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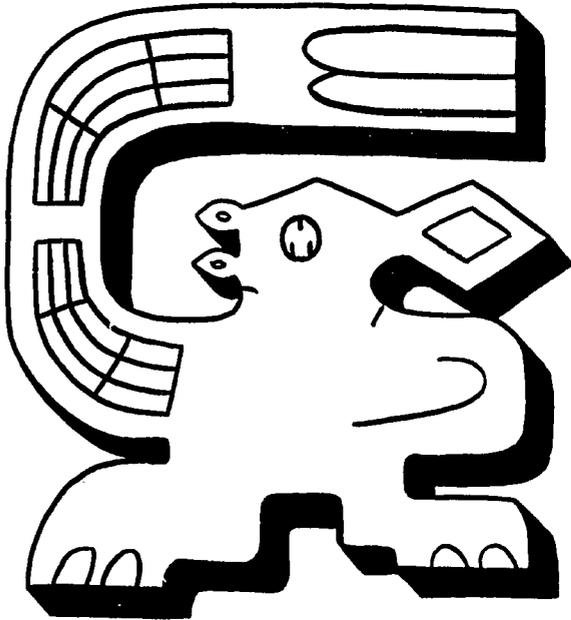
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The Correlates of Voter Participation in a Shantytown Barrio in Bogota, Colombia

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It has been predicted that between now and 1980 the urban population of Latin America will increase from 130 million to 216 million, with more than 100 million living in shantytowns.³ Although Latin America has a high rate of population growth, a major portion of this staggering increase in urban population is expected to result from rural to urban migration.

This mass migration of people from rural small towns and haciendas to congested urban slums gives rise to the possibility of massive political unrest. The poverty conditions of these urban slums are said to develop feelings of class consciousness, alienation, and anomie. Thus many observers consider these marginal barrios "breeding grounds for" or "festering sores of" radical political activity, particularly communism.⁴

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² Research Assistant in the Land Tenure Center. This study was supported by the Agricultural Development Council, Inc., and the Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities, Inc. The work was done with the cooperation of the Faculty of Sociology at National University in Bogotá, Colombia. The authors wish to thank William Thiesenhusen, Marion Brown, and A. Eugene Havens for their comments on an early draft of this paper.

³ Nathan Miller, "The OAS Under Its New Secretary General. *The New Republic*, 158 (March 2, 1968), p. 11. For other predictions see, Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, meeting on Municipal Financing in Latin America, Washington, D. C., January 23 to 26, 1966, Document 36, *El Desarrollo Urbano de America Latina*, pp. 2-3.

⁴ This view that poverty produces revolution is as old as Aristotle and Plato. See Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. translated by Ernest Baker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 59; and Plato, *The Republic*, translated by A. D. Lindsey (New York: Dutton, 1951), p. 54.

Mangin argues that this is more myth than fact.⁵ One study, for example, demonstrates that slum voting is, in general, more conservative than middle class voting.⁶ Others stress that shantytowns are slums of hope rather than slums of despair.⁷

Although the literature contains numerous references to the political behavior of the urban poor, few empirical studies are available concerning the behavior that can be expected from Latin American slum dwellers.⁸ The present paper focuses on voting behavior. Specifically it analyses the relationships between personal characteristics and voter participation among residents in a shantytown in Bogotá, Colombia.

Lipset has delineated a series of variables which several studies have shown to be related to voting: income, literacy, level of occupational skills, age, length of residence, and organizational membership.⁹ The better educated vote more than the less educated; the high income, more than the low; those between 35 and 55, more than the younger and older voters; skilled more than unskilled; older residents, more than new residents; members of organizations, more than non members. To Lipset's list we have added church attendance, employment status, size of birth place, and political efficacy. (See Table 1) Political efficacy is the feeling that one can play a part in the decision making process which affects him. Persons born in urban areas vote more than persons born in rural areas;¹⁰ regular church attenders, more

⁵ William Mangin, "Latin American Squatter Settlements: A Problem and a Solution," *Latin American Research Review*, 2 (Summer, 1967), p. 66.

⁶ Norman E. Whitten, Jr., "Urbanization and Political Extremism," Cambridge, Massachusetts, mimeographed, 1962.

⁷ Charles J. Stokes, "A Theory of Slums," *Land Economics*, 38 (August 1962), pp. 187-197.

