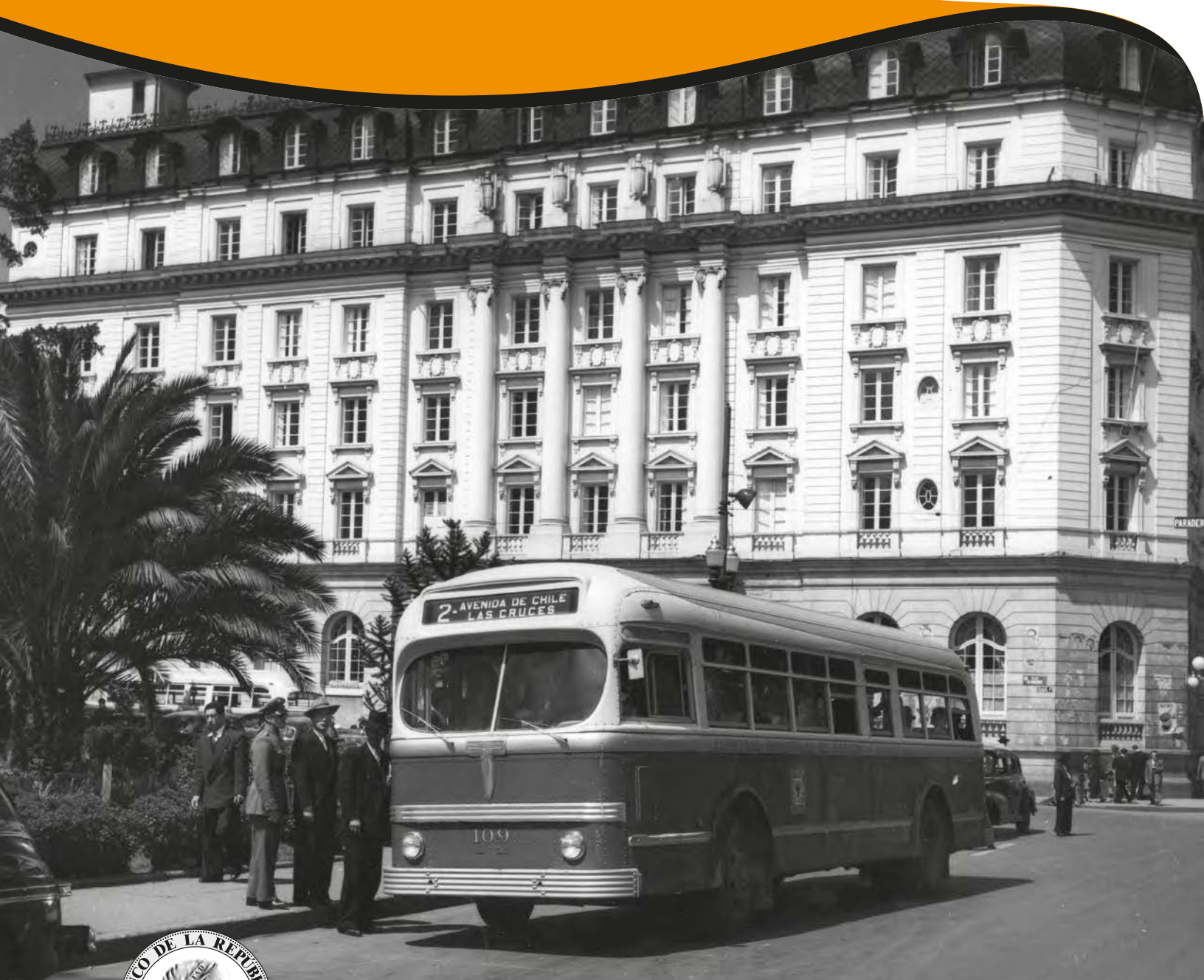


Borradores de ECONOMÍA

The path to gender equality in
Colombia: Are we there yet?

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The path to gender equality in Colombia: Are we there yet?♦

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Abstract

This document analyzes the historical process of women transformation in education, employment, fertility, civil rights and political participation in Colombia during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Four stages of this transformation were identified in this article. The first stage, from 1905 to 1935, was characterized by high fertility and maternal mortality rates, low enrollment rates in education, low labor participation and few civil and political rights. In the second stage, between 1936 and 1965, high fertility rates and low labor participation continued to be observed; however, enrollment in education increased, although it was still low. During this stage, women achieved the right to vote and the right to be elected. The third stage, between 1966 and 1985, stood out for the demographic transition, for a greater education of women and for an increase in their labor participation. In the fourth stage, from 1985 to the present, there is a significant increase in the enrollment of women in higher education, exceeding that of men. Maternal mortality and fertility rates continued to decline, women's labor participation kept increasing, although since the beginning of the 21st century it stagnated, and the wage gender gap still persists. Also, a greater presence of women in politics is observed; however, they are a minority in this area. Finally, despite the progress made by women throughout the period analyzed, gender inequalities are still entrenched and persist over time, especially in labor and political participation.

JEL Classification: J16, J22, N36.

Keywords: Demographic transition, gender gaps, labor participation, education.

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El camino hacia la igualdad de género en Colombia: ¿Ya llegamos?♦

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Resumen

Este documento analiza el proceso histórico de la transformación de las mujeres en educación, empleo, fertilidad, derechos civiles y participación política en Colombia durante el siglo XX y comienzos del siglo XXI. En este artículo se identifican cuatro etapas de esta transformación. La primera, de 1905 a 1935, caracterizada por altas tasas de fertilidad y de mortalidad materna, bajas tasas de cobertura en educación, baja participación laboral y escasos derechos civiles y políticos. En la segunda etapa, entre 1936 y 1965, se continúan observando altas tasas de fertilidad y baja participación laboral; sin embargo, se incrementa la cobertura en educación, aunque esta continúa siendo baja. Durante esta etapa las mujeres lograron el derecho al voto y el derecho a ser elegidas. La tercera, entre 1966 y 1985, se destaca por la transición demográfica, por una mayor educación de las mujeres y por un aumento en su participación laboral. En la cuarta etapa, desde 1985 hasta el presente, hay un aumento importante en la matrícula de las mujeres en educación superior, superando la de los hombres; las tasas de mortalidad y fertilidad continuaron reduciéndose, la participación laboral de las mujeres siguió creciendo, aunque desde comienzos del siglo XXI se estancó, y las brechas salariales entre hombres y mujeres aún persisten. En esta etapa, se observa una mayor presencia de las mujeres en la política; sin embargo, todavía siguen siendo una minoría en ese ámbito. A pesar de los avances logrados por las mujeres a lo largo del período analizado, subsisten desigualdades importantes de género, especialmente en materia laboral y de participación política.

Clasificación JEL: J16, J22, N36.

Palabras clave: Transición demográfica, brechas de género, participación laboral, educación.

♦ Agradecemos a Adolfo Meisel por habernos animado a realizar este documento y a Daniela Santos por valiosas conversaciones sobre el tema. Cristian Felipe Arévalo, Laura Chaves, Laura Cristancho, Tatiana Mojica, Juan Camilo Pardo, Alejandra Rodríguez, David Vargas, y Nicolás Villada brindaron excelente asistencia de investigación.

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I. Introduction

This document analyzes the long-run comprehensive transformation of women's role in employment, education, fertility, women's rights, and political participation in Colombia from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. The study is undertaken in the spirit of the influential paper of Goldin (2006), who evaluates the involvement of women in the economy of the United States throughout the 20th century. Her analysis considers four different stages; the first three show the changes in women's labor market participation, which she denoted as evolutionary phases, and the fourth stage, was named as a revolutionary phase. The first stage, called "the independent female worker", went from 1900 to the 1920s, characterized by the participation of young and non-married women. The second stage, "easing the constraints on married women's work", went from the 1930s to 1950, in which married women increased their participation. The third stage, "roots of the revolution", from the 1950s to the mid to late 1970s, where women continued increasing their participation thanks to higher demand. The fourth stage, "the quiet revolution", from the late 1970s onwards, where women's participation is defined by their own identity, decisions and future prospects.

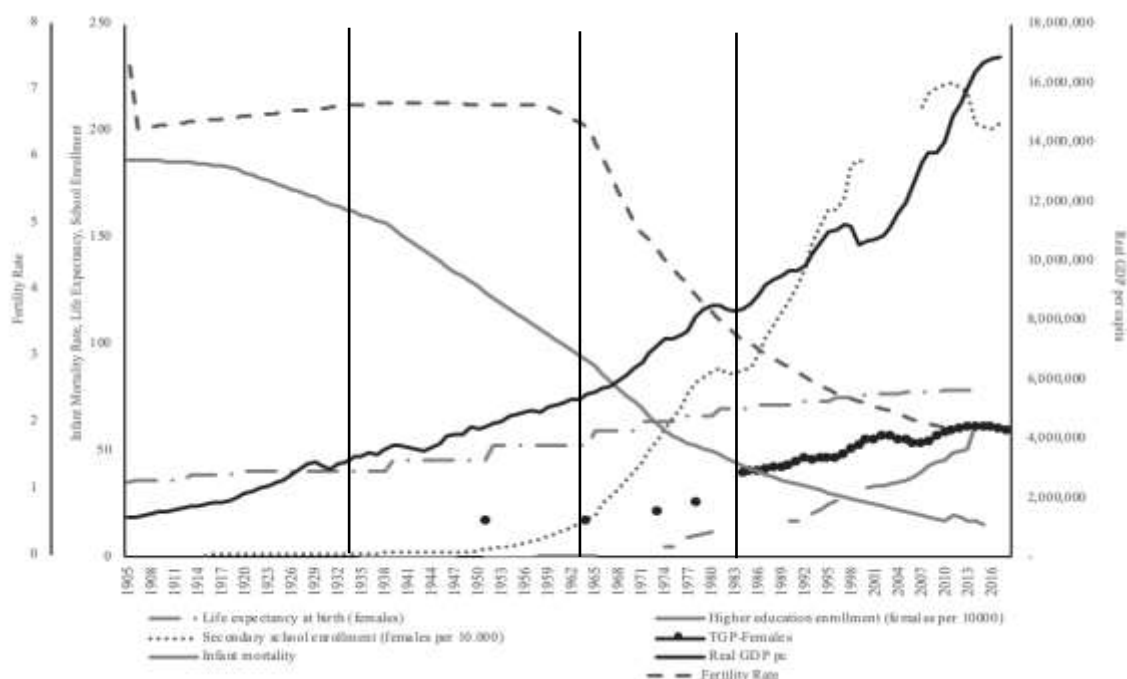
In Colombia, we identified four stages in women's transformation during the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Graph 1, summarizes the long-run trends and interactions in some socio-demographic indicators used to identify the different stages of female transformation during the period under consideration. From this graph, we observe a break-point in 1966 that coincides with the establishment of *Profamilia*, a private institution, which promoted sex education and fostered the use of the contraceptive methods. This led to a sharp drop in fertility over a period of 20 years, accompanied by an unprecedented increase in female enrollment rates. These changes seem to have repercussions on the increased labor participation.

The first period, from 1905 to 1935, that we named "women left behind", is characterized by very high fertility and infant and maternal mortality rates, low enrollment rates in primary and secondary education and no access to higher education, very low labor participation and

considerable discrimination against married women in the labor market, no political participation, which means that women neither had the right to vote, nor the right to be elected for a public appointment.

Graph 1

Long-run trends in female socio-demographic indicators



Source: Graphs 4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 24. For real GDP: GRECO and DANE.

The second period, called “first steps towards women’s empowerment”, went from 1936 to 1965. During these years, women started to enroll in universities but with low rates; high fertility and high marriage rates at young ages persisted. Moreover, female labor participation continued to be limited and the majority of working women were the youngest and single due to the formal and informal constraints imposed on hiring married women. Also, it is worth mentioning that women achieved the right to vote and to be elected.

The third period, called “the rise of women’s empowerment”, went from 1966 to 1985. This period was characterized by the demographic transition, with a steep decline in fertility rates, mainly as a result of the reduction in infant mortality, access to contraceptive methods, and

greater education for women. Also, this phase recorded an increase in labor market participation for both single and married women.

The last stage, named “moving forward: still a lot to catch up”, went from 1985 onwards; during these years, there is a steady increase in female enrollment in higher education, exceeding that of men; fertility and mortality rates continued reducing, and women’s labor participation kept growing although at the beginning of the twenty-first century stagnated. Wage gaps persist even if there was a reduction. Finally, the progress in political participation has been significant during this period, even though there is a long way to go.

During the first half of the twentieth century, women in Colombia were at a disadvantage compared to those of developed countries in terms of access to education, the labor market, political rights, high fertility rates and maternal mortality. However, during the second half, Colombian women were able to catch up with developed countries in several areas. For example, the timing of the stages identified by Goldin (2006) for the United States, varies with respect to the stages we defined for Colombia, especially during the first two stages.

This document examines the role that women in Colombia have played from before they had equal civil rights as men until today. Although women have achieved great milestones, they still have not reached equality and face discrimination on many fronts. Colombian women, as in other countries, still face great obstacles to fulfill their expectations, due mainly to the unpaid domestic and care work that has fallen disproportionately on them, which makes it difficult for them to think of themselves as workers outside the domestic environment.

Although the role of women has been studied in the country for some periods and fields, to the best of our knowledge there has not been a comprehensive analysis on gender and economics from a historical perspective, that covers all the dimensions that we study for the entire century. For instance, Flórez (2000) studies the socio-demographic transformation in Colombia throughout the 20th century and constructs a unique data set to analyze the socio-demographic trends, highlighting the great transformations in fertility, mortality and life expectancy, among others. Next, López-Uribe, Quintero and Gaitán (2011) examine the

relationship between women's labor participation and education in Bogotá, using a cohort study based on the results of the 1963-1970 Employment Survey for Bogotá, and the 2006 Integrated Household Survey. Besides, they use the Official Diary between 1905 and 1950 to obtain information about legislation in education.

From a historical point of view, Archila (2014) studies the collective social action, armed conflict and gender in Colombia, and motivates it with a section on structural changes in the condition of women, providing a brief description of the trajectory of women in various areas since the second half of the twentieth century. In turn, Wills (2004) in her doctoral dissertation analyses the struggle of Colombian women to achieve their full citizenship in politics and academia for the period 1970-2000. Also, in the political and institutional spheres, Pachón and Aroca (2017) examine the effect of institutional variables on the political participation of women in Colombia, at the national and local levels of government, between 1962 and 2014. They find that while decentralization and the Law on quotas increased the share of women candidates in elections, the adoption of open lists reduced the share of elected women.

The contribution of this document to the literature is twofold. First, it articulates, for a period of more than one hundred years, the analysis of the achievements of women in areas, such as education, labor market participation, fertility, and political and civil rights with an emphasis in studying the patterns, trends and interrelationships that have determined the structural transformation of women during all these years with a gender perspective, which allows us to understand the current situation of women in the country. Also, we carry out international comparisons to have a viewpoint of Colombia in a global context. Second, to carry out this study and to identify the major milestones for women empowerment it was necessary to put together a consistent data set, rigorously and meticulously, using both primary and secondary sources, for the whole period, which was a very demanding task.

Taking these aspects into consideration, it is important to understand the dynamics of the women's transformation throughout the twentieth century, having in mind that at the beginning of the century Colombia was a poor country, not integrated in the world markets,

and with poor socio-demographic indicators. Nevertheless, during the course of century, Colombia became a middle-income country with socio-demographic indicators close to those of developed countries, despite having suffered more than five decades of violence.

This document proceeds as follows. We next analyze women's transformations between 1905 and 1935. In section 3 we examine the evolution of women empowerment in the period 1936-1965. Then, section 4 describes the demographic transition in Colombia, between 1966 and 1985. Section 5 presents the achievements of women from 1985 onwards. The final section concludes.

II. Women left behind: 1905 to 1935

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Colombia was a poor country, it was not integrated into the international markets, and its regions were isolated, due in part to the inadequate transportation infrastructure that the country had during the first decades of this century. Besides, the socio-economic and demographic indicators in Colombia resembled those observed at the end of the nineteenth century: very low enrollment rates, especially for women; very high fertility and infant mortality rates; low life expectancy at birth and high maternal mortality rates. During this time, women also married at a very young age, had very low labor participation (mainly clerical and menial jobs) and had no political participation, meaning not having voting rights, not rights to be elected for a public appointment, and had no participation in public office. These indicators remained almost unchanged until the end of the 1920s, although some progress was made towards the end of the period.

A. Education

The advances in education in this period were slow. As in the late 19th century, the enrollments in primary and secondary education were low; the Catholic Church continued to control the academic curriculum and to supervise teachers; there were few resources allocated to education; the qualification and compensation of the teacher were precarious,

and primary education was free but not compulsory (Law 39 of 1903).¹ The guidelines defined in this Law determined the evolution, regulation, and organization of education in the country during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Ramírez and Téllez (2007) pointed out that it was not until the middle of the century that advances and increases in enrollment in all levels of education began to take place.

During this period, the literacy rate was very low for both men and women; less than 50% of the Colombian population could read and write (Graph 2). This rate lagged behind that of other Latin American countries such as Chile and Argentina, where more than 65% of their population were literate during this period.² In particular, women had small enrollment rates in both primary and secondary education and did not have access to tertiary education. Less than 43% of school-age girls attended primary school and only about 3% of girls attended secondary education (Graphs 3 and 4).³ In other countries female enrollment ratios were higher than in Colombia. For example, while in Colombia the primary school gross enrollment ratio was on average 33% during 1900-1930, in Argentina was 48%, in Chile 54%, in the United States it was almost 100% and in Spain 55%. The indicators for secondary education were even worse. The gross enrollment ratio for females was on average 0.26% in Colombia during 1900-1930, in Argentina 1.7%, in Brazil 0.4%, in Spain 0.7% and in the United States was 25% (Graphs 5 and 6).

It was only until the late 1920s that the gap between boys and girls in primary school enrollment closed (Graph 7).⁴ This occurred a long time after the United Kingdom, the United States and Chile, for example, had closed these gaps in the 19th century (Ramírez and

¹ For more details of this Law, see Ramírez and Téllez, 2007.

² See Ramírez and Téllez (2007).

³ Only until 1927, the government decreed the compulsory nature of primary education.

⁴ By these years, boys and girls had a similar academic curriculum in primary education. However, as López-Uribe et al. (2011) mentioned, girls had an additional class, in which they received handworks classes, in all grades. These classes changed their emphasis according to the grade being studied. For example, in elementary the classes were about the early seam, mesh or stocking stitch; in the next, mesh fabric or stocking, sewing and patched and, in the last section, sewing and cutting (p. 13).

Salazar, 2010). In addition, the gender gap in secondary education in Colombia started to close much later, in the 1960s (Graph 8).⁵

Regarding teachers, Law 39 of 1903 established that in each department, there should be a Normal school⁶, one for boys and one for girls. However, most of the teachers in primary education continued to be women (Graph 9). On the contrary, female teachers in secondary education were fewer than men (Graph 10). In general, teachers were not well prepared. More than 70% of primary school teachers did not graduate during this period, and the quality of education was worse in rural areas than in urban areas. In fact, in 1936, the teacher data classification by sex showed that 50% of female teachers and 60% of male teachers in primary education in urban areas did not have a degree. In rural areas the figures were worse, more than 90% of primary teachers, both males and females, were classified as teachers with no degree. In turn, in secondary education the percentage of teachers, both male and female, without a degree was 30%, and only 20% of teachers were women (Table 1).

Table 1 also shows the marital status of teachers in 1936. More than 80% of female teachers in primary school were single, and 70% in secondary schools, while near 50% of male teachers were single. These figures illustrate the fact that single women were the group that participated more in the labor market during this period; as it will be discussed, once women got married, most of them left the labor market.⁷

The quality and supply of education also differ between men and women. It was only in the early 1930s, with a new ruling political party in the government, that women's education received more attention. After more than 40 years of conservative hegemony, the Liberal

⁵ In the United States, for example, the gender gap in primary and secondary education was already closed at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Goldin (1999) “...after the establishment of publicly funded primary schools, girls were educated for about the same number of years as were boys, and during the early to mid-twentieth century, a greater fraction of girls than boys attended and graduated from secondary schools” (p.3).

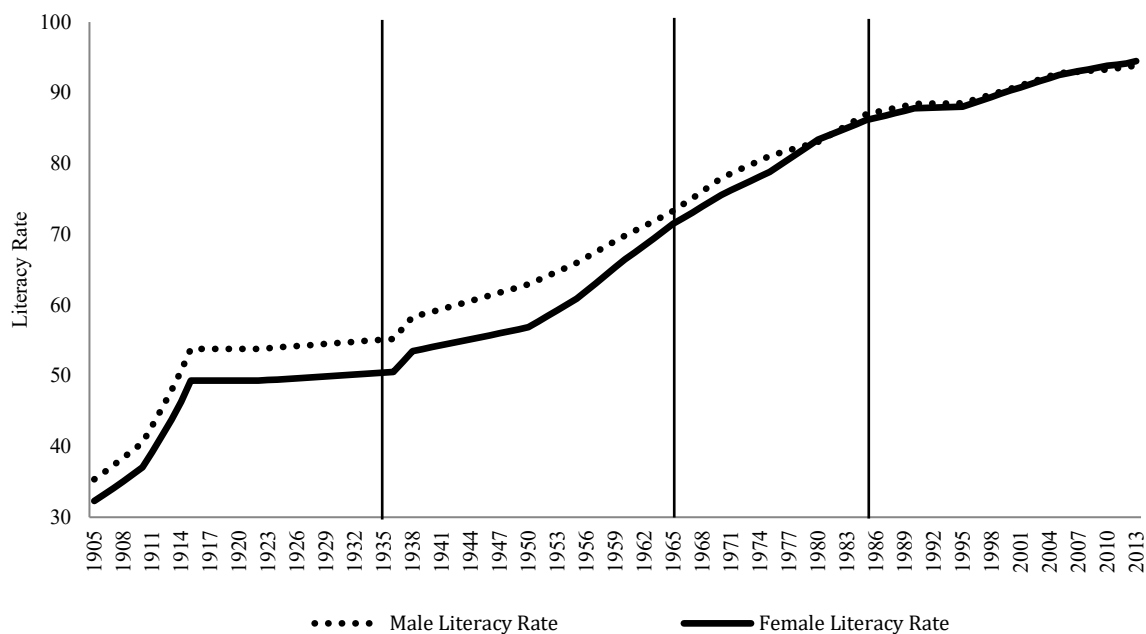
⁶ A Normal school is an educational institution responsible for the training of school teachers. One of the most important schools for preparing teachers for primary education was the *Instituto Pedagógico Nacional* for young ladies, founded in 1927 in Bogotá under the second German mission chaired by Franzisca Radke.

⁷ See for example, Farnsworth-Alvear (2000), and Arango (1991), who documented females' labor conditions during this period.

Party came to power, and one of its main concerns was social welfare, which included improving women's education. In 1933 the government of President Olaya Herrera, through Decree 227, equalized the conditions and degree requirements between the schools of men and women in secondary education.⁸ Also, in December of 1934, a bill was drafted so that women could enter the university on equal terms with men. These were the first steps to guarantee women the same conditions as men to enter tertiary education, as we will discuss in the next section.

Graph 2

Literacy Rate by Sex in Colombia

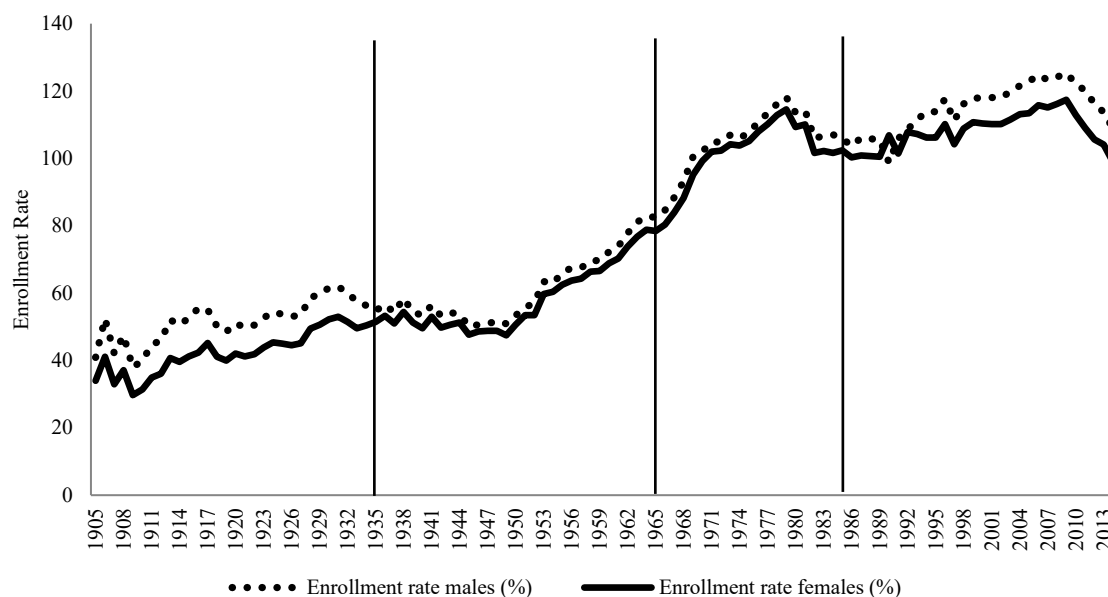


Source: Jaramillo, Meisel y Ramírez (2019) database.

