
35. Divergent paths of (de-)politicization: the Colombian and Venezuelan public administrations

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Colombia and Venezuela are neighboring countries that share a common culture and language, history, and separation-of-powers political system. Their governments also undertook significant administrative reforms to de-politicize and professionalize their public administrations after nearly simultaneous democratization processes in 1958. Following those reforms, the two-party systems of each country struggled to eliminate patronage hires and followed a similar course of merit-based recruitment and human resource management into the twenty-first century. Following these struggles with administrative professionalization, however, the countries took sharply divergent paths, with Colombian governments continuing to incrementally improve merit-based recruitment and the Venezuelan government politicizing the recruitment and tenure of public servants as well as policymaking.

Today, Colombia's civil service reflects a mixture of neutrality and politicization, as it continues to wrestle with the implementation of merit-based practices. The country adopted important reforms in 2004 to help create a more professional civil service, although limited acceptance of this among the political elite and corruption have undermined progress. Nonetheless, the country's incomplete progress at de-coupling politics and administration is a sharp contrast to the overt politicization of the Venezuelan civil service under presidents Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro. There, all levels of the public administration are highly politicized as the bureaucracy has become a part of the governing project. Moreover, the Venezuelan civil service possesses neither the autonomy nor the capacity to use the expertise of neutral competence bureaucrats, as the government centralized policymaking authority and extended political control over public policy.

The stark contemporary differences in these two civil services despite so many historical similarities reflect the fragility of gains in administrative professionalization, especially in places with weak institutions. Among other things, their experiences demonstrate how (de-)politicization is partially a function of political will. While Colombian politicians pursued limited administrative professionalization in the 2000s to comply with their political constitution, Venezuelan presidents almost exclusively sought bureaucratic loyalty at the expense of expertise and discretion. They also point to the important role of regime type in calcifying that political will. Regular elections under democracy may result in a mass exit and entrance of politically appointed bureaucrats, but the rotation of political leaders also ensures that few political appointees become entrenched in power. Lastly, Colombia and Venezuela's experience shows the limits of path dependency as an explanation for the relationships between politics and the public administration: although both countries long followed a similar trajectory, their paths have subsequently diverged.

This chapter begins by providing some background and a comparison of the structure of the Colombian and Venezuelan public administrations. It then traces the historical politicization of the two bureaucratic apparatuses and examines the countries' many attempts to institute merit-based practices. The third section explores the contemporary politicization of each administrative structure, comparing improvements in democratic Colombia to the overt and direct politicization of the bureaucracy in Venezuela. The last section concludes by examining some of the implications of this comparison and provides possible suggestions for future reforms.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

The two countries' administrative structures, as shown in Table 35.1, offer a first point of comparison. Colombia is a unitary state that is administratively decentralized, while Venezuela is a highly centralized federal state (Brewer-Carías 2019). Both countries have governors that have only been elected since 1989 (Venezuela) and 1991 (Colombia) and which have little influence on national policymaking, and neither country is territorially bicameral. Although both have attempted to decentralize political and administrative power, successive Colombian governments were motivated to do so to improve policy responsiveness and extend the reach of the state, while Venezuela has used this as a tool to weaken state-level elected officials – especially those from non-government parties.

A notable difference in administrative structures since the early 2000s is Colombia's clear organization versus Venezuela's ever-changing, often unclear, bureaucratic apparatus. In the former, so-called "Administrative Planning Regions" are hierarchically super to departments and municipalities, while the latter comprises at least five levels of administration, with redundant structures at the regional level (see Table 35.1). Similarly, while Colombia has a single, autonomous policy planning body, Venezuela has two parallel organs: the Ministry of Popular

