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Urban Stud published online 31 March 2014

DOI: 10.1177/0042098014527484

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Urban governance in the South: How did Bogotá lose its shine?

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DOI: 10.1177/0042098014527484

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Abstract

There are all too few examples of good urban governance in the 'South'. One city which improved its performance dramatically after 1992 was Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. It joined the ranks of exemplar cities and its former mayors toured the world advertising this 'miracle'. Unfortunately, after 2008, the city's administration became mired in corruption and its image ratings have dived. The current administration has so far failed to revive trust in the city's governance. Based on interviews with key personalities in the city, this paper examines the causes of Bogotá's recovery and its recent relapse. Bogotá's experience is useful to students of urban governance in showing not only how a city in the 'South' can improve its performance but also that any improvement is fragile. A decent working relationship between technocrats and politicians is critical in guaranteeing both public support and progress in implementing major public works.

Keywords

bureaucracy, corruption, decentralisation, politics, urban management

Received June 2013; accepted February 2014

Introduction

Improving the quality of urban governance has become a major policy issue in most rapidly urbanising countries. It rose up the policy agenda because of the need to improve the often desperately poor living conditions of the less privileged. In addition, the struggle for market share and foreign investment in a globalising world is being fought more and more intensively between major cities and city regions. Since global success depends in part on the quality of infrastructure provision, freedom from crime and the desirability of living in each city, urban governance is a critical ingredient in improving competitiveness (Baud and Post, 2003;

Devas, 2003; [Tendler, 1997](#); World Bank, 1992, 1999).

Cities increasingly joust for the top positions in the kind of league tables produced by Mercer, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and others designed to rank them in terms of their urban excellence (http://www.citymayors.com/features/quality_survey.html). Poorer cities now compete for a position in those tables: Cape Town recently joined 17 other cities around the world in being designated as a 'Role Model City' by the UN office

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for disaster risk, and Medellín has been anointed as 'the most innovative city in the world' by the Urban Land Institute (<http://www.citigroup.com/citi/news/2013/130301a.htm>).

Many have argued that a key ingredient in improving the quality of urban governance is decentralisation and this has clearly been a major ingredient in many development strategies since the 1980s (Campbell, 2003; Tandler, 1997; UN-Habitat, 2009; World Bank, 1992). Autonomy from national decision-making is needed if cities are to increase their competitiveness. They should be free to negotiate loans with commercial and multilateral agencies and encouraged to make full use of their local resources. Decentralisation will also make governance more democratic because it will make the authorities more accountable to the people (Blair, 2000; Devas, 2003: 32; Rowland, 2001).

Critical here, of course, is the quality of democracy. Local administrations should be freely elected and should consult the public on major issues. A further essential ingredient is an ability to balance the financial books – higher expenditure should be financed by increased taxation or by realistic loan agreements. Technical competence is also obligatory – governments should appoint officials on the basis of their experience and expertise, and eliminate all forms of nepotism, cronyism and clientelism.

Unfortunately, when the quality of urban governance is considered against the above criteria, too many cities fail to reach the required standard (Amin, 2013; Devas, 2003; Myers and Dietz, 2002). Too few administrations in Africa, Asia and Latin America are capable of providing all of their population with basic services. In 2010, two-thirds of urbanites in sub-Saharan Africa lacked treated water piped to their homes, and only 43% had access to an 'improved' sanitation system (UNICEF/WHO, 2012).

While more and more cities now have elected mayors, the quality of local democracy is all too often highly flawed. Local

politics is frequently corrupt and is as likely to undermine good urban governance as to enhance it. Too often major cities are being run with a blatant disregard for the rules of financial accounting. Taxes and utility charges are not raised in line with the rising costs of improved infrastructure provision. Similarly, the interests of major lobbies, car drivers, construction companies, major unions and the like, too often triumph over the needs of the poor. Many cities also have excessively complex administrative systems and many mega-cities, such as Mexico City and São Paulo, are divided into a series of distinct political entities where different administrations compete more than they cooperate.

Of course, all these problems are manifest most clearly in the rapidly growing cities of the South. Nevertheless, as this paper will argue, not all cities in the South are as badly administered as the literature frequently points out. Amin (2013: 488), for example, has suggested that virtually every city in Africa, Asia and Latin America is governed by 'fiscally hampered or corrupt and inefficient public authorities', and that they are inhabited by 'slum dwellers, [who] owing to their legal status, remain a population without rights, left outside the society of sovereign and civic obligations, now usurped by the haves alone' (Amin, 2013: 486).

In recent years, a number of cities in the South, and particularly in Latin America, have greatly improved their governance systems in certain important respects. In Brazil, Curitiba has been applauded for its innovations in public transport and Porto Alegre for its experiences in participatory budgeting (Abers, 1998; Souza, 2001; Van Lindert and Nijenhuis, 2003). Quito, Medellín, Belo Horizonte, Montevideo and São Paulo have all appeared in the lists of exemplary cities as a result of different initiatives: urban renovation, harvesting methane to power the city and connecting slum settlements to

the metro system through cable cars (Brand and Dávila, 2011; EIU 2010; Rojas et al., 2006).

A further exemplar of a city which has greatly improved the quality of its governance is Bogotá, the capital of Colombia.¹ Bogotá first hit the development headlines in the late 1990s as an example of a city that had recovered from a major financial and social crisis to become a model of relatively honest and competent governance. By 2005 it had a widely admired bus rapid transit (BRT) system (Gilbert, 2008; Gómez, 2004), it had greatly reduced its crime rate and the city's finances were extremely healthy. In October 2002, the United Nations declared Bogotá to be an 'urban ideal' (*ciudad ejemplo*) for the rest of Latin America. Successful ex-mayors, notably Antanas Mockus and Enrique Peñalosa, began publishing their memoirs and touring the world to teach the world about Bogotá's success (Beccassino, 2000; Castro and Garavito, 1994; Veeduría Distrital, 2003). Bogotá had suddenly achieved almost miracle status, an exemplar of the virtues of decentralisation, transparency and efficiency in public administration.