⁸ For exceptions see, John McCamant and others, *Las Elecciones del 17 de Marzo de 1968 en la Ciudad de Cali* (Cali, Colombia, Universidad del Valle, Division de Ciencias Sociales y Economicas), 1968; Norman E. Whitten, Jr., op. cit.; and Daniel Goldrich, R. B. Pratt, and C. R. Schuler, "The Political Integration of Lower Class Urban Settlements in Chile and Peru," a paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, New York City, 1966.

⁹ Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 189.

¹⁰ See Ronald Freedman and Deborah Freedman, "Elements in the

than non attenders;¹¹ employed more than unemployed; the political efficacious more than the inefficacious.¹²

Unfortunately the studies from which these generalizations are drawn were conducted in developed countries: United States, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. Thus, these variables may or may not have a strong influence on voter behavior in lesser developed countries. Nevertheless, we hypothesize that voter participation is higher among respondents

Table 1: SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS CORRELATED WITH VOTING TURNOUT

<i>Higher Turnout</i>	<i>Lower Turnout</i>
1. High per capital monthly income (more than the median of 81 pesos)	Low per capita monthly income (less than 81 pesos)
2. Literate (3 years or more)	Illiterate 0-3 years)
3. Skilled occupations Businessmen Commercial farmers Machinists and mechanics Bricklayers and Carpenters Taxi and bus drivers	Unskilled occupations Construction and manual laborers Servants Gardeners Peasants, subsistence Watchmen and guards
4. Older people (37 years and older)	Young people (less than the median of 37 years)
5. Older residents in Community (3 years or more)	Newcomers in community (less than 3 years)
6. Members of organizations (one or more)	Nonmembers of organizations
7. Church participants (attend more than once a month)	Non-church participants (attend once a month or less)
8. Urban background (born in area of 2,000 or more population)	Rural background (born in area of less than 2,000 population)
9. Regularly employed (unemployed once or less)	Irregularly employed (Unemployed two or more times)
10. Political efficacy	Politically inefficacious

Source: Adapted from Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 189.

who are: (1) earners of high monthly per capita incomes; (2) literate; (3) skilled workers; (4) older people; (5) old

Non-Farm Population," *Rural Sociology*, 21 (1956), 50-61.

¹¹ See Lester W. Milbrath, "Political Participation in the States," in Herbert Jacob and Kenneth N. Vines, eds., *Politics in the American States* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), p. 137.

¹² See Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin and Warren E. Miller, *The Voters Decide* (Evanston: Row, Peterson, 1954), p. 192.

residents in the community; (6) members of voluntary organizations; (7) regular church attenders; (8) persons born in urban areas; (9) regularly employed; and/or (10) politically efficacious. Before examining these relationships, let us place them in context with a brief description of Colombian politics and of the social setting and methods used in the study.

Background on Colombian Politics. There has been an increasing decline in voter participation in recent Colombian elections. (See Table 2) In the most recent election, less than 40 per cent of the electorate participated, compared with nearly 70 per cent in 1958. This growing apathy has been attributed to widespread dissatisfaction with the passive gradual reforms and nonideological policies of the National Front, the Liberal-Conservative coalition that has governed Colombia since the national referendum on December 1, 1957. Recent research indicates that both voters and non-voters express apathy and dissatisfaction toward the Front. This is especially true among workers.¹³ The governing parties, made up mostly of upper class elite, have had as their major objective the reduction or elimination of the *violencia*, a virtual civil war between the Liberals and Conservatives which has killed more than 200,000 people in the past 35 years. Under the terms of the National Front, both parties are equally represented in all judicial, legislative, and executive bodies including the president's cabinet. This agreement extended to all levels of government: national, departmental, and municipal with the presidency being shared on an alternating four-year basis.

Although the two party system has dominated Colombia for over a hundred years, it has become highly fractionalized over dissatisfaction with the National Front. The majority faction of the conservative party, the Ospinistas, and the Oficialistas of the Liberal party support the Front. The Alvaristas of the Conservative party and the Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal (MRL) of the Liberal party oppose the coalition.

