 called for drastic constitutional changes, which eventually prompted the creation of a new constitution.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Durán, Mauricio G. et al. "The M-19's Journey from Armed Struggle to Democratic Politics." *Berghof Research Center*, 2008, [http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2548/pdf/transitions\\_m19.pdf](http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2548/pdf/transitions_m19.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

On March 9, 1990, M-19 officially demobilized, and on the 11th, Pizarro ran for mayor of Bogotá and won more than 70,000 votes (~7.8%). In the May presidential election, AD/M-19 was already allowed to run and even won more than 750,000 votes (~12.5%) but ultimately lost to Liberal César Gaviria.<sup>91</sup>

After the agreed constitutional alterations were determined by the courts to be unconstitutional, President Gaviria, having just assumed power, quickly began the process of drafting a new Colombian constitution.<sup>92</sup> Part of that process was forming a Constitutional Assembly which was decided to have 90 members, with representatives voted in by the public. In the Constitutional Assembly elections, AD/M-19 received over 950,000 votes (~27.3%), meaning that the demobilized guerilla group that just months before had been in armed opposition to the government now had 19 representatives in the 90-member assembly.<sup>93</sup>

However, AD/M-19's political success story largely mirrored what happened to the Patriotic Union less than a decade before. First, both parties received unexpected public support and turnout in their initial elections. Second, both parties suffered a political assassination crisis. A month after agreeing to demobilize M-19, leader Carlos Pizarro was assassinated on a plane minutes after takeoff from the El Dorado International Airport in Bogotá. Though it is still not clear who was behind the attack, the Medellín cartel was responsible for the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán and Patriotic Union presidential candidate Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa. On top of that, right after the attack, one Colombia radio network received an anonymous call claiming the Medellín Cartel ordered the assassination.<sup>94</sup> As already reviewed, the Patriotic Union experienced a sweeping, disastrous wave of political assassinations ranging from their presidential candidate to hundreds of local leaders. Lastly, after a few years of political success, both AD/M-19 and the Patriotic Union fizzled in influence. Since M-19 had already demobilized and felt that the group's larger mission of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Vanegas, Farid. "Law as a Peace Treaty: The Case of M-19 and the 1991 Colombian Constitution." UMass Amherst, 2005, <http://www.umass.edu/legal/Hilbink/250/Benavides.pdf>

<sup>93</sup> Durán, Mauricio G. et al. "The M-19's Journey from Armed Struggle to Democratic Politics." *Berghof Research Center*, 2008, [http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2548/pdf/transitions\\_m19.pdf](http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2548/pdf/transitions_m19.pdf)

<sup>94</sup> Just as a note, AUC head Carlos Castaño (and former Medellín Cartel member) eventually admitted to being responsible for the Pizarro assassination. Castaño confessed to the assassination in his book *Mi Confesión* (My Confession).

improving Colombian democracy was largely accomplished by the new constitution, AD/M-19 did not convert back into a guerilla group, unlike the Patriotic Union which rejoined with the FARC.<sup>95</sup>

### ***Controlling Coca Cultivation***

While the pervasive violence has been and continues to be the primary problem plaguing Colombia, coca cultivation, with all its ramifications, has been the modern undercurrent fueling the conflict. Colombia banned farming coca in 1947, yet with limited national oversight in rural regions, peasants were able to continue growing the lucrative crop. Drug cartels emerged in the 1970s, a development which ramped up production and streamlined international distribution. Left-wing guerillas also began their “protection” schemes around that time. With both the drug cartels and the guerillas heavily profiting from coca, and with added pressure from the U.S. government to crack down on coca growers as part of the war on drugs, the Colombian government decided to ramp up stymying coca cultivation and the drug trade generally.<sup>96</sup> Specifically, the government has focused on destroying cocaine production laboratories and eliminating the cartels.<sup>97</sup>

The two most powerful cartels over the last couple decades, the Medellín and Cali cartels, both dissolved after their leaders were killed by Colombian police, arrested, or turned themselves in. Yet with coca still in high demand, right-wing paramilitaries (with many founded by the cartels) and left-wing guerillas have competed for, and continue to battle over, the cartels’ lost territory and infrastructure.<sup>98</sup>

### ***The Formation of the UNODCCP (UNODC)***

This year, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP) merged to form the United Nations Office on Drug Control

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<sup>95</sup> Durán, Mauricio G. et al. “The M-19’s Journey from Armed Struggle to Democratic Politics.” *Berghof Research Center*, 2008, [http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2548/pdf/transitions\\_m19.pdf](http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2548/pdf/transitions_m19.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> “Alternative Coca Reduction Strategies in the Andean Region.” *Office of Technology Assessment*, July 1993, <https://ota.fas.org/reports/9307.pdf>

<sup>97</sup> Riding, Alan. “The Drug Trade in Colombia Prospers, Crackdown or No.” *The New York Times*, May 23, 1986, <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/05/23/world/the-drug-trade-in-colombia-prospers-crackdown-or-no.html>

<sup>98</sup> Sánchez-Moreno, Maria M. and Braunschweiger, Amy. “Interview: Murder and Corruption in Colombia.” *Human Rights Watch*, March 13, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/13/interview-murder-and-corruption-colombia>

and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP).<sup>99</sup> While this move was mainly to consolidate bureaucracy, the merger does demonstrate that the international community continues to value an international response to the drug trade.<sup>100</sup>

Though the 1990s were declared as the “United Nations Decade Against Drug Abuse,” Colombia has seen a surge in coca cultivation. Moreover, the UN’s inability to interfere with national sovereignty inhibits the UNDCP and the new UNODCCP from implementing substantial policy measures. While the existence of the UNODCCP is a net positive, clearly concrete reforms are also needed.<sup>101</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

Despite escalating crime, violence, and drug trade activities, Colombia has somehow largely avoided the international spotlight. Past actions taken with regard to different situations in Colombia throughout the years have had mixed results in tempering short-term hostilities and arguably no success in making progress to end the long-term conflict.

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<sup>99</sup> This was the precursor to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and ostensibly had the same function.

<sup>100</sup> “#UN70: Seven Decades of the United Nations.” *United Nations*, 2015, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/frontpage/2015/un70.html>

<sup>101</sup> “1997/37. Review of the United Nations International Drug Programme.” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, 1997, [https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/Resolutions/resolution\\_1997-07-21\\_1.html](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/Resolutions/resolution_1997-07-21_1.html)

## Possible Solutions

### ***Introduction to Possible Solutions***

For 150 years, Colombia has waded in tumult, conflict, and loss. The OAS now has the opportunity to introduce a resolution to guide Colombia into lasting prosperity. While thoughtful committee debate will produce the ultimate resolution for the OAS, below are some ideas that should inspire more detailed plans.

### ***New Peace Agreements***

While the OAS cannot compel any party to agree to a peace deal, the OAS could draft a roadmap for how to encourage the different parties in the conflict to come together and design a nuanced framework for a potential long-term agreement. One possible idea is that foreign aid could be provided for achieving different objectives that help foster peace. However, in drafting such an agreement, be careful not to accidentally create any perverse incentives: that is, create more harm than good. For instance, providing financial benefits to groups that eradicate their coca crops may appear to be an effective way to diminish guerilla and paramilitary funding sources while at the same time deescalating the drug trade. However, such a solution may cause those groups to plant more coca to destroy the crops for the promised funds (or worse, to first sell the coca and then claim to have destroyed those same fields).

The most consequential example of perverse incentives in Colombia is the “false positive” killings scandal. The Colombian government received more aid from the U.S. after the government was able to demonstrate that its anti-guerilla tactics were working based on their high number of guerilla casualties. In reality, the military lured thousands of poorer (often young adult males) citizens unaffiliated with guerillas deep into the forest, killed them, stripped off their clothes, and then dressed them in FARC uniforms to inflate the casualty numbers. While “false positive” killings were

suspected to have occurred since the early 1980s, the scandal did not break until 2008 and is thus not applicable for this committee session, which is taking place in 1997.<sup>102</sup>

Also consider the differences between the Uribe Accords ceasefire between the government and the FARC and the demobilization of M-19. Even though the Uribe Accords did not have an explicit end date, the agreement did not last and the FARC continues to terrorize Colombians. On the other hand, the demobilization of M-19 did permanently transform that guerilla group into a political party (albeit a party with limited influence now). Convincing guerillas and paramilitaries to completely demobilize is likely the surest way to facilitate long-term peace, but with each fearing that the other will attack its members once the group has disarmed itself, ending this standoff will require creativity and tact.

### ***Curbing the Drug Trade***

Colombia coca cultivation has recently skyrocketed from 50,900 hectares in 1995 to 79,400 hectares this year (nearly a 60% increase).<sup>103</sup> Colombia's strategy of targeting cartel leaders successfully brought down the Medellín and Cali cartels, but ostensibly did not hamper drug trade operations based in Colombia. Around the world, coca has been banned, and thus encouraging countries to legalize and regulate cocaine is not on the table. That leaves two main avenues to addressing Colombia's coca problem: eradication or limitation.

#### **Eradication**

Especially with the U.S. encouraging Colombia to take stronger action against those involved with the drug trade, the Colombian government has pursued obliterating coca crops with scant sympathy for peasants relying on those crops to survive. After all, the government contends that rural farmers can attempt to make a living planting legal crops, even if they are less lucrative. However, that perspective does not take into account guerilla and paramilitary leaders pressuring peasants to grow coca to fund their operations. To complicate matters further, President Samper, the current leader

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<sup>102</sup> "Peace Court: Colombia Army 'Behind 6400 Extrajudicial Killings.'" BBC News, July 18, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56112386>.