Unfortunately, Bogotá's star status was not to last long. The mayor in charge of the city between 2008 and 2011 is under arrest and numerous councillors and former officials are either in jail or are facing charges of embezzlement and corruption. It is clear that a so-called 'carrousel of corruption' operated in the city after 2008, which led to commissions being paid on a number of public contracts including those concerning maintenance of the road system, building new BRT routes and operating the city's ambulance system.

The current mayor, who was one of the first to denounce his predecessor's misdeeds, is himself embroiled in a series of charges against his administration. The media have constantly attacked his administration for

its perceived failures and he has faced continuous opposition in the city council. Confidence in the mayor, both among the general public and the chattering classes, is very low, albeit at a level above his immediate predecessor (Figure 1). Most seriously he is under threat of a recall motion and the Attorney General has declared that he should be removed from office and has banned him from political life for 15 years (see below).

This paper is concerned with explaining how a city with an increasingly competent administration could succumb so quickly to one embroiled in corruption and mismanagement.

Bogotá: From chaos to 'miracle' status

In the early 1990s Bogotá was in the midst of a severe crisis (Castro and Garavito, 1994; Gilbert, 2006; Gilbert and Dávila, 2002; Vargas, 2003). A series of major electricity blackouts badly affected life in the city during 1992 and public service coverage was in decline after years of improvement. Increasing evidence of corruption in the public administration was hitting the headlines and, in 1991, the city's mayor was actually imprisoned.² In a city already notorious for its lack of security, crime rates were increasing and, by 1993, the homicide rate had reached 80 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in urban Colombia (Figure 2). The city was also bankrupt. In 1992, when the city tried to borrow money abroad, the national government refused to guarantee the loan. In response, local creditors stopped advancing payments even on existing loans (Cárdenas et al., 1995: 166; Castro and Garavito, 1994: 81).

The crisis demanded change and by the mid-2000s Bogotá was a substantially different city. A series of competent

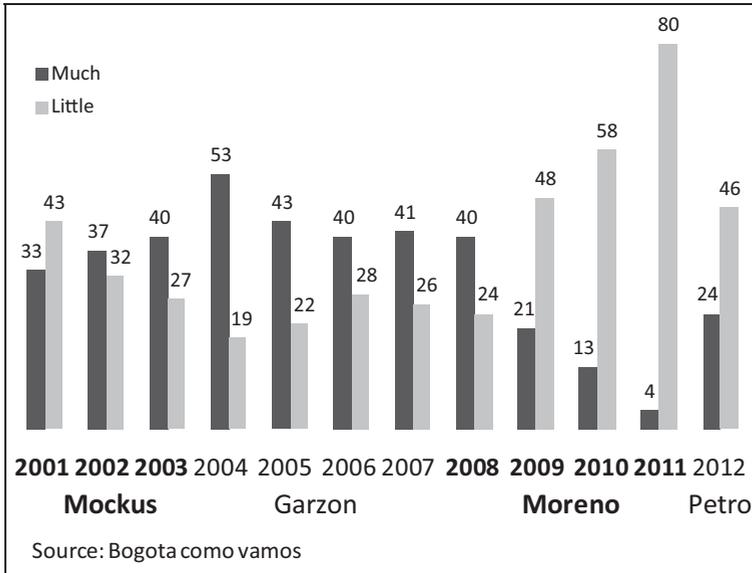


Figure 1. Confidence in the mayor (%).

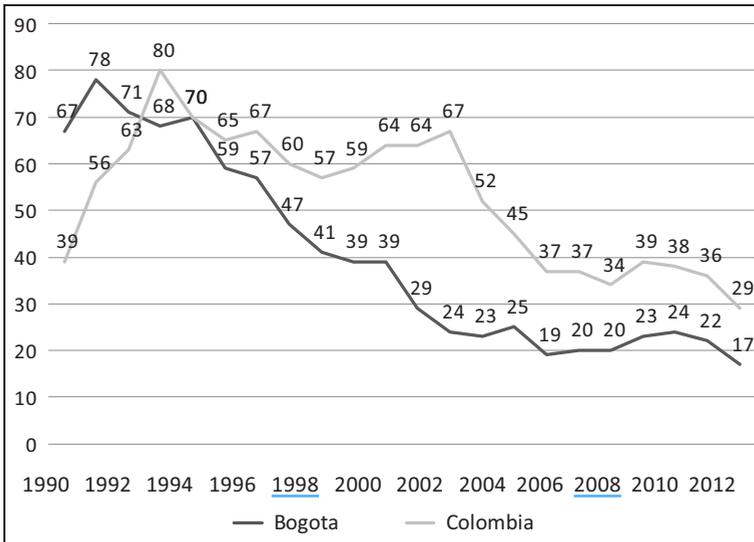


Figure 2. Homicide rates in Bogotá and Colombia, 1990–2012.

administrations had put the public finances in order, invested heavily in public works, improved public transport and upgraded and serviced many low-income settlements.

Improvements to the city’s policing, its open spaces and even the mentality of drivers, together with the opening of new public buildings and a radical new public transport

system, had managed to generate something in the way of public pride in the national capital. For a city where most people had always lacked confidence in its public leaders and had always held a negative image of the city, this was a major achievement.

The 'miracle years'

Various explanations have been put forward to explain Bogotá's remarkable transformation after 1992 (Beccassino, 2000; Bromberg, 2003; Dávila, 2004; Gilbert, 2006; Gilbert and Dávila, 2002; Gilbert and Garcés, 2008; Montezuma, 2005; Pasotti, 2010; Silva, 2009). The main factors are set out below.

The end of co-administration and clientelism

For years, the mayors of Bogotá complained that their power was undermined by the actions of the city council. They could not raise taxes without striking sometimes nefarious deals with councillors in order to increase the city's revenues. The mayor was forced to offer favours to the politicians who controlled the council; jobs had to be distributed through councillors, contracts ceded to certain favoured groups, and policies adopted, or relinquished, according to the wishes of the mayor's supporters. The balance of power shifted dramatically with the passing of the Organic Statute in 1993. This limited the council's responsibilities to passing laws and to supervising the actions of the executive. It thereby gave the mayor much more autonomy and flexibility in administering the city (Castro and Garavito, 1994). Authorship of this statute is widely attributed to Mayor Jaime Castro, a heavy-weight Liberal politician who claims to have rewritten the statute and guaranteed its progress through Congress. He gained little electoral benefit as a result of his achievements and was defeated when he tried to

return to the mayorship in the 2003 election. Nevertheless, most of the cognoscenti recognise his achievements; 'the little big things of Jaime Castro', as Pizano (2003: 28) puts it.