Though National Front agreement explicitly limits electoral participation to the Conservative and Liberal parties, other

¹³ McCamant, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Table 2: REGISTERED VOTERS AND ACTUAL VOTERS,
COLOMBIA, 1957-1968

Election	Registered voters	Actual * voters	Turnout as percent of registered voters	Turnout as percent of population 21 years old and over
1957 Plebiscite	6,080,343	4,397,090	72.3	—
1958 Congressional election	5,365,191	3,693,939	68.9	60
1958 Presidential election	5,365,191	3,108,567	57.9	—
1960 Congressional election	4,397,541	2,542,651	57.8	39
1962 Congressional election	5,338,868	3,090,203	57.9	45
1962 Presidential election	5,404,795	2,634,840	48.8	—
1964 Congressional election	6,135,628	2,261,190	36.9	31
1966 Presidential election	6,611,352	2,649,258	40.1	—
1966 Congressional election	6,609,639	2,939,222	44.5	38
1968 Congressional election	6,973,516	2,496,441	35.8	30

* Figure for vote in congressional elections is the total vote for candidates for the House of Representatives.

Sources: National Register of the Civil state and John McCamant and others, *Las Elecciones del 17 de Marzo de 1968 en la Ciudad de Cali* (Cali, Colombia: Universidad del Valle, Division de Ciencias Sociales y Economicas, 1968), Appendix A.

parties may present themselves as factions of these two parties, even though they are opposed to the National Front agreement. For example, the Alianza Nacional Popular (ANAPO), and Alliance of Liberals and conservatives compete for votes from both parties although its support is heavily conservative. McDonald has shown that there is a trend among voters to support these political factions and parties which are not sympathetic to the National Front.¹⁴ Several of these groups urge their supports to stay away from the polls as a protest against the coalition government. (See Table 3) This

¹⁴ Ronald H. McDonald, "Political Protest and Alienation in Voting: The Case of Colombia," *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, 21 (Autumn, 1967), pp. 3-22.

is undoubtedly partly responsible for the decline in voter participation.

Table 3: POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ELECTORAL POLICIES, COLOMBIA

Name of Organization	Initials	Anglicized Name	Advocate Electoral Participation
LEGAL POLITICAL PARTIES			
Partido Conservador		Conservative Party	Yes
Alvaristas *	---	-----	Yes
Alzatistas *	---	-----	Yes
Leyvistas *	---	-----	Yes
Ospinistas *	---	-----	Yes
Partido Liberal	---	Liberal Party	
Oficialistas	---	Official Liberal	Yes
Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal		Liberal Revolutionary Movement	Yes
Línea Dura	MRL	Hard Line	Yes
Línea Blanda	MRL	Soft Line	Yes
OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS			
Alianza Nacional Popular	ANAPO	National Popular Alliance	Yes
Ejército de Liberación Nacional	ELN	National Liberation Army	No
Frente Unido del Pueblo	FUP	United Front of the People	No **
Movimiento Democrático Nacional	MDN	Democratic National Movement	No
Movimiento Nacionalista Popular	MNP	Popular Nationalist Movement	No
Partido Comunista Colombiano	PCC	Colombian Communist Party	Yes **
Partido Social Democrata Cristiano	PSDC	Christian Social Democratic Party	No

* Named after the founder.

** Some factions within advocated electoral participation, others abstained. The official FUP Line was abstention; the hierarchy of the Communist party advocated participation with own candidates.

Source: Adapted from Henry Wells, ed., *Colombia: Election Factbook* (Washington, D. C.: Institute for the Study of Comparative Political Systems, March-May, 1966), p. 24. Electoral policies of the various parties were added by the authors.

The Social Setting and Methods. The community chosen for our study was Barrio Gavilan (pseudo name), a shantytown in Bogotá. The city planning office describes the community as a workers' *barrio*. Eighty-eight per cent of the residents are migrants from small towns, cities, and rural areas in Colombia. The rest are native *Bogotanos*. For the migrants the median length of residence in Bogotá is seven years. The

median length of residence in the barrio for all respondents is three years. Approximately two-fifths of the residents lived in the central city before moving to the barrio. Others have moved to Gavilan from neighboring barrios. Few moved directly to the community from their former residence in small towns, cities, and farms. The barrio is characterized by incomplete, makeshift dwellings; inadequate water and sanitation facilities; ineffective police, fire, education, and health services; and poor streets. At first the neighborhood developed as a barrio *clandestino*, an illegal subdivision in which small parcels of unimproved land were sold without official permit. Later, an *urbanización*, a legal subdivision designed according to city specifications and provided with some public services, was built adjacent to the clandestine barrio. Today both of these developments are administered as a single governmental and social unit. This shantytown should be distinguished from another major type, *invasiones* or *tugurios*, which are squatter settlements on public and private lands.