<sup>103</sup> "Coca Cultivation." *Colombia Reports*, August 8, 2019, <https://colombiareports.com/coca-cultivation-statistics/>

of Colombia, allegedly received funding for his campaign from drug traffickers.<sup>104</sup> As a result, the U.S. has been suspicious of the Colombian government's efforts to impede the drug trade and has "decertified" the Colombian government two years in a row as a partner in the war on drugs. This "decertification" has led to the U.S. cutting financial aid to Colombia. However, the U.S. largely backtracked on their decision to not grant Colombia foreign aid by providing funding for the Colombian armed forces, leaving the "decertification" label a dangling, impotent symbol.<sup>105</sup>

Now, the OAS can choose between encouraging a more serious coca eradication effort or developing a limitation strategy.

The advantages for pursuing eradication are that the drug trade would be rapidly diminished and that success on this front would smooth over Colombia-US relations; both would be significant accomplishments that could bolster Colombia's international standing. On the other hand, eradicating coca fields would leave thousands of peasants destitute and may increase the price of coca by sharply reducing supply, not to mention incense the guerillas and paramilitaries and perhaps drive more peasants to join those groups, as it would appear the government does not care about their plight.

### Limitation

Regarding limitation, it is difficult to determine the pros and cons because limitation policies have not really been implemented. One idea, crop substitution, sought to either replace coca fields with legal crops or to ensure coca crops would be used for solely legal purposes (examples include eye drops, Coca-Cola soda, and more). However, crop substitution efforts have largely failed mainly because growers have had little economic incentive to switch from coca to any other plant. For example, farmers can profit from growing coca crops after approximately two years or less, with a nearly guaranteed market; on the contrary, legal crops can take three years or more to grow, and after that long, the market price may have fallen for the substituted crop (especially if farmers

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> "Colombia: The Problem of Illegal Narcotics and U.S.-Colombian Relations." *Congressional Research Service*, May 11, 1998, [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/19980511\\_98-152F\\_94e4e0d2b1e8556cbdf987e608735fc75facb330.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/19980511_98-152F_94e4e0d2b1e8556cbdf987e608735fc75facb330.pdf)



substitute their coca crops all at once).<sup>106</sup> Especially in Colombia, where politicians are allegedly tied to the drug trade, policies that only limit coca production instead of seeking to destroy the crops will likely not be met with broad international approval. Yet given how long this conflict has lasted, perhaps countries will be open to this less-ventured path.

### ***Improving Rural Infrastructure and Welfare***

Despite decades of focused military assaults and paramilitary raids, guerillas persist in Colombia primarily because they continue to draw support from rural peasants who feel neglected by the government. For multiple peace deals, the Colombian government has agreed to developing rural infrastructure, but has largely ignored its task.

Rural Colombians have a shockingly lower standard of living compared to their urban counterparts. While nearly 100% of urban Colombians have access to improved water and sanitation sources (sources that successfully prevent contamination with human waste), only 52% of rural households have access to improved water and only 65% have access to improved sanitation. Similarly, while 100% of urban Colombians have access to electricity, only 77% of rural Colombians can say the same. One of the most massive disparities is with household access to telephones, with nearly 53% of urban households having access to a telephone compared to less than 4% of rural households. This pattern of outsized differences continues with transportation, income, access to fuels, and more.<sup>107</sup>

Improving infrastructure is more costly in rural areas compared to urban areas because of how spread out homes and communities are. For instance, denser cities require fewer roads than a vast rural network. Solutions for how to improve clearly needed rural development will rely on crafting incentives for infrastructure companies to take on improving rural areas. One example might be to encourage the Colombian government to lower corporate taxes for individual firms based on how much a company focuses on rural areas. Another idea might be to have a summit of different

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<sup>106</sup> Rensselaer, Lee and Clawson, Patrick. "Crop Substitution in the Andes." *The Office of National Drug Policy*, December 1993, "<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/146794NCJRS.pdf>

<sup>107</sup> "Colombia: Recent Economic Developments in Infrastructure (REDI)." World Bank, November 1, 2004, [http://www.energytoolbox.org/library/good\\_practices\\_in\\_water+sanitation\\_utility\\_regulation/contents/Colombia-REDI\\_Report.pdf](http://www.energytoolbox.org/library/good_practices_in_water+sanitation_utility_regulation/contents/Colombia-REDI_Report.pdf)

infrastructure companies to coordinate projects in rural Colombia to make the projects logistically easier.

Improving rural infrastructure and peasant welfare is critical, and with so many facets to this specific category of solutions, there should be numerous concrete reforms outlined in committee to address this broad problem.

### ***Conclusion***

Colombia's present issues of violence, illegal drug cultivation and trade, and underserved rural communities are not individual problems; rather, they are interconnected and sustain the larger conflict engulfing Colombia. If the OAS's resolution is successful, adapted solutions may be used to not only finally resolve the armed conflict in Colombia but to also remedy similar conflicts internationally. With so much at stake, delegates should be ready to engage in committee with nuanced research in order to effectively debate solutions that will come together to form a final comprehensive resolution.

## Bloc Positions

### *Introduction to Bloc Positions*

In committee, countries will have different principles and priorities that will influence how each member will craft solutions. Members that overlap in these values tend to work together to form blocs, which are groups that collaborate to form draft resolutions. The goal of this section is to outline some potential points of distinction between OAS members to provide an idea as to how countries may organize into blocs for committee. Keep in mind that committee members will ultimately need to form blocs themselves during the committee sessions, and that the following groupings are merely examples of potential sources of allyship.

### *Countries With Experience Combating Guerillas*

Across the Americas, different governments have been challenged internally by violent guerillas. In the last three years, two separate guerilla movements have sprung up in Mexico: the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN-- *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) and the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR-- *Ejército Popular Revolucionario*), each seeking to spur severe political turmoil.<sup>108</sup> In El Salvador, five years ago the government was able to end a 12-year civil war with left-wing guerillas after signing the broad Chapultepec Agreement with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN-- *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*), the most prominent guerilla organization in the country.<sup>109</sup> In 1979, the Nicaraguan government was overthrown by the Sandinistas, a political party that operated with guerillas. 10 years later, after brutal fighting between the Sandinistas and the Contras (also a guerilla group), Sandinista party leader Daniel Ortega struck a deal with neighboring countries to allow a democratic presidential election in 1990 in exchange for those neighboring countries to shut down Contra bases within their borders; Ortega lost the election and the Sandinistas quietly retreated from power.<sup>110</sup> Countries who are currently

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<sup>108</sup> Ross, John. "Strong Contrasts Between Zapatistas, New Guerrilla Movement in Guerrero." *Latin America Digital Beat*, September 18, 1986, <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4632&context=sourcemex>

<sup>109</sup> "Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Farabundo-Marti-National-Liberation-Front>

<sup>110</sup> "Sandinistas are Defeated in Nicaraguan Elections." *History*, February 24, 2020, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/sandinistas-are-defeated-in-nicaraguan-elections>

fighting or have resolved tensions with guerillas may come ready to committee with a strong sense of what solutions work and do not work in ending guerilla violence.

On the other hand, other OAS members such as Canada, Barbados, and Saint Lucia have had little to no experience in combating guerilla groups. As a result, these countries may instead be apt to offer solutions of how to keep a permanent peace without promoting armed guerilla hostilities in the first place.

### ***Countries Facing the Drug Trade***

All OAS members have had some involvement in the international drug trade. Coca production powerhouses Peru and Bolivia have seen a significant dip in coca cultivation in the last few years due to myriad factors, including explicit drug eradication policies as well as a widespread fungal blight.<sup>111</sup> While the United States has helmed the “War on Drugs”, the global effort to end the illicit procurement and use of various drugs such as cocaine, the U.S. has nevertheless been one of the prime markets for cocaine. The Office of National Drug Control Policy has estimated that Americans consumed approximately 275 metric tons of cocaine in 1997 and 1,551 metric tons of cocaine in the past five years.<sup>112</sup> While cocaine consumption has dropped since 1988 when an estimated 660 metric tons of cocaine was consumed, clearly the U.S market for cocaine is still lucrative.<sup>113</sup> Thus, instead of just focusing on coca supply, OAS members more involved in the drug trade should also discuss how to dampen cocaine demand.

Additionally, other OAS countries have focused on preventing drug transports.

For example, many OAS members such as Jamaica and Guyana have legal provisions allowing for police to search any container suspected to be involved in trafficking drugs without a warrant.<sup>114</sup> One especially harsh policy that may transgress international law undertaken by Peru, Colombia, and

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<sup>111</sup> Bigwood, Jeremy and Coffin, Phillip. “Coca Eradication.” Institute for Policy Studies, October 6, 2005 [https://ips-dc.org/coca\\_eradication/](https://ips-dc.org/coca_eradication/)

<sup>112</sup> “The Global Cocaine Market.” UNODC, 2010, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2010/1.3\\_The\\_global\\_cocaine\\_market.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2010/1.3_The_global_cocaine_market.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Griffith, Ivelaw L. “Drugs and Criminal Justice in the Caribbean.” Caribbean Quarterly, 1996, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/40654199?seq=10#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/40654199?seq=10#metadata_info_tab_contents)

Mexico is to shoot down planes believed to be carrying illegal drugs.<sup>115</sup> Given that these aforementioned laws threaten civil liberties and are potentially, if not absolutely, human rights abuses, OAS members who have passed these laws and those countries lacking these laws should collaborate to adopt some regional standard for what legal provisions are permissible in the name of frustrating the international drug trade.