Good mayors

Until 1988, the mayor of Bogotá was directly appointed by the national president. However, Law No. 1 of 1986 decreed that in future all mayors would be elected. Between 1988 and 2008, Bogotá was the beneficiary of seven elections each of which produced a highly responsible mayor, usually a candidate who had stood against the traditional political system (Bromberg, 2003). The independence of Bogotá voters, and particularly their wholesale distrust of traditional party politics, severely weakened the power of the political parties, their councillors and national representatives. While the first three elected mayors were drawn from the Conservative and Liberal parties, no mayor since then has come from the two traditional parties and several have had no party affiliation. Antanas Mockus (1994–1996 and 2000–2003) was a university rector and was elected largely because he publicly denounced traditional party politics; Enrique Peñalosa (1997–1999), previously a losing candidate when standing for the Liberal party, won when he stood as an independent. These candidates won on multi-class tickets, albeit with greater support from the better off. Between 1992 and 2004, there were few complaints about the honesty or competence of the mayors and even the election of the first left-wing mayor in 2003 did not lead to widespread criticism of the quality of the city's government (Pizano, 2003: 181).

Technocracy not democracy?

Bromberg (2003) has argued that: 'Bogotá changed because technocratic elites governed

it'. Supported by a popular mandate, the mayors could identify certain priorities, appoint their own teams and push through their programmes as best they could. Unlike the situation in the 1980s, when it is argued that political appointees became embedded in the main city agencies and the city payroll was used to reward political allies, most high level appointments after 1993 were made on predominantly technical grounds. And, protected by the Organic Statute, these officials were able to administer their agencies with a degree of autonomy.³ National legislation also protected the public utilities from political interference by subjecting them to a series of detailed rules about finance, charging and general performance.

Continuity of administration

Democratic rule sometimes produces instability but it did not do so in Bogotá. The first seven elected mayors all served their full term and their period in office was gradually lengthened from two years to four. Even more impressive was the continuity in policy with most heads of agency staying in power throughout the administration and, occasionally, beyond. In addition, each mayor carried on with the major projects of his predecessor, the BRT *Transmilenio* system and *Metrovivienda*, for example, continued across administrations (Silva, 2009: 149).

More resources

A further sign that Bogotá's mayors were both responsible and brave was their ability to increase the city's income and sometimes to raise taxes. Local government spending in the city rose from a little more than 1% of the city's gross product in 1980 to over 4% in 2004 (Hernández-Rodríguez, 2005). An increasing share of this spending went into investment projects rather than in

paying employees. Most mayors maintained a policy of 'fiscal orthodoxy' and were prepared to raise taxes and levy new charges, something that guaranteed a regular budget surplus (Hernández-Rodríguez, 2005).

Privatisation and commercialisation

In Colombia, privatisation has occupied a prominent role in the national agenda since 1990. The neo-liberal regime initiated by President César Gaviria encouraged foreign trade and investment and sought to reduce inefficiency and bloated public payrolls. In the country as a whole, the private sector gradually increased its hold over banking, health care, power generation and telecommunications. But Bromberg (2003) argues that unlike the central government, few local authorities in Colombia have ever been strong believers in neoliberalism and, in Bogotá, privatisation has been rather limited. After a major political struggle, the incredibly inefficient municipal street-cleaning and rubbish-collection company was closed down in 1993. The collection of taxes was privatised the same year, as was responsibility for issuing vehicle number plates and administering mechanical checks on buses and trucks (Castro and Garavito, 1994: 91–92; Piza, 1995). The electricity company was partially privatised in 1997 and some private sector input was permitted in the provision of secondary schooling (through concessions to run new colleges) and in the health sector. However, after long debates neither the water nor the telephone service was privatised. The most important way that neoliberalism affected the District administration was in the manner in which services were provided. Commercial principles were adopted gradually by most of the main service agencies and there can be little doubt that their performance improved. De-capitalisation of the electricity company was

justified, even on the left, on the grounds that the capital generated was used to finance necessary public investment in the city. Privatisation has played some role in reforming the way that Bogotá is managed but, in comparison with what has occurred in many other parts of Latin America, it is difficult to argue that privatisation has been at the heart of the transformation.

From honest administration to corruption

During the 'miracle years', virtually every mayor increased tax returns and generally spent the money on useful projects. The separation of politics from the bureaucracy to allow the mayor greater freedom of action from the council seemed to work well. The level of honesty and transparency rose. Why did the improvement not continue?

Clearly, the rot really began with the election of a dishonest mayor. Between 1992 and 2003, most of the mayors were independents who won power because they did not represent the traditional political parties who *bogotanos* had learned to distrust. To a considerable degree, support for these candidates came from every social class. In the election of 2003, however, this pattern changed and while the electorate continued to vote for representatives of non-traditional parties, the election revealed a much clearer class divide. A left-wing candidate won largely on the basis of working class votes. He defeated the representative of Enrique Peñalosa, one of the much applauded ex-mayors, largely because the poor felt that they had benefitted little during the miracle years.⁴

While his pro-poor promises attracted the votes of the less privileged, Luis Eduardo Garzón promised not 'to adopt populist policies' during his time in office (Vargas, 2006). He would maintain most of the policies of his predecessors, while also introducing

several programmes aimed directly at the poor. An independent evaluation of his first three years in power was very complimentary, noting the advances in education for the poor, the improving economic situation and the strengthening of public finance (BCV, 2007: 4). There was also praise for his anti-hunger programme, the provision of hot and cold lunches to 650,000 or so beneficiaries, the reduction in child mortality and for the decline in poverty (*El Tiempo*, 2007b). The only real complaint about his administration concerned a perceived increase in crime and his failure to much improve the transport situation. Views today differ over whether or not he was a good mayor but he left office with high ratings in the opinion polls and with no obvious signs that the city was in decline (Figure 1) (Gilbert and Garcés, 2008). He may have been indecisive, have allowed some councilors too much influence within the administration and he was certainly culpable in signing off on some poor transport contracts but, at worst, he can only be judged to have been an indifferent mayor.