Table 35.1 Administrative characteristics

	Colombia	Venezuela
Formally federal	No	Yes
Governors elected	1991	1989
Autonomous?	Yes	No
Administrative decentralization	High	Low
Territorial bicameralism	No	No
Administrative levels	Administrative Planning Regions (5)	Political-Administrative Regions (9)
	Departments (32)	Strategic Regions of Integral Development (7)
	Municipalities (1,102)	States (23)
		Municipalities (335)
		Parishes (1,146)
		Communal Councils (45,000?)
Policy planning body	Administrative Department of the Public Function	Ministry of Popular Power for Planning;
		Central Planning Commission
Autonomous?	Yes	No; No
Civil service development body	School of Public Service	Institute of Advanced Studies in Administration
Administrative oversight body	National Civil Service Commission;	General Comptroller of the Republic
	General Comptroller of the Republic	

Power for Planning as well as the Central Planning Commission. Further, while Colombia boasts a longstanding administrative oversight body in addition to a comptroller, Venezuela relies solely on weakly effective comptrollers at both the national and state levels. Differences in these structures and administrative oversight bodies contribute to different degrees of politicization.

Colombian Public Administration

The Republic of Colombia is a decentralized unitary republic with a relatively clear administrative organization. Departments are headed by a governor responsible for the autonomous administration of the resources granted by the state. They have autonomy in the handling of matters related to their jurisdiction and operate as entities between the nation and the municipalities (República de Colombia 1991: Article 298). Municipalities are directed by the figure of a mayor, who governs along with a municipal council (República de Colombia 1991: Article 314). Beginning in 2016, the government created a new level of administrative decentralization, known as the Administrative Planning Region (*Región Administrativa de Planificación*, RAP). The objective of the RAP is to coordinate planning and investment across departments with geographic, demographic, or economic similarities (Nader Orfale 2020).

The country's main policy planning body, the Administrative Department of the Public Function (*Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública*, DAFP), has been the entity in charge of formulating public administration policy in matters relating to the civil service, management, internal control, and executive branch procedures since 1958 (Strazza 2014).¹ This department has the authority to define the guidelines and instruments in everything related to human resource planning, work organization, and job training. Likewise, it provides legal advice to state entities, civil servants, and citizens regarding human talent. The DAFP also operates the School of Public Service (*Escuela Superior de Administración Pública*, ESAP), to educate and prepare public servants.

The National Civil Service Commission (*Comisión Nacional del Servicio Civil*, CNSC) is the body responsible for the administration and supervision of careers and functions as a protective body for the merit system in public employment. It can do this because it is endowed with administrative autonomy and is independent of the other branches of public power. Its actions include not only the administration and monitoring of open competition but also performance evaluation. In this way, the CNSC has helped contribute to de-politicization in the Colombian public administration.

Venezuelan Public Administration

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has a more complicated administrative structure which has detracted from merit-based practices. While the 1999 Constitution defines the country as a Federal Republic, it abolished the Senate, transferred competences of the states to the federal government, and granted the president vast powers to intervene in states and municipalities. In practice, what this means is that governors exist, but possess limited autonomy (Monaldi 2010: 184). Below the state level, the country is broken into municipalities which are in turn divided into parishes and then local “communal councils” – which are directly connected to and dependent upon the national government. Confusingly, Venezuela has two intermediate political-administrative regions located between the state and national levels: the longstand-

ing Political-Administrative Regions, which were created in 1969, and the parallel Strategic Regions of Integral Development created in 2013.

The administrative structure has changed frequently since 2001 and, at the planning level, consists of several seemingly overlapping agencies and responsibilities. The longstanding central planning organization is the Ministry of Popular Power for Planning (*Ministerio del Poder Popular de Planificación*, MPPP) which is tasked with promoting executive coordination and national development as well as budgetary and administrative planning.² Legal modifications in the early 2000s, including the Organic Planning Law of 2001, created a national planning system and centralized policymaking power in the planning ministry (D'Elia 2010).

At the apex of this planning system is a Central Planning Commission. Created in 2007, this body monitors the president's National Economic and Social Development Plan (*Plan de la Patria*) and coordinates different levels of the planning hierarchy. The 2010 Organic Law of Popular Public Planning concentrated additional planning power in the presidency and created a five-level hierarchical National Planning System made up of the Federal Government Council; state councils for planning and public policy coordination; local public planning councils; communal planning councils; and communal councils. In short, since 2001, the Venezuelan state's formal federal structure coexists with a complex, ever-changing, and increasingly centralized administrative planning system.