### ***Countries with Significant Rural Populations***

Approximately 25.9% of the Latin American and Caribbean population is rural.<sup>116</sup> Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia have the largest total rural populations while geographically smaller countries like Saint Lucia, Guyana, and Antigua and Barbuda have the highest percent of rural residents per total population.<sup>117</sup> As previously discussed, rural development in Colombia is severely lacking, which has inspired a loss of confidence among peasants in the national government that has in turn promoted guerillas and paramilitaries. Using different OAS members' perspectives and knowledge in improving rural infrastructure will be crucial to improving the current situation in Colombia.

While dividing into blocs based on similar land areas or populations may seem sensible as similarly sized countries will likely have similar priorities, perhaps having a more diverse bloc will enable a more thorough and holistic resolution to be crafted. Consider also that a bloc of just smaller nations will likely be unable to secure enough funding for impactful solutions and a bloc with larger nations will likely be too removed from the experience of smaller countries to be able to come up with successful ideas that can be applied to Colombia and ideally beyond (case in point, the current ostensibly unilateral role the U.S. has played in the armed conflict has been relatively ineffective, especially given how much aid the U.S. has provided the Colombian government).

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<sup>115</sup> Johnson, Phillip A., "Shooting Down Drug Traffickers." International Law Studies, 1998, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1467&context=ils>

<sup>116</sup> "Rural Population (% of Total Population)- Latin America and Caribbean." The World Bank, 2018, [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=1997&locations=ZJ&most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true&start=1960](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=1997&locations=ZJ&most_recent_value_desc=true&start=1960)

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. (Using the same web tool with different inputs)

## Glossary

**Amnesty:** A pardon offered by the government given to individuals or organizations in exchange for negotiated conditions such as disarming

**Cartel:** A group of people or businesses that produce or supply a common good and that form an alliance to manipulate the market for their benefit

**Coca:** A crop grown primarily for its leaves, which can be used to produce cocaine

**Demobilize:** For an organization to disarm itself and cease violent and destructive operations

**Department:** A group of municipalities led by a governor and an assembly. Some contain provinces which are smaller collections of municipalities within a single department.

**Guerilla:** A person or group that functions as a coordinated armed unit whose attacks are unorganized

**Hectare:** 10,000 square meters of land

**Law 35:** A provision envisioned by President Betancur and passed by congress to allow those who perpetrated politically related crimes before the law was enacted (in December of 1982) to be generally pardoned; the law excluded weightier crimes such as kidnapping and murder<sup>118</sup>

**Military Junta:** A committee of armed forces leaders who take power, usually after a coup

**Paramilitary:** a person or group that functions as a coordinated armed unit that while perhaps may not be directly associated with a military does consider itself to be an unofficial part of the military

**War on Drugs:** An international effort started and led by the United States government to reduce drug use through preventing cultivation and production of source crops and impeding drug transport

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<sup>118</sup> See the Past Actions section under the Uribe Accords heading for the citation

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## TOPIC B: EL NIÑO EVENT, 1997-1998

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### Statement of the Problem

*Note: This section begins informationally, referencing things from beyond 1998*

#### ***What is an El Niño Event?***

We begin by focusing on the weather events of early 1997, when the typical **trade winds** blowing along the equator weakened and eventually reversed. Westerly winds forced warm water along the equator toward the east, and the **warm pool** of water (mass of ocean water which consistently exhibits the highest water temperatures over the largest expanse of the Earth's surface<sup>119</sup>) became larger. As such, the effects of the westerly winds became greater, and these greater forces made the warm pool grow even further. In the eastern Pacific ocean - close to the Americas - the typical temperature gradient of the ocean (**thermocline**) was forced down to greater depths by these winds, causing the surface temperatures of the ocean in the eastern Pacific to increase. By late 1997, the thermocline in the eastern Pacific was depressed by over 90 meters, or almost 300 feet.<sup>120</sup> Sea surface temperatures in the Pacific rose, and thus began the 1997-1998 El Niño.

El Niño events are not particularly rare, but these events occur irregularly. Every few years, surface temperatures in the Pacific ocean rise and the water becomes especially nutrient-poor. Trade winds normally blow west and move warm water toward Asia, and the warm water is replaced by cooler water from the depths of the ocean. This process is called **upwelling**. During an El Niño period, which can sometimes last for years, the trade winds are weakened and occasionally reversed. When warm water is pushed back toward the Americas, the weather changes significantly. Additionally, without normal upwelling of nutrient-rich water from the depths of the ocean, marine life suffers. El Niño events are typically followed by a cooling period known as La Niña, and these events combined are

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<sup>119</sup> Peterson, Thomas C., Peter A. Stott, and Stephanie Herring. "Explaining Extreme Events of 2011 from a Climate Perspective". *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 93.7 (2012): 1041-1067. <<https://doi.org/10.1175/BAMS-D-12-00021.1>>. Web. 8 Jul. 2021.

<sup>120</sup> McPhaden, Michael J. "Genesis and Evolution of the 1997-98 El Niño." *U.S. Dept. of Commerce / NOAA / OAR / PMEL / Publications*, Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, Washington, 1999, [www.pmel.noaa.gov/pubs/outstand/mcph2029/text.shtml](http://www.pmel.noaa.gov/pubs/outstand/mcph2029/text.shtml).

known as El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events.<sup>121</sup> However, El Niño and La Niña are not always connected. In this instance, strong El Niño conditions were observed in December 1997, and La Niña conditions peaked around December 1998.

During a La Niña period, the trade winds get much stronger. This means that upwelling increases, and the Pacific ocean gets cooler along the equator. Rain clouds form more readily over warm water, so the cooler water in the eastern Pacific makes the Americas along the Pacific much drier.<sup>122</sup>

Although El Niño and La Niña occur in the Pacific ocean, these events affect weather all around the world. Moreover, climate change is making El Niño events more frequent and more intense. While these weather events may seem inconsequential, El Niño periods have significant impacts on both aquatic and terrestrial life. According to the UN, the 1997-1998 El Niño brought about thousands of deaths and injuries through a variety of natural disasters. Estimates for related damage range between 32 billion and 96 billion US dollars.<sup>123</sup>

*Note: Now we go back in time to 1998.*

## Droughts and forest fires

As it pertains to the OAS, Mexico, Central America, and Brazil have experienced extreme droughts and forest fires as a result of the recent El Niño. While tropical forests are normally too humid to burn, forest fire effects have been exacerbated by the arid forest and grassland areas left by **slash-and-burn agriculture**.<sup>124</sup> Because the climate has become more arid since the start of the El Niño, forest fires produce more smoke, and visibility has been reduced throughout the region. Within the last two years, over one million acres have been burned by these El Niño-related forest fires. Strong winds have forced the resulting pollution as far north as the United States.

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<sup>121</sup> US Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *What Are El Nino and La Nina?*, 26 Mar. 2009, oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/ninonina.html.

<sup>122</sup> "What Is La Niña?" NOAA SciJinks – All About Weather, [scijinks.gov/la-nina/#:~:text=La%20Ni%C3%B1a%20is%20a%20weather,the%20coast%20of%20South%20America](http://scijinks.gov/la-nina/#:~:text=La%20Ni%C3%B1a%20is%20a%20weather,the%20coast%20of%20South%20America).

<sup>123</sup> "INTERNATIONAL STUDY RELEASED 'LESSONS FROM THE 1997-1998 EL NIÑO: ONCE BURNED, TWICE SHY?'" Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/press/en/2000/20001027.unep76.doc.html](http://www.un.org/press/en/2000/20001027.unep76.doc.html).

<sup>124</sup> "OFDA Situation Report #2: Mexico and Central America - Fires - Honduras." *ReliefWeb*, [reliefweb.int/report/honduras/ofda-situation-report-2-mexico-and-central-america-fires](http://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/ofda-situation-report-2-mexico-and-central-america-fires).

In Mexico, over ten thousand individual fires have started since January of this year (as of 21 May 1998).<sup>125</sup> In May, there were around 277 active fires in the country. The Secretariat of the Environment, Natural Resources, and Fisheries (SEMARNAP), Julia Carabias Lillo, said that Mexico has only received a tenth of its usual rainfall.<sup>125</sup> While the government of Mexico has made every effort to fight these fires, it has also recognized its need for aid in the form of international technical expertise and improved equipment.

According to the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), there are around two thousand fires in Guatemala (as of 21 May 1998). The air quality in Guatemala has worsened greatly since it began to suffer from droughts and subsequent fires, and the Ministry of Health has noticed a significant rise in the prevalence of respiratory illnesses and smoke-related ailments. Unfortunately, the Guatemalan Air Force has a relatively small number of helicopters, which has reduced its capacity to fight the fires. Aerial forces have also been inhibited on occasion by the thick smoke, low visibility, and air pollution.<sup>126</sup>

Since December of last year, there have been over thirteen thousand fires in Nicaragua, which is the highest number of individual fires in any country in Central America.<sup>127</sup> Rain has recently helped some fires to subside, and the Nicaraguan government has turned to long term prevention. One measure it has pursued is a campaign to inform farmers about the dangers associated with burning fields, asking them to use plows instead. The Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources has since asked for assistance in firefighting from the United States government.

Like Central America, Brazil is also dealing with droughts and fires related to the recent El Niño. The slash-and-burn techniques used by many farmers have caused many of these fires, and the dry climate resulting from the El Niño have spun these fires out of control.<sup>128</sup> Firefighters from Argentina and Venezuela have arrived in Brazil to help with fighting fires in the Amazon.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> "Julia Carabias Lillo." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., [www.britannica.com/biography/Julia-Carabias-Lillo](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Julia-Carabias-Lillo).