Unfortunately, his successor proved to be a disaster. Like Garzón, Samuel Moreno (2008–2011) won the election because of working-class support. The problem was that Moreno came from the National Popular Alliance (ANAPO) party which had a history of engaging in populism and clientelism.⁵ Worse still, several members of his family had earned a reputation for corruption when occupying positions of power.⁶ One of my interviewees argues that the left-wing Democratic Pole party made a major mistake when allying with Moreno. After all, the latter was rich and unlike his trade unionist predecessor he was a less than obvious representative of the left. However, he was a rather charming person and they did not have a plausible candidate of their own. He also possessed considerable political skills, having served for several years in the

national Senate, something that was manifest when as mayor-elect he quickly made deals with political parties of several persuasions to guarantee a majority in the city council.

It is strongly suspected that this political majority was constructed on the basis of deals with councillors from different parties. He agreed to accept their nominations for key representatives in the government bureaucracy. Such a process had been eliminated under Mockus, and although mayors Peñalosa and Garzón had been less rigorous in upholding this policy, political appointments to posts in the administration had generally ceased. Moreno, however, allowed the council to appoint some very surprising people to posts in the control agencies.⁷ The Comptroller, Miguel Ángel Morales-Russi (2008–2011), despite his slogan to ‘rescue public morality and ethics’, was a particularly dubious appointment. The appointment of the City Solicitor, Francisco Rojas Birry, who had been Moreno’s campaign manager, was derided in the press and the suitability of the City Observer (*veedor*), a person directly appointed by the mayor and whose role is to advise him about any problems in his administration, was also widely questioned. These regulators did nothing to question the increasing signs of corruption in major contracts and were accused increasingly of participating in illicit deals.⁸

These appointments and increasing evidence of council influence in several key city agencies created the opportunity for corruption to spread. In March 2009, the anti-corruption tsar claimed that the administration was being undermined by clientelism (Lancheros, 2009) and soon certain members of Moreno’s own party alliance were identifying cases of corruption (*Semana*, 2010b). It has subsequently been shown that major construction and maintenance contracts, such as the new *Transmilenio* route along Calle 26, involved commissions being paid to

the Moreno brothers. These commissions were handled by intermediaries with experience in corrupt dealing at the national level, but it is clear that certain councillors were also devising their own illicit schemes. A profitable deal was concocted between Councillor Hipólito Moreno and Health Secretary Héctor Zambrano, which allowed two construction companies to win a contract for running an ambulance service even though they had no experience at all in this area.

The flood of accusations about the ‘carousel of corruption’, led to Mayor Moreno being suspended and later stripped of office for improprieties in the allocation of city contracts.⁹ He resigned just over six months before the end of his four-year administration.¹⁰ The Attorney General’s office argued for pre-trial detention and Moreno was arrested on 23 September 2011. Several other important officials have subsequently been imprisoned. Francisco Rojas Birry was sentenced to eight years in jail and ordered to pay a fine of approximately US\$200,000 (*Kienyke*, 2012); Héctor Zambrano was sent to pre-trial imprisonment over the ambulance contracts (*El Colombiano*, 2013); and in March 2013 some 15 councillors and ex-councillors were under investigation for corruption (*Semana*, 2013).

How did corruption regain its hold over the administration in Bogotá?¹¹ Many local observers claim that the rot began during Luis Eduardo Garzón’s administration (2004–2008). He allowed certain councillors, particularly those belonging to his own party alliance, to name officials in the bureaucracy and particularly in the control agencies. This kind of abuse expanded enormously under Samuel Moreno. As a result, the control agencies did not perform their duty of defending the public, regulating the behaviour of District officials and properly supervising public contracts. Councillors had once again begun to acquire influence within the

administration by appointing their friends to important posts.

The return of honest administration

When Gustavo Petro and Carlos Vicente de Roux denounced the carousel of corruption and Mayor Moreno, his brother, Lilian Pardo and the Nule brothers had been arrested, it seemed that this would be the end of Bogotá's problems. Unfortunately, optimism about the state of Bogotá's administration was short-lived. Former Senator Gustavo Petro of the Progressive party, an offshoot of the somewhat discredited Democratic Pole party, won the election because the opposition failed to back a compromise candidate. Most of his support came from working class votes and while he was distrusted by many because of his guerrilla past, he had a strong reputation for honesty.¹²

Unfortunately, his administration faced problems almost immediately. First, the political and economic establishment attacked the new administration because it threatened to introduce policies that would transform the city and weaken its control. Second, the mayor had won the election with only 32% of the votes and only eight councillors out of 45 belonged to his Progressive party. Worse still was the fact that a significant number of councillors were under investigation for corruption and were determined to deny support to his initiatives; some even sought personal revenge through launching legal challenges to his administration through the offices of the District Solicitor and the Controller. Third, certain powerful national actors were also hostile to the new mayor. He was thought to be using the mayorship as a step towards campaigning for the presidency. In addition, ex-president Álvaro Uribe, whose administration (2002–2010) had sought to improve security in the country by destroying the main guerrilla

organisations, was an implacable enemy. He was totally hostile to the idea of an ex-guerrilla becoming mayor of the nation's capital city, let alone national president. Similarly, the Attorney General was no friend of the mayor and launched an investigation in September 2012 into Petro's links with the carousel of corruption. Finally, the national government of President Manuel Santos was concerned that a successful Petro administration might take too many votes in the 2014 national election. Equally, he was worried about how the mayor's radical agenda might undermine Bogotá's economy and its administrative machine. As such, he was determined to keep a close eye on the new government.