⁸ Decree 227 of 1933, Article 2º: “The public and private schools of young ladies who aspire to give the secondary education or institute's degree, countersigned by the Government, must fulfill the requirements established in the aforementioned Decree and will organize their study plans in accordance with the provisions of the Ministry of National Education for men's secondary schools” (own translation). However, women who did not aspire to a high school diploma to enter university were exempt from the last two years of studies and from the advanced courses, but all the students had to see home economics courses during the four years of high school. The students who only attended the first four years received a certificate that allowed them to enter the industrial education institutes and commercial, decoration and fine arts schools, nursing schools and social service (López-Urbe et al. 2011).

Graph 3

Primary School Enrollment Rate by Sex in Colombia

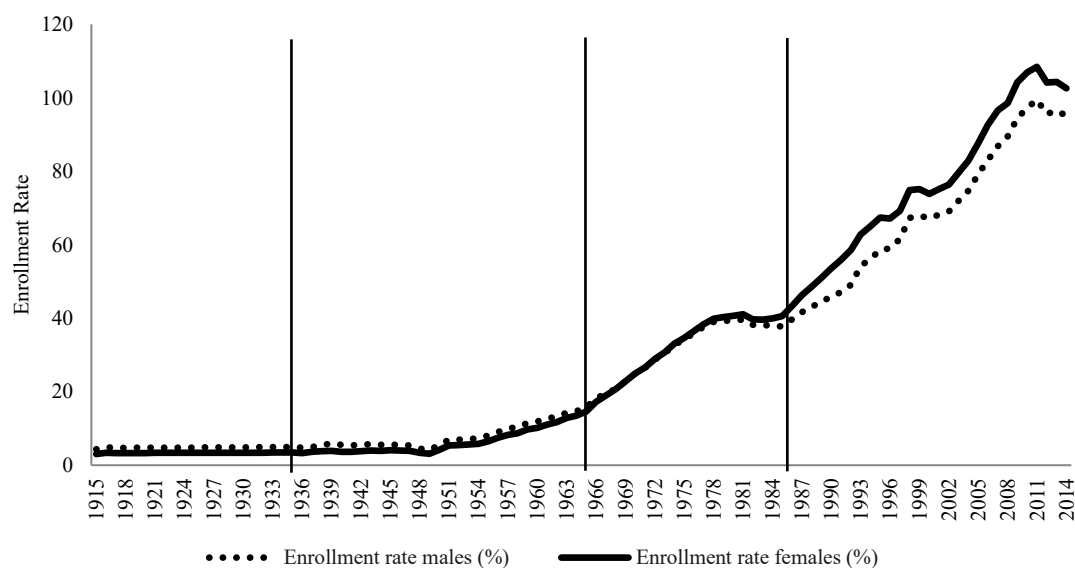


Source: Jaramillo, Meisel and Ramírez (2019) and Ministry of National Education (MEN).

Note: PSER= $PE/POP7-11$ (estimated). PSER: Primary School Enrollment Rate, PE: Primary Enrollment, POP7-11: estimated population aged 7-11 years.

Graph 4

Secondary School Enrollment Rates by Sex in Colombia

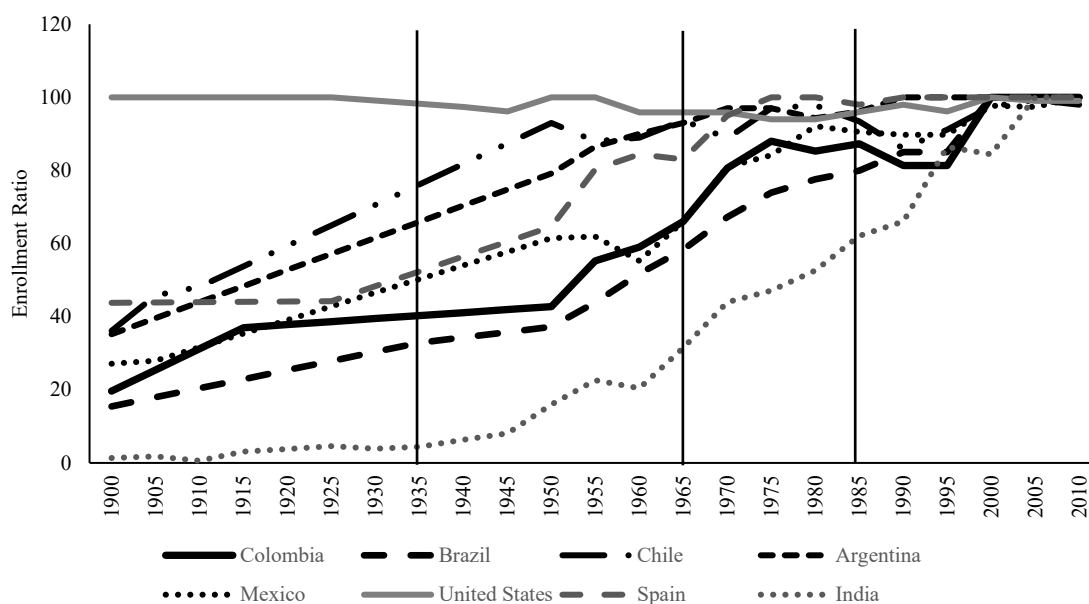


Source: Jaramillo, Meisel and Ramírez (2019) and MEN.

Note: SSER= $SE/POP12-17$ (estimated). SSER: Secondary School Enrollment Rate, SE: Secondary Enrollment, POP12-17: estimated population aged 12-17 years.

Graph 5

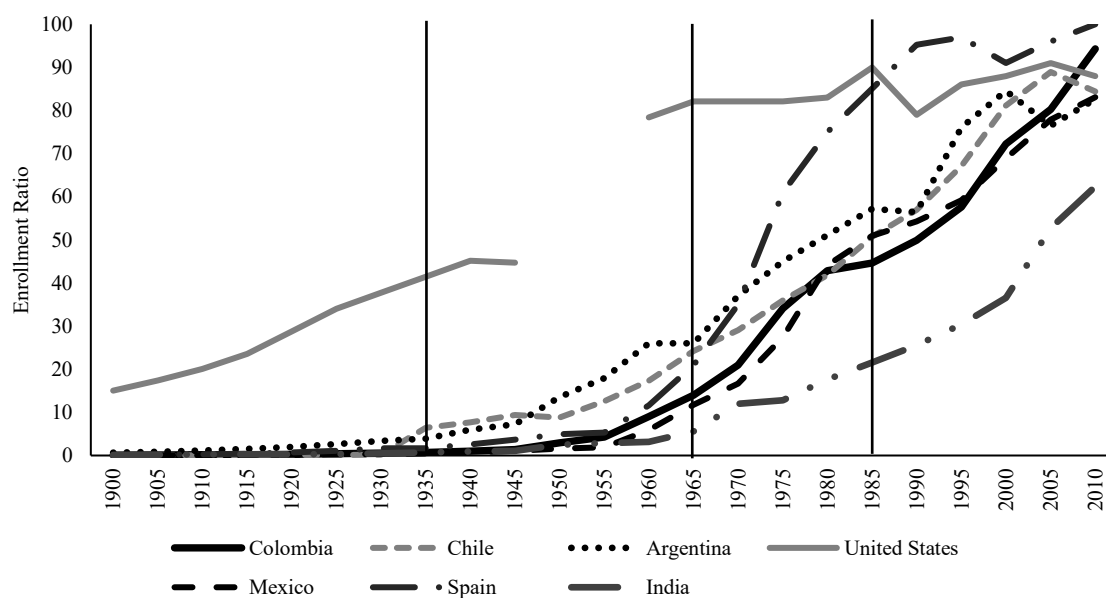
Primary Enrollment Ratios for Female Population, 1900-2010



Source: Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Dataset (www.barrolee.com).

Graph 6

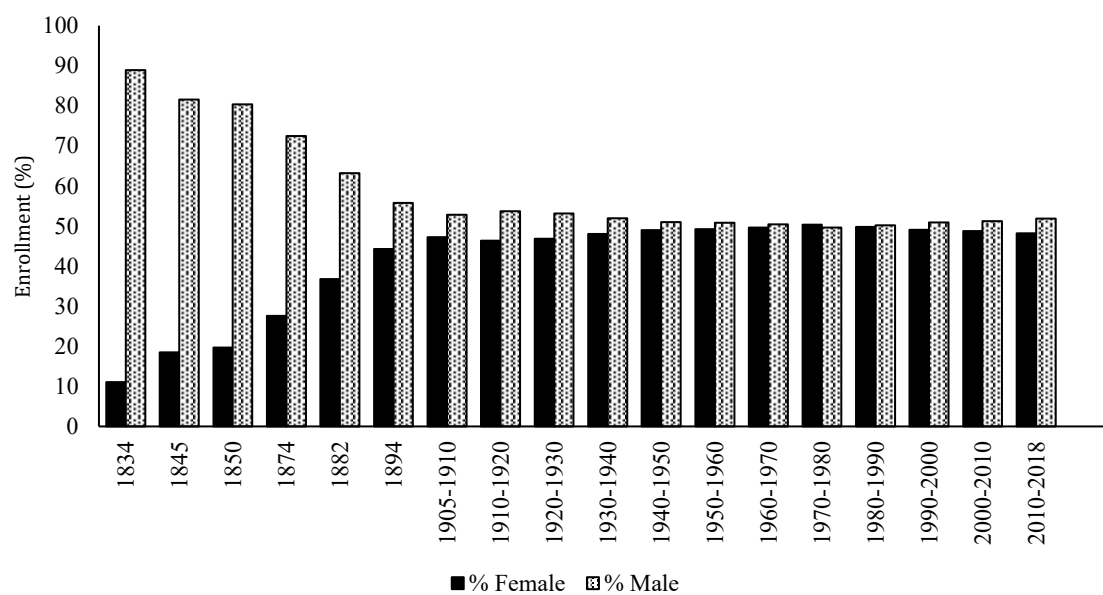
Secondary Enrollment Ratios for Female Population, 1900-2010



Source: Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Dataset (www.barrolee.com).

Graph 7

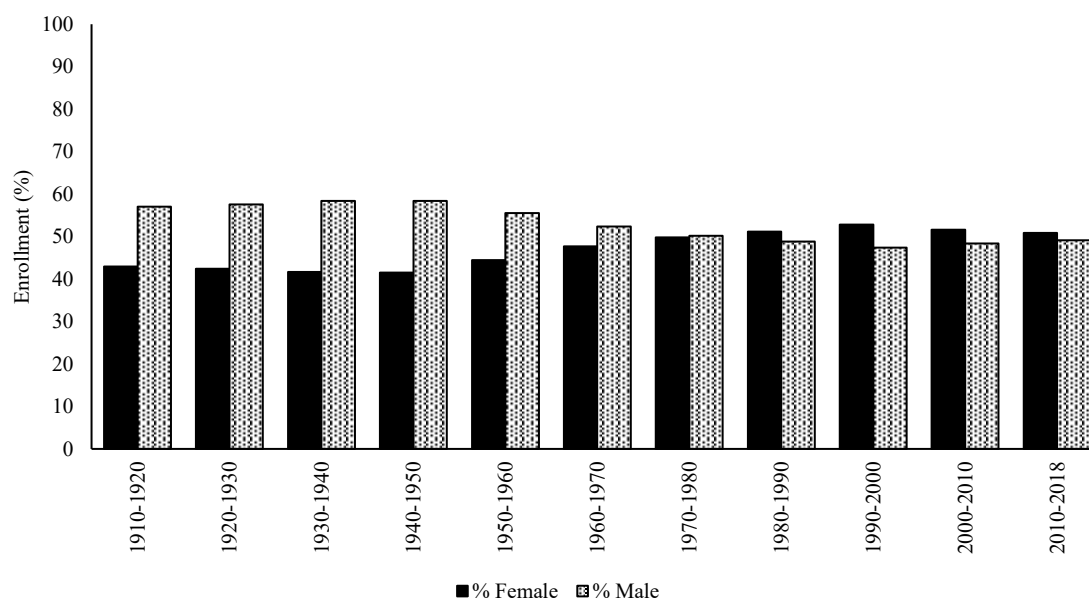
Share of females and males in Primary School Enrollment (%)



Source: Ramírez and Salazar (2010), Jaramillo, Meisel and Ramírez (2019), and MEN.

Graph 8

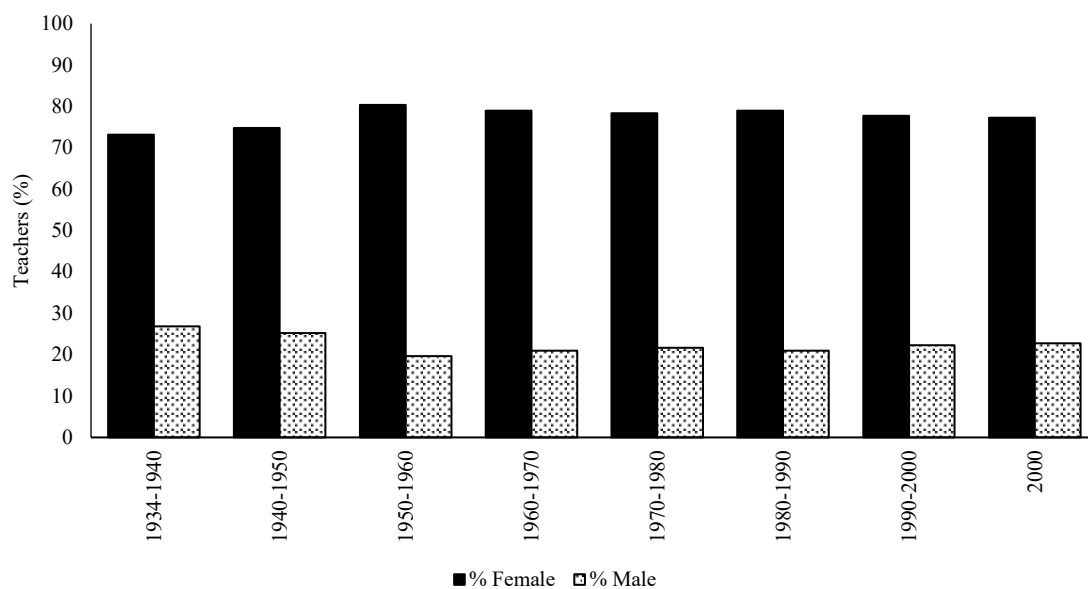
Share of Females and Males in Secondary School Enrollment (%)



Source: Ramírez and Salazar (2010), Jaramillo, Meisel and Ramírez (2019), and MEN.

Graph 9

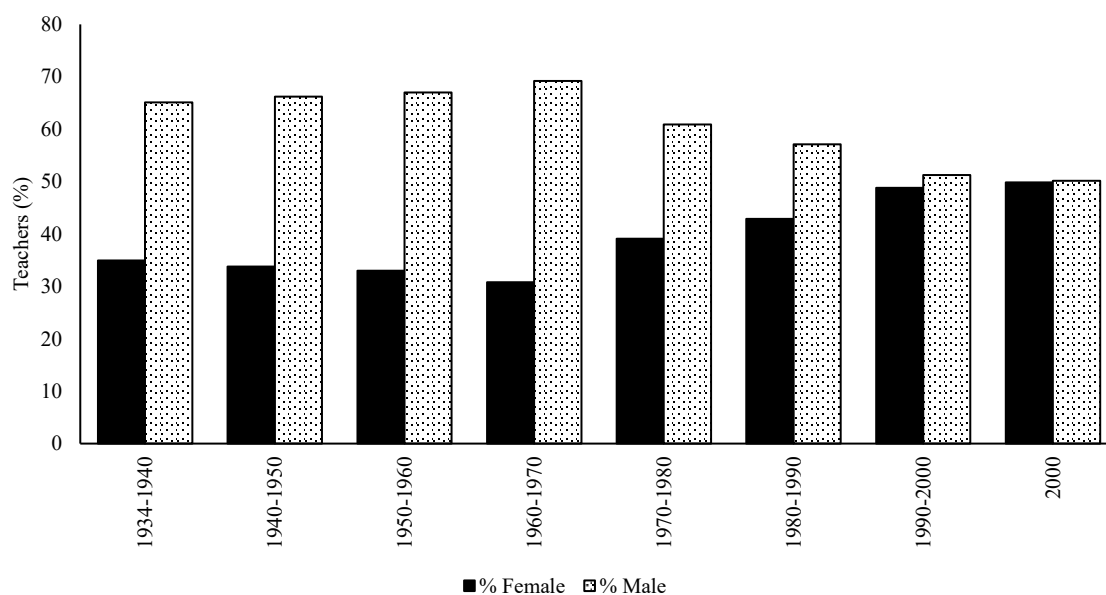
Primary School Teachers by Gender



Source: Unesco (2015), *Anuario General de Estadística: 1935-1967*, *Boletín Estadísticas del DANE 1968-1975*, DANE *Boletines y anexos estadísticos 2007-2015*.

Graph 10

Secondary School Teachers by Gender (%)



Source: Unesco (2015), *Anuario General de Estadística: 1935-1967*, *Boletín Estadísticas del DANE 1968-1975*, DANE *Boletines y anexos estadísticos 2007-2015*.

Table 1
Teaching Staff Classification: 1936

School	Males					Females				
	Category		Marital Status*			Category		Marital Status*		
	with degree	no degree	singles	married	widow/widowers	with degree	no degree	singles	married	widow/widowers
Public urban primary schools	40.3	59.7	49.2	49.4	1.4	50.5	49.5	78.9	17.8	3.3
Public rural primary schools	9.9	90.1	58.9	40.0	1.1	7.0	93.0	79.8	16.4	3.8
Public secondary schools	70.0	30.0	48.4	49.9	1.6	69.8	30.2	71.6	23.5	4.9

Source: Anuario General de Estadística, 1936

*Marital status figures are incomplete for some departments.

B. Demographic indicators

The twentieth century started with very high fertility rates that remained almost constant until the mid-1960s. According to estimations of Flórez (2000), between 1905 and 1935, the average number of children per woman was 6.4 (Graph 11). As Flórez (2000) pointed out these high rates were necessary to preserve population growth, given the high mortality rates that still prevailed, at least during the first two decades of the century (Graph 12). This rate was higher than those observed in many countries at that time. For example, in 1930, Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela had lower fertility rates than Colombia. Most European countries, Canada, and the United States had less than 3.5 children per woman, suggesting that in those countries, the demographic transition took place in the preceding decades (Table 2).

Although the infant mortality rate, measured as the number of dead children under one year of age per 1000 live births, fell from 186 deaths per thousand births in 1905 to 161 in 1935 (Flórez, 2000; Graph 3), this rate continued to be high by international standards. Table 3 presents the mortality rate for children under five years of age per 1000 live births in some countries. Furthermore, life expectancy at birth was low during this period, and remained almost constant until 1940. For women, life expectancy increased from 36.3 years in 1905 to 40.8 in 1938, and for men from 33.7 years to 38.2, respectively (Graph 13).

These improvements in demographic indicators were partly due to increases in per capita income, that took place in the 1920s, with the insertion of the economy into the international markets, and the rise in coffee exports. Consequently, the living standards of the population gradually started to improve, in particular the reduction in mortality rates. In the 1920s, more importance was given to breastfeeding and pasteurizing milk, chlorine began to be applied to the water of aqueducts, and obstetric and pediatric services were established in hospitals; these factors helped, in part, to reduce infant mortality rates.⁹ However, intestinal infectious diseases, acute respiratory infections, conditions originating in the perinatal period, emphysema, and other diseases still caused high mortality rates; the population was also affected by malaria, smallpox, and malnutrition. According to Jiménez-Peña (2014) "...until the end of the 1940s, the diseases that mainly killed people remained the same as in the late 19th and early 20th centuries" (own translation).¹⁰

Graph 11

Fertility Rate



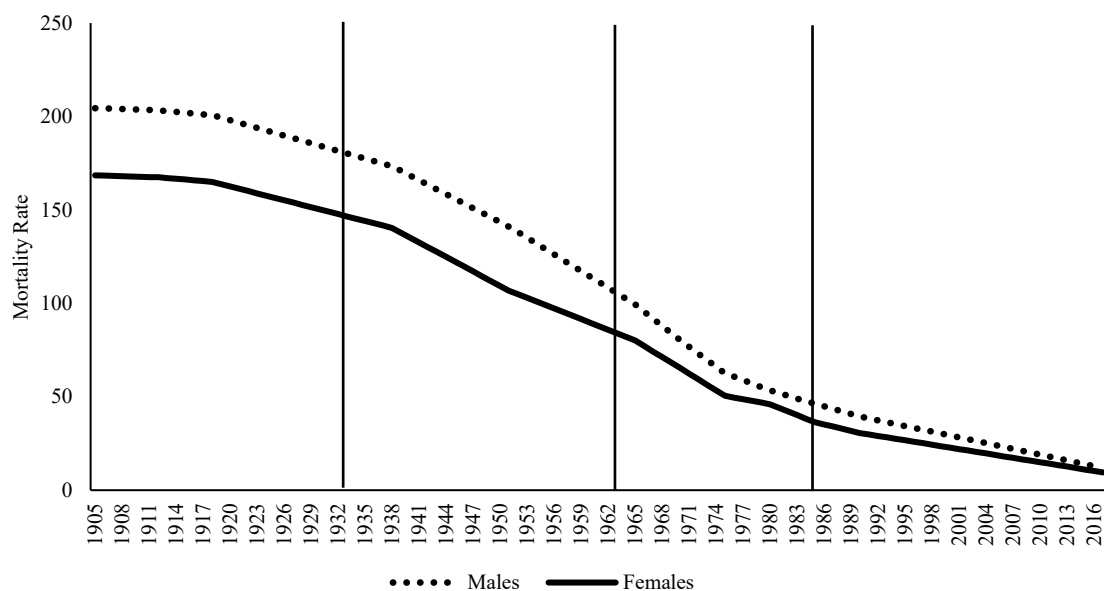
Sources: Flórez (2000) and DANE.

⁹ See also Law 48 of 1924 that was oriented to protect the children. This Law created nurseries in factories where the number of workers was 50 or more.

¹⁰ See Jiménez-Peña (2014) for a complete analysis of the health transition in Colombia.

Graph 12

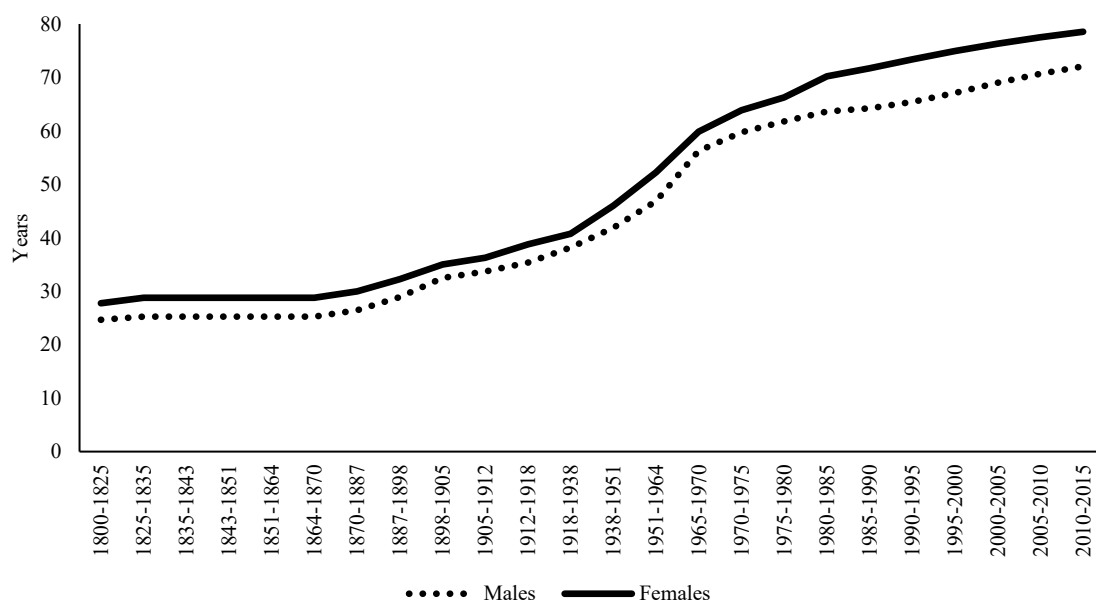
Infant Mortality Rate During the First Year of Life (per 1000)



Source: Flórez (2000) and DANE.