<sup>126</sup> "OFDA Situation Report #12: Mexico & Central America - Fires - Honduras." *ReliefWeb*, [reliefweb.int/report/honduras/ofda-situation-report-12-mexico-central-america-fires](http://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/ofda-situation-report-12-mexico-central-america-fires).

<sup>127</sup> "Ibid."

<sup>128</sup> Gleason, Enloe. "Wildfires - Annual 1998." *National Climatic Data Center*, [www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/fire/199813](http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/fire/199813).

<sup>129</sup> *CNN*, Cable News Network, [edition.cnn.com/EARTH/9803/31/brazil.fires.update/](http://edition.cnn.com/EARTH/9803/31/brazil.fires.update/).



## ***Hurricanes and floods***

While the ENSO event caused the climate to become drier in some regions, it has also resulted in flooding in others around the world. Northern Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador have witnessed increased rainfall and flooding. Tumbes, a city in Peru, had sixteen times the normal amount of rain during the recent ENSO cycle.<sup>130</sup> As a result, there has been limited access to transportation, more infectious diseases, and negative effects on livestock. Recovering agriculture and residential infrastructure will take time. In the meantime, flooding contributes to an increased presence of malaria, chronic diarrhea, and acute respiratory infections in Peru.<sup>131</sup>

Last year's Hurricane Pauline was the most severe storm to hit Mexico since 1959, according to officials.<sup>132</sup> Experts believe that the warm water in the Pacific caused by El Niño worsened the severity of the storm. The hurricane killed an estimated 230-500 individuals, with winds moving up to 134 miles per hour.<sup>133</sup> Acapulco was damaged severely, with costs of damage potentially reaching around 447 million US dollars.<sup>134</sup> Floods are believed to have killed over 200 people in Acapulco alone.<sup>135</sup> In the aftermath of Hurricane Pauline, 300,000 people have been left homeless in Mexico.<sup>136</sup> Due to infrastructural and agricultural damages, Mexico's economy suffers greatly. Specifically, damage to the coffee harvest is particularly harmful, as Mexico exports about forty percent of its harvest.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Bayer, Angela M, et al. "An Unforgettable Event: a Qualitative Study of the 1997-98 El Niño in Northern Peru." *Disasters*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Apr. 2014, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4317261/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4317261/).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> "NOVA Online | Tracking El Niño | Across the Globe." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/el\\_nino/reach/across/mexico.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/el_nino/reach/across/mexico.html).

<sup>133</sup> Price, Niko. "Mexico Issues Warnings As Hurricane Pauline, Carrying 130 MPH Winds, Moves Toward Southern Mexico Coast." *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 7 Oct. 1997, [apnews.com/article/f940902f287bdae52c5534dc9c4855a1](http://apnews.com/article/f940902f287bdae52c5534dc9c4855a1).

<sup>134</sup> "The International Disaster Database." *EM-DAT*, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters - CRED, [web.archive.org/web/20140203051752/www.emdat.be/search-details-disaster-list](http://web.archive.org/web/20140203051752/www.emdat.be/search-details-disaster-list).

<sup>135</sup> Lawrence, Miles B. "Eastern North Pacific Hurricane Season of 1997." *AMETSOC*, American Meteorological Society, 1 Oct. 1999, [journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/mwre/127/10/1520-0493\\_1999\\_127\\_2440\\_enphso\\_2.0.co\\_2.xml](http://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/mwre/127/10/1520-0493_1999_127_2440_enphso_2.0.co_2.xml).

<sup>136</sup> "Appeal Mexico Hurricane Pauline - Mexico." *ReliefWeb*, [reliefweb.int/report/mexico/appeal-mexico-hurricane-pauline](http://reliefweb.int/report/mexico/appeal-mexico-hurricane-pauline).

<sup>137</sup> Torres, Craig. "Mexico Assesses Damage From Hurricane Pauline." *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company, 13 Oct. 1997, [www.wsj.com/articles/SB876700158236987000](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB876700158236987000).

During the recent ENSO, Ecuador experienced 104 fatalities due to severe flooding and resulting mudslides.<sup>138</sup> Severe floods along the coastline have affected access to medical supplies, clean water, and housing, and in February, 105,000 hectares of agriculture and many homes were lost.<sup>139</sup> There are over six thousand families in need of governmental assistance.



*A landslide in Colombia reveals the impact of El Niño conditions*

In Peru, over 5.9 percent of the country's GDP was lost because of the El Niño, totaling up to 2 billion US dollars.<sup>140</sup> Due to extreme rainfall and floods, there is a high prevalence of undernutrition and

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<sup>138</sup> Lozanova, Sarah. "Ecuador Braces for El Niño." *TriplePundit*, 11 Nov. 2015, [www.triplepundit.com/story/2015/ecuador-braces-el-nino/30736](http://www.triplepundit.com/story/2015/ecuador-braces-el-nino/30736).

<sup>139</sup> "Ecuador El Niño Floods Situation Report No. 6 - Ecuador." *ReliefWeb*, [reliefweb.int/report/ecuador/ecuador-el-ni%C3%B1o-floods-situation-report-no-6](http://reliefweb.int/report/ecuador/ecuador-el-ni%C3%B1o-floods-situation-report-no-6).

<sup>140</sup> "Weird Coastal El Nino Clobbers Peru: 80 Killed, \$1.4 Billion in Damage." *Weather Underground*. Web. 08 July 2021, <https://www.wunderground.com/cat6/weird-coastal-el-nino-clobbers-peru-80-killed-14-billion-damage>.

infectious disease. (Flash forward ten years, and childhood stature and lean mass in northern Peru is known to have been adversely affected by the El Niño of 1997-1998.<sup>141</sup>)

The recent ENSO event has also played a role in delaying the start of this year's hurricane season, which is predicted to have devastating effects. (Looking back, the 1998 hurricane season had 14 storms and was one of the deadliest hurricane seasons in centuries.<sup>142</sup> Honduras lost 70 percent of its GDP during Hurricane Mitch in 1998.<sup>143</sup>) Serious flooding connected to the El Niño was also observed in Uruguay, Paraguay, southern Brazil, and Argentina.

### **Heat waves**

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 1998 will likely be the hottest year in recorded history.<sup>144</sup> Experts say that, while these changes are associated with the recent El Niño, the recent ENSO has only worsened an existing problem. Although the usual reports only include recorded weather history, researchers have recently reconstructed trends from the past one thousand years.<sup>145</sup> Experts have found that the past century (as in the twentieth century) has reversed the nine hundred years of natural global cooling that preceded it.<sup>146</sup> Global temperatures typically change quite slowly, but this recent shift is very abrupt. Experts worry that this period of warming is a sign that the worst climate changes are yet to come.

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<sup>141</sup> Danysh, Heather E, et al. "El Niño Adversely Affected Childhood Stature and Lean Mass in Northern Peru." *Climate Change Responses*, BioMed Central, 25 Nov. 2014, [climatechangeresponses.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40665-014-0007-z](http://climatechangeresponses.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40665-014-0007-z).

<sup>142</sup> Chicago Tribune. "1998 Hurricane Season Summary." *Chicagotribune.com*, Chicago Tribune, 30 Jan. 2019, [www.chicagotribune.com/sns-hc-history-1998nhc-htmlstory.html](http://www.chicagotribune.com/sns-hc-history-1998nhc-htmlstory.html).

<sup>143</sup> Mata, Luis Jose, et al. "Latin America." *The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, [www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/wg2TARchap14.pdf](http://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/wg2TARchap14.pdf).

<sup>144</sup> "El Niño / Southern Oscillation." *World Meteorological Organization*, 2014, [library.wmo.int/doc\\_num.php?explnum\\_id=7888#:~:text=The%20year%201998%2C%20which%20had,average%20of%2014%20%C2%BoC](http://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=7888#:~:text=The%20year%201998%2C%20which%20had,average%20of%2014%20%C2%BoC).

<sup>145</sup> "1998 Was Warmest Year Of Millenium, Climate Researchers Report." *ScienceDaily*, ScienceDaily, 4 Mar. 1999, [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/1999/03/990304052546.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/1999/03/990304052546.htm).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

## ***Extreme climate events and long-term health***

Because of droughts, floods, and damage to agriculture, El Niño events are associated with long-term damage to the health of populations.<sup>147</sup> As previously stated, there is restricted access to medicine, medical offices, and hospitals across the world because of flooding and forest fires. There has been increased prevalence of malnutrition and infectious disease since the start of the current El Niño period. While these health problems are primarily observed in the short-term, there are also concerns about the long-term implications of air pollution, agricultural devastation, and infectious illnesses. Bolivia and Chile, for example, are in need of medications to cure **cholera** as well as materials to purify water as a result of El Niño-related contamination. While many nations have experienced devastation of their healthcare sector during the current El Niño event, it is important to remember that the medical plight caused by the El Niño will not end in the very near future. Affected nations require the capacity to support their populations medically in this time of economic crisis.

## ***Failing industries and food insecurity***

With the rapidly changing environment and recent devastation either caused or exacerbated by the El Niño, many nations have experienced agricultural and economic adversity. While climate variability does make it more difficult to restore agricultural output, specific industries have been devastated by the warming of the ocean and its subsequent effects on land.

Fishing industries have been recently devastated by the warming of the Pacific Ocean, a ruination which includes the accelerated death of vulnerable fish populations due to the poor nutrient content of warmer water as well as the movement of fish away from their traditional homes. As the warm pool expands during an El Niño, fish populations move toward regions of the Pacific which are usually cooler.<sup>148</sup> Peru is particularly susceptible to damage to its anchovy industry, which

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<sup>147</sup> Kovats, R Sari, et al. "El Niño and Health." *Protection of the Human Environment - Task Force on Climate and Health*, World Health Organization Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments, 1999, [www.who.int/globalchange/publications/en/el-nino.pdf](http://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/en/el-nino.pdf).