Many of his enemies were affronted by Mayor Petro's radical agenda. His urban plan promised to reduce inequality, control urban sprawl, to reduce the cost of water and transport for the poor, to increase taxes for the better off, to reduce the prevalence of guns in the city and to deal with drug addiction. He was also determined to try to reduce the profits of private operators of *Transmilenio*, rubbish collection and secondary schools in concession. Much of this agenda clearly threatened powerful interests in the city.¹³

However, perhaps his greatest problem was self-imposed. It soon became clear his administration was proving less than effective in implementing his ambitious agenda. He has been consistently accused of taking action without having conducted the necessary planning studies, such as the 17% cut in rubbish collection charges, modifications to the valorisation plan, and the changes being made to the POT (*El Tiempo*, 2013a). The inexperience of many in his team was clearly a problem and was reflected in his decision to ask his whole cabinet to resign after six months.¹⁴ He claims that that too many of his team lacked experience in running large enterprises and appeared to be

out of their depth. He wanted rapid action because he had only four years to change the structure of the city and he felt that his administration was not delivering quickly enough. It was this impatience to implement a socialist agenda that was perhaps the reason why the administration made some key errors. The most notorious was the decision to take rubbish collection under state control because the operators were making what he considered to be excessive profits. While his aim was not unreasonable, its application was a disaster. When it began operations in December 2012, the new agency lacked sufficient collection vehicles and the trained staff to do the job. Pictures of piles of uncollected rubbish in the streets featured in every news outlet. Another controversial decision was to change the plans for transport improvements along the emblematic Seventh Avenue, shelving the plans for a light *Transmilenio* service so that a tram system could be built instead. This decision led to the eventual resignation of the head of *Transmilenio* on the grounds that the action was illegal; the law precludes undertaking new studies when existing contracts have not been terminated. His resignation was one of many in the agency; the current incumbent was the fourth director to be appointed in Petro's first ten months.

Petro's public image was also not being helped by his habit of regularly upsetting significant lobby groups (*El Tiempo*, 2013e). He dismayed aficionados of bullfighting by banning such events in the city, he alienated taxi drivers by changing the *pico y placa* timetable¹⁵ and closing part of *Carrera Séptima* to cars, he worried elite households by threatening to raise valorisation charges and he continues to irritate many through his constant tweeting. His difficult (*recio*) personality has upset people who were once his friends and allies (*Semana*, 2013). As one commentator put it, the main 'leader of the opposition is himself' (Rueda, 2012). With the exception

of his own officials, none of my interviewees commented favourably on his record.

These charges have taken their toll on the mayor's reputation and the media are constantly denouncing his incompetence. A recent editorial claims that eight million *bogotanos* are suffering 'the worst mayor of all time' (Nieto de Samper, 2013) and the leader of the revocation campaign claims he is a 'terrible mayor' (Lancheros, 2014). An attempt to mount a recall referendum has obtained the 289,263 signatures that it requires to proceed.¹⁶ The opinion polls have been less than favourable; towards the end of March 2013, his favourability rating fell to 31%, the lowest rate among the mayors of the largest cities in the country (*El Tiempo*, 2013g). And, in the first week of February 2014, 55% of the public said that the conditions in Bogotá were deteriorating compared with 39% who thought they were improving (La W Radio, 2014).¹⁷

In addition, he and his officials are under seemingly permanent attack from the control agencies. The Attorney General launched an investigation into supposed links between Petro and the leaders of the carousel of corruption (*Semana*, 2012a, 2012b). Similarly the District's Solicitor and Comptroller launched attacks. The Council at first rejected his request for approval of a large loan to finance his transport projects and are unlikely to approve his valorisation plan. Even his own appointee, the City Observer, has criticised him for his failure to implement some of his policies – in his first year he managed to spend rather little of his investment budget (Veeduría Distrital, 2013).¹⁸ Some have long believed that one or other of these legal cases, and particularly the charges relating to the rubbish collection fiasco, would lead to his removal from office (Lancheros, 2013). And, while the forthcoming revocation vote is unlikely to unseat him (Lancheros, 2014), the decision of the Attorney General to remove him from power

and to ban him from political life for 15 years could well prove terminal. Petro's fate may well be decided by the Solicitor General on 20 February although the legal situation is anything but clear.

Given this flurry of threats and denunciations, few mention his achievements. Despite having had only 26 months in office, some significant steps have been taken. His development plan, which was actually approved by the council, represents a major effort towards reducing inequality in the city. Much of the long delayed 26th Street BRT project is now operational. His disarmament policy has received widespread support and may well have helped to reduce the murder rate.¹⁹ He has set up the first drug treatment centres in the city and has provided six cubic metres of free water each month to those living in the poorest districts. He reduced peak loads on *Transmilenio* by cutting the fares for travelling off peak. He has halved the prohibition on driving under the *Pico y Placa* programme to seven hours for private cars and taxis. He has increased the education budget by around half and increased that for health by around one-third. Whatever else he may be accused of, he cannot be charged with any lack of ambition or energy.

Compared to the supposedly golden years of mayors Castro, Mockus and Peñalosa (1992 to 2003), Bogotá has most definitely lost its shine. Admittedly Petro can claim that few say that his administration is worse than that of his predecessor, many admit that his development plan contains many excellent ideas and, so far at least, there is no sign that his administration is anything but honest. In maintaining its integrity, it helps that the mayor appointed an independent and critical person as Observer of the city – something that was definitely not the case during the previous two administrations.

In addition, Bogotá is belatedly cleaning out its stables. The past sins of the

councillors, contractors and administration are gradually being punished. The authorities are investigating the activities of the former mayor and his brother, both of whom are currently incarcerated. Both the former City Solicitor and Comptroller are in prison and 15 current and former councillors are under investigation for various crimes to do with corruption. Gradually, the delayed public works are being completed and while too many experienced administrators have been lost, some competent and honest people are still occupying key positions.