Graph 13

Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)



Source: Flórez (2000) and DANE.

Table 2
Total fertility rate (Children per woman), Selected countries

Country	1905	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020pr
Argentina	5.76	5.41	4.86	4.07	3.43	3.16	3.11	3.07	3.33	2.99	2.56	2.37	2.23
Australia	3.51	3.35	3.07	2.58	2.26	3.07	3.44	2.81	1.90	1.88	1.76	1.93	1.81
Bangladesh	6.70	6.70	6.70	6.61	6.42	6.23	6.73	6.95	6.36	4.55	3.12	2.28	2.00
Belgium	3.57	3.31	2.78	2.25	1.84	2.31	2.60	2.21	1.63	1.58	1.63	1.81	1.81
Bolivia	6.48	6.48	6.48	6.48	6.60	6.72	6.70	6.58	5.52	4.91	4.06	3.20	2.73
Brazil	5.81	5.90	5.90	5.90	5.90	6.18	6.21	5.02	4.07	2.81	2.30	1.81	1.67
Canada	4.03	4.05	3.58	3.28	2.76	3.45	3.88	2.23	1.67	1.66	1.52	1.64	1.56
Chad	6.06	6.06	6.06	6.06	6.06	6.06	6.25	6.53	6.96	7.31	7.35	6.59	5.55
Chile	6.21	6.15	5.71	5.50	4.94	4.82	5.10	4.02	2.78	2.55	2.11	1.88	1.75
China	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.25	5.29	3.99	5.75	2.32	2.35	1.50	1.59	1.65
Colombia	6.29	6.34	6.39	6.33	6.12	6.77	6.81	5.55	3.97	2.99	2.39	2.01	1.78
Costa Rica	7.15	7.29	6.72	6.79	6.69	6.15	6.45	4.61	3.59	3.17	2.37	1.92	1.73
Cote d'Ivoire	6.78	6.78	6.78	6.75	6.69	6.62	7.35	7.91	7.60	6.50	5.71	5.22	4.66
Ecuador	6.94	6.88	6.89	7.12	6.82	6.70	6.72	6.14	4.73	3.77	3.03	2.66	2.38
Egypt	6.02	6.02	6.08	6.51	5.88	6.65	6.72	6.23	5.60	4.66	3.23	3.19	3.06
France	2.71	2.57	2.69	2.30	2.00	2.83	2.77	2.49	1.84	1.75	1.82	1.99	1.97
Greece	4.85	4.22	2.97	4.19	3.32	2.36	2.33	2.57	2.27	1.47	1.32	1.41	1.30
India	5.72	5.71	5.74	5.86	5.92	5.90	5.91	5.59	4.83	4.05	3.31	2.60	2.24
Italy	4.45	4.39	3.41	3.38	3.07	2.45	2.39	2.44	1.69	1.30	1.25	1.43	1.52
Japan	4.52	5.01	5.35	4.82	4.13	3.48	2.04	2.11	1.78	1.56	1.32	1.37	1.51
Jordan	6.97	6.97	6.97	7.09	7.33	7.56	7.69	7.93	7.26	5.49	4.03	3.66	3.12
Mexico	6.19	5.94	5.82	5.96	5.93	6.66	6.77	6.83	4.84	3.47	2.72	2.34	2.07
Morocco	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.49	7.04	6.65	5.68	4.06	2.78	2.58	2.35
Norway	3.95	3.82	3.61	2.19	1.95	2.52	2.88	2.50	1.72	1.93	1.85	1.95	1.83
Peru	6.77	6.72	6.62	6.53	6.70	6.90	6.97	6.38	5.02	3.83	2.93	2.55	2.29
Portugal	4.13	4.12	4.37	3.86	3.22	3.10	3.16	2.99	2.29	1.52	1.46	1.33	1.24
South Africa	6.47	6.47	6.47	6.45	6.40	6.35	6.17	5.67	4.84	3.65	2.83	2.59	2.35
Spain	4.66	4.43	4.14	3.68	3.09	2.45	2.77	2.87	2.22	1.34	1.23	1.37	1.42
Turkey	6.89	6.86	6.80	6.75	6.67	6.70	6.37	5.62	4.41	3.11	2.50	2.16	1.98
United States	3.75	3.59	3.26	2.53	2.11	3.02	3.67	2.46	1.82	2.07	2.05	1.93	1.89
Uruguay	4.40	4.38	3.59	3.13	2.68	2.69	2.88	2.90	2.73	2.52	2.24	2.08	1.95
Venezuela	5.75	5.91	5.53	5.52	5.49	6.54	6.62	5.40	4.20	3.45	2.82	2.47	2.23
Zambia	6.71	6.71	6.71	6.71	6.70	6.67	7.12	7.37	7.09	6.44	6.04	5.40	4.76
World	5.41	5.38	5.22	5.02	4.8	4.84	4.68	4.88	3.72	3.34	2.75	2.56	2.42

Source: Taken from www.gapminder.org/data.

Table 3

Death of children under five years of age per 1000 live births, Selected countries

Country	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020pr
Argentina	358.0	248.0	200.0	149.0	131.0	93.6	73.3	71.8	42.8	28.6	19.6	14.4	9.4
Bolivia	404.0	398.0	388.0	379.0	370.0	318.0	291.0	229.0	168.0	121.0	75.3	41.1	25.4
Brazil	417.0	410.0	400.0	391.0	315.0	212.0	169.0	133.0	96.3	63.0	34.8	18.7	13.5
Canada	304.0	283.0	265.0	125.0	77.7	48.6	32.6	22.0	12.5	8.3	6.2	5.7	4.9
Chile	537.0	434.0	427.0	380.0	353.0	238.0	157.0	79.9	33.0	19.1	10.9	8.7	6.9
Colombia	417.0	410.0	287.0	160.0	224.0	188.0	136.0	97.9	57.7	35.2	25.0	18.5	13.5
Ecuador	405.0	399.0	389.0	380.0	341.0	222.0	177.0	137.0	91.9	53.9	29.0	18.3	13.5
Egypt	404.0	398.0	388.0	351.0	353.0	362.0	315.0	244.0	168.0	85.8	46.8	29.0	19.8
India	536.0	350.0	317.0	294.0	268.0	283.0	242.0	214.0	168.0	126.0	91.6	58.2	33.9
Italy	297.0	243.0	243.0	166.0	142.0	88.8	52.0	33.6	16.1	9.7	5.6	4.0	2.8
Japan	337.0	317.0	270.0	196.0	131.0	91.3	39.7	17.4	9.9	6.3	4.5	3.2	2.3
Mexico	476.0	471.0	404.0	342.0	302.0	224.0	150.0	108.0	73.1	44.8	26.4	17.4	12.3
Paraguay	373.0	367.0	359.0	350.0	209.0	89.0	82.4	77.9	65.2	45.4	33.8	26.0	19.4
Peru	371.0	365.0	356.0	348.0	337.0	309.0	227.0	165.0	126.0	80.5	38.6	20.1	13.5
Spain	332.0	299.0	314.0	216.0	209.0	117.0	56.8	29.7	14.9	9.1	5.4	3.9	2.8
Turkey	379.0	373.0	364.0	355.0	361.0	303.0	258.0	188.0	129.0	73.9	37.9	17.3	9.7
United Kingdom	225.0	156.0	134.0	89.4	77.2	36.6	26.6	21.0	14.1	9.3	6.5	5.2	4.2
United States	232.0	202.0	168.0	90.8	61.9	37.6	30.1	23.3	15.0	11.2	8.5	7.3	6.6
Uruguay	405.0	399.0	177.0	149.0	119.0	61.0	63.6	54.1	39.7	22.9	17.0	10.7	7.2
Venezuela	414.0	408.0	398.0	242.0	190.0	107.0	79.2	62.3	43.9	29.6	21.6	17.0	25.5
Zambia	409.0	403.0	393.0	383.0	359.0	247.0	206.0	181.0	156.0	186.0	162.0	80.3	54.5

Source: Taken from www.gapminder.org/data.

C. Labor market

High fertility rates, marriage at a young age, very low educational attainment, and conservative social and cultural norms, were some of the main barriers for Colombian women to participate in the labor market during those years. Most of the women that work were single, and most of their jobs were mainly clerical and menial; women also worked in schools, as primary school teachers. Along the same lines, López-Urbe et al. (2011) pointed out that women were not trained enough, given their low levels of education, to respond to the new demands of the labor market brought about by the process of the earlier industrialization in the 1920s and 1930s.

Besides, there was considerable discrimination against married women in the labor market. These barriers to married women came mainly from conservative social and cultural norms and the influence of the Catholic Church.¹¹ The discrimination against married women was present in all sectors. For example, Arango (1991) documented that in the textile sector, in the *Fabricato* factory, between 1923 and 1944, the labor relations were based on paternalism and religiosity by the owners and heads of the company to ensure full control over workers, inside and outside the factory. In this context, married women were excluded; *Fabricato* not only rejected the entry of married women, but the single workers who got married or stayed pregnant were withdrawn from the company. The author pointed out that the rejection to employ married women was due to their family commitments that they considered could interfere with their work. Moreover, the owners of the company believed that industrial work was hardly reconcilable with raising children. As a result, *Fabricato* exclusively employed single female workers, and to a lesser degree, widows.

Another example of discrimination against married women in the labor market was the hiring of female teachers; motherhood and marriage were considered two critical problems that affected the teaching profession. Ospina-Cruz (2015) illustrated this point through an example of an employment contract to hire female teachers in Antioquia's schools in 1923. The contract stipulated, among other things, that the young woman (*señorita*) agreed not to marry; if the teacher got married, the contract would be automatically null and void. Therefore, being a teacher was incompatible with being a married woman.¹²

Social norms and institutional barriers during this period discriminated against married women and their participation in the labor market not only in Colombia but also across countries.¹³ For example, Goldin (1988) pointed out that in the United States, before 1950, the labor market did little to involucrate married women, and many employers barred their

¹¹ Most of the women who worked during this period were single. The Catholic Church was against the work of married women since the Church considered that the main role of woman was at home. As Humphries and Saraúa (2012) pointed out "Catholicism and conservatism have played a crucial role in keeping women home" (p.58).

¹² See all the aspects of the contract in Ospina-Cruz (2015), Image 1, page 114.

¹³ See Jayachandran (2019) for a discussion on social norms as barriers for women employment in developing countries.

hire; these barriers were called “marriage bars”. These “marriage bars” policies were adopted between the 1900s to 1950 by companies and local school boards to fire single women when they married and not to hire married women. Therefore, these barriers explained the slow growth in the participation of married women in the labor market before World War II.¹⁴ “Marriage bars” also had consequences in the following generation; young women in the 1950s and 1960s were conscious of the problems their predecessors faced in the labor market during previous decades, and some of them were discouraged about their labor prospects (Goldin, 2002).

During this period, women from the lower economic strata in Colombia worked in low skilled and low remunerated jobs such as cooks, laundresses, nannies, and in general in domestic service or in agricultural tasks such as planting and harvesting and animal care. In the nascent industry, they worked mainly in threshing coffee, tobacco and cigarettes and in the textile sectors. In turn, women from the middle classes worked in jobs that required some kind of qualifications such as in the telegraph, banks, public offices, and most of them performed secretarial duties. They also worked as teachers, nurses, and in jobs related to social services. On the contrary, it was common for upper-class women not to work, and, instead some of them did charity work.¹⁵

D. Women’s rights and political participation

Before the constitutional reform carried out by the liberal party in 1936, women, especially married women, had few civil and economic rights. With the civil code of 1887, women's property and economic rights were nullified at the time of marriage.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in 1922, through the Law 8, married women obtained the right to freely administer and use the following assets: dresses, trousseau, jewelry and instruments of their profession or job, and those determined in their marital capitulations. But, it was until 1932, that the Law 28

¹⁴ For more details on “marriage bars” and their impact in the United State labor market, see Goldin (1988).

¹⁵ For a complete analysis of the role of women during this period see López-Urbe et al. (2011) and Reyes (1995).

¹⁶ See Gaviria et al. (2013) for an analysis of the civil incapacity of women married in Colombia between 1887 and 1930, such as that women could not appear in court, sign contracts or withdraw from them, acquire debts, and obtain mortgages, among other rights.

reformed the legal condition of civil incapacity of married women; through this law, married women acquired full civil capacity under the same conditions as her husband and single women of legal age. Before this law, married women did not have the autonomy to carry out any legal action such as signing a contract, and they were treated the same as minors and insane.¹⁷

Although some civil rights were gained during this period, women still did not have the right to vote or to be elected for a public position. Luna and Villareal (1994) pointed out that, in Colombia, following the experience of other countries, the suffragettes' agenda took place from 1930 to 1954 when women fought to be included in politics, and not to be treated the same as minors, crazy and lazy people who did not have the right to vote.¹⁸

III. First steps towards women's empowerment: 1936 to 1965

During this period, women started to enroll in university, and their welfare conditions began to improve, with a lower maternal mortality rate and better health conditions. However, high fertility and high marriage rates, at young ages, persisted. Although infant mortality continued to decrease significantly, life expectancy only increased at a very low pace. During this period, there was also very low female labor participation, and the majority of working women were the youngest (between 15 and 19 years old). Also, women achieved the right to vote and the right to be elected.

A. Education

Regarding education, the gender gap in secondary and higher education was very large in favor of men, especially at tertiary education. The liberal government took some measures to make women's conditions better. During the presidency of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-38), some policies aimed at improving education were implemented to modernize the country. The Constitutional reform that took place in 1936 guaranteed freedom of education,

¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of Law 28 of 1932, see Gómez (2015).

¹⁸ See Luna and Villareal (1994) for a complete analysis of the suffragettes' movement in Colombia during this period.

allowed the secularization of education, gave constitutional character to free and compulsory primary education, unified the curriculum of public and private secondary schools, established a minimum salary for primary teachers, and prohibited discrimination against students (based on race, religion, social class, or illegitimacy of birth), among others. Tax reform was also carried out to increase resources for education; thus, the share of expenditure in education within the total budget of the Nation went from about 4% on average in the 1920s to 8.6% in 1936.¹⁹

With the constitutional reform of 1936, the right of women to enter university on equal terms with men was recognized. The possibility of incorporating women into university was strongly debated in the early 1930s by intellectuals, politicians, the Church, and the society in general.²⁰ In particular, article 8 of the Legislative Act # 1 of 1936 stated that: *“Colombian women of legal age can exercise all professions, even those that include authority and jurisprudence, under the same conditions that the law requires for male citizens”* (own translation). This constitutional reform granted women equal rights in the workplace and academia. However, women did not yet have political or electoral rights. It is worth mentioning some of the first women that graduated from university during this period. For example, Gerda Westendorp was the first woman admitted in 1935 to the School of Medicine at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Then, she specialized in philology and languages at the same University. Maruja Blanco Cabrera, was in 1941 the first female dentist in the country, also graduated from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Gabriela Peláez, who entered 1936 to study law, was the first female Colombian lawyer. María Carulla founded in 1936 the first school of social work at the Universidad del Rosario. The first country's female civil engineer was Sonny Jiménez de Tejada graduated from the Facultad de Minas in Medellín in 1946, and Inés Ochoa Pérez de Patiño, was the first Colombian woman graduated as a doctor, she graduated from the Universidad Nacional.²¹ Moreover, the first female economist was María Elvira Santos, who studied during the early 1950s at the Faculty of

¹⁹ For a complete analysis of the educational reform that took place during this period see Ramírez and Téllez (2007).

²⁰ For this debate, see for example Uribe de Hincapié (2016) and Giraldo (1987).

²¹ See Otto (2017).

Economics of Gimnasio Moderno (Later on, it became the Department of Economics of Universidad de los Andes).

In 1945, through Law 48, the “*Colegios Mayores*” such as “el Colegio Mayor de Bogotá” were established to offer women university degrees in science, letters, arts, and social studies, without the requirement of having completed secondary studies (López-Uribe et al., 2011). The establishment of these “*Colegios*” was very important to train women for the labor market.

Despite these reforms and the liberal government's promotion of education, the gross enrollment rates in universities for both females and males were very low during the period 1936-1950; on average these rates were less than 0.1% for females and 1.15% for males (Graph 14), and males represented 97% of the total enrollment in tertiary education (Graph 15). Also, in secondary education, enrollment rates did not improve significantly. For males and females, these rates were similar to those in the previous period, 5.5% and 3.8%, respectively, and males represented 60% of the total enrolled in secondary schools (Graphs 4 and 8).

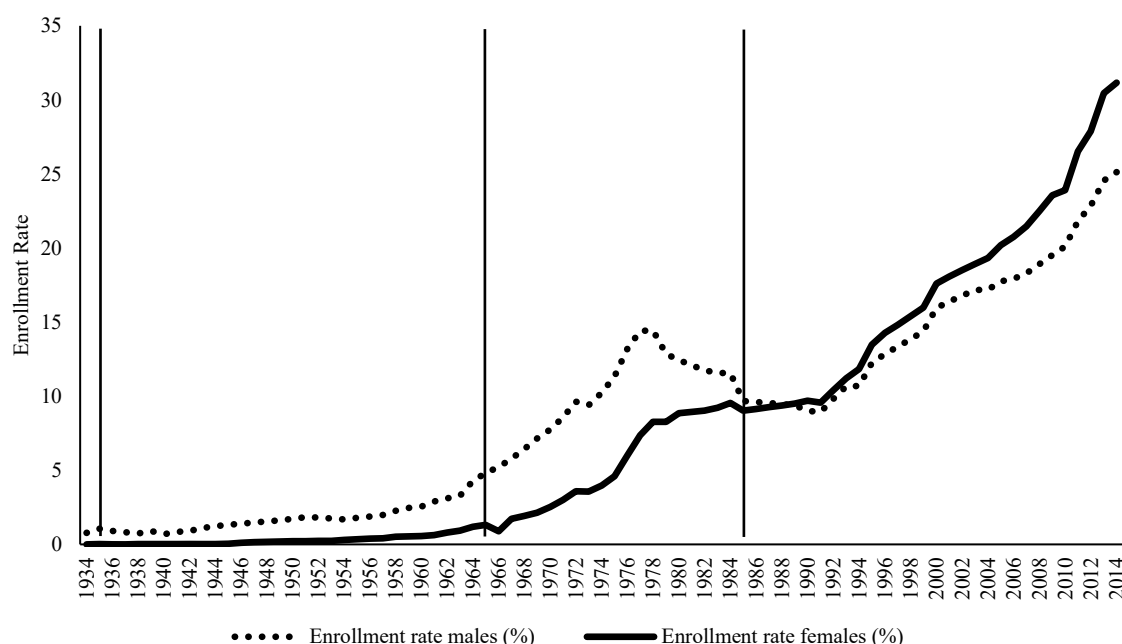
As Ramírez and Téllez (2007) pointed out, it was only in the 1950s when the expansion of education in Colombia took off; from 1950 to the mid-1970s, the enrollment rates of all levels of education increased as never before. The growth of students enrolled in primary, secondary, and tertiary education was much higher than the growth of the population in that period. According to the authors, this was the result of the political, demographic, and economic changes that took place in these years, which fostered a greater awareness of educational problems and the need to overcome them.

In particular, the advance in education responds to the greater fiscal effort the government made, given by the favorable conditions of the economy. This fiscal effort translated into higher public spending on education, which went from 1% of GDP in the late 1940s to 3%

in the 1960s.²² The Plebiscite of 1958 established a minimum spending on education equivalent to 10% of the central government budget. Besides, the expansion of education responded to demographic changes that occurred between 1950 and mid-1960s, years that were characterized by high fertility rates and decreasing mortality rates. These trends led to a period of demographic explosion and changes in the age structure, with an increasing population under 15 years, which raised the demand for education (Flórez, 2000). The rapid urbanization from 39% in 1951 to 52% in 1964 demanded more schools in the cities. The economic structure also changed: industrial, communication, and service activities gained share compared to agricultural activities, modifying the educational needs of the economy, demanding more educated workers.

Graph 14

University Enrollment Rates by Sex in Colombia



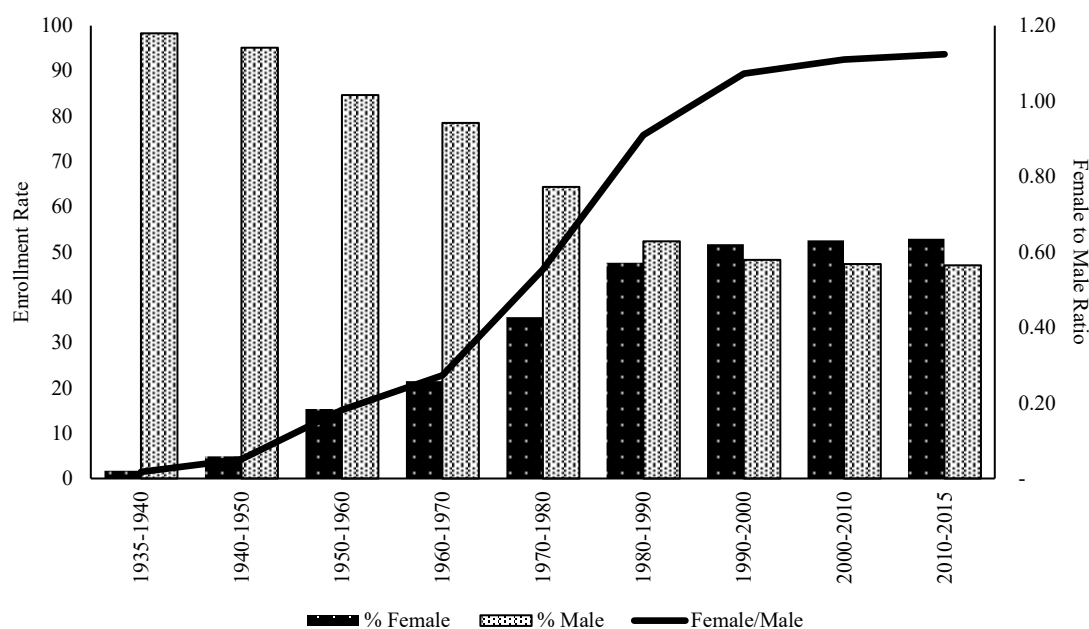
Source: Jaramillo, Meisel and Ramírez (2019) and MEN.

Note: UER= UE/POP18-21(estimated). UER: University Enrollment Rate, UE: University Enrollment, POP18-21: estimated population aged 18-21 years.

²² In addition, municipalities and departments also allocated a fixed percentage of their income to education (Ramírez and Téllez, 2007).

Graph 15

Share of Females and Males Enrollment in Tertiary Education



Source: Graph 14.

Nevertheless, these efforts were not yet reflected in a widespread advance in women's education. Although their enrollment improved at all educational levels, they still lagged behind men. In 1965, the university gross enrollment rate for females was 1.3%, while for males it was 5%, and females represented 20% of total university enrollment. High fertility rates and marriages at younger ages were still important barriers for women to enter university. Women in tertiary education were not only behind men's education in Colombia but also compared with women in other countries. For example, the female tertiary gross enrollment rate was 2.5% in Spain, 4.5% in Chile, 11.4% in Argentina, and 31% in the United States (Graph 16).