<sup>148</sup> "El Niño in 1997-1998: Impacts and CARE's Response - World." *ReliefWeb*, [reliefweb.int/report/world/el-ni%C3%B1o-1997-1998-impacts-and-cares-response#:~:text=The%20fishing%20industry%20was%20devastated,that%20support%20cold%20water%20fish.&text=In%20the%20coastal%20areas%2C%20heavy,damaged%20water%20and%20sanitation%20of%20facilities](http://reliefweb.int/report/world/el-ni%C3%B1o-1997-1998-impacts-and-cares-response#:~:text=The%20fishing%20industry%20was%20devastated,that%20support%20cold%20water%20fish.&text=In%20the%20coastal%20areas%2C%20heavy,damaged%20water%20and%20sanitation%20of%20facilities).

constitutes one of the largest fisheries in the world.<sup>149</sup> During the recent El Niño, catches of anchovies in Peru fell by eighty percent, largely as a result of the fish migrating away from the unusually warm waters.<sup>150</sup>

Livestock and crops have been particularly affected by the world's recent climate changes, reducing many people's access to food. Many farmers' livelihoods have been wiped out by the recent El Niño event, and there is little opportunity to access fresh foods around the world. Many nations, especially those with little weather-resistant infrastructure, are in need of international aid, and individuals are in need of financial and social assistance across the Americas.

### ***Key Issues to Confront***

In times of crisis, it is important to set clear priorities. The committee is encouraged to consider short-term solutions to encourage the preservation of human life in this time of need. This includes care for families without housing, those who lack access to food and medicine, and any others who are considered to be at imminent risk. Long-term solutions should also be addressed, of which you may consider infrastructural developments, the implementation of weather-related technology, and other measures which will help predict storms and prevent future damages.

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<sup>149</sup> FocusEconomics. "Peru: El Niño Still on Economic Radar: FocusEconomics." *FocusEconomics | Economic Forecasts from the World's Leading Economists*, 31 Dec. 2014, [www.focus-economics.com/blog/posts/peru-el-nino-still-on-economic-radar](http://www.focus-economics.com/blog/posts/peru-el-nino-still-on-economic-radar).

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

## History of the Problem

### *Introduction to the Problem's History*

The periodic warming of the eastern Pacific Ocean was first recognized by Peruvian fishermen centuries ago.<sup>151</sup> In fact, the term “El Niño” refers to the Christ child, named as such because the effects of warm currents along the coasts of Peru and Ecuador often peaked in December. These events were not always particularly harmful. In fact, the first applications of this term referred more to seasonal variations than to the devastating ENSO events of today.<sup>152</sup> Experts believe that El Niño events have been occurring for thousands of years. Since the 1970s, El Niños have shifted to originate in the western Pacific rather than in the east, and El Niño events have been more devastating as a result of human-caused changes to the climate.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, the warming of the oceans throughout the twentieth century has increased the frequency and intensity of El Niños. As the ocean becomes warmer because of greenhouse gases and climate change, the temporary warming of the Pacific during El Niño events becomes more and more harmful. Essentially, more recent El Niños heat an already-warmed ocean. Besides the most recent (1997-98) El Niño event, the most devastating El Niño occurred only fifteen years ago, in 1982 through 1983.<sup>154</sup>

(Flash forward to the year 2021, and six El Niños have been observed since 2000. The 2015 El Niño caused record-breaking warming and drought in the Amazon rainforest.<sup>155</sup> The Amazon is often considered to be the “lungs of the planet,” as one fifth of the world’s oxygen is produced by the world’s largest rainforest; this El Niño-related weather event was especially damaging.<sup>156</sup>)

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<sup>151</sup> Carrillo, C. (1892). Hidrografía oceánica. *Bol. Soc. Geogr. Lima*, 1, 72–111.

<sup>152</sup> Adamson, G., 2020, IMPERIAL OSCILLATIONS: Gilbert Walker and the Construction of the Southern Oscillation, *Weather, Climate, and the Geographical Imagination: Placing Atmospheric Knowledges*. Mahony, M. & Randalls, S. (eds.). University of Pittsburgh Press, p. 43-66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10hg9g13.6>

<sup>153</sup> Wang, Bin, et al. “Historical Change of El Niño Properties Sheds Light on Future Changes of Extreme El Niño.” *PNAS*, National Academy of Sciences, 5 Nov. 2019, doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1911130116.

<sup>154</sup> Gannon, Robert. “Solving the Puzzle of El Niño.” *Popular Science* September 1986: 82-85, 118.

<sup>155</sup> Jiménez-Muñoz, J., Mattar, C., Barichivich, J. et al. Record-breaking warming and extreme drought in the Amazon rainforest during the course of El Niño 2015–2016. *Sci Rep* 6, 33130 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1038/srep33130>

<sup>156</sup> Written by Aylin Woodward. “The ‘Lungs of the Planet’ Are on Fire.” *World Economic Forum*, [www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/amazon-burning-unseen-rate/](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/amazon-burning-unseen-rate/).



## ***Recording of El Niño Events***

The first potential “recording” of an El Niño event was chronicled by Spanish conquistadors in South America over 400 years ago. Francisco Pizarro documented his expeditions from Panama down the western coast of South America, noting that the winds were notably different on his three expeditions. More specifically, Pizarro observed strong northeasterly winds in 1531-1532. These winds are commonly seen in El Niño years. Additionally, once these Spanish troops moved inland on this expedition, they documented rainfall in areas of Peru and Ecuador which are typically dry. This account is believed by some to be the first documentation of an El Niño event.<sup>157</sup>

Official recordings of El Niño events only began in the 1890s, so the record of El Niños is relatively new.<sup>158</sup> Based on the Oceanic Niño Index, the only two El Niño events which fall into the “Very Strong” category have happened within the last fifteen years.<sup>159</sup> These “Very Strong” El Niño events occurred from 1982 to 1983 and most recently from 1997 to 1998 (present day). While El Niño events were once regarded merely as recurring weather events by the scientific community, the devastation brought by the 1982-83 El Niño generated substantial scientific interest in better understanding these events. As such, in terms of specific recordkeeping of El Niño effects, there is little evidence that goes beyond the past fifteen years. ENSO events, which also involve a corresponding La Niña, were only officially recognized in the 1980s. La Niña events have been recorded since the early 1900s, but the term “La Niña” for these events was coined in the mid to late 1980s as well.<sup>160</sup> Thus, the committee is encouraged to promote investment into weather-related research to elucidate the specific mechanisms of El Niño events and the reasons why some El Niño events evolve into ENSOs. The recorded history of El Niños and ENSO events is quite limited.

(Flash forward to 2021: Scientists are studying coral records and shells to piece together a history of warming in the Pacific Ocean.<sup>161</sup> These studies are based on cores drilled from coral which have

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<sup>157</sup> “El Niño: Pacific Wind and Current Changes Bring Warm, Wild Weather.” NASA, NASA, [earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/ElNino/page3.php](https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/ElNino/page3.php).

<sup>158</sup> “Past ENSO Events.” *Home: NOAA Physical Sciences Laboratory*, [psl.noaa.gov/enso/past\\_events.html](https://psl.noaa.gov/enso/past_events.html).

<sup>159</sup> *El Niño and La Niña Years and Intensities*, [ggweather.com/enso/oni.htm](https://ggweather.com/enso/oni.htm).

<sup>160</sup> Gagan M.K. (2009) Paleo-El Niño-Southern Oscillation (Enso) Records. In: Gornitz V. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Paleoclimatology and Ancient Environments*. Encyclopedia of Earth Sciences Series. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4411-3\\_172](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4411-3_172)

<sup>161</sup> Stanford University. “Q&A: Tracking the History of El Niño.” *Stanford News*, 21 Dec. 2018, [news.stanford.edu/2018/12/19/qa-tracking-history-el-nino/](https://news.stanford.edu/2018/12/19/qa-tracking-history-el-nino/).

allowed researchers to create a multi-century record dating back 400 years.<sup>162</sup> Studies on fossilized shellfish have led scientists to believe that El Niño events also occurred as far back as 10,000 years ago.<sup>163</sup> Although this technology largely surpasses the technological capabilities and interests of researchers at the time of this committee, these types of studies may be of interest in terms of plans for future investigation.)

### ***Predictability of El Niño Events***

Currently, dynamical and statistical models are used to predict El Niño events. Dynamical models, also known as ocean-atmosphere models, involve mathematical calculations, while statistical models are driven by existing data.<sup>164</sup> The first attempt to predict an oncoming El Niño took place in 1974, following the 1972-73 El Niño and the collapse of the Peruvian anchovy industry.<sup>165</sup> Prior to the launching of ocean-observing satellites, researchers could only look at the Southern Oscillation Index, which documents the strength of the trade winds. This first attempt was not successful, unfortunately; the first successful forecast for an El Niño event was for the 1986-87 El Niño event.<sup>166</sup> It is relevant to point out that this accurate forecasting did not occur until after the devastation of the 1982-83 El Niño. The environmental, economic, and social devastation of the early 1980s, caused by the El Niño event, brought attention to the importance of El Niños in the modern world. Despite the recent investment into El Niño research, forecasting methods are still imperfect. Although the Cane et al. (1986) model was successful in predicting the 1986-87 El Niño, it did not predict the current El Niño. In fact, the most recent El Niño was a complete surprise in the scientific community.<sup>167</sup> Official pronouncements of the recent El Niño were not made until April of last year (being 1997), and these

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<sup>162</sup> ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes. "'Impossible' research produces 400-year El Niño record, revealing startling changes: Centuries long seasonal record of El Niños from coral cores." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 6 May 2019. <[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/190506111441.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/190506111441.htm)>.