It should also be pointed out that in most respects the quality of life in Bogotá continues to improve. While it is possible that some deterioration may set in over the next couple of years as a result of Petro's political and legal troubles, that is not the case at the moment. According to an official study by the National Department of Statistics conducted in 2012, 76% of *bogotanos* felt less poor than five years previously (*El Tiempo*, 2013f) and official figures show that the incidence of poverty has fallen rapidly (Figure 3). Unemployment has continued to fall from 11.8% in 2007 to 8.8% by September 2013 (DANE, 2013; Vargas, 2006), the supply of water and sanitation continues to be virtually universal and the homicide rate fell from 21.9 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011 to 16 in 2012 (Figures 2 and 4).²⁰

Conclusion

Since a grave crisis of governability in 1992, many aspects of life in Bogotá have been transformed. Bogotá followed Churchill's advice and did not 'let a good crisis go to waste'. Since 1992, the incidence of poverty has fallen dramatically, service provision has improved, the homicide rate has been cut by three quarters and major improvements have been made to the transport system. While certain elements of life have improved little, notably the availability of decent work and

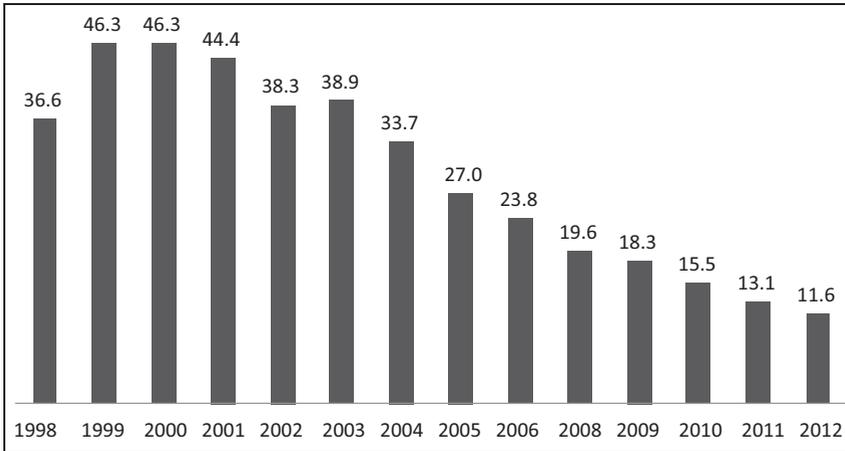


Figure 3. Incidence of poverty (%) in Bogotá.

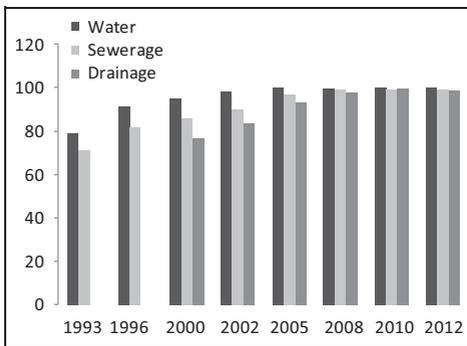


Figure 4. Coverage of water, sewerage and drainage (%) in Bogotá.

housing, inequality and social segregation, most of these failings can be blamed on the national situation. Unemployment is high in every Colombian city, the distribution of income and wealth is highly unequal across the country and reducing social problems in the city has not been helped by the arrival of thousands of people displaced by violence and criminality from the countryside. Much of the downside is simply a reflection of the obvious fact that Bogotá is the capital of a complicated, violent, unequal and poor country.

Bogotá's transformation began with the election of several effective mayors, and perhaps even more important, a change in the relationship between the Council and the executive which allowed a mayor to actually govern the city. It also relied heavily on the continuity of policy between one administration and the next.

Democratic elections produced a number of effective mayors but a case can be made that the electorate was lucky in the outcome insofar as its votes were based excessively on a contrary logic. The people voted decisively in favour of candidates who were manifestly different from those put up by the traditional parties. The victory of the excellent Antanas Mockus in 1995, a university rector who hardly campaigned and who gained public notoriety because he pulled his pants down in protest against being heckled during a debate, was the first declaration by *bogotanos* that they wanted mayors who did not act like 'typical' politicians. They followed this up by voting for a newly independent Enrique Peñalosa and then by re-electing Mockus. To an extent this pattern changed in 2003, when a candidate from the left won on the basis of massive support from the

working classes, something that was repeated in 2007 and 2011. However, this was also a somewhat contrary vote insofar as the electorate failed to support the nominee of one of the former 'excellent' mayors in 2007 and one of those mayors himself in 2011. While the poor no doubt appreciate the period of good governance, their vote suggests that they feel that those years brought too few benefits for themselves.

Equally important is that after 1991 the mayor benefitted from the powers provided by the organic statute. This gave the mayor considerable executive authority allowing him (and for a brief period her) to be independent of the council. Antanas Mockus took full advantage of these additional powers, cutting the influence of councillors and representatives of the different political parties over the bureaucracy. Under Mockus, and to a considerable extent under Peñalosa and Garzón, appointments were clearly made on the grounds of ability rather than political affiliation. This change helped the development of an increasingly competent local administration and allowed the mayors to raise additional taxes which in turn helped finance public investment and provide more services. Good leaders need a measure of autonomy in order to introduce less than popular initiatives and to raise taxes. They also have to rely on their successors to carry through long-term investment projects.

Bogotá began to lose its shine after 2004 when Mayor Garzón once again began to allow councillors and traditional politicians to influence public appointments and failed to make enough unpopular decisions. However, the decline really began with the victory of Samuel Moreno. Moreno named numerous officials more on grounds of political affiliation than competence and appointed several dubious individuals to office. The denunciations made against the administration for corruption were the final straw; a new crisis had hit the city. By the

time Moreno was removed from his post, faith in the local authority had plunged to an all-time low (Figure 1).

The election of Gustavo Petro brought back honesty to the administration. However, because he had few supporters in the local council and was opposed by many among the national and local establishments he was bound to face an uphill task. He stiffened opposition resolve by announcing a socialist development plan for the city. While his goals were worthy, they were overly ambitious given the awful legacy left by his predecessor and his own limited period in office. And any real chance of his successfully implementing a radical agenda in four years was severely damaged by his failure to appoint an effective administration. For a variety of reasons, far too many people, some highly competent and some less so, have retired and as a result implementation has been poor in several key sectors.

Of course, the major dilemma now facing both the mayor and the city is whether Petro will have to step down from office. The Attorney General's decision to demand his removal, first announced on 9 December 2013 and confirmed on 13 January, hangs over the city. Since the first announcement there has been a flurry of legal activity, press speculation, an appeal by Petro to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and street demonstrations in his support (*Semana*, 2014b). While opinion polls reveal that a majority of the public feels that the Attorney General's decision is both punitive and undemocratic, Petro has still been summoned to meet with the Public Prosecutor on 20 February. Among the many possibilities are that the national president will dismiss him and appoint a temporary replacement, probably from Petro's own party, that the revocation vote will go ahead on 2 March, and that new elections for mayor will be held sometime after June (Lancheros, 2014;

Semana, 2014b, 2014c). The problem for the city is that Petro and his closest allies have been fighting for their political lives for several months and have been unable to concentrate fully on administering the city (Saldías, 2014).