CONCURRENT EFFORTS AT DE-POLITICIZATION (1958–1990s)

Politicization – the substitution of neutrality by introducing political considerations into the human resource management and behavior of civil servants – is quite common across public agencies in the developing world (Asmerom and Reis 1996; Van de Walle 2006). This includes Latin America, where patronage continues to be the dominant form of bureaucratic staffing (Grindle 2012; Oliveros 2016). Colombia and Venezuela are no exceptions. Although national development efforts in the mid-twentieth century helped spur the creation of modern administrative apparatuses in these places, political leaders' personal patronage systems and kinship relations still largely held these structures together until the collapse of two party-rule in the 1990s.

Reflecting their historical and political similarities, the two countries followed comparable paths of meritocratic development. Until the 1950s, their administrative systems were entirely spoils based. In Colombia, patronage served to reward political followers from the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties, public resources were used to promote party loyalties, and the bureaucracy was completely turned over each time one of the two parties fell from power (Schmidt 1974). Similarly, there was no personnel administration system for all public servants in Venezuela (Groves 1967). However, in 1958, both countries exited dictatorships, with major parties establishing consociational power-sharing agreements to govern and pass laws to professionalize the bureaucracy.

Beginning in 1960, the Colombian government enacted several administrative reforms intended to develop a technically competent bureaucracy and served to standardize procedures, elevate the role of planning, and provide administrative consistency. However, a lack of political resolve frustrated the application of these reforms. Patron–client relationships continued to exist even though party affiliations were no longer supposed to be considered in the hiring, firing, and promotion of career administrators, and career bureaucrats were not

allowed to engage in any other political activity. The power-sharing agreement known as the National Front extended not only to sharing cabinet appointments, but bureaucratic ones as well, keeping the spoils system but changing its nature. Moreover, there was limited political support for the reforms, especially after the end of President Alberto Restrepo's term in 1962 (Álvarez Collazo and Jiménez Benítez 2012). In the mid-1980s, civil service employees still constituted only about 15 percent of the bureaucracy, with the remaining appointments made on the basis of political patronage, private influence, connections (*palancas*), and nepotism (Hanratty and Meditz 1988).

Likewise, upon democratization in Venezuela in 1958, the government undertook a series of ambitious reforms. It created the Public Administration Commission, charged with drafting the Civil Service Law, proposed the creation of a Central Personnel Office, and convened a Commission on Public Administration to reform the upper levels of the public service. Nonetheless, concepts of regular personnel procedures and civil service tenure took hold incompletely: the Civil Service Career Law was not enacted until 1970, and a "mixed" system, closer to an employment system than a career system, prevailed. Although the Administrative Career Law in 1975 established a merit-based test as a personnel selection mechanism, oil industry nationalization a year later initiated a highly political process as politicians sought to exploit the potential of the state-owned oil industry to provide money, patronage, and jobs to the well-connected (Iacoviello and Zuvanic 2006a: 58–59). Despite constant efforts at reform, the incentives for continued corruption almost invariably proved stronger (Haggerty 1990). Consequently, a 1989 proposal from the Presidential Commission for State Reform pointed out two basic dysfunctions in the Venezuelan public administration: (1) over-politicization of decisions and (2) over-centralization (Iacoviello and Zuvanic 2006b).

Both countries adopted new political constitutions in the 1990s which included provisions for the civil service. Colombia's 1991 Political Constitution dedicated a special chapter to public service and reinforced the principle of merit and equal opportunity (Álvarez Collazo and Jiménez Benítez 2012). It also stipulated the creation of the CNSC to administer and monitor administrative careers. Likewise, following Article 144 of Venezuela's 1999 Constitution, the country passed the Civil Service Statute Law in 2001 which introduced personnel plans as a basic instrument of human resource planning activity in all branches of the public administration. Nonetheless, the country's civil service system was not capable of guaranteeing the use of merit-based selection criteria, and the system continued to offer great latitude for arbitrariness and discretion in decision-making (González de Pacheco 2002).