<sup>163</sup> "Ancient Shellfish Remains Rewrite 10,000 Year History of El Nino Cycles." *The School of Oceanography, University of Washington*, [www.ocean.washington.edu/story/Ancient\\_Shellfish\\_remains\\_rewrite\\_10000\\_year\\_history\\_of\\_El\\_Nino\\_cycles](http://www.ocean.washington.edu/story/Ancient_Shellfish_remains_rewrite_10000_year_history_of_El_Nino_cycles).

<sup>164</sup> Meng, Jun, et al. "Complexity-Based Approach for El Niño MAGNITUDE Forecasting before the SPRING Predictability Barrier." *PNAS*, National Academy of Sciences, 7 Jan. 2020, [www.pnas.org/content/117/1/177](http://www.pnas.org/content/117/1/177).

<sup>165</sup> "Predicting El Niño Then and Now: NOAA Climate.gov." *Predicting El Niño Then and Now | NOAA Climate.gov*, 3 Apr. 2015, [www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/enso/predicting-el-ni%C3%B1o-then-and-now](http://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/enso/predicting-el-ni%C3%B1o-then-and-now).

<sup>166</sup> Cane, M. A., S. E. Zebiak, and S.C. Dolan, Experimental forecasts of El Niño, *Nature*, 321,827-832, 1986.

<sup>167</sup> McPhaden, Michael J. "Genesis and Evolution of the 1997-98 El Niño." U.S. Dept. of Commerce / NOAA / OAR / PMEL / Publications, Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Seattle, Washington, 1999, [www.pmel.noaa.gov/pubs/outstand/mcph2029/text.shtml](http://www.pmel.noaa.gov/pubs/outstand/mcph2029/text.shtml).



warnings came entirely too late to prepare to deal with the repercussions of an El Niño event in any significant way.<sup>168</sup>

### ***The 1982-1983 El Niño Event***

The 1982-83 El Niño event was not only the first “Very Strong” El Niño, but it was also the first El Niño in which the reversal of the equatorial trade winds was observed. The westward trade winds reversed direction in the Pacific Ocean in June 1982.<sup>169</sup> The warm water pool of the western Pacific moved eastward and the sea level in the central Pacific rose. Record-breaking changes in atmospheric pressure were observed around the world, with increased pressure being recorded in some locations and lowered pressure recorded in others. Five hurricanes formed in the eastern Pacific in August 1982.<sup>170</sup> Peru and Ecuador experienced significant increases in rainfall in late 1982, followed by droughts in early 1983.<sup>171</sup>

Conservative estimates of the worldwide damage caused by the 1982-93 El Niño surpass 8 billion USD, a figure which takes into account damage resulting from droughts, fires, floods, and hurricanes.<sup>172</sup> Some estimates speculate that there may have been over 13 billion USD lost in El Niño-related damages. Thousands of deaths are also directly attributed to this El Niño event.<sup>173</sup> Like the recent El Niño, the 1982-83 El Niño has also been connected to outbreaks of infectious disease. Encephalitis and bubonic plague both increased in prevalence due to the rise of mosquito populations in humid areas and an increase in populations of flea-ridden rodents.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Anderson, D. L. T., and M. K. Davey, *Weather* **53**, 295 (1998).

<sup>169</sup> “Timeline of an El Niño Event Earth Space Research GROUP, 1982-83 El Niño Chronology.” *History of El Niño*, [www.oc.nps.edu/webmodules/ENSO/history.html](http://www.oc.nps.edu/webmodules/ENSO/history.html).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> NOAA. 1994. El Niño and Climate Prediction—Reports to the Nation on Our Changing Planet. A publication of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA27GP0232-01. UCAR, Boulder, Colorado.

<sup>173</sup> 1982-1983 El Niño: The Worst There Ever Was, [www.who.edu/science/B/people/kamaral/1982-1983ElNino.html](http://www.who.edu/science/B/people/kamaral/1982-1983ElNino.html).

<sup>174</sup> “El Niño and the Southern OSCILLATION: A Reversal of Fortune.” *El Niño*, [www.who.edu/science/B/people/kamaral/ElNino.html#82-83](http://www.who.edu/science/B/people/kamaral/ElNino.html#82-83).

## ***Climate Change and El Niño***

There has been an observable increase in El Niño events and a decrease in the frequency of La Niñas since the 1970s. Although it is generally speculated that these changes are linked to global warming, the evidence that directly connects altered intensity and frequency of El Niño events to climate change is limited (by the year 1998). One 1996 study has directly connected the increase in El Niño events to the observed increase in greenhouse gases, as recent events differ significantly from expectations based on the existing record.<sup>175</sup> (Although global warming was recognized in the 1990s, it is now known that ENSO teleconnections have been directly altered by climate change.<sup>176</sup> The ocean has been warmed by the changing climate, which has caused the expansion of the Pacific warm pool and has thus aggravated the effects of El Niño events.)

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<sup>175</sup> Trenberth, Kevin E., and Timothy J. Hoar. "The 1990-1995 El Niño-Southern Oscillation Event: Longest on Record." *Geophysical Research Letters*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1996, pp. 57–60., doi:10.1029/95gl03602.

<sup>176</sup> Zhou, Zhen-Qiang, Shang-Ping Xie, Xiao-Tong Zheng, Qinyu Liu, and Hai Wang. "Global Warming–Induced Changes in El Niño Teleconnections over the North Pacific and North America". *Journal of Climate* 27.24 (2014): 9050-9064. < <https://doi.org/10.1175/JCLI-D-14-00254.1>>. Web. 12 Jul. 2021.

## Past Actions

### 1982-83 El Niño Event: Predictions

The American Geophysical Union met in the fall of 1982 to discuss the changing atmospheric conditions in the Pacific.<sup>177</sup> At the time, it was thought that the eruption of the El Chichón volcano in Mexico was related to the reappearance of the El Niño phenomenon; experts suggested that sulfur compounds from the volcano may have encouraged the weather conditions typical of an El Niño event.<sup>178</sup> However, no direct links were found. These presumptions were based on measurements taken by the NOAA-7 satellite, which had only begun recording Pacific Ocean temperatures in August of 1982. In 1983, geophysicists and meteorologists rejected the previous idea that the eruption in Mexico was related to the El Niño in any way. This El Niño was the most devastating event of its kind up to that point, and two major efforts were thus launched to study the causes of El Niño and to identify predictory signs.<sup>179</sup> Despite the beginning of these efforts, it was still thought that El Niños could occur from every four years to every thirty years in the early 1980s; it is now known that El Niños take place every three to seven years.<sup>180</sup> Like in the case of the recent El Niño, a loss of the usual trade winds and a movement of warm water towards the east was observed in the Pacific Ocean in the early 1980s, but scientists were unable to identify the markers of an El Niño. This inability to identify an oncoming El Niño is of importance now and was also significant over a decade ago. Scientists have since focused on developing an enhanced understanding of El Niños, how they form, and how to combat their potentially-devastating effects.

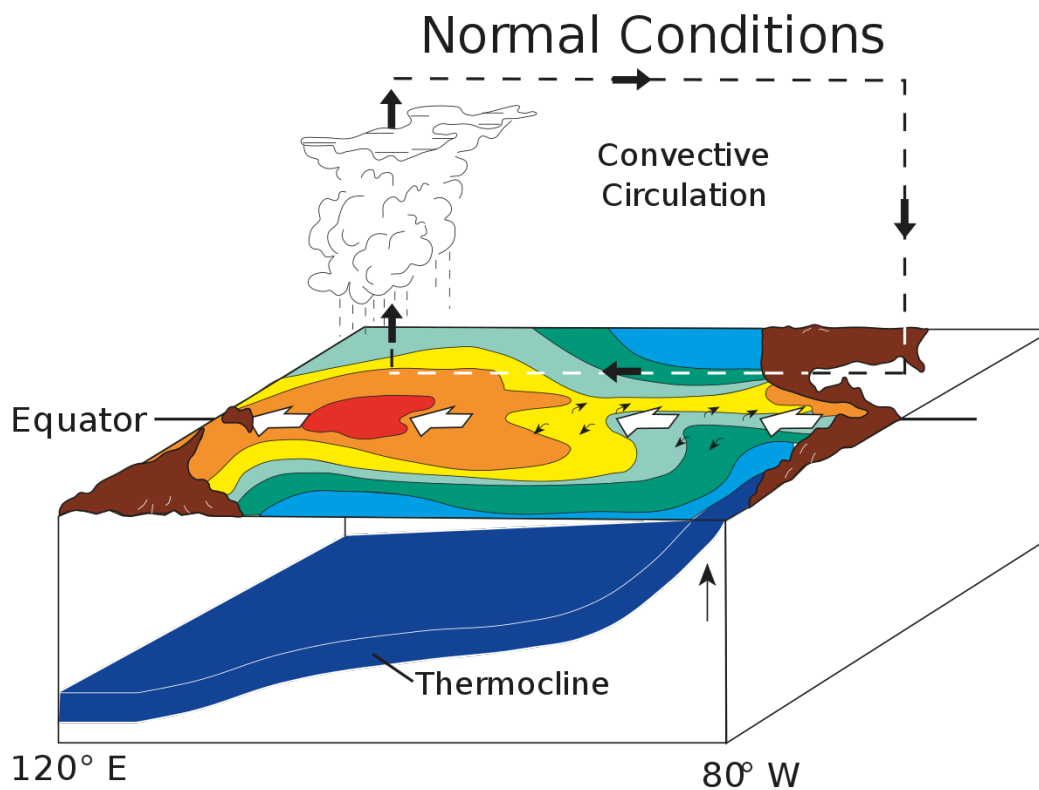
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<sup>177</sup> Williams, Jack. "How the Super El Nino OF 1982-83 Kept Itself a Secret." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 24 Apr. 2019, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2015/06/12/how-the-super-el-nino-of-1982-83-kept-itself-a-secret/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2015/06/12/how-the-super-el-nino-of-1982-83-kept-itself-a-secret/).