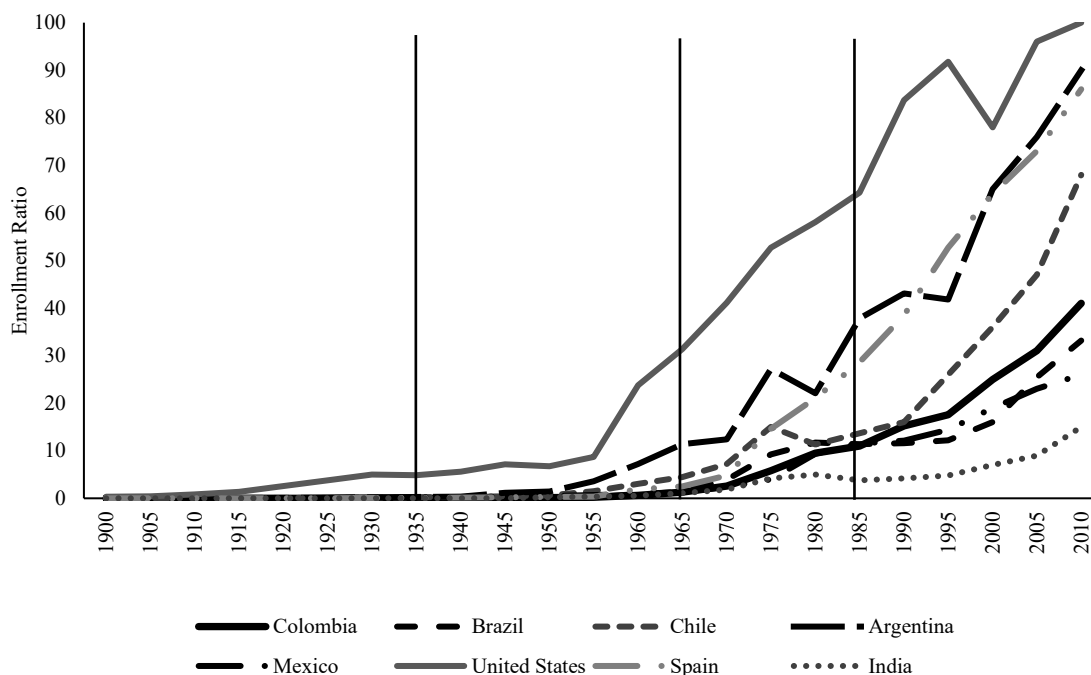
At the end of this period, women were still studying careers related to social services, social sciences, arts, letters, and careers related to the care of others. For example, in 1965 the share of female students in Nursing was 100%, Nutrition 100%, Decorative arts 100%, Bacteriology 94%, Library science 84%, Languages 73%, Philology 73%, Social Sciences 65%, and Psychology 60%. On the contrary, very few women studied Engineering, Medicine,

and other careers that were better paid in the labor market. The share of female students in engineering was only 4%, in Geology 3%, in Medicine 13%, in Economics 13%, in Mathematics 14%, in Architecture 15%, and in Law 18% (Graph 17).

Lastly, as a result of the relatively low enrollment rate of women in tertiary education, less than 10% of higher education teachers were females, meaning that most of the university courses were mainly taught by male professors in 1965 (Graph 18). Recent literature has shown that teacher gender matters, as students can see their teachers as role models, especially women (see for example Bertrand, 2011). In particular, Carrel et al. (2010) found that female professors have not only a significant impact on female students' performance, but also on the likelihood of majoring in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM).

Graph 16

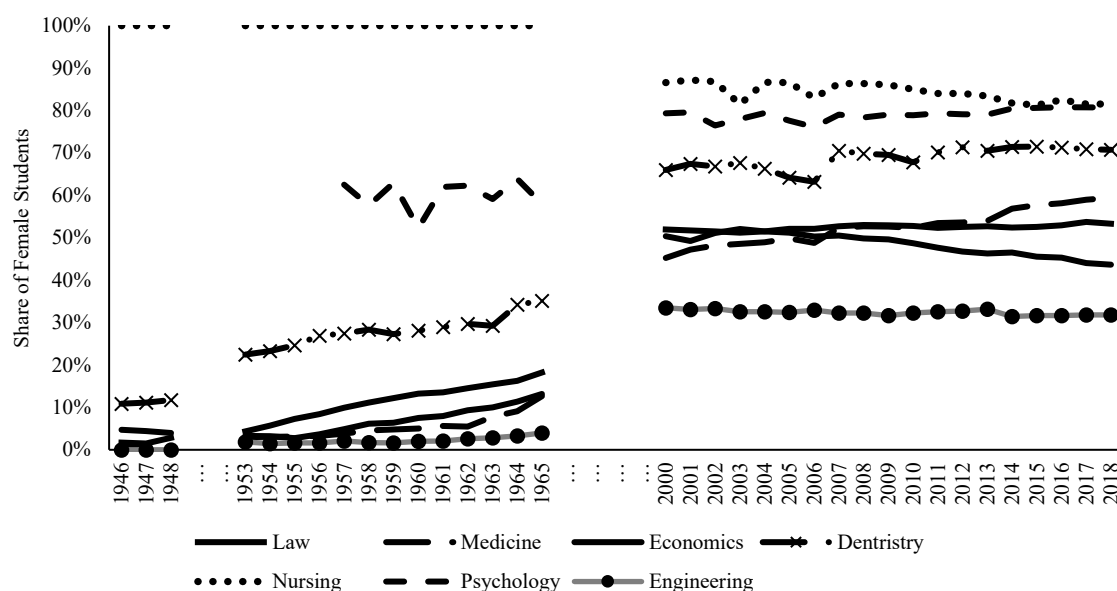
Tertiary Enrollment Ratios for Female Population, 1900-2010



Source: Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Dataset (www.barrolee.com).

Graph 17

Share of Female Students in Professional Programs (%)

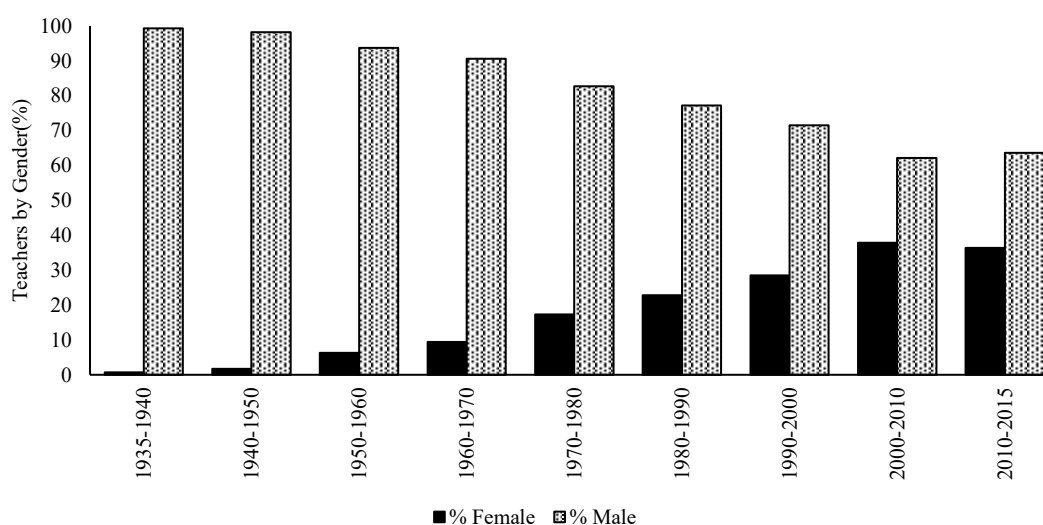


Sources: Anuario General de Estadística: 1934-1967, Departamento Nacional de Estadística: 1970-1982 and following years, Colombia Estadística 1979-1998, MEN for 2000 y 2013, ICFES, DNP calculations, UMacro, Anuarios, MEN for 1950 1970, 1975 and 1984

Note: For the period of 2000-2013, we took the information only for the first semester, as they can be enrolled in the first and second semesters of the year.

Graph 18

Higher Education Teachers by Gender (%)



Source: Unesco (2015), *Anuario General de Estadística*: 1935-1967, *Boletín Estadísticas del DANE* 1968-1975, DANE *Boletines y anexos estadísticos* 2007-2015.

B. Demographic indicators

Fertility rates remained almost constant between 1936 and 1965, women had on average 6.7 children, a very high number by international standards, and higher than the observed in the previous period. During this period, women also continued to marry at very young ages compared to men. In 1936, 40% of women who got married did so before turning 20 while only 4% of men married before turning 20 (Graphs 19, 20 and 21). These figures were also the same by 1965, suggesting that women had fewer opportunities than men to enter university and to participate in the labor market during this period. Once women got married, most of them abandoned their studies, stopped working, to do housework, and took care of their children, following the social norms at that time.

Graph 19

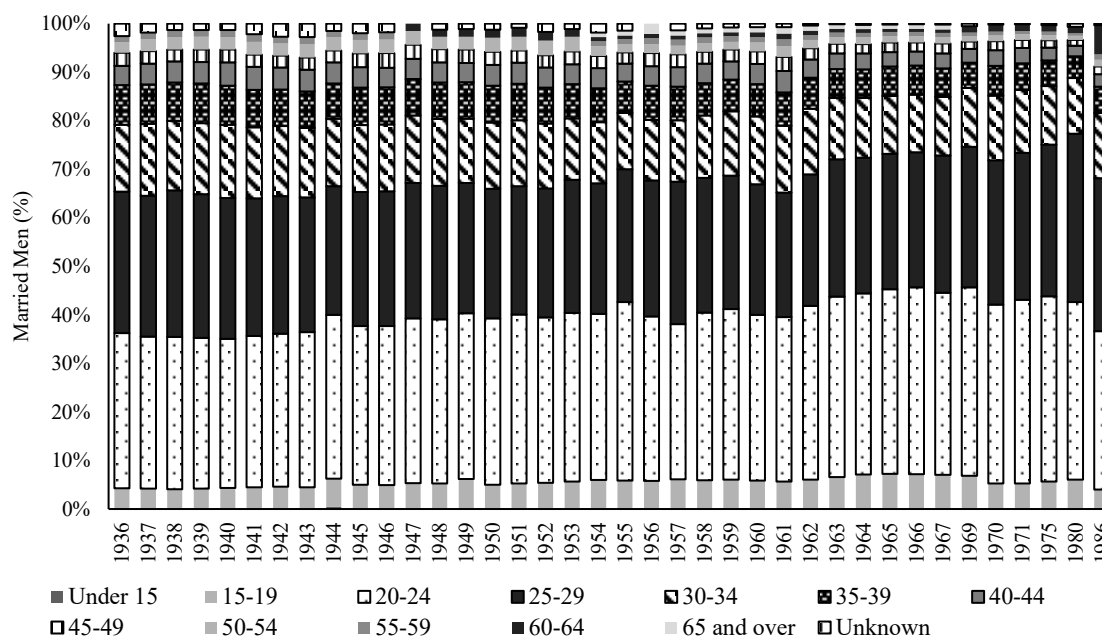
Marriage Rate (per 1000 habitants)



Source: Anuario General de Estadística, United Nations Demographic Yearbook, DANE and own calculations.

Graph 20

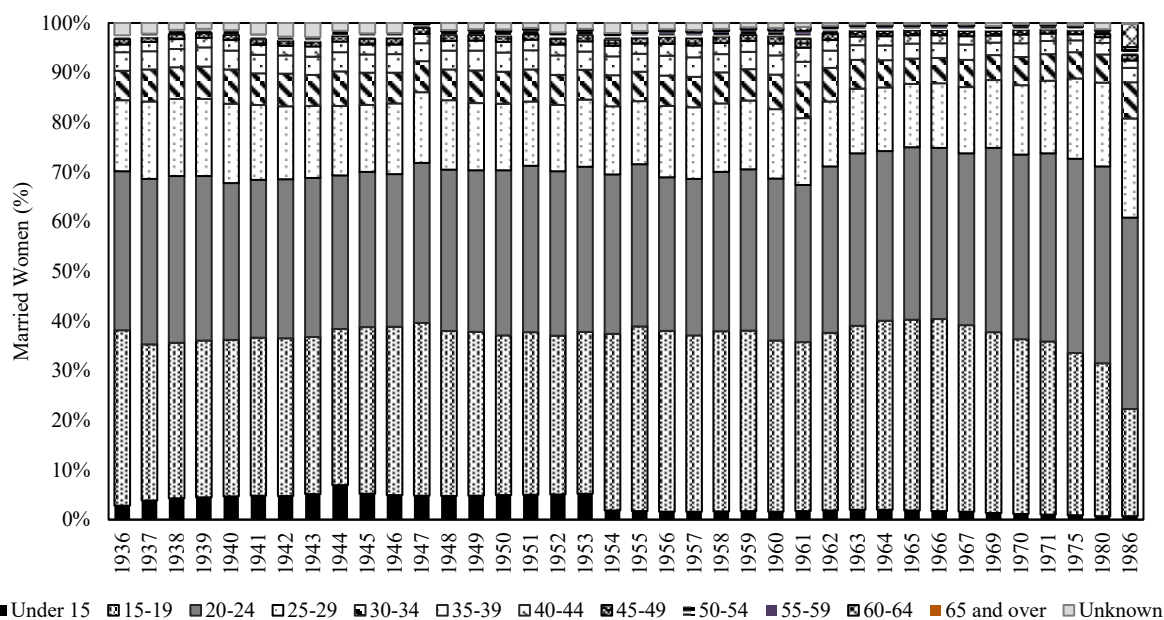
Distribution of Married Men by Age



Source: Anuarios Demográficos. United Nations

Graph 21

Distribution of Married Women by Age



Source: Anuarios Demográficos, Naciones Unidas

Diebolt et al. (2016) highlight the relationship between education and fertility as a key element in explaining the transition to sustained economic growth. However, in Colombia, it was only at the end of the 1960s that fertility and marriage rates started to reduce significantly (Graphs 11 and 19), mainly due to the introduction of modern contraceptive methods. The reduction of these rates allowed women to enroll and graduate from university on a larger scale. These greater levels of education increased the participation of young women in the labor market, as we will discuss in section 3.

The indicators of mortality rate and life expectancy at birth for both men and women continued to improve at a faster rate, especially since 1950 (Flórez, 2000). This was the result of advances in the quality of life of the population, because of higher per capita income, improvements in public health and in the provision of public services, better nutrition, and the expansion of the use of sulfa drugs to treat infectious diseases, that started in the 1940s (Flórez, 2000 and Jaramillo et al., 2019). Jaramillo et al. (2019) claim that the decrease in the mortality rate and the reduction in the prevalence of water-borne diseases were closely related to the expansion of the provision of public goods, especially aqueducts and sewers, that took place during this period. In particular, the reduction in infant mortality rates for boys and girls is explained by best hygiene practices, improvements in primary health care, and better environmental sanitation, among others.

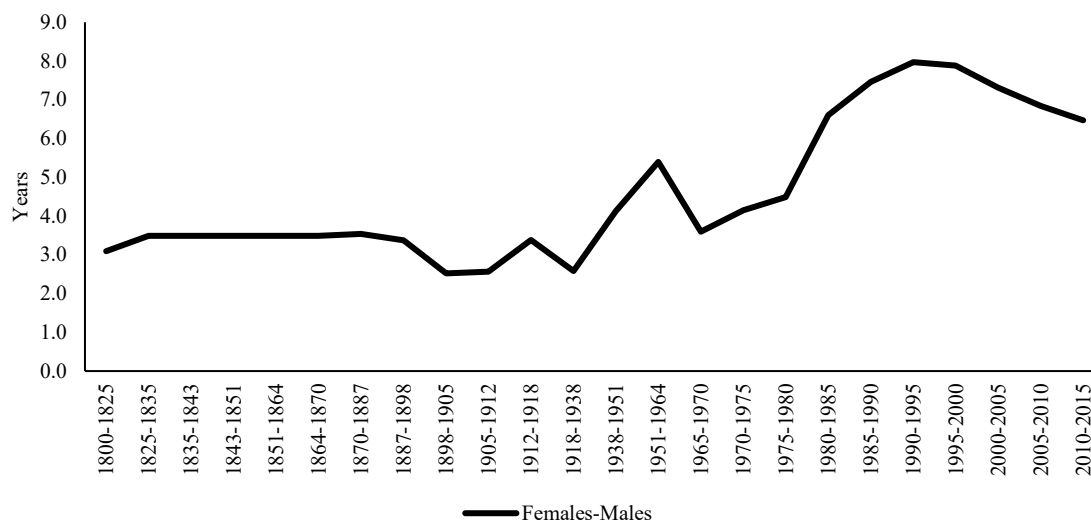
The difference in years in life expectancy between females and males increased considerably after 1938 (Graph 22). This was due, among other factors, to the reduction in maternal deaths, especially since 1940, when maternal programs that included pre and postnatal care, and better control of infections during pregnancy were introduced (Graph 23).²³ The reduction in maternal mortality would also play an important role in the expansion of the labor market of married women in the following decades. Albanesi and Olivetti (2016) argued that medical progress in improving maternal health, which mitigated the negative effects of pregnancy

²³ Goldin and Lleras-Muney (2019) found that the reduction in maternal mortality and to a greater degree the decreases in infectious diseases in the early 20th century played a crucial role in explaining the timing of the relative increase in the life expectancy of women compared to men in the United States.

and childbirth on women's ability to work, played a key role in helping married women to enter into the labor force.

Graph 22

Life Expectancy at Birth (Difference between females and male, years)



Source: Graph 13.

Graph 23

Maternal Mortality Rate (Deaths per 100,000 live births)



Source: Rate 1: Jiménez-Peña (2014). Rate 2: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group, and the United Nations Population Division.

Moreover, between 1951 and 1964, a larger difference in life expectancy between men and women is observed. This difference could be explained by the outbreak of the period of “*La Violencia*”, triggered by the assassination of the liberal candidate Jorge Eliecer Gaitán in 1948. According to the estimations of Romero and Meisel (2019), during “*La Violencia*” about 58,000 fatalities occurred during the period 1949-58, most of them were young men. The authors mentioned that in the second half of the 1950s, there was a stagnation in the life expectancy of Colombians, as a result of the higher rates of violent deaths.

C. Labor market

The participation of women in the labor market began to increase during these years, especially at the end of this period. Some factors could explain this trend. Women began to be better prepared to enter the labor market since they were more educated, as they were already attending university. As a result, women were able to perform more types of jobs and more tasks than in the past, and they were also allowed to work in the public sector. This was also a period when the economic structure started to change from agricultural to manufacturing and services, sectors that began to demand more labor force. Growing urbanization was also a factor that explained the expansion of the labor market in the cities. As Olivetti and Petrongolo (2016) explained, in the case of women, the expansion of the service sector might generate a type of job that given their characteristics, could better match women’s preferences and household roles. Moreover, the relative demand for working women may increase as they have a comparative advantage in the production of those services.

The expansion of the industrial sector generated a growing demand for labor, especially for unskilled female workers. In the 1930s industrialization took off in Colombia; manufacturing grew at an average annual rate close to 6% per capita in constant pesos between 1930 and 1953; the highest rate was observed between 1938 and 1953 (7.5%). This was one of the highest rates of industrial growth among the largest Latin American economies during this

period.²⁴ According to Montenegro (2002), in 1927, women constituted 67% of the textile sector workforce.

The first industrial census of 1945 is an important source to analyze the labor composition of Colombian manufacturing. This census gathered detailed information by sectors and municipalities about production, income, expenses, value-added, capital, and employment, among other aspects of the Colombian manufacturing. Most importantly, employment information was disaggregated by sex. Santos-Cárdenas (2017) analyzed the composition of the manufacturing labor force by sex. According to the author, by 1945, 93% of the women employed in the Colombian industry were unskilled workers (*obreras*). Most of these women worked in textiles, clothing, and tobacco sectors. As expected, female workers were, on average, significantly younger than their male counterparts. The average age of women was 24 years, while that of men was 27 years. Besides, the share of single women in the industry was 88%; as we mentioned, most women left the job market when they got married.

Although women increased their role in economic activity, they still faced important barriers that limited their participation in the labor market, especially for those married. There was still a very high fertility rate, since women did not have mass access to oral contraceptives, and they continued to marry at younger ages.²⁵ Also, the labor market discriminated against women, and they were paid lower wages than men.²⁶ Consequently, during this period the global participation rate of women was on average a constant rate of less than 17%, much lower than that of men who achieved a participation rate of more than 75%; the female to male relative labor participation was around 23% during this period (Graph 24). Moreover, the structure of occupations for women was very different than for men. According to the estimations of Junguito et al. (1970), most women were in occupations related to personal

²⁴ See, Jaramillo et al. (2016).

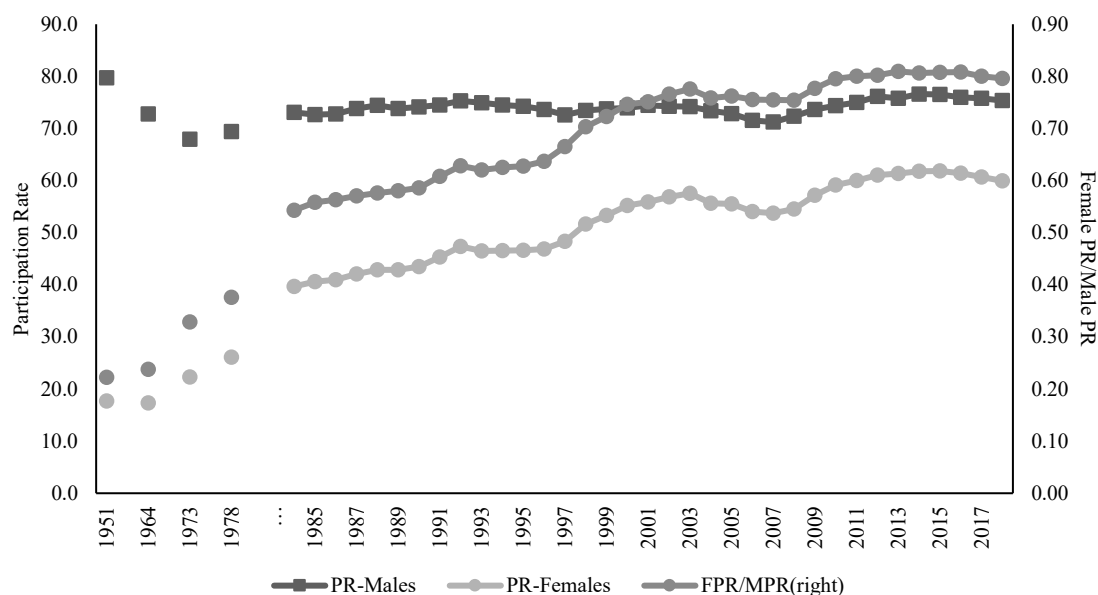
²⁵ As will be discussed in section 3, women started to have more access to contraceptives at the end of the 1960s, with the introduction of the pill. As a result, the fertility rate started to decrease rapidly as well as the marriage rate, and women began to have the first child at an older age.

²⁶ As López-Uribe et al. (2011) mentioned, women could not occupy all jobs positions. There were some occupations that were assigned to men, because there was no formal training for women in those positions, or because they were specifically "male" jobs (p. 39).

services, domestic service, and handicrafts, while men were mostly in agriculture and livestock occupations (Table 4).

Graph 24

Global Participation Rate



Source: Junguito et al. (1970), Ocampo and Ramírez (1987). and Grupo GAMLA Banco de la República.

In 1951, young and single women were those who participated more in the labor market; after the age of twenty, the participation rate started to decline (Table 5, Graph 25). This result suggests that women left the labor market as they got married to take care of their home and family. As Junguito et al. (1970) pointed out, female participation followed the guidelines of the socio-economic and cultural context of the country at that time. The presence of barriers in the labor market for married women constituted an important impediment to achieving larger female labor participation during this period.

By the end of this period, even though women were more educated and got married at a later age, their participation in the labor market remained almost constant, less than 20%. Women's participation started to decline after the age of 30 years, which means that they were lasting longer in the labor market than in the preceding period (Graph 26). Nevertheless, female labor participation was still much lower than that of men. During this period nearly

96% of men, between 20 and 50 years old, participated in the labor market, and most of them were married.²⁷

Table 4
Economically Active Population by Occupation and Sex (%)

Occupation	1951			1964		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Professionals, Technicians and related	2.3	1.8	4.6	3.9	2.6	9.2
Professionals and Technicians				1.6	1.8	1
Nurses and Midwives				0.5	0.1	2.1
Professors and Teachers				1.8	0.7	6.1
Managers and Administratives	5.7	6	4.8	2.6	2.8	1.9
Office workers	2.4	2.1	3.5	4.6	3.7	8.2
Typist and Stenographers				1	0.2	4
Others				3.6	3.5	4.2
Sellers	1.7	1.4	2.8	5.6	5.2	7.1
Owner Sellers				2.5	2.3	3.1
Peddlers				2.4	2.2	3.6
Farmers and Ranchers	53.1	62.5	12.4	47.3	56.6	10.3
Miners	1.3	1.1	2.1	8	8	1.1
Drivers of means of transport	2	2.4	0.1	3	3.7	0.2
Craftsmen and Operators	15.1	13.5	22.4	16.3	16.1	17.1
Spinners and Weavers				1.1	0.5	3.4
Tailors and Dressmakers				2.5	0.8	9.4
Shoemakers, Carpenters, and Bricklayers				5.9	7	0.8
Electricians				2.8	3.4	0
Others				4	4.4	3.5
Workers and laborers	2	2.2	1.6	1.1	1.3	0.5
Workers in personal service	10.6	2.7	44.7	11.2	3.6	41.5
Watchmen				1.3	1.6	0.3
Domestic Servants				7.7	0.6	35.8
Others				2.1	1.4	5.4
Unidentified	3.8	4.4	1	3.5	3.6	2.8

Source: Junguito et al. (1970).