As a result, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Colombian and Venezuelan civil services reflected a mixture of career civil servants and political appointees. In a cross-national study of Latin America in the early 2000s, Iacoviello and Zuvanic (2005) find that the two countries rated above the regional median in a "merit index" measuring the extent objective, technical, and professional procedures exist and are followed to recruit, select, promote, compensate, and dismiss employees. Still, the authors argue that merit-based practices coexisted with traditions of political patronage and that these countries "have very politicized situations, but with a strong movement to include merit in personnel management based on new legal frameworks" (Zuvanic et al. 2010: 155).

DIVERGENT PATHS (2000s–PRESENT)

The countries' trajectories of bureaucratic professionalization began to diverge radically in the early 2000s. This reflected the decisions and political resolve of the countries' leadership as well as elements of their respective political regimes. Colombia's democratic governments – Alvaro Uribe (2002–2010), Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018), and Iván Duque (2018–2022) – pursued at least partial compliance with the merit principles established in its 1991 Constitution and sought to expand the reach of the state. By contrast, leaders of the increasingly authoritarian Venezuela – Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) and then Nicolás Maduro (2013–present) – politicized the bureaucracy as they tied the public administration to the state apparatus and their socialist, “Bolivarian” political project.³

Numbers from expert surveys bear out these characterizations. To illustrate how these public administrations have deviated, Figure 35.1 plots the “government effectiveness” scores from the World Bank's World Governance Indicators database. Among its four dimensions, this measure captures perceptions of bureaucratic independence from political pressures.⁴ As the figure shows, the countries begin at roughly the same point, slightly below the global median of 0. However, while Colombia's scores show slight improvement since the late 1990s, Venezuela's has fallen consistently during this nearly 25-year period, ranking tenth lowest of 214 countries globally in 2019.

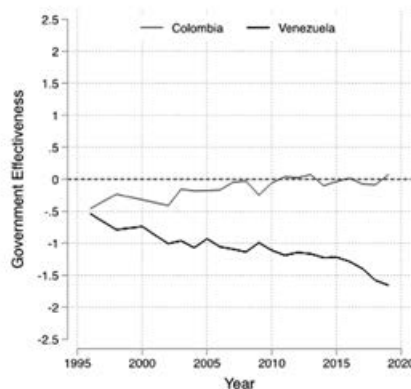


Figure 35.1 Government effectiveness (1996–2019)

Indices intended to strictly measure administrative professionalization reach a similar conclusion. In the University of Gothenberg's 2015 Quality of Government (QoG) dataset, Venezuela ranked third lowest in the world in the “index of professionalism”, or the extent to which the public administration was professional rather than politicized.⁵ Colombia, however, did not fare much better, ranking fifteenth lowest of 116 countries – although as Figure 35.2 shows, the country is just below the median in Latin America, while Venezuela is at the bottom. Even in terms of hiring via a formal examination system, something in which Venezuela made strides, the QoG dataset placed the country fourth lowest in the world, while Colombia ranks a more respectable 67th.



Figure 35.2 *Index of professionalism across Latin America (2015)*

Colombia (2004–Present): Continued Attempts at De-Politicization

For Colombia's civil service system, 2004 was a turning point: after 13 years of inaction, it finally began implementation of merit principles in accordance with Articles 125 and 126 of the 1991 Constitution. With significant political support and a push from the Constitutional Court, the legislature passed Law 909 aimed at professionalizing the public sector through regulation of public employment, administrative careers, and public management (Flórez López 2015). Politicians seeking to improve state capacity bought in to these changes: as soon as this Civil Service Career Law was passed, the government began implementation. Special emphasis was placed on setting up the CNSC, which was in charge of managing and monitoring competitive, merit-based hiring processes (Longo 2005). The law incorporated greater guarantees for meritocratic access to employment and tenure and also incorporated the possibility of dismissal due to poor performance as established in the constitution (Iacoviello and Zuvanic 2006a: 58–59).