The data for this study are drawn from 99 formal interviews with residents of Barrio Gavilan, in the summer of 1966. The interviews were carried out with a randomly selected sample of the total household in the barrio. Interviewers were sociology students and faculty from National University in Bogotá. Household heads were interviewed whenever possible.

Before any interviews were conducted, the interviewers spent two months in the area to establish rapport with local leaders, officials and residents. The interview schedule began with questions concerning non-political issues such as age, education, etc. All respondents were assured that they and their barrio would remain anonymous.

Variables such as age, education, income, etc., were measured by direct questions and categorized as shown in Table 1. Political efficacy was measured by the following question:

Do you feel the vote is useful or not useful in producing change in Colombia?

Answers	(N)
Vote is useful	33
Vote is not useful	62
No answer	4

Of the 62 respondents who felt the vote was not useful, a typical statement was that, "The vote is a farce." A young gardener told us, "Voting and the vote aren't worth anything." A construction worker who rarely votes said, "Don't bother me with crazy questions. Everyone knows that the upper class makes all the decisions before the election."

Many of the 33 who expressed positive opinions toward the utility of the vote had some reservations. As one brick mason put it: "The vote is useful even though no one has any faith in those who govern." A businessman who always votes expressed the following opinion: "Sometimes I think the vote is useful, but as the cost of living keeps rising, I don't know what to think." A taxi driver said, "I vote regularly because the priest says I should."

Perhaps the opinions are best summed up by a factory worker's statement who said, "There are no solutions to our problems by any of the means available. With or without help, things will be the same. Perhaps there will be a revolution. Who knows?"

Voter participation was measured by the following question:

When there are elections, do you:

Choices	(N)
a. always vote	45
b. almost always vote	9
c. rarely vote	23
d. never vote	20
no response	2

Respondents who always vote and those who almost always vote were categorized as high voter participants. Those who rarely vote or never vote were classified as low voter participants.

Findings. The data (see Table 4) support only four of the hypothesized relationships: members of voluntary organizations, church participants, regularly employed workers and the politically efficacious respondents have a propensity to vote. Although it was predicted that the residents who had resided in the community longer vote more regularly, the

opposite was actually observed. No consistent tendency was observed among earners of high per capita monthly income, skilled workers, literates, older people, or persons of urban origins.

Table 4: PROPORTIONS AND Z SCORES BETWEEN PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND HIGH VOTER PARTICIPATION
BARRIO GAVILAN, COLOMBIA, 1966

Personal Characteristics	N	Percentage of High Voter Participation	Z Scores ^a
1. Per Capita Monthly Income			
High earners	45	62	1.07
Low earners	45	51	
2. Education			
Literate	38	58	.24
Illiterate	56	55	
3. Occupational status			
Skilled workers	56	54	-.43
Unskilled workers	36	58	
4. Age			
Older people	48	54	-.29
Younger people	49	57	
5. Length of residence in community			
Old residents	49	47	-1.77*
New residents	48	65	
6. Organizational membership			
Members	20	80	2.89**
Non-members	77	49	
7. Church participation			
High participants	73	63	2.68**
Low participants	24	33	
8. Area of Origin			
Urban	42	54	-.93
Rural	55	56	
9. Employment status			
Regularly employed	53	66	2.32**
Irregularly employed	43	43	
10. Political efficacy			
Politically efficacious	51	81	4.10***
Politically inefficacious	42	42	

^a A difference of proportions tests was used to obtain the Z values. See Hubert M. Blalock, *Social Statistics* (New York: McGraw Hill), 1960, pp. 176-179.

* Significant at the .05 level, with a one-tail test of probability.

** Significant at the .01 level, with a one-tail test of probability.

*** Significant at the .001 level, with a one-tail test of probability.

There are three fundamental questions about these findings:

1. Why are membership in voluntary organizations, church

participation, regular employment, and political efficacy related to high voter participation?

It is understandable that people who attend religious services often are more likely to vote than are persons who seldom or never attend. The Catholic church makes it the duty of each priest to remind his parishioners of their moral obligations regarding voting behavior.¹⁵ For example, the parishioners obligations include going to the polls, voting for a worthy candidate, not selling his vote, etc. The priest is expected to abstain from favoring a particular party except when a particular party is openly hostile to the religion. In actuality, however, the bishop often sends instructions to pastors when controversial persons and issues are at stake.

It is also reasonable that members in voluntary organizations are more likely than nonmembers to vote. One can infer that organizational members are more aware of political processes and tend to participate more fully in it.