<sup>178</sup> Sullivan, Walter. "Climate Shift off Peru Tied to Eruption in Mexico." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 12 Dec. 1982, [www.nytimes.com/1982/12/12/us/climate-shift-off-peru-tied-to-eruption-in-mexico.html?searchResultPosition=1](http://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/12/us/climate-shift-off-peru-tied-to-eruption-in-mexico.html?searchResultPosition=1).

<sup>179</sup> Sullivan, Walter. "Massive Disturbance in Ocean Brings Far-Flung Havoc." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 5 Apr. 1983, [www.nytimes.com/1983/04/05/science/massive-disturbance-in-ocean-brings-far-flung-havoc.html?searchResultPosition=3](http://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/05/science/massive-disturbance-in-ocean-brings-far-flung-havoc.html?searchResultPosition=3).

<sup>180</sup> "El Niño and La Niña: Frequently Asked Questions: NOAA Climate.gov." *El Niño and La Niña: Frequently Asked Questions* | NOAA Climate.gov, 18 Jan. 2016, [www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/el-ni%C3%B1o-and-la-ni%C3%B1a-frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=What%20are%20El%20Ni%C3%B1o%20and,for%20El%20Ni%C3%B1o%2DSouthern%20Oscillation](http://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/el-ni%C3%B1o-and-la-ni%C3%B1a-frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=What%20are%20El%20Ni%C3%B1o%20and,for%20El%20Ni%C3%B1o%2DSouthern%20Oscillation).



## Research

In the 1980s, a significant number of studies that focused on meteorology and the ocean—primarily the Pacific—were conducted. Because effects from this El Niño event were observed on almost every continent, costing many lives as well as billions of dollars in material and infrastructural damages, studying the climate was seen as crucially important in a way that it never had been before. One Canadian study, for example, used a general circulation model to simulate the atmospheric response to the changing sea-surface temperatures associated with the 1982-1983 El Niño.<sup>181</sup> Another study, published in 1984 by the American Geophysical Union, focused on the effects of the 1982-1983 El Niño on the sea level at the equator.<sup>182</sup> Some studies had a more local basis, like the studies

<sup>181</sup> Boer, G.J. "Chapter 2 Modelling the Atmospheric Response to the 1982/83 EL NIÑO." *Elsevier Oceanography Series*, Elsevier, 5 May 2008, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0422989408706986](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0422989408706986).

<sup>182</sup> Lukas, Roger, et al. "Equatorial Sea Level Response during The 1982–1983 El Niño." *AGU Journals*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 20 Sept. 2012, [agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1029/JCo8giCo6p10425](http://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1029/JCo8giCo6p10425).

performed on the Paraná River in Argentina following severe flooding in 1983 or those focused on the Northeast Pacific region, conducted by American scientists.<sup>183</sup>

Many of these studies from the 1980s are centered around particular models or modes that were proposed to describe the changes in the ocean and the atmosphere during an El Niño event. However, despite these relatively recent scientific advancements, predictive measures were still unable to forecast the more recent El Niño. While research on El Niño events has, for the most part, been performed within the last two decades, there is still much improvement to be done with relation to human understanding of El Niño events, especially because the most devastating El Niño events were not foreseen by the scientific community.

### ***Emergency Response and El Niño Events***

In Ecuador, the flooding of the river in Santa Rosa, a small town in El Oro province, made over 3,000 people homeless in one November 1997 night.<sup>184</sup> Not only was crucial infrastructure affected, but banana and cocoa plantations were underwater and shrimp farms were washed away, destroying many residents' livelihoods. Projections for El Niño-related damages from the 1982-83 event reach around \$165 million in Ecuador alone, while this El Niño may have cost Ecuador up to \$300 million according to the World Bank which is providing Ecuador with technical assistance.<sup>185</sup> Many Ecuadorians are frustrated with their government due to the lack of foresight when it comes to the current situation. Although the world at large was not anticipating the level of damage brought on by the recent El Niño, the public-works ministry has been accused of a slow response to the flooding in El Oro province. Moreover, developments to Ecuador in the aftermath of the 1982-83 El Niño may have actually worsened the current situation. For example, Ecuador had only 35,000 hectares of shrimp farms at the time of the 1982-83 event; now, there are 180,000 hectares, the development of

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<sup>183</sup> Camilloni, Inés, and Vicente Barros. "The Paraná River Response to El Niño 1982–83 And 1997–98 EVENTS." *AMETSOC*, American Meteorological Society, 1 Oct. 2000, [journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/hydr/1/5/1525-7541\\_2000\\_001\\_0412\\_tprte\\_2\\_o\\_co\\_2.xml](http://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/hydr/1/5/1525-7541_2000_001_0412_tprte_2_o_co_2.xml).

Johnson, Mark A, and James J O'Brien. "The Northeast Pacific Ocean Response to the 1982-1983 El Niño." *FSU, Journal of Geophysical Research*, 1990, [www.coaps.fsu.edu/bios/90-2.pdf](http://www.coaps.fsu.edu/bios/90-2.pdf).

<sup>184</sup> "El Niño Goes into Politics." *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, [www.economist.com/the-americas/1997/11/20/el-nino-goes-into-politics](http://www.economist.com/the-americas/1997/11/20/el-nino-goes-into-politics).

<sup>185</sup> van Aalst, Maarten K, et al. "Climate Information and Forecasting for Development." *Climate Change Series*, World Bank, Dec. 2000, [documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/451971468739263265/pdf/multiopage.pdf](http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/451971468739263265/pdf/multiopage.pdf).

which required tearing down mangroves which provided a natural barrier against flooding.<sup>186</sup> While Ecuador attempted to restore its economy a decade and a half ago with the development of these new farm areas, it has become clear that the disruption of the natural environment may actually have caused greater destruction in the long-term. The government has now declared a state of emergency.

The United States is fortunate to have the resources to respond to these sorts of extreme weather events due to the wealth of its government. In the 1982-83 El Niño, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assembled a task force to assess the damages to homes and coastal businesses in California after a storm surge.<sup>187</sup> The United States has reinvested in public recreational facilities and has supplied aid to its residents who experienced irreparable damages as a result of these El Niño events. Other nations have petitioned the U.S. government for technical assistance in dealing with El Niño-related damages, as some nations lack the resources to do so.

While many nations do not have previously arranged El Niño response plans, they may respond to individual crises, like flooding or heat waves, as they occur. However, many states in this committee lacked the funding and resources to respond directly to any of these crises, and as such, they relied on outside aid from international organizations or other governments. Many governments across the Americas— and across the entire globe— have declared El Niño-related states of emergency due to the level of damage to their industries and the environment.

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<sup>186</sup> "El Niño Goes into Politics." *The Economist*, The Economist Newspaper, [www.economist.com/the-americas/1997/11/20/el-nino-goes-into-politics](http://www.economist.com/the-americas/1997/11/20/el-nino-goes-into-politics).

<sup>187</sup> State of California - Ca. Coastal Commission. "California Coastal Commission: El Niño." *Ca*, [www.coastal.ca.gov/climate/extreme-weather/el-nino/](http://www.coastal.ca.gov/climate/extreme-weather/el-nino/).

## Possible Solutions

### *Introduction to Possible Solutions*

While this section is not comprehensive, it aims to give delegates an opportunity to think about the various ways in which they may respond to the crisis in order to have more holistic solutions. This section will have three main categories, which will then each be divided into sections based on more specific responses. The divisions will cover immediate response and recovery, preparedness for future El Niño events, and long term solutions. To reiterate, this section is in no way comprehensive, and delegates are encouraged to consider their nations' own policies for weather-related emergency responses as well as utilize their creativity.

### *Immediate Response and Recovery: Opportunistic Agriculture*

As previously mentioned, many industries have been adversely affected by the recent El Niño. Farms and fisheries have experienced destruction in a way only rivalled by the 1982-1983 El Niño event, which caused over \$13 billion in damages to property and livelihoods including these industries.<sup>188</sup> Agricultural opportunism relies on an analysis of the new environment after a natural disaster in order to maximize agricultural output and prevent malnutrition or starvation. Some crops are more suitable for drier climates which may have been affected by El Niño-related droughts. In the case of flooding, it is important to note that the edible portion of a crop must not be exposed to flood waters due to the risk of contamination.<sup>189</sup> After flooding, crops like potatoes and spring onions can be grown in containers, and the soil should be given approximately a year for cleaning and improvement. Archaeological evidence suggests that prehispanic societies took advantage of El Niños by using replenished ground aquifer water following flooding in areas with a typically arid

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<sup>188</sup> 1982-1983 El Niño: The Worst There Ever Was, [www.who.edu/science/B/people/kamaral/1982-1983ElNino.html#:~:text=The%20event%20was%20blamed%20for,damage%20to%20property%20and%20livelihoods](http://www.who.edu/science/B/people/kamaral/1982-1983ElNino.html#:~:text=The%20event%20was%20blamed%20for,damage%20to%20property%20and%20livelihoods).