What does the recent experience of Bogotá contribute to our thinking about good urban governance? The first is that it demonstrates that a city in the South can transform itself. This goes against the tenor of much of the international literature which argues that the quality of urban governance in the South is almost universally poor. While that criticism is clearly justified in much of Africa and Asia, it does not apply very well to the situation in many cities in Latin America. There the quality of urban governance has greatly improved over the years and the capital of Colombia is among the success stories.

Second, Bogotá shows that positive change is only possible with strong and effective leadership. This requires a strong measure of separation between partisan political demands and technocratic management. Officials should not be appointed primarily because of their links to influential councillors or national politicians. They should be competent professionals committed to pushing through the agenda of the elected mayor. Once in office they should not face political interference on a day-to-day basis or be subjected to constant legal harassment.²¹

Third, democracy is a necessary but unreliable mechanism for producing better quality governance. While voters in Bogotá have generally voted for good candidates, only once making a catastrophic choice, arguably their reasoning has always been somewhat perverse. It is clear that *bogotanos* now distrust politicians of virtually every stripe and have a low opinion of both national congressmen and their local council representatives. They distrust politicians who wheel and deal and for this reason have tended to vote for any candidate who has been independent of a

traditional political machine. However, they are still susceptible to the appeal of those who appear to be strong leaders, perhaps explaining why so many voted twice for right-wing Álvaro Uribe as president while simultaneously voting for left-wing mayors. Also, their aversion to *politiqueros* has not prevented them voting into the Council many representatives of the traditional parties or for people who are now in jail for corruption.

Clearly, the relationship between democracy and good governance is very complicated. Good councillors are essential to hold the bureaucracy in check and prevent abuses of power. But the election of opportunistic and/or dishonest councillors can lead to an undermining of the quality of the bureaucracy and a weakening of the regulators. Indeed, one bizarre paradox of public opinion in Bogotá is that it attributes improvements in the city's administration to the popular election of mayors and yet it damns politicians as a class for every kind of problem that arises. Recent opinion polls report little or no confidence in the city council; in 2012 Bogotá *Cómo Vamos* (BCV, 2012) reported that 63% of the public had little respect for the Council.

Fourth, corruption in the public contracting process is a constant danger in any city and even when stopped, as it generally did in Bogotá between 1992 and 2008, it can quickly reappear. As one councillor put it to me, 'the corrupt in Colombia constantly seek out new opportunities. If one avenue is closed, politicians find another'. However, the fact that the corruption of Moreno's administration finally came to light and many of the culprits are now in prison is a major, if belated, sign of Bogotá's improved quality of governance.

Fifth, Bogotá created various ways of recording what the public thought about the quality of life in the city and how it is run. This is best reflected in the annual survey of public opinion, *Bogotá cómo vamos*. Every director and secretary in the city takes these yearly polls very seriously and is prepared to

modify agency policies accordingly. Every city should regularly conduct similar kinds of audit as a way of keeping the administration on its toes.

Sixth, decentralisation can facilitate better quality governance but as many recent studies have shown it is no panacea (Bahiigwa et al., 2005; Faguet, 2013; Lessmann and Markwardt, 2010; Tandler, 1997). Very few of Colombia's 1102 municipalities have effective authorities and, beyond Bogotá, Medellín and a handful of other cities, honest administration is all too rare. New scandals are constantly hitting the headlines and in recent years the mayors of many important Colombian cities have been suspended and even imprisoned (*El Tiempo*, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2007a, 2013d; Posada, 2007a; 2007b; *Semana*, 2006, 2010a). The Colombian experience suggests that even if decentralisation is desirable it does not prosper in violent areas and it produces its best results in the largest and best resourced cities (Faguet and Sánchez, 2008; Velásquez, 2009).

Seventh, uninterrupted improvement in urban governance can never be guaranteed as the election of the corrupt Samuel Moreno shows. Mayor Petro stemmed corruption but failed to wholly right the administrative ship. His efforts have been hampered by his lack of a majority in the Council, constant sniping from his enemies, both local and national, the threat of legal prosecution and a revocation vote. Confidence in the local administration, once high, continues to be low. And, if Petro is removed from office, it is less than clear who will replace him.

Finally, while Bogotá is a much better city to live in today than it was in 1992, its recent vicissitudes remind us that improvements in the quality of urban governance are fragile. Indeed, good administrations may well be undermined when important economic and political interests decide that a democratically elected administration is too radical to be acceptable. The current efforts

to remove the mayor are not only damaging the left's future in Colombian politics but also undermining the chances of effective long-term decision-making in Bogotá. Major investment programmes cannot be implemented without new administrations accepting their predecessors' decisions, and in the absence of such programmes social and economic progress will stall. This is the position that Bogotá has found itself in ever since the removal of Mayor Moreno and which has been currently made worse by the uncertainty over whether or not Petro will stay in office (Saldías, 2014; *El Tiempo*, 2013c).

By the standards of most poor cities, Bogotá is still a well-managed place. However, the trials and tribulations of its last two mayors have slowed progress towards creating a better city. If the local administration does not regain its former stability, the city's quality of life may begin to decline. For, as Alice discovered in *Through the Looking Glass* – you have to keep running even to stay in the same place.

Postscript

On 19 March 2014, the President of Colombia decided to remove Mayor Petro from his post and replace him with the Liberal Minister of Work, Rafael Pardo. The latter is required to continue implementing Petro's plan for Bogotá.

Funding

The research began in 2004 with a grant from the Leverhulme Trust and later visits to the city have been funded by various organisations including UCL, UN-Habitat and two universities in Universidad de los Andes and Universidad Nacional.