There is a lack of consensus about its progress. In a multicategory analysis of the public administration, Strazza (2014) found that “meritocratic practices” was the category in which Colombia improved the most between 2004 and 2013. He pointed to two principal areas: institutionalization reflected in the prominence of Law 909 and the effective constitution of the CNSC, as well as development in human resource management policies, including adoption of open competitions, articulation of meritocratic mechanisms for access and evaluation of public managers, and progress in the management of the work environment. However, others are not

as sanguine. Álvarez Collazo and Jiménez Benítez (2012) argue that implementation has been incomplete, due to an array of cultural, political, legal, and technical factors. Among other things, they describe limited acceptance of the public service merit system among members of the country's political class since it weakens their control over the middle and lower levels of the bureaucracy. Corruption has also played a role weakening merit-based management (Whittingham 2021).

Worryingly, collusion between politicians and illicit groups – especially paramilitary forces such as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, AUC) – created another type of direct politicization of the bureaucracy in the 2000s at the subnational level. Specifically, “parapolitical” control over local offices was a strategy of co-governance with paramilitaries. As Escobar Arango writes, “Politicians and paramilitaries created a complex legal/illegal power structure, fueled by violence. The legal wing ... increasingly allowed the illegal wing – the AUC – to control subnational appointments, bureaucracies and budgets in exchange for electoral protection and vote maximization” (2013: 129). State capture was especially pronounced in security agencies, which were essentially infiltrated by the AUC. This certainly reflects a troubling level of corruption, clientelism, and politicization of the local administration, despite the presence of formal merit-based rules.

In sum, Colombia's civil service reflects a combination of professionalization and politicization. While the country possesses a well-structured bureaucracy with a relatively stable workforce, it retains some weaknesses in the areas of merit guarantees and human resource management tools due to political interference. Despite the persistence of corruption, the strengthening of the meritocratic criteria for the entry of personnel, especially through the formation and application of the CNSC, has also helped contribute to a more professional civil service.

Venezuela (1999–Present): Direct Politicization

Venezuela's situation is far different. At the dawn of the 2020s, Venezuela's public sector is characterized by what Peters (2013) calls “direct politicization”, the appointment of political loyalists to positions that might otherwise be career, from upper-level bureaucrats down to the street level. This is in sharp contrast to other types of politicization – professional, redundant, anticipatory, dual, or social – which are less overt or seek to maintain the professionalism of the civil service. However, this tendency extends far beyond limits to meritocratic recruitment and the appointment of policymakers based on personal loyalty to the president or his political project. Since the 2000s, but increasingly since the 2010s, the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, PSUV) has exercised nearly absolute control over public policy decisions and implementation, giving little autonomy to civil servants regardless of their political stripe. In fact, today, the bureaucracy is little more than an extension of the ruling party and ruling ideology.

The installation of loyalists at all levels of the civil service as well as tightened control over policymaking and implementation reflected a desire to realize a controversial socialist and Bolivarian policy platform in the face of fierce resistance as well as a growing authoritarianism that was intolerant of dissenting voices (Brewer-Carías 2010). First, the populist government distrusted non-supporters, including career civil servants, to implement its public policies. This tendency began in 1999 but was especially true after some members of the political opposition launched a failed military coup against Chávez in April 2002. Second, under Chávez,

Venezuela's weak democracy decayed into a competitive authoritarian regime, and then under Maduro descended into outright authoritarianism (Corrales 2020). As democratic guarantees eroded, it became increasingly difficult for other political actors or institutions to challenge the government's politicization of state institutions.