<sup>189</sup> "How to Handle Flooded Fields: CAROLINA FARM Stewardship Association." *Carolina Farm Stewardship Association | Local, Organic Farming Resources for North and South Carolina*, 12 June 2018, [www.carolinafarmstewards.org/expert-tip-how-to-handle-flooded-fields/](http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/expert-tip-how-to-handle-flooded-fields/).

climate.<sup>190</sup> Delegates are encouraged to consider other ways to increase agricultural productivity in the short term in order to best support affected communities.

### ***Immediate Response and Recovery: Heat Waves, Droughts, Floods, and Landslides***

The World Health Organization has set recommendations for dealing with heat waves, droughts, and floods in order to reduce their costs on human life. When it comes to global emergencies, the WHO recommends to: (1) ensure adequate access to foodstuffs; (2) restore medical care services such as child and maternal health, mental health, and immunization; (3) assemble mobile health outreach teams; (4) direct epidemic warning and surveillance; (5) request emergency funding.<sup>191</sup> When it comes to floods and landslides, organizations, including governments, need additional response measures to ensure that search and rescue missions take place. Responses to specific climate emergencies will be further touched upon in the “Preparedness” section.

### ***Preparedness: Improving Meteorological and Agricultural Research***

One theme throughout the last two El Niños with the highest classification of destructiveness is the fact that there was a lack of preparedness and foresight from meteorological sources and the scientific community at large. As such, it is crucial that this committee explores ways to improve predictive measures for El Niño events. Additionally, as was seen in the “Past Actions” section with the example of Ecuador, agricultural advancements can sometimes lead to the reduction of natural barriers against extreme flooding and other weather events. Thus, agricultural research must be undertaken in order to encourage appropriate agricultural output alongside maintenance of the natural environment to the greatest extent possible.

### ***Preparedness: Ensuring Awareness Across Populations***

A major problem when it comes to weather-related emergencies is that the population is largely unaware of the best ways to deal with the disaster at hand. El Niños cause flooding and landslides in

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<sup>190</sup> Caramanica, Ari, et al. “El Niño RESILIENCE Farming on the North Coast of Peru.” *PNAS*, National Academy of Sciences, 29 Sept. 2020, [www.pnas.org/content/117/39/24127](http://www.pnas.org/content/117/39/24127).

<sup>191</sup> “Heatwaves.” *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, [www.who.int/health-topics/heatwaves#tab=tab\\_3](http://www.who.int/health-topics/heatwaves#tab=tab_3).



some places while causing droughts, heat waves, and forest fires in others. Civilians should be made aware of the best ways to deal with these disasters in their communities in order to preserve human life to the greatest extent possible. Populations in at-risk areas should be made aware of the warning signs that a landslide is coming, for example, and should know how to best deal with the situation. With the population made aware of the particular responses necessary to deal with the effects of an El Niño on their region, there will be fewer extreme outcomes resulting from lack of knowledge.

### ***Long Term Solutions: Partnerships and Disaster Relief***

During the recent El Niño crisis, multiple nations which did not have the resources to adequately support their populations petitioned the UN and wealthier nations for technical assistance and support. For long-term solutions, nations are encouraged to have set mechanisms in place to form or utilize any possible partnerships which may be needed in times of disaster. Because El Niño events are sure to occur again in the future, the international community at large should consider ways to ensure that at-risk populations are able to access necessary technology in times of crisis, including helicopters, for example.

### ***Long Term Solutions: Risk-Informed Development***

While virtually all nations were unable to predict the levels of destruction brought about by the 1982-83 El Niño and the recent El Niño, nations are encouraged to consider redevelopment from a risk-informed perspective. As previously mentioned, some regions are more affected by flooding and landslides, while others experience heat waves and droughts. The committee should consider risk-informed development wherever possible, and plans should be made with regard for specific affected regions.

## Bloc Positions

### *Introduction to Bloc Positions*

As mentioned in the description of bloc positions for the previous topic, this committee relies on the division of nations into blocs, which are typically influenced by delegates' plans for action and on their nations' set policies. While this section will also establish divisions between nations, these divisions may be more nuanced, as all of the nations in the OAS have been directly affected by the recent El Niño to varying degrees. To reiterate, members of the committee are not required to adhere to these set divisions in any way, but the sections listed below may provide some insight as to potential differences of opinion regarding a topic that involves devastation across the globe.

### *Nations Experiencing Extreme Devastation*

Depending on a nation's geographical location and preexisting risk-informed infrastructural development, members of the OAS have experienced a wide range of environmental outcomes as a result of the recent El Niño. Unfortunately, some nations have thus witnessed what may be considered as "extreme" amounts of devastation. While this definition is quite subjective, it can generally include those nations which have experienced severe impacts on their essential industries, major losses of life (including both to human populations and in the larger environment), and restricted access to basic necessities in times of crisis, which include food, potable water, and medical attention.

In Guatemala, for example, forest fires have already produced a significant increase in the prevalence of smoke-related respiratory illnesses. Unfortunately, Guatemala is not the only nation experiencing this level of devastation due to forest fires. Nicaragua, Mexico, and Brazil are all undergoing extensive forest fires and extreme droughts brought about by the recent El Niño. Unfortunately, these nations do not have the resources to combat these fires on their own, and human populations are being directly affected.

While some of Mexico is dealing with extreme drought, northern Mexico is currently suffering from extensive damage due to El Niño-caused hurricanes and subsequent flooding. Hundreds of Mexican

citizens have died as a result of Hurricane Pauline, and hundreds of thousands are left homeless. Again, Mexico is not the only nation experiencing devastating floods. Peru and Ecuador have both seen hundreds of their citizens die due to severe flooding and resulting mudslides, and many families are in need of governmental assistance. In Peru, there is already a rise in malnutrition and infectious diseases brought on by flooding. Northern Mexico and Peru have also witnessed a devastation of their key coffee and anchovy industries (respectively), which each constitute a substantial amount of their GDPs.

As mentioned, many nations are already confronting an increase in El Niño-related illnesses stemming from extreme weather events. Other nations also require enhancements in their medical systems because of the recent El Niño, even though the damages caused by climate events in these countries may not have been quite as extreme. Bolivia and Chile are two examples, as both nations' water supplies have been contaminated; civilians are experiencing potentially fatal cholera infections as a result.

### ***Nations with Relatively Little Infrastructural Development***

As previously stated, nations which had relatively little risk-informed infrastructure were more likely to experience extreme amounts of devastation, as peoples' homes, for example, were more susceptible to being completely swept away by flooding, collapsing in a mudslide, or being burned down in fires. Unfortunately, these same nations (like Ecuador, Guatemala, and Brazil, for example) tend to also lack the resources to prevent further damages. Some countries have petitioned international organizations like the World Bank for assistance as well as requesting aid from other nations such as Argentina, Venezuela, and the United States: three countries which may be able to collaborate with respect to providing regional aid.

### ***Nations Leading Research***

Some nations are able to benefit from the knowledge brought by researching an El Niño event and its impacts, while others are not. The nations which are able to conduct research are, primarily, wealthier. For example, a number of general studies on the ocean and the environment following the 1982-1983 El Niño were undertaken by researchers in the United States and Canada. Other nations,

like Argentina, were able to conduct research on regional events like flooding, but the outreach of each nation's research into climate events truly depends on that nation's wealth. Thus, wealth is also a divisive factor in the comparative aftermath of natural disasters between nations. Despite this potential, no nation predicted the most recent El Niño event and the magnitude of its destruction.

## Glossary

**Aquifer:** "An aquifer is a body of porous rock or sediment saturated with groundwater. Groundwater enters an aquifer as precipitation seeps through the soil. It can move through the aquifer and resurface through springs and wells."<sup>192</sup>

**Cholera:** A diarrheal disease that can be fatal if left untreated within a matter of hours.<sup>193</sup>

**General circulation model:** Numerical models which represent physical processes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere, and land surface; "have the potential to provide geographically and physically consistent estimates of regional climate change which are required in impact analysis."<sup>194</sup>

**Greenhouse gases:** "Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere."<sup>195</sup>

**Slash-and-Burn Agriculture:** A practice that involves clearing forest area using controlled fires so the land can eventually be used to grow crops.

**Thermocline:** Where the warmer surface water of the ocean meets the colder, deep water

**Trade Winds:** Winds that constantly follow a pattern of flowing east to west near the equator. Trade winds can have significant impact on larger storms and other weather events and are often used for maritime navigation.

**Upwelling:** When cold, nutrient-rich water from the depths rises toward the surface.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> National Geographic Society. "Aquifers." *National Geographic Society*, 29 July 2019, [www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/aquifers/](http://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/aquifers/).

<sup>193</sup> "Cholera." *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cholera](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cholera).

<sup>194</sup> *What Is a GCM?*, [www.ipcc-data.org/guidelines/pages/gcm\\_guide.html](http://www.ipcc-data.org/guidelines/pages/gcm_guide.html).

<sup>195</sup> "Greenhouse Gases." *EPA*, Environmental Protection Agency, [www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases](http://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/overview-greenhouse-gases).

<sup>196</sup> "What Is Upwelling?" *NOAA's National Ocean Service*, 1 June 2013, [oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/upwelling.html](http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/upwelling.html).

**Warm pool:** “This body of water, which spans the western waters of the equatorial Pacific to the eastern Indian Ocean, holds the warmest seawaters in the world.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> “Reverberations of the Pacific Warm Pool.” NASA, NASA, [earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/WarmPool](https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/features/WarmPool).

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