Notes

1. This investigation into urban governance in Bogotá began in November 2004 with a grant from the Leverhulme Trust, although the author had conducted research on urban issues in the city for many years previously. Since 2004, information has been gathered from a variety of sources:

- a) Interviews with more than 80 important decision makers in the city over the past 20 years. Those interviewed so far include six mayors of the city, numerous heads of the main urban agencies and public utilities (including electricity, health, housing, social welfare, planning, transport and water), local councillors and community leaders. In my most recent visit, in February 2013, the following people were generous in offering me their time and experience: Paul Bromberg, Carlos Vicente de Roux, Clemencia Escallón, Juan Carlos Flórez, María Teresa Garcés, Fabio Giraldo, María Mercedes Maldonado, Antonio Navarro Wolff, Gina Parody, Gustavo Petro, Fernando Rey, Carmenza Saldías, Fernando Sanclemente and Hernando Vargas. I promised them that our conversations would remain private but they may well recognise some of their comments appearing anonymously in the text.
- b) Bogotá's amazing array of surveys, for example those conducted by *Bogotá cómo vamos*, Fundación Corona, Gallup and *Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá*. In addition, there is the three-monthly *Encuesta de Hogares* of DANE, the census of 2005 and the *Encuesta de Calidad de Vida* of DANE of 2003–2004 and 2011. Documentary sources, including reports from the local press, council minutes and internal government documents.
- c) Background papers prepared by local professionals on issues such as finance, local politics, transport and water provision.
- d) Official and unofficial information on service provision, use of public infrastructure and services, and voting patterns.
- The research relies therefore on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods and the vast amount of information collected is only partially reflected by the data shown in this short paper.
2. Caicedo was convicted for distributing *auxilios* to individual councillors at a time when the Constitution prohibited this practice (he was finally cleared of the charge in 2012). The distribution of *auxilios* was an important way in which councillors maintained their political support. Under threat of a jail sentence themselves, most of the councillors eventually returned the *auxilios*.
 3. However, several members of the Garzón cabinet complained in interview about the amount of time that they were forced to spend in the Council defending their policies. In addition, there is a growing feeling that the *Contralor* and the *Solicitor*, both appointed by the Council, have tended to mount political campaigns against office holders. This explains why most high officials in the current administration have insurance policies to cover potential legal costs.
 4. This accusation was unfair on both Mockus and Peñalosa, whose policies had done much to help the poor. They certainly guaranteed that Bogotá improved its service provision and began construction of a decent public transport system. Both service provision and transport were subsidised, large areas of informal housing legalised and provided with infrastructure and services. The authorities also built parks, libraries and neighbourhood leisure facilities in the low-income settlements. However, both mayors were perceived to come from privileged backgrounds and they were hardly responsible for the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the city, especially during times of national economic recession.
 5. ANAPO was founded by Colombia's last dictator, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. His daughter Maria Eugenia Rojas stood as the party's presidential candidate in 1974. She and her two sons, Samuel and Néstor Iván, have all served as national congressmen and senators. I have talked to several people in the poor suburbs who recall Maria Eugenia distributing sweets to the children in those areas. This is a trivial but revealing example of her populist style of politics.
 6. His mother virtually destroyed the national housing institute by offering houses with no

- deposit and then failing to collect the mortgage payments, his father has a rather notorious business reputation and his brother escaped well-based charges of corruption when he was mayor of the city of Bucaramanga (<http://www.vanguardia.com/historico/102477-quien-es-ivan-moreno-rojas>).
7. Some even claim that these people were elected by councillors who would be rewarded with a share of the appointees' salaries (Bustos, 2011).
 8. María Consuelo del Río Mantilla held the post of Veeduría Distrital from 2004 until 2012.
 9. Given the relative autonomy of the press in Colombia and the amount of coverage given to corruption in most of the daily and weekly journals, it is perhaps surprising that more was not done earlier to reveal the corruption going on in Bogotá.
 10. He was replaced for the last few months by Clara López, a member of the *Polo Democrático* party.
 11. There were clearly some examples of corruption under the 'good' mayors, particularly at the sub-mayoral (*alcalde menor*) level. In 2005, Lucho Garzón famously appointed all twenty *alcaldesas* on the grounds that women were more honest than men. Even so six of the twenty were later suspended or forced to resign (*El Tiempo*, 2006).
 12. As a young man he became an active member of the 19th of April Movement, which later evolved into the Alianza Democrática M-19, along with two of his close associates, Antonio Navarro Wolff and Guillermo Asprilla. In 1985, Petro was arrested by the army for the crime of illegal possession of arms. He was convicted and sentenced to 18 months in prison. Much later he became first a Congressman and then a member of the Senate.
 13. It is claimed that the private rubbish collection companies allied with some of those involved in the carousel of corruption organised a plot to bring down the mayor. The plotters intended that the planned public rubbish company would not work effectively (*Semana*, 2014a).
 14. Approximately half of the cabinet was replaced.
 15. The *pico y placa* restriction on use of private cars, and later taxis, during rush hour was introduced in 1998. Vehicles are only permitted on the roads on certain days, or at certain hours. Control is exercised according to the last digit on the number plate. The precise rules have changed many times over the years.
 16. This is unlikely to be successful insofar as recall motions have never prospered in Colombia (Bromberg, 2013; Lancheros, 2012). To request a recall motion the signatures of 40% of the total votes of the last election are required.
 17. However, his personal rating has improved greatly in response to the Attorney General's destitution decision. In a February survey, 56% stated that they had a favourable image of the mayor against 39% who expressed a negative view (La W Radio, 2014).
 18. By 31 December 2012 actual investment had only reached 62% of that requested in the budget (Veeduría Distrital, 2013: Cuadro No. 1).
 19. Up to 1 April 2012 the police reported that they had captured 75,000 soft arms and 613 illegal firearms. Unfortunately, this is something of a pin prick in a city with as many as one million guns.
 20. During January 2013, the rate was even lower at 13 (*El Tiempo*, 2013b). The city claims to offer 99.9% network coverage for water, electricity, sewerage and rubbish collection and 89.4% for gas (DANE, 2013).
 21. Many officials since the days of Antanas Mockus' administration have been charged with any number of offences in an attempt to undermine their policies. Most of those charges have been unfounded but have involved the officials in long legal battles (Saldías, 2014).

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