Due to these two factors, there was little merit-based promotion or career civil service during Chávez's 14 years in power. Instead, he clientelistically rewarded his supporters and punished opponents through the selective distribution of goods and provision of the state-run "social missions" (Penfold-Becerra 2007). Public workers were largely expected to refrain from criticizing the government or its policies. Actions from the political opposition exacerbated the government's intolerance and intransigence, such as the failed coup in 2002, an opposition-led general strike in 2002–2003, and a presidential recall referendum in August 2004.

The price for civil servants who deviated from the government line was high. In 2004, Chávez dismissed state workers who signed the referendum against him (Iacoviello and Zuvanic 2006b), and others whose names appeared on this leaked list encountered great difficulty in obtaining employment in the public sector. Amidst another referendum drive to recall Nicolás Maduro in 2016, the leader of the PSUV publicly admitted that Maduro had directed top officials to fire any workers whose names appeared on his petition drive (Miroff 2016). Government employees – especially workers at the state-owned oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.* (PdVSA) and members of the armed forces – were fundamental pieces of the PSUV's governing coalition, and their loyalty became essential for the survival of its leaders.

In addition to demanding political fealty, Chávez also attempted to indoctrinate public employees, including the officer corps of the armed forces, as he forced public institutions to adopt the government's Bolivarian ideology (Polga-Hecimovich 2019). For instance, a 2007 reform demanded soldiers salute with the phrase "Fatherland, socialism, or death, we will prevail!", an example of promoting politics over professionalization, while a 2008 law changed the name of the military from the "National Armed Forces" to the "Bolivarian National Armed Forces" (*Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*, FANB), invoking the defense of that political project rather than the nation.

Chávez also created alternative structures to implement policy due to his distrust of career bureaucrats (Brewer-Carias 2011). A first strategy was to bypass established administrative channels in favor of delegating policy implementation to actors like the armed forces whom the president considered to be more ideologically friendly (Polga-Hecimovich 2015). This began as early as 1999 with the "Plan Bolívar 2000" national development project and continued with the antipoverty distributions and relief efforts that were a part of the government's so-called "social missions" (D'Elia 2006). Reliance on the military to carry out task implementation increased substantially after the 2002 coup. Specifically, the fallout from this event led the administration to tighten its circle of trusted supporters and give influential government positions and lucrative contract opportunities to loyalists within the military.

Second, the government sought to circumvent elected opposition governors and mayors through the creation of parallel state- and municipal-level "protectors" that administered their own budgets. Chávez created these offices in 2009 when his candidate lost the mayoralty of Caracas to an opposition leader. Months later, Chávez created the new position of "Head of the Government of the Capital District" and appointed an ally to assume many of the mayor's responsibilities, including education, emergency response, and civil protection (Ore 2013). Chávez and then Maduro expanded this practice after the 2012 and 2017 regional elections, creating the office of protector exclusively in those states where opposition governors had pre-

vailed. Similarly, after the 2013 local elections, office holders in the 49 mayoralities that passed from the PSUV to the opposition complained about efforts by Maduro's central government to strip them of their powers through parallel organizations (Scharfenberg 2013).

Lastly, the government circumvented bureaucrats by devolving a limited amount of policymaking power to grassroots organizations aligned with the PSUV. The 2010 Law and Regulations of the Federal Council of Government adopted a new definition of federalism as a political organization aimed at constructing a socialist society, in the face of attempts by "national and international oligarchies" to monopolize economic and political power (D'Elia 2010). In practice, the law altered the constitutional order by ignoring the federal and decentralized structure of the state. In violation of the constitution, states and municipalities would no longer manage all their previous capacities, but instead further delegated power to the socialist, grassroots "Popular Power" organizations such as the communal councils which were aligned with both the ruling party and the central planning body (Brewer-Carías 2011).

In short, the Venezuelan public administration is now among the most politicized in the world, not only in terms of civil service management but complete bureaucratic capture by political interests. This politicization took place over nearly 20 years, as the government ignored merit-based personnel decisions, fired workers who opposed the government, appointed loyalists up and down the administrative ranks, indoctrinated public servants, delegated policy management and implementation to "friendly" institutions like the armed forces, created parallel political structures in opposition-led states, and devolved limited decision-making and money to ideologically aligned neighborhood organizations. These actions – all a sharp contrast to what occurred in Colombia – reflect the government's complete and total commitment to its ideology and distrust of non-supporters to loyally implement it as well as the country's democratic decay and authoritarian creep.