Women's employment rate in Colombia lagged behind those of developed countries during this period. Olivetti and Petrongolo (2016) documented the evolution of female employment of nineteen high-income countries for the period 1850-2008; in all countries of their sample,

²⁷ For a complete analysis of the Colombian labor market during this period see Junguito, et al. (1970).

except for Japan, female employment rates increased post-1950, accelerating around 1980. Before the 1950s, a slow rise in female employment was observed across all countries, except for the United States and Canada. By 1960, the employment of working-age women was close to 40% for almost all the sample, except for Japan (60%), and Spain, Italy, and Portugal, with a female employment rate close to 20%. All these rates were higher than the Colombian rate at that time. However, as it will be discussed in section 4, Colombia in the 2000s presents one of the highest female labor participation in the world.

Table 5
Participation Rate by marital status in 1951

Age groups	Single		Married		Widower/Widow		Cohabitation		Separated	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
less than 15	4.74	1.73		9.36		16.51		10.89		9.8
15-19	84.6	26.92	92.88	5.16	90.91	22.47	94.09	7.88	90	25.8
20-24	94.51	40.79	98.94	5.7	94.63	28.85	98.35	9.05	95.23	31.93
25-34	95.84	43.22	98.79	6.79	96.87	37.3	99.12	10.4	96.81	36.68
35-44	95.01	42.07	98.67	7.3	96.58	34.8	99.08	11.4	96.74	37.53
45-54	92.88	35.37	97.69	7.03	94.52	25.42	98.55	11.62	95.58	30.14
55-64	86.44	27.66	94.16	6.04	88.02	18.22	96.53	10.34	90.73	23.07
65 and more	63.22	16.36	77.57	4.61	57.07	9.73	84.6	7.99	68.7	14.5

Source: Junguito, et al. (1970).

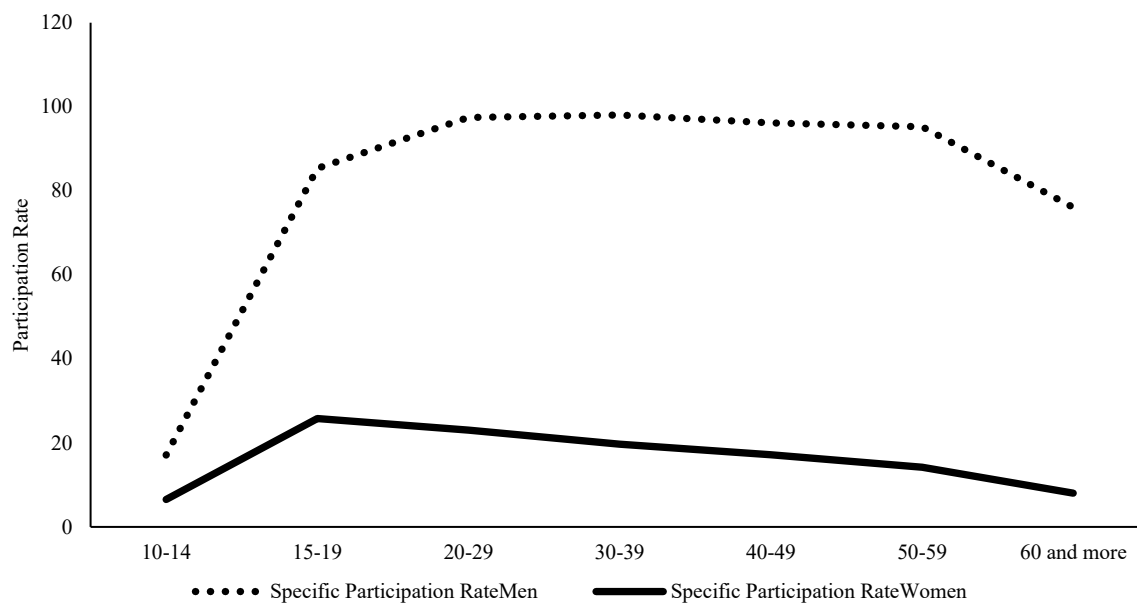
Gender-based pay discrimination in the labor market was an important issue during this period. Even though there is a lot of qualitative and narrative evidence, the wage gender gap is very difficult to estimate quantitatively for this period since we do not have enough information. Qualitative evidence on women's working conditions and the gender wage gap, especially in factories is illustrated for example, in the narratives of the textile female workers' strike that took place in those years.²⁸ As Santos-Cárdenas (2017) pointed out, between 1920 and 1946, there were eight strikes in the Antioquia textile industry, with the participation of a large number of working women, which expressed their dissatisfaction with their working conditions and low wages.²⁹

²⁸ See López-Urbe (2008), López-Urbe et al. (2011), Arango (1994), Arango (1991), who presented qualitatively evidence on the difficult conditions that faced women in the labor market during this period.

²⁹ On the participation of working women in strikes at textile factories, see Santos-Cárdenas (2017), Villegas and Yúniz (1976), Farnsworth-Alvear (2000), and Arango (1991), among others.

Graph 25

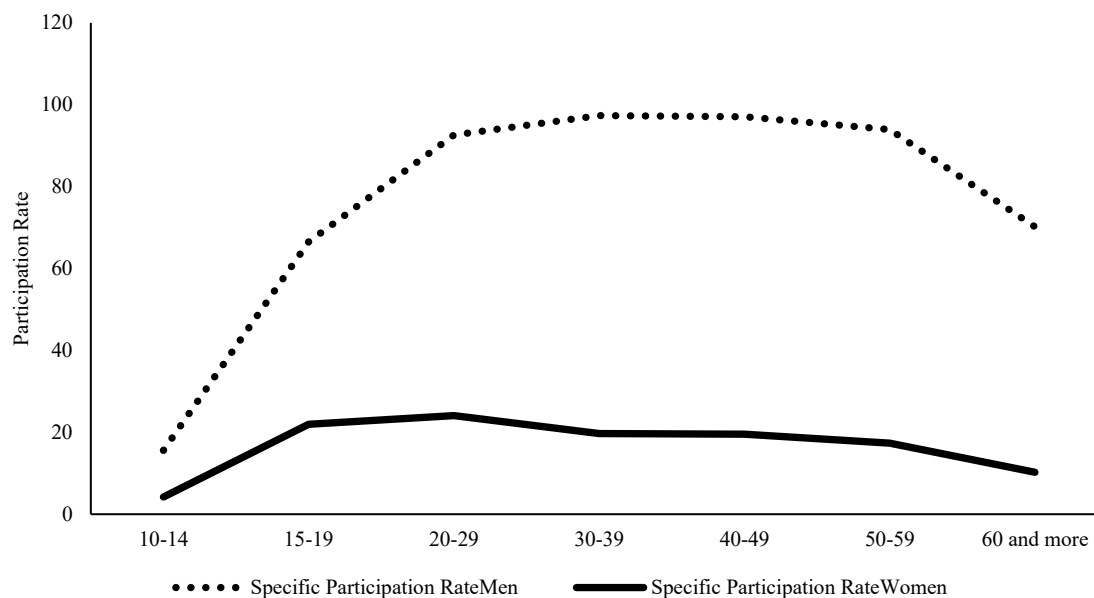
Specific Participation Rate by Age Group and Sex, 1951



Source: Junguito et al. (1970).

Graph 26

Specific Participation Rate by Age Group and Sex, 1964



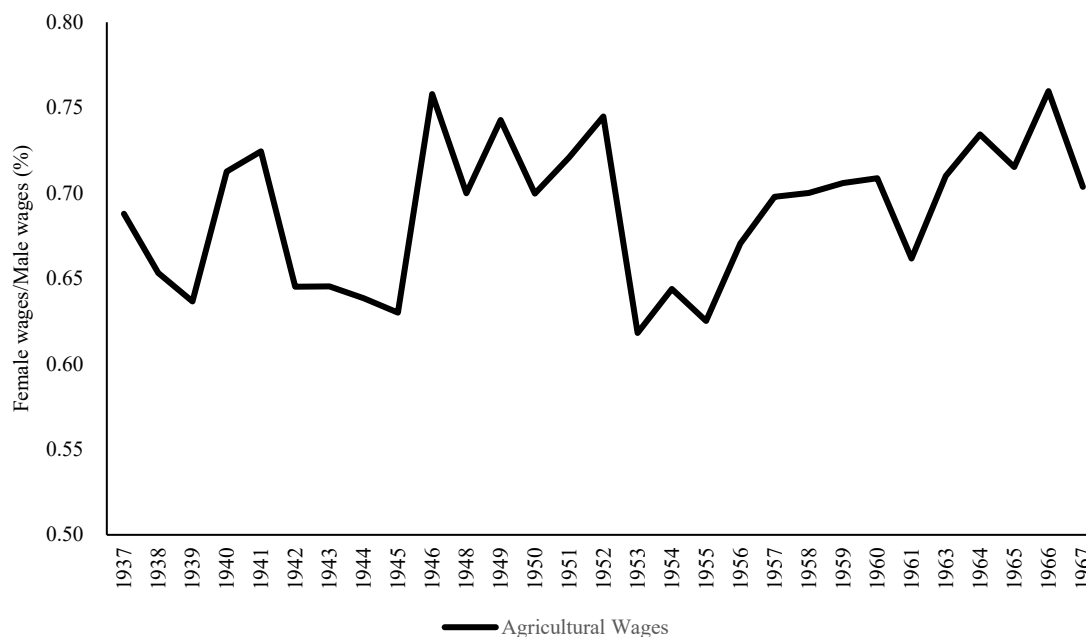
Source: Junguito et al. (1970).

To address quantitatively the gender wage gap during this period, we can use two available sources of information: the agricultural daily wages and the industrial census of 1945, which will give us some idea of the magnitude of this gap. Graph 27 depicts the evolution of the share of female agricultural daily wages on male's agricultural daily wages for the period 1937-1967.³⁰ On average, female daily wages represented 68% of male's wages. It is important to note that between 1947 and 1952, years of increasing political violence, the gender wage gap in agriculture was reduced, maybe due to a shortage of male labor in the countryside. As mentioned, men were the most affected by the political violence of those years.

³⁰ We take agricultural daily wages excluding payments in kind (i.e., food)

Graph 27

Agricultural Daily Wages (Female wages/Male wages) %



Source: Own calculation based on agricultural daily wages by sex, taken from the Anuario General de Estadística, several years.

Santos-Cárdenas (2017) used the Industrial Census of 1945 to analyze the gender wage gap in the Colombian industry. The wage data indicated that female factory workers earned, on average, 60% of their male counterparts. Interestingly, this share is similar to the one we calculated for the agricultural sector for this period. Santos-Cárdenas (2017) also estimated the gender wage gap as the additional percentage of women's salary necessary to earn the same as men. She found that the wage gap, on average, in the industrial sector was 67%. Her econometric results suggest that this gap was neither due to differences in productivity nor to differences in education between female and male workers.

D. Women's rights and political participation

The Constitutional reform of 1936 gave women some economic and civil rights. As mentioned, this reform recognized the right of women to enroll in university on equal terms as men. Moreover, with this reform women had the possibility of accessing public positions. Nevertheless, this reform did not give women political or electoral rights. It was until 1954, during the government of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, when female suffrage was allowed along with the ability to choose and be elected for public offices. Women voted for the first time in the Plebiscite of 1957. For a long time, politicians, including those from the Liberal Party, were against giving women the right to vote. In particular, according to Wills (2004), the majority of liberals believed that women at the polls would lean towards the Conservative Party following the speeches delivered from the pulpit in favor of this political party.

Moreover, Wills (2004) pointed out that in the *National Constituent Assembly* of 1954, women from different political parties came together to demand that women be given the right to vote. They defended the idea that, if they obtained the right to vote, women would not follow the political ideas of the two traditional parties, but work to advocate women's rights. These women, including Esmeralda Arboleda, Josefina Valencia, Bertha Hernández, and María Currea, were able to participate in politics thanks to the connections that their families had with political networks in their regions, worked together with the slogan: *Women for Women*. Their role was very successful, and their objective to obtain women's right to vote was accomplished.

Table 6 shows that Colombia was one of the countries in Latin America where women were later granted the right to vote and the right to be elected. Women in Colombia had traditionally been excluded from politics and the public sphere. Then, men had the right to take all the policy decisions, which in many cases affected women's conditions and even their lives. As Wills (2004) stated, *the public sphere supposed a certain type of separation between the public world and private life biased in favor of a conception that gave men prerogatives, advantages, and power over the lives of women* (own translation, p. 27).

Table 6

Year in which the right to vote is granted to women in Latin America

	Right to Vote	Right to be elected
Argentina	1947	1947
Belize	1954	1954
Bolivia	1952	1952
Brazil	1934	1934
Chile	1931-1949	1931-1949
<i>Colombia</i>	<i>1954</i>	<i>1954</i>
Costa Rica	1949	1949
Dominican Republic	1942	1942
Ecuador	1929	1929
El Salvador	1939	1961
Guatemala	1946	1946
Guyana	1953	1945
Nicaragua	1955	1955
Panama	1941	1941-1946
Paraguay	1961	1961
Peru	1955	1955
Suriname	1948	1948
Uruguay	1932	1932
Venezuela	1946	1946

Source: Taken from http://womensuffrage.org/?page_id=109.

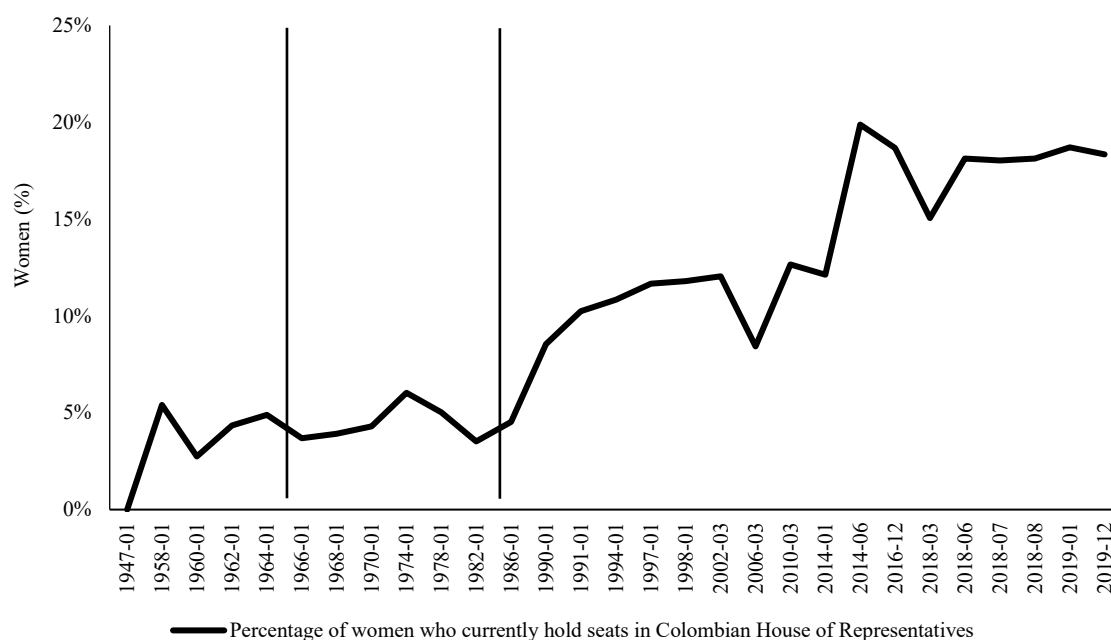
Therefore, after 1954 women had the right to participate in the political environment. It is worth highlighting the role of women that were appointed in public positions like Esmeralda Arboleda, the first female senator (1958-1961) and minister of communications in 1961; Josefina Valencia who was governor of the Department of Cauca in 1955, and was appointed Minister of Education in 1956, and María Raquel Puentes, the first female mayor, appointed in 1963 as the mayor of Tibasosa (Boyacá), among others.

From 1958 to 1966, on average, the share of women in the House of Representatives was 4.2%, and their share in the Senate was 1.2% (Graphs 28 and 29). During this period, there were only 2 female ministers, being less than 1% of the total of ministers (Graph 30). These percentages were very low in the international context. For example, the percentage of

women in parliament in 1965 was close to 20% in Bulgaria, Mongolia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Guinea, near 15% in Finland and Sweden, and around 12% in the Netherlands whereas in Colombia it was only 3.8%.³¹

Graph 28

Percentage of Women in the Colombian House of Representatives

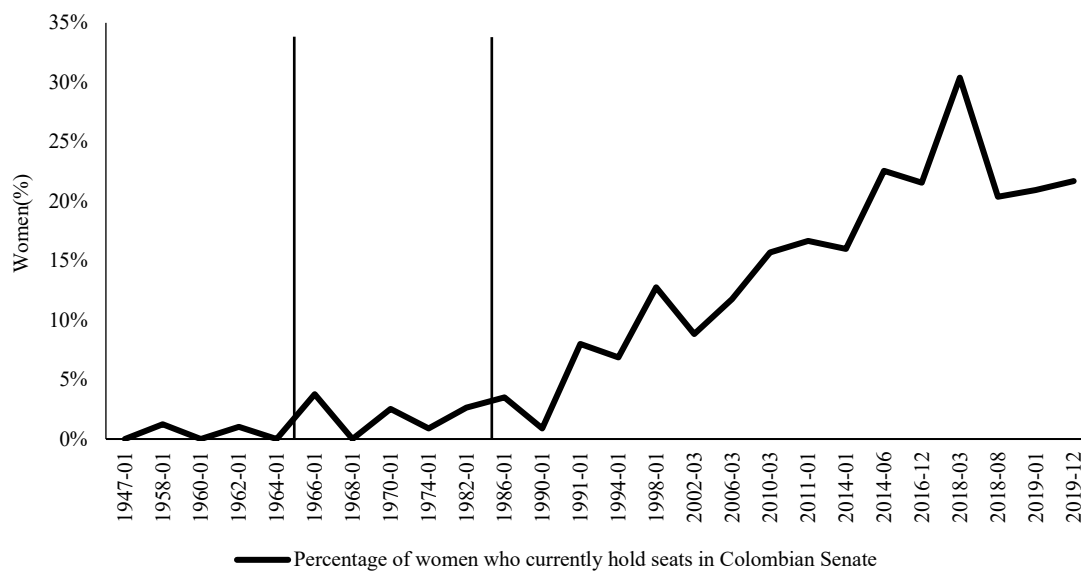


Source: Taken from Inter-Parliamentary Union (<https://data.ipu.org>).

³¹ See Inter-Parliamentary Union (<https://data.ipu.org>).

Graph 29

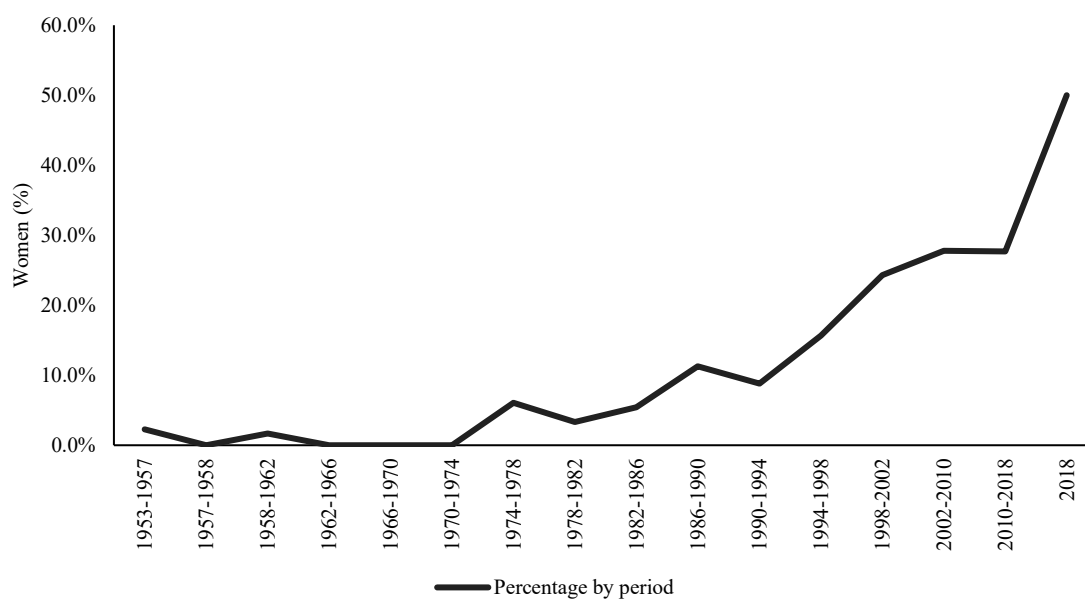
Percentage of Women in the Colombian Senate



Source: Taken from Inter-Parliamentary Union (<https://data.ipu.org>).

Graph 30

Share of Female Ministers (%)



Source: González (1982) and ministries websites.

Women also obtained important rights in the labor market, rights especially oriented to protect pregnant women. Law 53 of 1938 established a maternity leave at the time of delivery of eight weeks for all pregnant women, who work in offices or companies, official or private.³² This Law also protected the employment of pregnant women. For example, Article 2 stated that no employee or worker may be dismissed from her job for reasons of pregnancy or lactation, and their job position to which she could be absent due to illness arising from their state of pregnancy shall be retained. All women who work piecewise, or by contract, had the same rights recognized by this Law.³³

This Law was very important for Colombian women. As Ramírez, Tribín and Vargas (2015) pointed out, Colombia was one of the first countries that accepted the International Labor Office (ILO) recommendations (Convention No. 3, 1919) on the labor rights of pregnant women (Table 7). Some of these rights were adopted by the Colombian legal system in Law 129 of 1931,³⁴ which ratified the Convention, and was later modified by Law 53 of 1938. By 1950 about 40 countries, including Colombia, had compulsory insurance laws that provided maternity benefits.

Table 7
Year of Adoption of Maternity Leave, Selected Countries

Country	Year	Legislation
Mexico	1917	1917 Constitution
Spain	1923	Royal Decree-Law of August 21, 1923
Argentina	1924	Law 11317 of 1924 and Law 11932 of 1934
Chile	1925	Decree-Law 442, 1925
Colombia	1938	Law 53 of 1938
Canada	1971	Unemployment Insurance ACT

³² This law was ratified by Decree 2663 of 1950, *Substantive Labor Code*, that maintained maternity leave for 8 remunerated weeks, the obligation of the employer to grant two twenty-minute breaks within the day to breastfeed the child, and no worker could be fired due to pregnancy or breastfeeding.

³³ The law 58 of 1938 was a very important one, and also included regulation in case of dismissal of pregnant women, breastfeeding time for working mothers. Also, this Law stated that an employee or worker who had an abortion or preterm labor in the course of pregnancy was entitled to two weeks of incapacity for work. For an analysis of this Law see Ramírez-Bustamante, Tribín-Urbe and Vargas (2015).

³⁴ Law 129 of 1931 regulated the Colombian labor market, working hours and potentially dangerous work.

Table 7 (Cont.)

Year of Adoption of Maternity Leave, Selected Countries

Country	Year	Legislation
United States	1978	The pregnancy discrimination ACT 1978
	1993	Law on February 5 1993 We just take into account the federal rights. Nevertheless, the United States has State rights. In 1987, 9 states had unpaid maternity leaves, in 1989 another 14 states included maternity leaves. To this day, 20 States have maternity leaves that last between 4 and 18 weeks (unpaid).
Austria	1957	
Belgium	1889	Article 5 of the Law on Women's and Children's Labor
	1954	
Finland	1917	Decree 18 August 1917/64
	1922	Employment Contracts Act (1.6.1922/141)
France	1909	
	1928	
Germany	1878	
	1924	
Italy	1902	Law 19/6/1902, n. 242
	1950	Law 26/08/1950, n. 860
Japan	1947	The Labour Standard Law. Article 19-1
	1969	
New Zealand	1981	Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act 1980
	2002	The Parental Leave and Employment Protection (Paid Paternal Leave) Act 2002
Norway	1909	
Sweden	1901	
	1955	
Switzerland	1877	
	2005	
Turkey	1930	
	1936	The Labour Law
United Kingdom	1948	
	1976	The 1975 Employment Protection Act
Ecuador	1986	Official Registration No.371 from February 6, 1986
	1998	Article 39 from the 1998 Constitution.

Sources: Taken from

https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PF2_5_Trends_in_leave_entitlements_around_childbirth_annex.pdfOECD.