People who feel that they can influence the decision making processes which affect them, are more likely to vote than are persons who feel such influence is beyond their grasp. Researchers have frequently observed a relatively high incidence of nonvoting and expression of disinterest among the lower socio-economic status categories. This apathy or indifference is in part attributed to a feeling that their vote will have no effect.

Regularly employed workers are more likely than the unemployed to vote. The regularly employed have security of income and a stake in the existing system. Therefore, it is to be expected that they will support the political system by participating in it. Similar findings have been reported by other writers. Zeitlin, for example, found that Cuban workers who experienced the most unemployment during the pre-revolutionary years were the ones who were most likely to support the revolution.¹⁶

¹⁵ Gustavo Jimenez, "The Role of the Rural Parish Priest as an Agent of Social Change in Central Colombia," unpublished *Ph.D. dissertation*, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1965, p. 103.

¹⁶ Maurice Zeitlin, "Economic Insecurity and the Political Attitudes of Cuban Workers," *American Sociological Review*, 31 (February 1966), pp. 35-52.

2. How can the unexpected finding that newcomers to the community are more likely than older residents of the community to vote be accounted for when it is counter to the findings of other studies?

In our study, more newcomers than old residents in the community are satisfied with their present residence. The newcomers to Barrio Gavilan are also more satisfied with their incomes than older residents. Other research indicates that the newcomers to Barrio El Carmen in Bogotá are less anomic than the old residents of the community.¹⁷

Perhaps recent arrivals to the barrio believe they have experienced upward social mobility by moving to the community. Research indicates that migrants from the central city slums have experienced upward social mobility prior to their move to the shantytown fringe and further suggests that these marginal barrios may be "shantytown suburbs."¹⁸ This increase in status and a higher standard of living may tend to increase aspirations. Instead of their rate of achievement increasing with length of residence in the community, it decreases or remains the same. This causes a drop in expectations among the old residents of the community. To put it in de Tocqueville's words: "Evils which are patiently endured when they seem inevitable become intolerable when once the idea of escape from them is suggested."¹⁹ Thus, it may be hypothesized that the longer the residents remain in the shantytown, the more they show feelings of political alienation because they realize that any additional upward mobility is improbable.

3. Why are there no significant tendencies among earners of high monthly per capita incomes, skilled workers, the literate, older people, or persons of urban origins to vote which is counter to the findings obtained in the developed nations?

¹⁷ William L. Flinn, unpublished data on Barrio El Carmen in Bogotá, Colombia, University of Wisconsin, Department of Rural Sociology, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁸ William L. Flinn, "The Process of Migration to a Shantytown in Bogotá, Colombia," Land Tenure Center Research Paper No. 53, University of Wisconsin, Madison, July 1968.

¹⁹ A. de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, translated by John Bonner (New York: Harper and Bros., 1856), p. 214.

A partial explanation may be that Barrio Gavilan is a working class neighborhood and does not represent wide range of occupations or incomes. In the case of occupational status, difficulty was encountered in trying to classify the respondents as skilled or unskilled because of the lack of a wide range of skill in their occupations. The same problem was observed in the variables of income and education. Few respondents possessed more than four years of education and most had monthly per capita incomes around the median of 81 pesos or \$4.06 (U.S.).

Discussion. The objective of this study was to identify some of the factors associated with voter participation in a slum barrio in Bogotá, Colombia. The data indicate that political efficacy, church attendance, organizational membership, and regular employment are positively associated with voting. Perhaps the most interesting finding is that newcomers to these slums are more likely to vote than older residents. This may be because newcomers feel they have experienced upward mobility in moving to these peripheral slums, whereas older residents have become disillusioned as to the prospects for further upward mobility. If this is true, the question arises as to what political behavior can be expected as the present and future waves of migrants also become disillusioned and dissatisfied.

Students of revolution argue that such frustrated expectations are the antecedents of revolt.²⁰ Another alternative may be that new non-revolutionary political parties will form and seek the allegiance of these groups, offering ameliorative programs and change. It is also possible, with the demise of the National Front in 1974, that the dissatisfied and politically inactive elements may be recruited into the political system as supporters of existing parties and factions.

²⁰ See James C. Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *The American Sociological Review*, 27 (February 1962), 5-13; and Raymond Tanter and Manus Midlarsky, "A Theory of Revolution," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 1 (September 1967), p. 265-280.

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