DEMOCRATIC COMPATIBILITY AND NEED FOR REFORM

Wilson's (1887) model of the politics–administration dichotomy theorized that the function of politics is to provide guidance for administration, while the function of public administration is to provide neutral competence to the policy process. As this chapter makes clear, neither the Colombian nor the Venezuelan civil service systems historically met this ideal model. And although Colombia made slight improvements to a more complete merit-based system beginning in 2004, Venezuela broke completely from its prior trajectory as Hugo Chávez politicized the bureaucracy and exercised nearly complete political control over planning, decision-making, and implementation, merging political leadership with administrative function and activity.

Each country's decades-long struggle to de-politicize their public administrations reflected opposing imperatives to improve bureaucratic expertise while maintaining political agreements that depended on patronage. In these institutionally fragile environments, (de-)politicization has often been a function of political will. The frustrated implementation of reforms in the 1960s and 1970s speak to this, although never was it clearer than under the Chávez and Maduro governments. What this suggests for future efforts at professionalization, then, is that they require buy-in and compliance not only from presidents or prime ministers, but a range of the political elite. Judicial independence is also helpful: while the Colombian Constitutional

Court ensured compliance in 2004 with the 1991 constitution, Venezuela's courts are as beholden to the governing PSUV as the bureaucracy.

Despite the limited success of professionalizing reforms in these two cases, their comparison may nevertheless offer some reasons for hope. Scholarship suggests that the relationship between political and administrative officials is based on both cultural or national traditions (Painter and Peters 2010) as well as path dependence (Peters et al. 2005). However, the experiences of Colombia and Venezuela demonstrate that national culture and history are not determinant. These two places shared a common history and independence experience, struggles with state development, and limited democratization into the 1950s, and then carried out several reforms to establish modern bureaucracies. While Colombia has largely remained on that path, achieving incremental de-politicization, Venezuela fell off it. Perhaps, then, countries seeking to institute meritocratic reforms or depoliticization are similarly unbound by their history.

A necessary precondition, however, at least in Venezuela's case, is re-democratization. The level bureaucratic capture by the state is incompatible with the regular rotation of politicians to appoint and remove bureaucrats and would probably provide incentives for the re-establishment of a merit-based system for many civil servants. As in other developing countries, it will also be necessary to strengthen the rule of law to better guarantee compliance with reforms. There are a lot of hurdles to overcome.⁶

NOTES

1. This was called the Administrative Department of Civil Service (*Departamento Administrativo del Servicio Civil*, DASC), until December 29, 1992.
2. This was previously known as the Office of Coordination and Planning (CordiPlan) from 1958 to 1999, when it was a part of the office of the president. It has had four name changes since then: the Ministry of Planning and Development (1999–2006), the Ministry of Popular Power for Planning and Development (2006–2010), the Ministry of Popular Power for Planning and Finance (2010–2013), and then the MPPP (2013–present).
3. Chávez's Bolivarianism, an ideology inspired by South American independence hero Simón Bolívar, espouses economic and political sovereignty, self-sufficiency, democratic socialism, and participatory democracy, among other things.
4. If neutral competence is one criterion for evaluating the quality of administrative systems (Aberbach and Rockman 1994), then government effectiveness is one (imperfect) proxy to capture administration politicization.
5. This reflects a perception among survey respondents that skills and merits of the applicants rarely decide who gets the job, that applicants' political connections are decisive in job decisions, that politicians easily hire and fire senior public officials, and that senior public officials are rarely recruited from within the ranks of the public sector.
6. The views expressed in this chapter are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of or endorsement by the United States Naval Academy, the Department of the Navy, the Department of Defense, or the United States government.

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