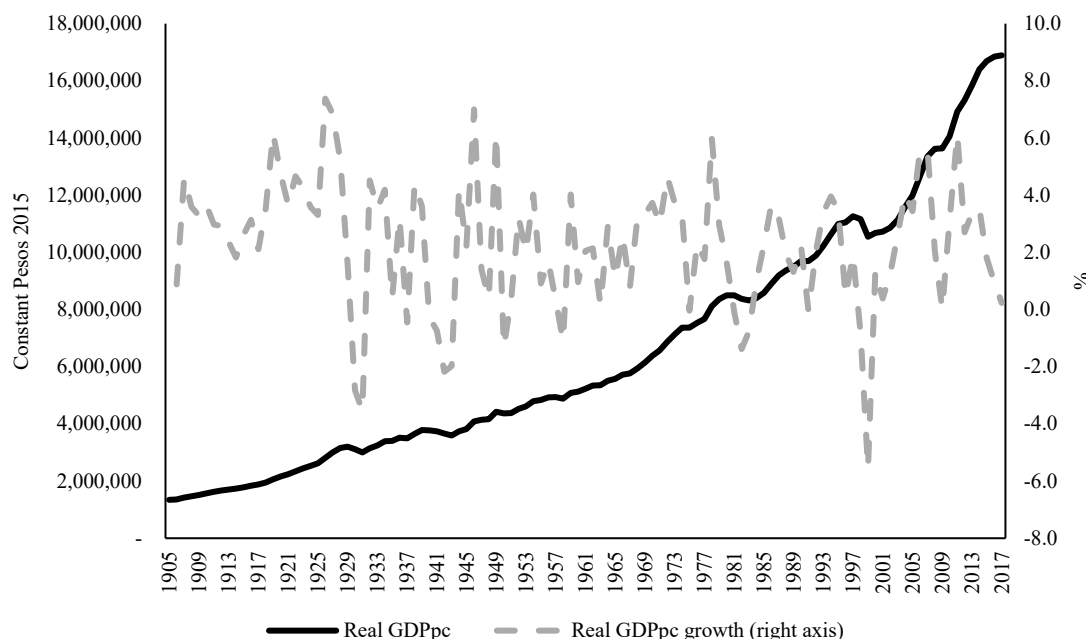
IV. The rise of women's empowerment: 1966 - 1985.

During this period there was a rapid and sustained economic growth as a result of the booming coffee prices and exports, with an average annual rate of per capita GDP growth of 2.2% (Graph 31). Moreover, education enrollment increased for both men and women, the gap in secondary education closed, and there was a rapid increase in female participation in higher education. The economic transformation of the country increased the demand for human capital, and so did investment in human capital. This period can be characterized as a period of demographic transition, from high fertility rates (e.g., 6.2 children per woman in 1967) to low fertility rates (i.e., 3.4 children per woman in 1985).³⁵ The reduction in fertility could be the result of the drop in infant mortality, access to contraceptive methods, greater education for women, or even their greater participation in the labor market; this is what Gaviria (2010) considered the most important transformation of the Colombian society during this period, and called it “the women’s revolution”. Similarly, the nuptiality rate reduced (from 4.3 weddings per 1000 inhabitants in 1967 to 2.7 in 1985), life expectancy increased, and the labor force participation of women began to increase with a lag with respect to men.

³⁵ For a description of the stages of the demographic transition in Colombia see, for example, Flórez (2000) and Mejía, Ramírez and Tamayo (2008).

Graph 31

Real GDPpc and Real GDPpc growth



Source: Greco and DANE.

A. Education

The constitutional reform of 1968 promoted an administrative change in the educational sector, which sought to improve the prevailing scheme of centralization of educational policy and decentralization of its administration. During this period, the literacy rate continued improving. It went from 74% and 72% in 1966 for men and women, to 87% and 86% in 1985, respectively (Graph 2). Despite this improvement, it was still below countries such as Chile and Argentina that had literacy rates greater than 90%.³⁶ An important aspect during this period was the universalization of primary education, a priority for the government. The gross enrollment rate in primary education continued increasing for boys and girls, reaching 118% and 115% in 1979, respectively (Graph 3). From that moment until 1985, this rate started to reduce, reaching 106% and 102%, for boys and girls respectively. It is important to mention, that the share of males and females in primary school enrollment was about 50%

³⁶ See Ramírez and Téllez (2007).

for both of them. As to primary school teachers, around 80% of them continued to be women (Graph 9). If we compared the primary enrollment ratio of girls with other Latin American countries, although in Colombia it has increased, it still lagged behind countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Mexico (Graph 5).

Secondary school enrollment rates were still low for both men and women, although, at the end of this period, they almost double (from 17% to 41% for women and from 18% to 38% for men) (Graph 4). The share of males and females in secondary education was about 50% each. It is important to notice that by the end of the period, the share of women was slightly superior than that of men (51%) (Graph 8). Graph 10 shows the share of teachers by gender in secondary education. It can be seen that at the beginning of the period 33% of teachers were women, whereas by the end of the period this percentage had increased to 44%. If we compared the secondary school enrollment rate in Colombia with other countries, despite the considerable improvement, by the end of the period, it still was behind those in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico (Graph 6).

In 1969, the National Institutes of Secondary Education (INEM) were created to promote the diversification and modernization of secondary education and to support the underprivileged classes. It is also worth mentioning that in 1973, the government introduced high school by radio (*Bachillerato por radio*)³⁷ as an alternative for people who were left out of secondary education due to their work, their place of residence or the lack of pedagogical resources. According to *El Tiempo* newspaper, in 1988 the people that benefitted from this alternative were mainly under the age of thirty (80%), and were mostly women, especially domestic workers, and housewives.³⁸ After completing all courses, these students could sit an ICFES examination to validate their studies.³⁹

³⁷ This program was carried out through the National Radio Broadcaster of Colombia (*Radiodifusora Nacional de Colombia*) until October 2004, when the National Institute of Radio and Television (*Inravisión*) was liquidated. In 1983 more than 53,000 people were enrolled in high school by radio and by the end of the program, more than 2 million people obtained their high school degree (Taken from <https://www.senalmemoria.co/articulos/la-otra-opcion-para-ser-bachiller>).

³⁸ See Lara (2020).

³⁹ ICFES, the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education, was created in December 1968. It implemented the public evaluation system, and sought to regulate higher education throughout the country. Its aim was to offer all high school graduates in the country the opportunity to take their entrance exams at the different universities in Colombia.

In 1976, the New School (*Escuela Nueva*) was introduced.⁴⁰ Under this scheme, all school-age students in the rural area were taught in a single classroom. Students were guaranteed flexible promotion, complete schooling, and were also able to attend agricultural tasks without having to abandon formal education. The New School increased the coverage and quality of education in rural areas (Psacharopoulos, Rojas and Vélez, 1992).

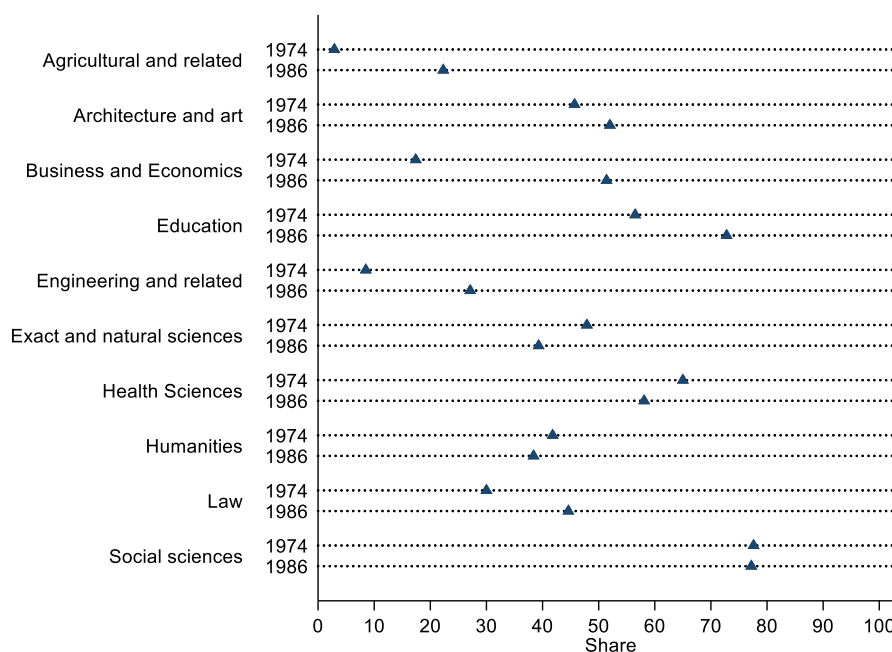
Regarding tertiary education, during this period enrollment rates continued to be very low for both, men and women. Starting from 5% for men and 2% for women in 1966, these rates reached 10% and 9% respectively in 1985. The increase in enrollment rates for women was impressive, and since that year onwards, it has continued growing, and it has exceeded that of men (Graph 14). As can be seen, the enrollment rate for women increased more than that of men, but it was still much lower than in countries such as Argentina (38%), Chile (14%), Spain (29%), and the United States (64%) (Graph 16). As to the percentage of women in higher education, Graph 15 shows that it increased continuously during the period, reaching about 49% in 1985. Higher education continued to be a male dominated occupation (24% of teachers were female in 1985) (Graph 18).

According to Vélez and Winter (1992) the fields of study varied significantly by gender, with women preferring educational fields that led to low-paying careers. In particular, the traditional female careers were education, health (mainly nursing), and humanities, although their inclination towards these fields appeared to be lessening (Figure 1). In fact, in 1974, 32% of those who graduated did so in education, and in 1986 that figure dropped to 29%. Valdés and Gomáriz (1993) suggested that the proportion of women in this area increased as a result of the withdrawal of men. In contrast, there was an increase in female participation in traditionally male careers: in 1974, women accounted for 8.5% of engineering students and 30% of law. By 1986, these proportions had increased to 27% and 44.6% respectively (Valdés and Gomáriz, 1993).

⁴⁰ For a complete presentation of the New School scheme, see Torres (1996).

Figure 1

Share of female graduates by academic area: 1974 and 1986



Source: Based on Valdés and Gomáriz (1993, p. 63).

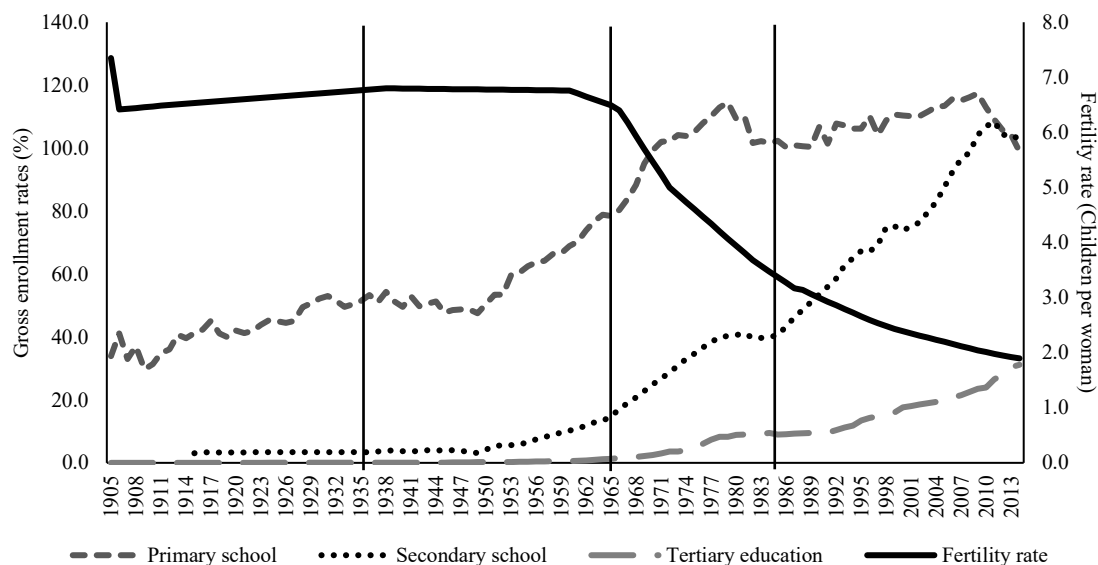
B. Demographic indicators

The demographic transition in Colombia had at least two stages, as it was mentioned in section 2. A demographic explosion took place between 1950 and 1964, when mortality rates decreased but fertility was still very high (Flórez, 2000). Then, in the 1960s fertility began to decrease considerably (Graph 11), as a consequence of the drop in infant mortality, the introduction of family planning, greater education for women, a higher opportunity cost for women and their greater participation in the labor market. The reduction in fertility, together with the decrease in mortality, led to a reduction in the population growth rate (1.8% at the end of the 20th century), and higher per capita income. The reduction in the fertility rate was preceded by an increase in human capital (Graph 32), whereas the drop in the mortality rates was reflected in an increase in life expectancy, which also preceded the decline in fertility (Graph 33). In Colombia, the mutual reinforcement between lower fertility rates and declining mortality rates was more intense than in other developing countries (Flórez, 2000; Gaviria, 2010). Moreover, it has been recognized that better female health could also

contribute to reduced fertility and therefore youth dependency, which could also affect labor participation (Bloom, Kuhn, and Prettnner, 2020).

Graph 32

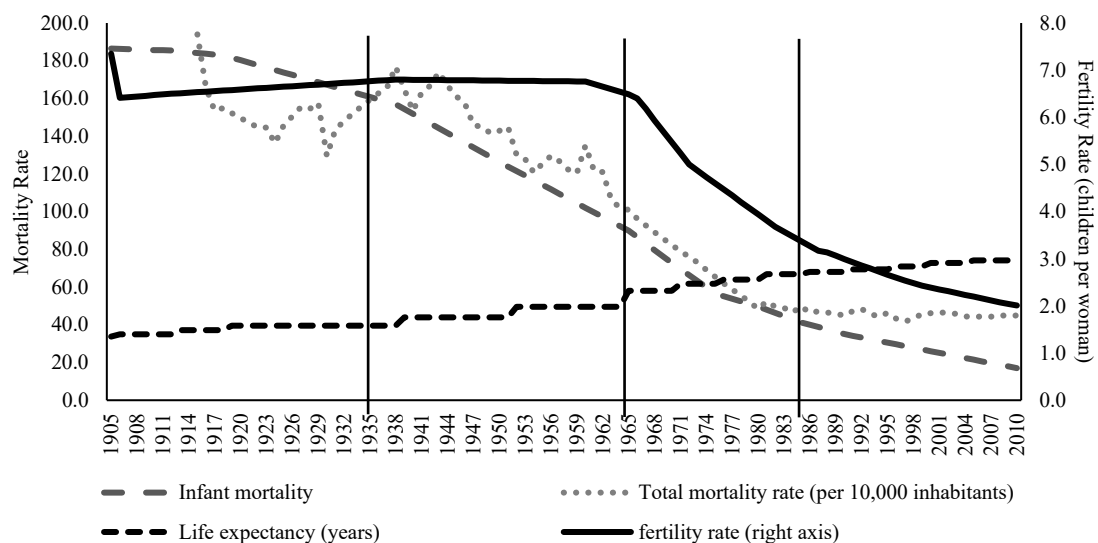
Relationship Between Female Education and Fertility



Source: Authors' calculations based on Jaramillo, Meisel and Ramirez (2019), Flórez (2000) and DANE.

Graph 33

Relationship between mortality (Infant and Total), life expectancy at birth and fertility rate



Source: Authors calculations based on Flórez (2000) and DANE.

Regarding our period of interest, between 1965 and 1985, there was a remarkable drop in fertility; it was the most rapid decline in South America during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Flórez, 2000; Miller, 2010). The period started with a high fertility rate (6.4 children per woman), and by 1985 it had reduced to around 3 (Graph 11). The decline in fertility rates was mainly the result of family planning programs, urbanization, and socioeconomic and cultural factors. On the contrary, among the socioeconomic conditions, poverty was the main cause that inhibited the reduction of fertility (Flórez, 2000; Palacios and Safford, 2002; Miller, 2010). For example, Dureau and Flórez (1996, p. 27) mentioned that aggregate figures could hide an essential feature of the demographic situation of Bogotá, that is, the persistence of marked differences according to social class. From the 1985 census data, the authors showed how differentials in fertility and infant mortality reflected the economic inequalities of the population of Bogotá (see Table 8). Also, Gaviria (2010) pointed out that the decline in fertility rates not only occurred in urban areas but also in rural areas although with a lag (it reduced from 8 children per woman in 1965 to 4.3 children in 1995)⁴¹, and that it was concentrated in women over 25 years of age.⁴² In addition, Miller (2010) called attention to the benefits of family planning by allowing young women to postpone their first birth; teenagers with access to family planning were more likely to have more education and a formal job.

Table 8

Global fertility rate and infant mortality rate according to poverty condition, Bogotá 1985

Poverty condition	Global fertility rate (children / woman)	Infant mortality rate (‰)
Not poor	1.9	28.0
Poor	3.6	37.7
In misery	4.3	48.1
Total Bogotá	2.5	31.3

Source: Taken from Dureau and Flórez (1996, p. 27). Authors' translation from Spanish.

⁴¹ Flórez and Hogan (1990) indicated that the reduction in mortality and fertility in rural areas occurred about twelve years later than in urban areas.

⁴² Gaviria (2010) also indicated that, for women under 20 years of age, the fertility rate had increased since the 1980s, as it did in other Latin American Countries, with the detrimental effects that teenage pregnancy have on health and nutrition of the baby, social mobility, alleviation of poverty, on school dropouts, among others.

If we compare the fertility rate of Colombia with that of other countries, we find, for example, that Chile and Brazil had lower rates in 1967 (4.5 and 5.5, respectively), whereas Mexico had a higher rate (6.8). By the end of the period, these countries had managed to reduce fertility rates (Table 2).

Up to the beginning of this period, the government had not adopted a public policy on birth control so as not to get into conflict with the Catholic Church and the traditional political parties. Hence, the introduction of birth control in the country was due to *Profamilia* (*Asociación Probienestar de la Familia Colombiana*), a private non-profit organization specialized in sexual and reproductive health. The advent of *Profamilia* received the fierce opposition of the Church, for being an idea contrary to its doctrine. When *Profamilia* was founded in 1965, the Colombian population growth rate was about 3%, which was reflected in the fact that each woman had an average of 6.6 children. If this trend had continued, it would have meant a context of very complex social tensions. *Profamilia's* programs contributed to reducing the fertility rate. In 1970, it was possible to carry out tubal ligation safely, and also in 1971, the first vasectomy was performed in the country.

The use of contraception began timidly in the mid-1960s among the upper classes of the main cities, spreading, later on, to rural towns and regions. Its use increased from 27% of women of childbearing age in 1964 to 72% in 1995 (Flórez, 2000). According to Palacios and Safford, (2002), the educational level of women was the most determining variable to explain the acceptance of modern methods of birth control. Also, in the 1970s, Colombia was the Latin American country with the highest proportion of women who employed them within family planning programs. The use of the contraceptive pill increased women's chances of entering secondary and higher education and formal and informal labor markets. All this had an impact on the size of families, the care and support of children, the greater social acceptance and legal equality of single or abandoned mothers and of children outside of marriage (Palacios and Safford, 2002; Miller, 2010). Goldin and Katz (2000, 2002) indicated that, in the United States, the use of contraceptive pills contributed not only to reduce fertility but also to delay marriage, which triggered a social change by increasing the age at first marriage. Moreover, these authors pointed out that change in women's economic status did

not originate from their increased participation in the labor market but instead from their rise in occupations and as career women.⁴³

Simultaneously with the demographic transition, Colombia experienced a rapid epidemiological transition. The latter was accompanied by a systematic reduction in child mortality (Graph 12). The infant mortality rate during the first year of life reduced from 95.7 deaths per 1000 live births for males and 77.2 for females in 1966 to 46.2 for males and 36.4 for females in 1985. Table 3 presents infant mortality rates for children under five years of age per 1000 live births for a selection of countries; it can be shown that Colombia had improved considerably, although this rate was still higher than in some developed countries.

The relatively high level of mortality, particularly in children, was mainly due to malnutrition, overcrowding, and illiteracy, which increased the risks of contracting infectious and parasitic diseases such as tuberculosis, typhoid, and malaria. The decline in mortality was achieved with the provision of drinking water, better housing, the expansion of public vaccination services, preventive and curative medicine, and the spread of antibiotics (Palacios and Safford, 2002). Specifically, until the end of the 1960s, the main causes of death in children under one year of age were intestinal infectious diseases; conditions originating in the perinatal period; acute respiratory infections; bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma, and vaccine-preventable diseases. In the early seventies, vitamin deficiency (*avitaminosis*), other deficiency states, and anemias began to gain importance, to the detriment of immune-preventable diseases. Towards the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, deaths from bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma began to lose importance compared to congenital anomalies (Jiménez-Peña, 2014).

In 1967, the report from the Sixth Conference of the Americas on malnutrition found that malnutrition was present in Colombia and that it had to be addressed by the government

⁴³ It is worth mentioning the case of Japan, a country that had an important reduction in fertility and an increase in the age at first marriage since the beginning of the 1970s. However, the economic status of women did not change much; cultural factors affected the education and employment of Japanese women. In this country, contraceptive pills were not legally available until 1999, and women had to rely on traditional methods of birth control and on abortions to avoid pregnancies (see for example, Birdsall and Chester, 1987; Goldin and Katz (2000, 2002).

(Restrepo-Yepes, 2011). In order to solve the evident problems, during the 1960s and 1970s, the national government, with the help of international organizations and private entities, decided to include the supply of food supplements to vulnerable groups of the population (children, pregnant or lactating women, and elderly people) within this policy.⁴⁴ According to Fajardo (2005) the most outstanding event in the second half of the 20th century, in the field of nutrition in Colombia, was the publication of the food and nutrition plan (March 5, 1975), which was adopted as an essential element of the government development strategy. Its implementation began in July 1976, through an integrated set of programs specifically designed to combat malnutrition among the lowest-income groups.

Furthermore, in mid-1969, the Ministry of Health began the maternal and child care program, which combined basic education activities in health and nutrition, promoted the demand for services and offered some minimum health protection to children, and pregnant and lactating mothers through the use of paramedical personnel. Later on, in 1982, Law 21 modified the family allowance regime established since 1957 (Decree 118), by authorizing its payment either in cash, kind, or services to middle and low-income workers. The primary objective of this reform was to assist the workers in alleviating the financial burdens of supporting a family.

The epidemiological transition was also accompanied by an increase in life expectancy at birth. For women, life expectancy increased from 59.8 years in 1966 to 70.2 in 1985, and for men from 56.2 years to 63.6, respectively (Graph 13). Despite the improvement, at the end of this period, Colombian female life expectancy was lower than that of countries such as Chile and Mexico. It is also important to mention that differences in years in life expectancy between females and males continued increasing, from 3.6 years in 1966 to 6.6 years in 1985 (Graph 22).

⁴⁴ For example, the Technology Research Institute devoted much of its research efforts to develop low-cost, high-nutritional-value food technologies (i.e., fortified pasta, protein soluble vegetables and precooked high lysine corn flour). Also, Dr. Sinisterra, a researcher from Universidad del Valle, developed a low-cost vegetable mixture for infant feeding (*Colombiarina*), which was later marketed through a national private company. Similarly, the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare developed a vegetable mixture, later known as *Bienestarina*, which would allow the country to partially replace the declining external food aid and even expand the coverage of nutrition programs (Fajardo, 2005).

During this period, we also observe a progressive decline in maternal mortality, from 237 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1966 to 86 in 1985 (Graph 23).⁴⁵ The decline in maternal mortality could affect women's fertility. For example, Albanesi (2013) studied, for 25 advanced and emerging economies during the twentieth century, the impact of the decline in maternal mortality on fertility and women's human capital. She found that "...a decline in maternal mortality is associated with a temporary rise in fertility and a permanent rise in women's human capital (p. 6)", and also that the "...female-male differential in education attainment grew more in those countries that experienced a sizable maternal mortality decline" (p.1).

During and after the demographic transition there were changes in marriage and fertility behaviors, since women were more educated, and some of them had entered the labor market. In both areas, urban and rural, women married later and had fewer children. However, this change was particularly noticeable in women of higher status in urban areas, since urban women were better educated, had better health care access, and more labor opportunities. Thus, their fertility was significantly lower than that of rural women (Flórez and Hogan, 1990).

The nuptiality rate reduced from 4.6 weddings per 1000 inhabitants in 1966 to 2.7 in 1985. The percentage of women marrying between 15-19 years of age reduced from 39% in 1966 to 22% by the end of the period. By that year, about 59% of women got married between 20-29 years of age (Graph 21); most men married between the ages of 20 and 29 (about 65%). Furthermore, between 1970 and 1985 the proportion of singles reduced, but not as a result of an increase in marriages. Instead, the number of cohabiting unmarried couples (common-law marriages) and divorced/separated couples increased. According to Valdés and Gomáriz (1993) the united couples went from 8% in 1970 to 13% in 1985, whereas the share of divorced/separated couples was less than 2% in 1970, it increased to 4% in 1985. Another important fact highlighted by these authors is that the percentage of divorced/separated

⁴⁵ According to Jiménez-Peña (2014, p. 221) the main causes of maternal mortality were complications from pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium, infections, bleeding, toxæmias, and abortions.

women and widowed women is greater than that of men. The former could be due to the fact that women take longer than men in finding a new partner, whereas the latter refers to the fact that women live longer than men. Valdés and Gomáriz (1993) concluded that in Colombia, as in other Latin American countries at that time, marriage rates were decreasing or remaining stable, while divorce rates were increasing steadily, especially since the 1980s.

C. Labor market

The participation of women in the labor market continued increasing during this period. It has been associated with a reduction in fertility and the educational improvement of women, as well as with a process of female labor mobility towards higher income sectors (Tenjo and Ribero, 1998). These authors also mentioned that the increase in female participation did not imply the decrease in male participation observed in other countries, since the male activity rate had also increased. Graph 24 shows that female labor participation increased considerably during this period, from 17.3 in 1964 to 40.6 in 1985. In addition, during this period, there was a move away from activities in primary sectors, such as agriculture and mining, towards manufacturing industries, commerce, finances, and services (Figure 2).

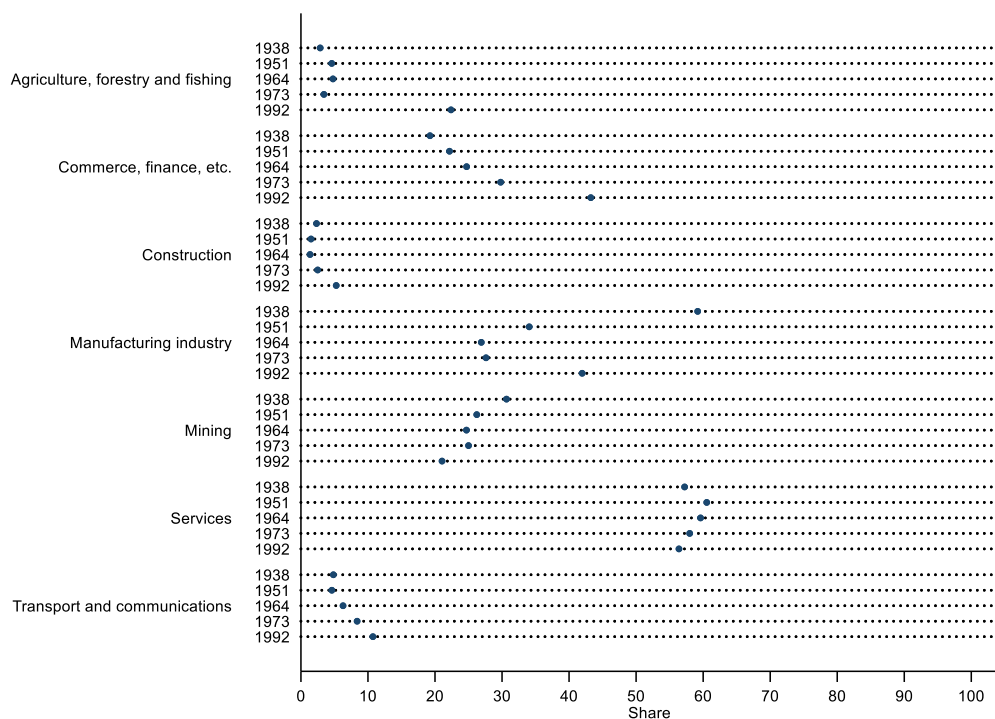
It has been documented that increased fertility reduced female labor participation during their fertile years. In fact, Bloom, Canning, Fink, and Finlay (2009, p.81) found, for a panel of 97 countries for the period 1960-2000, that each childbirth reduced labor supply by about 1.9 years per woman. Conversely, the decline in fertility, experienced during the demographic transition, increased female labor supply by approximately 8 additional years (out of a potential lifetime supply of around 45 years).

In 1973 and 1978, labor participation started to decline after 29 years of age. In 1985, participation increased until 40 years of age, and then started to decline (Graphs 34, 35, 36). These results could suggest an increase in the labor participation of married women. Magnac (1992) found that the labor participation rate of married women was 22% in 1975, 30.5% in 1980, decreased to 28.1% in 1981, and increased again in 1985 to 35.7% (Table 9). He also indicated that the increase in married women's participation was greater than that of the whole

population, which increased from 52.5% in 1981 to 57.3% in 1985. Another factor that helped to increase married women's labor market participation was the wider availability of electrical appliances (i.e., sewing machines, stoves, washing machines, refrigerators). As Olivetti and Petrongolo (2016) indicated, the technological progress in the household helped to reduce the participation gap between men and women. In addition, Albanesi and Olivetti (2016) mentioned that, in the United States, married women's participation was favored by the improvements in maternal health that together with the advances in infant feeding (i.e., the introduction of baby formula) contributed to relax the constraints on these women's labor participation.

Figure 2

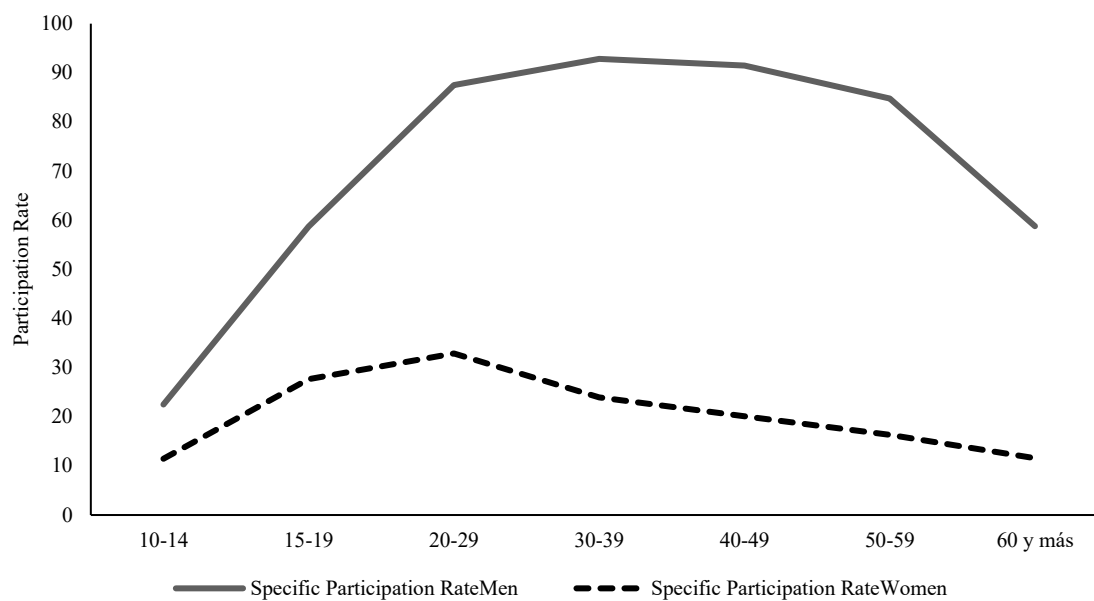
Economically active population by major industrial groups (share of women)



Source: Based on data from Mitchell (2003).

Graph 34

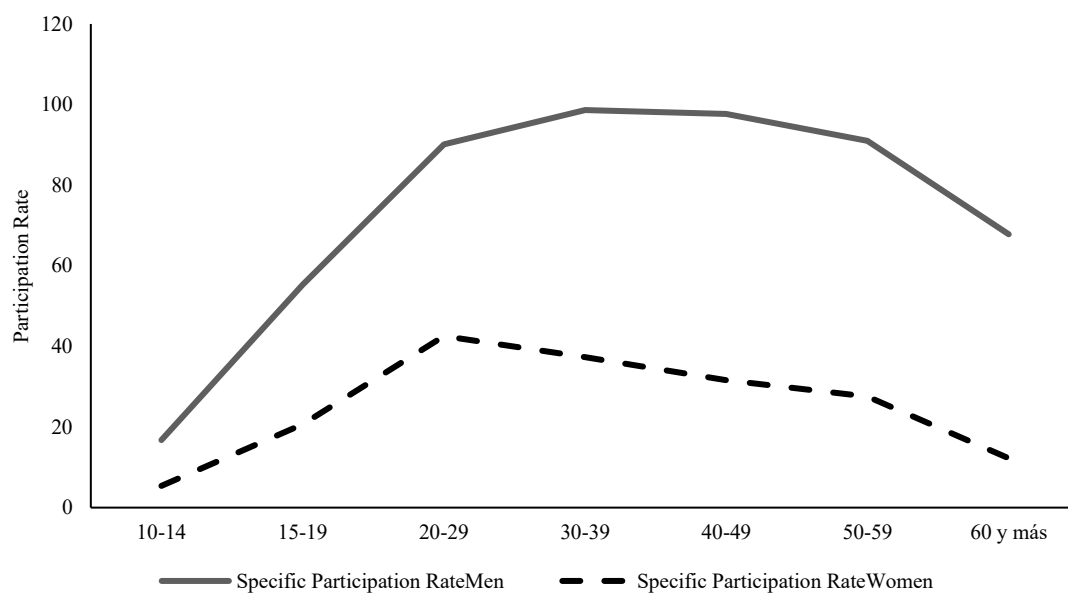
Specific participation rate by age group and sex, 1973



Source: Ocampo and Ramírez (1987).

Graph 35

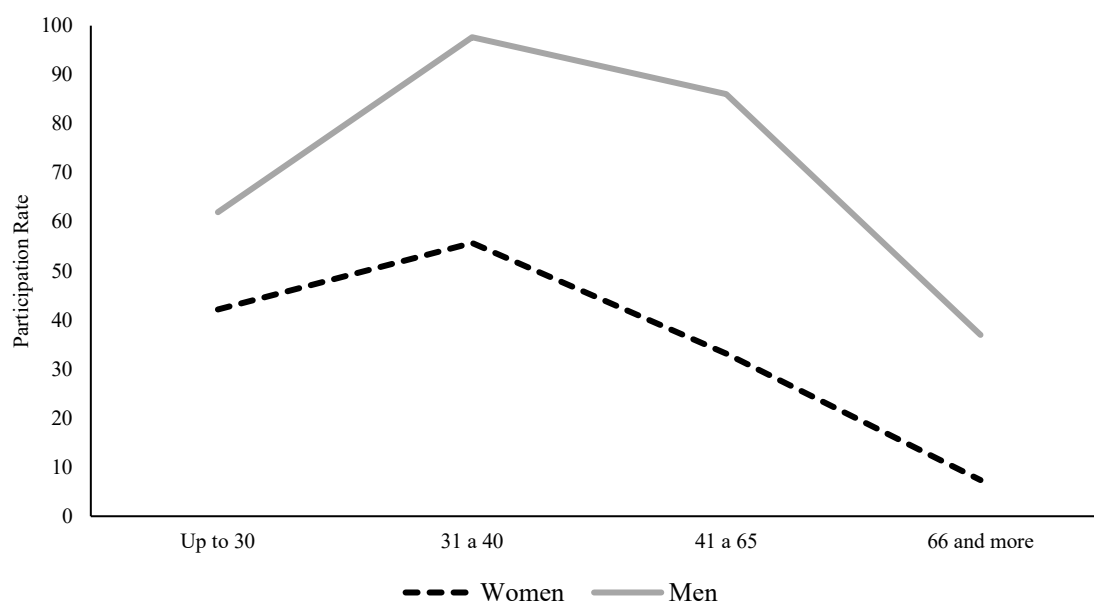
Specific participation rate by age group and sex, 1978



Source: Ocampo and Ramírez (1987).

Graph 36

Labor force participation rates by age groups and sex, 1985



Source: Grupo GAMLA Banco de la República.

Table 9
Participation rate of married women (percent)

Cities	1975	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Barranquilla	15.9	21.0	22.8	21.0	25.5	26.5	24.4
Bogotá	25.4	34.4	27.6	33.8	32.6	40.0	41.6
Medellín	17.4	28.3	25.7	25.1	26.2	26.4	29.2
Cali	19.4	35.3	29.5	30.9	30.2	32.7	33.0
Medium-sized cities*		26.5	37.8	28.6	38.1	41.1	40.7
Total	22.0	30.5	28.1	29.2	30.5	34.4	35.7

* Includes Bucaramanga, Manizales and Pasto. Note: The participation rate is calculated as the ratio of those working or currently searching for a job to the whole population.

Source: Magnac (1992, Table 7.1, p.171).

Vélez and Winter (1992) indicated that despite the significant increase in women's labor force participation, they were heavily represented in the informal sector. Another variable that affected female labor participation was her marital status, as Angulo and López de Rodríguez (1975) put it; housework and labor outside the home were still incompatible. These authors also indicated that with the increasing life expectancy and with more educational and

employment opportunities, some women were able to have some work experience before marriage.

According to the available data, in 1985, the unemployment rate for women was higher than for men (17.2% and 10.8% for women and men, respectively), whereas the occupation rate was 33.6% for females and 64.8% for males (Graphs 37 and 38). Magnac (1992) highlighted that the married women's unemployment rate, after having decreased between 1975 and 1980, grew rapidly between 1981 and 1985 from 7.5% to 15.4% (Table 10). It is worth mentioning, that 1984 saw the largest increase in both the unemployment and participation rates, which conformed with a partial recovery of the Colombian economy after the crisis. Moreover, according to Magnac (1992), during the crisis, young women withdrew from the labor force, but they reentered the market as soon as the crisis receded. Also, Tenjo, Álvarez, and Jiménez (2016) pointed out that the unemployment rate was always lower for men than for women, and that the gap between the two rates appeared to widen in times of recession, such as 1983-1984.

Table 10
Unemployment rate of married women (percent)

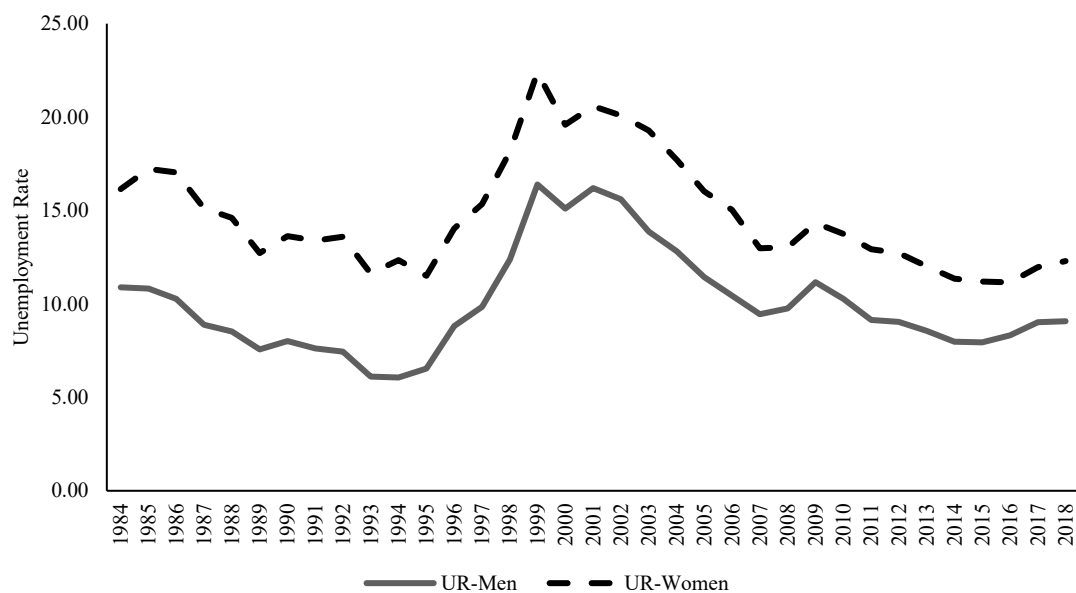
Cities	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Barranquilla	5.2	7.5	7.6	6.7	9.1	10.7
Bogotá	9.3	6.5	8.6	8.3	15.3	17.1
Medellín	12.4	8.9	11.2	16.4	17.4	14.4
Cali	5.4	8.1	11.8	8.6	11.9	16.7
Medium-sized cities*	4.5	7.7	8.0	10.0	10.5	9.8
Total	9.4	7.5	9.5	9.5	14.5	15.4

* Includes Bucaramanga, Manizales and Pasto. Note: The unemployment rate is calculated as the ratio of unemployed to participants.

Source: Taken from Magnac (1992, Table 7.1, p.171).

Graph 37

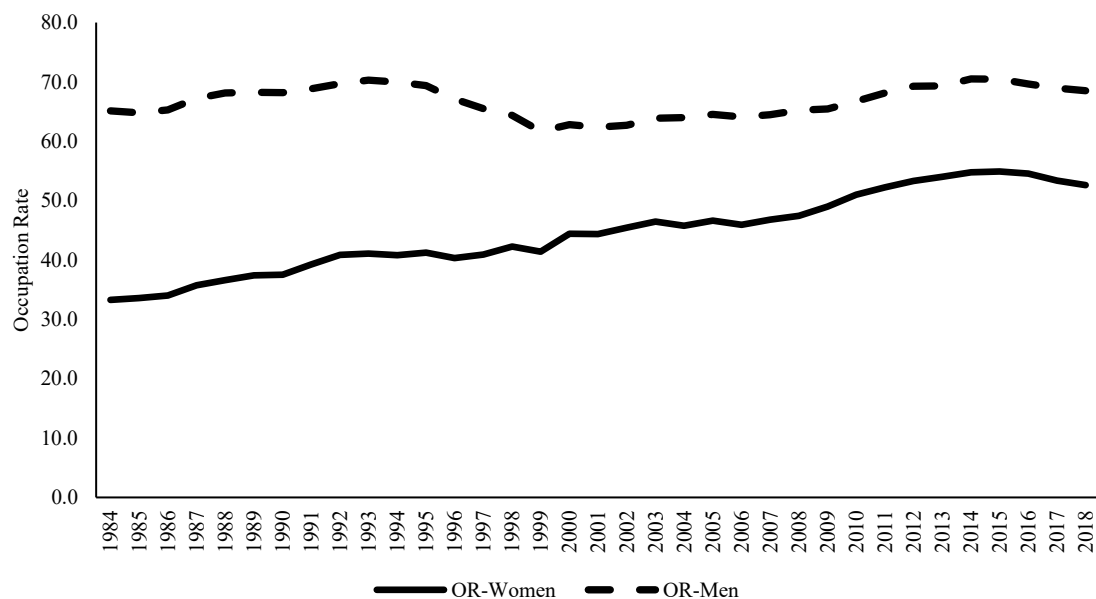
Unemployment rate



Source: Grupo GAMLA Banco de la República based on Household surveys 1984-2018; annual average, seven cities.

Graph 38

Occupation rate

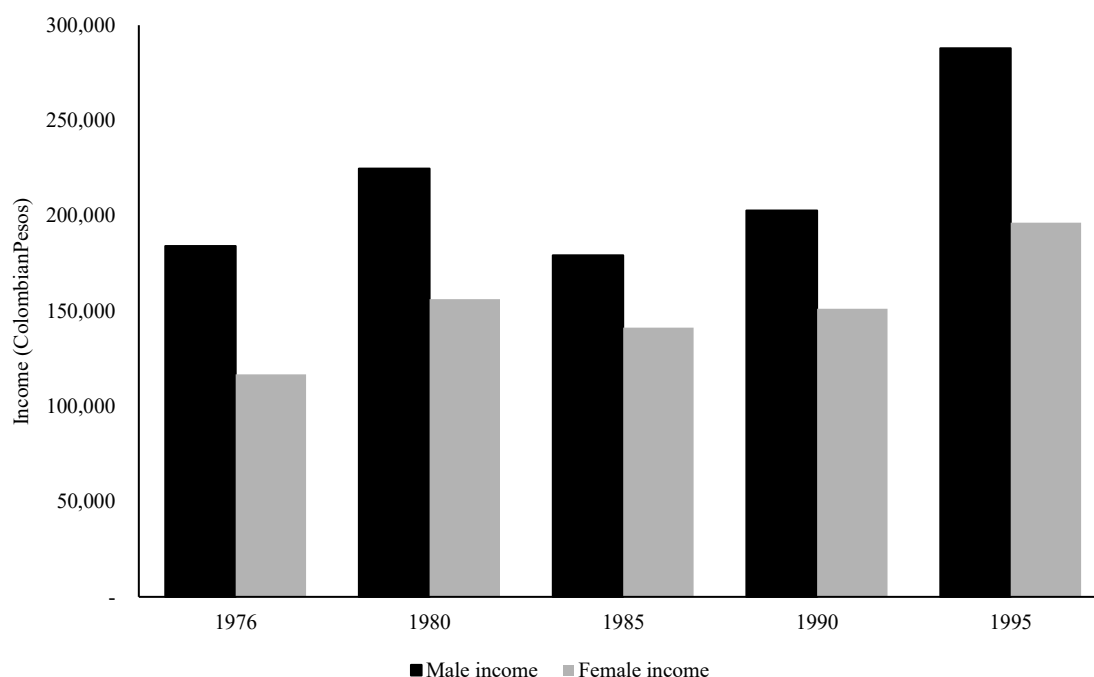


Source: Grupo GAMLA Banco de la República based on Household surveys 1984-2018; annual average, seven cities.

Regarding earnings by gender, from Ribero and Meza's (1997) data, we observed that the average earnings of women are lower than that of men throughout the period. However, there was an increase (21%), in real average wages from 1976 to 1985 for women, whereas men's average wages reduced 3% (Graph 39). Tenjo, Ribero, and Bernat (2004) indicated that the main reason why women's wages were lower than men was that women worked fewer hours. This was the result of the woman's inability to work extra hours due to their domestic work commitments.

Graph 39

Average labor income (Col\$ 1994)



Source: Based on data taken from Ribero and Meza (1997), Table 1, page 4.

Note: Labor income corresponds to the sum of monthly cash income and monthly in-kind income. In the case of women, it does not include domestic service.

D. Women's rights and political participation

The turning point for the participation of women in the political life of the country was the National Front (1958-1974). As mentioned, women were given the right to vote in Colombia in 1954 and exercised it for the first time in the 1957 Plebiscite.

According to Luna and Villarreal (1994), initially, women were excluded from representative positions, but they were given the role of training in political practices. Also, women that participated in traditional politics had two lines of action, civic-political and partisan. The former was developed around the activity of associations such as the Union of Citizens of Colombia (*Unión de Ciudadanas de Colombia*, UCC), and the Union of Democratic Women (*Unión de Mujeres Demócratas*, UMD). Both organizations, the UCC and the UMD, played a central role as a link between women and political movements; the former with the National Front, and the latter with the Communist Party. In both cases, women served the political socialization of the female population through messages, conferences, and with the materials that were published in their dissemination bodies; they also helped to shape electoral political opinion.

At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, women started to participate in union organizations such as the Professional Women's Association, the National College of Women Lawyers and the Women's Medical Association, which reflected the access of women from the middle and upper classes to traditionally male-dominated professional spaces. Also, unions, such as The Confederation of Colombian Workers, CTC, created women's committees to identify the needs of women as workers. The first National Women's Meeting was held in November 1970.⁴⁶ Similarly, in 1970 the Colombian Chapter of the World Association of Women Writers and Journalists was formed, which included journalists linked to the magazine *Mujer de América* directed by Flor Romero de Nohra.

The late 1960s were a period of social unrest. Luna and Villarreal (1994) indicated that since the mid-1960s, the political structure of the National Front began to show signs of exhaustion: peasant self-defense groups and radicalized urban sectors became guerrillas.⁴⁷ Also, the drug

⁴⁶ Women demonstrated in support of a family planning program aimed especially at young women, urged state intervention to improve their working conditions and demanded programs against female illiteracy (Luna and Villarreal, 1994).

⁴⁷ These groups originated during the government of Guillermo Leon Valencia (1962-1966). First, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) in 1964; then, the National Liberation Army (ELN) in 1965. Later on, in 1970 the April 19th Movement (M-19) (see for example, Palacios and Safford, 2002).

violence, with the marijuana wars (a prelude to the cocaine wars), burst onto the national scene in the mid-1970s, and during the 1980s, paramilitary groups appeared.

During this time, the demographic profile of the country changed from a rural country to an urban one. This period also saw the emergence of new political groups such as the Liberal Revolutionary Movement (MRL, 1960-1968) and the National People's Alliance (ANAPO, 1964-1980), which collected popular flags and demands from excluded sectors, like women, decreasing electoral apathy. Then, according to these authors, the participation of women in politics acquires interest, since politicians resorted to them to improve their electoral flow and dissident movements invited them to join their ranks. As a result of the demands from the UCC and the unions' women's committees, in 1970, under the government of Misael Pastrana, a Secretariat for Women's Affairs attached to the presidency was created.⁴⁸

It can be said that, during the sixties and seventies, the political participation of women involved mainly voluntary work as well as community work, and, as Luna and Villarreal (1994) put it, it did not mean access and distribution of powers in the political system, but a relationship that privileged subordination, without any change. Nonetheless, during this period the participation of women increased, but still, their activities were not comparable to those of men. Regarding voting, women participated with in lower share than men. Pinzón de Lewin and Rothlisberger (1977) reported electoral behavior since women were granted the right to vote until 1974 (see Table 11). The table shows that women's participation was always lower than that of men, regardless of whether the election was presidential or for public corporations. These authors concluded that the apathy of female voters was related more to her primary role as a housewife, which determined their political socialization, rather than with other factors.

⁴⁸ This secretariat, which relied on work from volunteers since it did not have a budget, operated until the mid-eighties.

Table 11
Electoral Participation During the National Front, by Sex, 1958-1974
(Percentages)

Election	Men	Women	Total
Plebiscite, 1957	81.9	55.8	68.8
Presidential			
1958	57.6	36.6	46.8
1962	43.8	25.8	34.5
1966	37.1	23.5	30.6
1970	58.3	37.0	46.0
1974	74.9	52.1	63.5
Average	54.0	36.6	45.3
Chamber of representatives			
1958	67.3	44.5	55.6
1960	48.3	23.8	35.7
1962	50.6	31.0	40.5
1964	35.1	20.7	27.7
1966	41.0	26.5	38.5
1968	34.5	20.4	30.6
1970	57.0	37.3	46.5
1972	46.3	31.2	38.7
1974	76.7	54.3	70.5
Average	46.0	34.0	40.0
General average	49.7	36.3	42.5

Source: Taken from Pinzón de Lewin and Rothlisberger (1977), Table 10, p.52.

As a result of their participation in the electoral process, women became the object of the election and so became part of the legislative corporations. This was an indicator of how their active participation in the political process was during the earlier part of this period. Table 12 shows the percentage of women elected to public corporations during the National Front years. It can be seen that the participation of women was low. Pinzón de Lewin and Rothlisberger (1977) pointed out that, during this period, their representation was no more than two women in the Senate and four in the Chamber of Representatives, although it was higher in the Assemblies (8 on average) and the Municipal Councils (6 on average). These authors concluded that the women who participated in legislative bodies during the National Front belonged to the upper classes and had family ties with political leaders.

Table 12
Female Participation in Public Corporations by Years of Election *, 1958-1974
(Percentages)

Election year	Corporation					
	Senate	Chamber of representatives	of Assemblies	Intendencial councils**	Municipal councils	Total
1958	1.25	5.41	9.35	n.a	n.a	n.a
1960	1.25	2.64	5.47	n.a	n.a	n.a
1962	1.02	4.35	8.73	0.00	4.65	5.25
1964	1.02	4.89	6.14	3.12	5.88	5.76
1966	3.77	3.68	1.12	0.00	6.78	6.85
1968	3.77	3.92	8.21	0.00	6.70	6.67
1970	2.54	4.29	8.11	9.40	6.00	6.11
1972	2.54	4.29	11.82	6.06	8.14	8.14
1974	0.90	6.42	14.37	7.89	8.69	8.77
Average 1958-1974	2.01	4.43	8.15	3.78	6.69	6.79

Source: Taken from Pinzón de Lewin and Rothlisberger (1977), Table 17, p.59.

n.a: not available.

* Corresponds to women over the total number of members.

** Intendencia was a territorial subdivision of Colombia, with a status similar to that of Departments, but with a different administrative regime. The maximum authority of these territories was the intendant and the Intendencial council.

Women continued participating in politics; their participation increased, although it was still very low. The share of women in Congress was 4.4% in the House of Representatives and 2.2% in the Senate (Graphs 28 and 29), and the share of female ministers was negligible (Graph 30). During this period, women were appointed ministers: in 1974, María Elena de Crovo (Minister of Labor and Social Security, 1974-1976); in 1976, Sara Ordoñez de Londoño (Minister of Communications, 1976-1978); in 1981, Maristella Sanín de Aldana (Minister of Labor and Social Security, 1981-1982); in 1982, Noemí Sanín Posada (Minister of Communications, 1982-1986); in 1984, Doris Eder de Zambrano (Minister of Education, 1984-1985) who was succeeded in office by Liliam Suárez Melo (1985-1986). Moreover, during the presidential elections of 1974 and 1978, for the first time in the history of Colombia, there were women candidates: María Eugenia Rojas in 1974, and Luz del Socorro Ramírez and Regina Betancourt de Liska in 1978.

During this period, there were some advances in women's rights. In December 1974, the civil code was modified, and equal rights and obligations were granted to women and men (Decree 2820 of 1974). In 1976, Law 1 established the divorce in civil marriages and regulated the separation of bodies and property in civil and canonical marriages. Also, in 1981, Law 51

ratified the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1979.

V. Moving forward: still a lot to catch up, 1985 to present

During this period, GDP per capita grew continuously, almost doubled between 1985 and 2017. This increase was interrupted by the 1999 economic crisis, but from the decade of 2000, continuous growth was recorded, favored by the boom in raw material prices (Graph 31). This growth contributed to the reduction in the poverty rates of the population and the improvement in the living conditions of Colombian households (Gaviria, 2010). It is worth highlighting the steady increase in female enrollment in higher education, the reduction in fertility rates, and mortality rates (maternal and infant). Although a decline in the ratio of female to male participation is observed in this period, a gap of about 10 percentage points has persisted in the last twenty years. In addition, there still persists a wage gap. Finally, progress in women's political empowerment has been made, although there is still a long way to go.

A. Education

Regarding primary and secondary education, it is important to mention that at this stage the country strengthened fiscal decentralization, which contributed to achieving universal primary education and increasing enrollment in secondary education. The Colombian educational system was basically centralized from 1975 to 1987. During the eighties, various measures were taken to decentralize education. For instance, in 1987, the administration of the school's infrastructure was transferred to the municipalities and in 1989, Law 29 delegated the appointment of teachers to local mayors. New measures were taken during the 1990s, especially the 1991-Constitutional Reform, which increased the transfer of resources and responsibilities from the national government to municipalities and departments to provide education at the local level.

The educational system that resulted from the new Political Constitution had two main elements. The first element was aimed at providing more autonomy to schools to manage education decisions and improve the quality of the sector (Law 115 of 1994), and the second defined the requirements to transfer the management of human, physical and financial resources to local authorities (Law 60 of 1993). The decentralization process had a positive effect on enrollment but not on the quality of education. According to Melo-Becerra (2012), enrollment is an observable variable that could generate more political dividends than the students' academic performance. Furthermore, regional authorities could be more committed to enrollment, since the Constitution explicitly defined that one of the aims of decentralization was to achieve universal coverage. Decentralization favored the enrollment of boys and girls equally. Overall, in this stage, an important reduction in gender inequalities in basic and secondary education was observed (Graphs 3 and 4). Furthermore, in Colombia, “women reversed the education gap and now have higher completion rates than men for primary and secondary education” (World Bank, 2012, pp. 12). In an international context, during this stage, Colombia converges in terms of enrollment in primary and secondary education compared to developed countries (Graphs 7 and 8).

Despite gains in enrollment, there is still a great heterogeneity in the quality of basic and secondary education across the country's public and private schools (Iregui, Melo, Ramos, 2010). This heterogeneity affects the likelihood of a large number of girls to improve their quality of life, considering that the benefits of education in terms of child survival, fertility, and female empowerment highly depend on the quality of education that the girls receive (Kaffenberger et al., 2018). Thus, as suggested by Evans, Akmal and Jakiela (2020) “Even as the world seeks to close the remaining gaps in girls’ access to education, it will have to consider how to ensure that education is worth girls’ time” (p. 19). For example, in Colombia, the performance of girls in the ICFES (2020) test was the most deficient among all participants. Colombia had the highest gap in mathematics in favor of boys, and in language, girls did not outperform boys like in other countries.

Regarding higher education, although progress has been made in enrollment rates over this stage, total enrollment is still low. Despite the efforts of different governments to increase access to this level of education, the enrollment rate barely rose from 8.9% in 1980 to 13.4% in 1990. However, the gross enrollment increased at a higher rate between 2000 and 2017, rising from 24.0% to 52.8%, respectively. It is worth noting that much of the recent increase in enrollment stems from the expansion of places in technical and technological education. This increase reflects the preferences of higher education policy during the first decade of the twenty-first century that gave priority to technical and technological education. From an international perspective, the enrollment is still low compared to developed countries such as the United States, Finland, Australia, Norway, and to some Latin American countries like Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, where enrollment rates are above 60%.

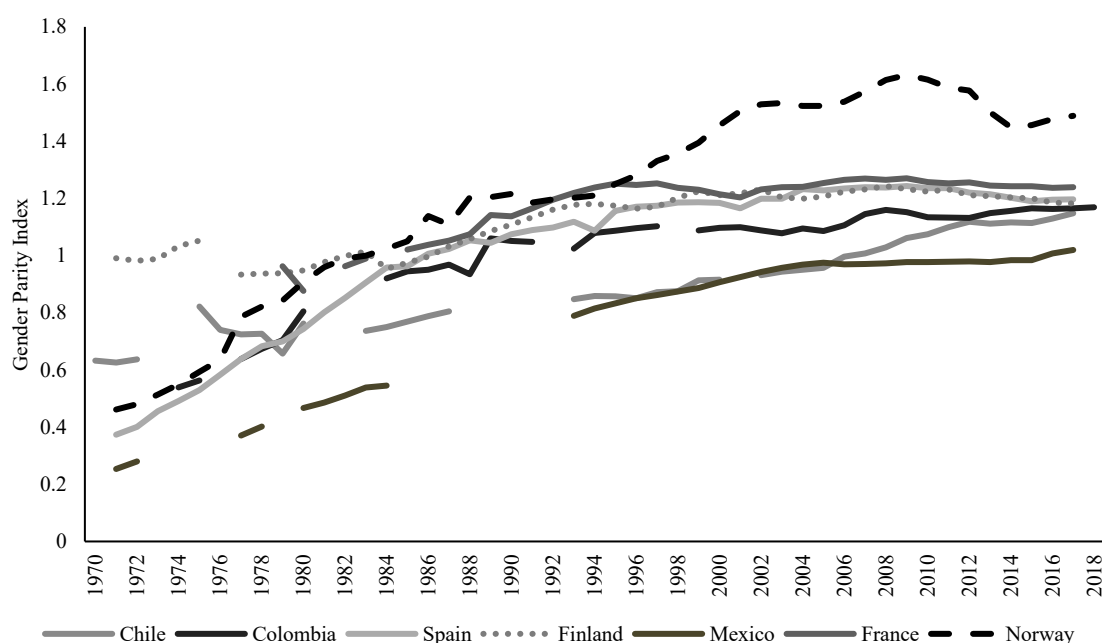
A significant increase in the enrollment of women is observed during this period. Indeed, in 1986 for every 10,000 women, 130 attended higher education; this indicator rose to 230 in 2015. It is also interesting to note that during this period, the share of females enrolled in higher education overcomes the number of males, giving a boost to the women's access to higher education (Graph 14). Thus, as remarked by the World Bank (2012) and Bertocchi and Bozzano (2019), an inverse bias is emerging in higher education in favor of women, whose enrollment rates have been exceeding those of men. Although in an international context the rate of total enrollment in higher education is still low, Colombia's gender parity index was very close to countries like Spain and Finland (Graph 40).

During this period, the enrollment in higher education was favored by the measures defined in the 1991-Constitution that established the freedom of teaching and recognized that education was a right and a public service that should be provided by the government or by private institutions. Later, Law 30 of 1992 established the principles and goals of the system, as well as the rules on budget management and public institutions, guaranteeing the exercise of university autonomy. Regarding the financing of public universities, this Law increased contributions from the National government budget and the student loan options as well as grants for state priority programs. During the 2000s, technical and technological education were strengthened, and educational accreditation measures were taken for all higher

education institutions, for which an Intersectoral Committee for Quality Assurance was created (*Comisión Intersectorial para el Aseguramiento de la Calidad*). Additionally, a set of information systems was established to contribute to the knowledge and decision making in the sector (Melo-Becerra, Ramos-Forero and Hernández-Santamaría, 2017).

Graph 40

Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Gross Enrollment Ratio in Tertiary Education



Source: World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files.

Note: GPI calculated as the ratio of women to men enrolled at the tertiary level in public and private schools.

Although there are still male-dominated careers and professions, at this stage, there is an increase in the enrollment of women in previously male-dominated areas, as well as a decrease in enrollment in careers that have historically been highly feminized. For instance, there is a significant increase in the share of women in careers like Medicine, Law, and Engineering (Graph 17). This trend has also been observed in other countries. In the United States, since the 1970s, an increase in the fraction of female students in Law, Medicine, Dentistry, Business Administration, Veterinary Medicine, Optometry, and Pharmacy has been observed. The greater proportion of women in these careers favors female labor participation, which together with the anti-discrimination laws that the governments established in different countries, contributed to improving the labor returns of women

(Goldin 2006). Nevertheless, as suggested by Bertocchi and Bozzano (2019), women continue at disadvantage, considering their apparent self-selection outside of the most lucrative fields of study in STEM and Economics.

The increase in the share of women in higher education has great benefits on several fronts. Indeed, several studies have found that progress in women's education is linked with improvements in household income, labor participation, women's health, and the shift in preferences from child quantity to quality (see for example, Bertocchi and Bozzano, 2019; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004; World Bank, 2012). In Colombia, the increase in university enrollment has been reflected in the participation of women in the labor market, as explained later on.

Lastly, according to the demography and health survey (2015), although women continue to make progress in improving their educational level, the median years of education barely reach ten years, remaining below international standards. Furthermore, large socioeconomic inequalities persist in the educational level for both women and men: the percentages that reach the highest level of education are increasing with the wealth quintile; the percentage of women in the highest quintile achieving higher education is nine times greater than that of the lowest quintile, and in the case of men this gap is ten times. The levels of non-attendance or abandonment of the educational system by young women and men are high, which are exacerbated at the end of secondary school. Pregnancy is a major cause of dropping out of school that weighs more heavily for young women than for men.

B. Demographic indicators

The improvement of women's education contributed to the reduction of fertility rates over time. During this period, this rate dropped from more than three children per woman in 1986 to less than two in 2015 (Graph 11). As studied by Stanfors (2003), in the context of the structural change observed during the 20th century, women chose different strategies, throughout their life cycle in terms of education, career, and fertility, contributing to the demographic change in the country. As suggested by Baizán and Camps (2005), the decrease

in fertility rates and the role of educated mothers had a positive intergenerational effect in terms of higher levels of education for their children as well as in demographic changes.

According to the report of the *Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud* (Profamilia, 2015), in Colombia, the fertility rate for urban areas was 1.8 children per woman, below the replacement rate. A downward trend in adolescent fertility was also found. Despite the low fertility level achieved in this period, the national average hides large differentials by geographic and socioeconomic groups. Indeed, fertility is higher in rural areas, in less developed regions, in lower wealth quintiles, and in women with lower levels of education. The widest social differentials are observed by educational level, with a lag of approximately 35 years in the decline in fertility among the most and least educated women. According to the *Encuesta Nacional de Demografía y Salud* (Profamilia, 2015), while in 2015 the most educated women have fertility levels below the replacement rate, 1.6 children per woman; those without education have similar fertility rates to those of the country in the early 1980s, 3.9 offspring. Geographical differences are striking, suggesting a lag of around 43 years in the decline in fertility among departments with lower and higher rates. For instance, Caldas had a fertility rate of 1.3 children, while Vaupés resembles the fertility rate of the country in 1972, 4.6 children per woman.

Regarding life expectancy at birth, it increases during this period for both men and women. However, interpersonal violence remains the leading cause of premature death. As observed in Graph 22, during the period 1985-1995, an increase in the difference between the life expectancy at birth of women and men is observed, mainly explained by the violence associated with drug trafficking that the country experienced in this period, which significantly increased the number of male homicides. According to Gaviria (2010), drug trafficking increased violence in several ways, which produced, in little more than a decade, an unprecedented criminal epidemic in the world that profoundly transformed the Colombian society. As a result of violence, female-headed households increased rapidly during this period. Many young men dropped out of school, joined illegal groups increasing the risky behaviors associated with their activities. In turn, many women, anticipating the impossibility of long-term relationships, chose to advance motherhood or renounce to stable unions.

Bertocchi and Bozzano (2019), based on a historical literature review, summarize the channels through which education affects women's fertility. For example, they stand out that education can reduce the desired number of children, as education puts women in touch with "more liberal norms" and gives them greater opportunities for participation in the workforce, increasing the opportunity cost of reducing labor participation. Furthermore, the delay in the age of marriage due to the longer time that women stay in schools also plays an important role in reducing the fertility rate. The age of marriage could be used as an indicator of female autonomy, considering that married women often leave the labor market to take care of their home (Diebolt and Perrin, 2013; Baten and de Pleijt, 2019). It is worth noting that in Colombia, the marriage rates fell significantly during this period. Although between 1990 and 2007 this rate rose slightly compared to the rates recorded in the late 1960s and early 1970s, from 2007, the marriage rate fell significantly, and in 2013 was close to 1 per 1000 inhabitants (Graph 19). Edlund and Pande (2002) showed that in the face of reduced fertility and the availability of contraceptive methods, the price of having premarital sexual relations decreases because there is no need to assume the cost of reproduction, therefore marriage becomes less attractive and necessary. This leads to lower marriage rates and increased labor participation of women.

Then, the increase in the number of marriages since 1990 coincided with the approval of divorce (Law 25, 1992) in the country. Before the sanction of the Law, many couples chose to establish de facto marital relationships and start families. After the Law, several couples decided to formalize their unions. As stated by Stevenson and Wolfers (2007), changes in divorce laws affect decisions about marriage, cohabiting, and remarriage. Edlund and Pande (2002) argue that the introduction of divorce has a negative effect on women, explained by the wage gap and a disadvantage in the labor market. When divorcing, women's income, in general, decreases, since their working conditions are usually worse than those of men. In addition, divorced women frequently bear most of the burden, in time and money, of their children care, which further reduces their income. Conversely, divorced men could end up in a better economic position and with a reduced care burden.

Moreover, in an international context, Colombia is one of the countries with a higher percentage of single parents, 12.4% in 2010. For example, these shares were 11.7% in Argentina, 10.5% in Brazil, 9.3% in the United States, and 8.7% in Japan.⁴⁹ According to the 2018 census, there are 6 million bi-parental families, 1.9 million single mothers and only 350,000 single fathers. These figures give an indication of the heavy burden of care Colombian women face, since many of them must fully assume care without the presence of the partner.

Increasing women's education also helps to reduce child mortality and improves the level of education of the children. Besides, there are positive effects on their own health, including maternal mortality and the risk of HIV infection. Indeed, the infant mortality rate during the first year of life and the maternal mortality rate have the lowest levels during this period (Graphs 12 and 23). It is important to note that the decrease in neonatal mortality rate in the period 1990-2015 contributed to the reduction in total infant mortality rate (Profamilia, 2015).⁵⁰

It is also important to mention that several studies have modeled the relationship between long-term growth and the demographic transition from high to low fertility rates (see Galor and Weil 1996, 1999, 2000; and Bertocchi and Bozzano, 2019). These models recognize the empowerment of women in the change from the “Malthusian” era to one of sustained growth (de la Croix and Donckt 2010). These studies show that higher returns of education and the fact that women invest more in education, increase their bargaining power in the household, and the possibilities of access to the labor market. As a result, the opportunity cost of having children increases, and consequently, the fertility rate reduces (Diebolt and Perrin 2013). Besides, the postponement of marriage, as a choice of women to acquire more human capital, also reduced fertility rates. This trend is also observed in Colombia.

⁴⁹ Figures taken from Our World in Data (<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/share-of-single-parent-families>).

⁵⁰ Perinatal mortality is the result of several conditions: access to quality maternal perinatal health services; the biological, social and health characteristics of the mother; prenatal care; childbirth, and postpartum care (UNICEF, 2014).

Although the increase in educational enrollment by women at the different academic levels and the improvement of health contribute to reducing the gender inequality gaps, inequalities in job opportunities, wages, and political participation still persist in Colombia.

C. Labor market

Colombia has experienced a sharp increase in the labor participation of women, increasing from nearly 40% in 1985 to 60% in 2017 (Graph 24), closing the gap between the rates of men and women. Elías and Ñopo (2010) explain that Colombia has the steepest increase in female participation within the region, going from being the country with the lowest female labor participation in the region to having the highest rates, in last three decades. Also, recently the ratio of female participation to male participation is similar to that of developed countries (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2016).

Amador, Bernal, and Peña (2013) show evidence that the increase in female participation is driven mostly by the increase in the participation rates of married or cohabiting women, and women with low educational attainment. This increase is the result of a long-term process initiated in the late 1930's as mentioned.

Table 13 shows that the highest increase in labor participation during this period was for women between 41 to 65 years old, followed by the group of 31 to 41 years old whose rates passed from 55% and 33%, respectively, in 1985 to 65% and 85% in 2018. The group of 31 to 41 reached the highest rates of participation, with a rate of 85% for 2018. These two groups used to have very low participation rates and consistently lower than those of around 20 to 29 years old in the 1970s, which could be explained by the fact that it was not usual for married women to join the labor market in the past, reflecting changes in “marriage bars” and social norms through time.⁵¹

⁵¹ See Goldin (2006) for the case of the United States:

Table 13
Global Participation rate by sex and age groups

Year	Males					Females				
	Up to 30	31 - 40	41 - 65	Over 66	Total	Up to 30	31 - 40	41 - 65	Over 66	Total
1985	61.960	97.641	86.032	36.967	72.682	42.175	55.702	33.125	7.373	40.594
1990	63.774	97.871	86.117	34.191	74.152	44.458	61.080	36.434	6.791	43.461
1995	62.579	97.715	86.639	32.933	74.237	45.321	66.749	42.446	7.813	46.603
2000	61.473	97.097	86.907	30.195	73.967	52.420	76.789	55.145	9.125	55.208
2005	60.190	96.915	86.835	27.919	72.830	52.075	78.417	57.341	9.672	55.516
2010	61.352	97.633	89.147	31.436	74.361	54.569	82.991	63.806	13.099	59.126
2015	65.816	97.420	90.097	32.483	76.551	58.321	85.708	67.326	14.991	61.834
2018	64.015	96.749	89.271	30.884	75.332	56.575	85.027	65.753	13.604	59.956

Source: Grupo GAMLA Banco de la República based on National Household Surveys (DANE). Representative for the seven principal cities in Colombia.

Women's participation accelerated between the 1980s and 1990s, the era of drug trafficking violence, when many men were murdered. Events like war could increase the participation of women in the labor market. For example, Doepke, Hazan, and Maoz (2015) argue that World War II had a persistent effect on the female labor market, increasing the number of women employed. It is interesting to notice that during the drug trafficking violence in Colombia, the marriage rates decrease reaching a new low at the beginning of the 1990s and increasing slightly after the violence period. These two events could be explained by the shortage of men during violent times.

Calderón, Gáfaró, and Ibáñez (2011) argue that during the middle of the 1990's, when the drug trade intensified the conflict, and the violence against the civilian population increased, female participation in the labor market rose. Their study finds that, in spite of forced displacement imposed on its victims, greater economic cost, and obstacles to participate in urban labor markets, women's participation increased due to the need to compensate for their income losses. Women's skills are more commonly demanded in urban labor markets, which push women to work and participate.

Likewise, the employment rate also shows a tendency to increase from 1984 onwards, reaching about 50% at the end of the period (Graph 38), resulting in a slight improvement of

employment for women compared to men. This improvement may be due to the entry of women into traditionally male occupations, which was aided, among other factors, by changes in decisions of professional careers as shown in Graph 17 where there is a clear increase in the percentage of women studying non-traditional careers for them.⁵² Colombia has experienced a significant increase in the share of college-educated female employees from 12% in 1994 to 44% in 2010. In addition, the proportion of workers with less than secondary education dropped by more than half from 39% in 1994 to 14% in 2010 (Abadía and de la Rica, 2011).

Despite the improvement, a constant occupation gap of around 20 percentage points has been present since 2000. It is important to acknowledge that unemployment for men and women have a similar tendency with a constant difference of 5 percentage points during this period (Graph 37). Colombia is among the Latin American countries with the highest unemployment rates for women and the largest gender gaps where women have double-digit unemployment.

Research for Colombia has shown evidence that women suffer the effect of discrimination in access and permanence in formal employment due to pregnancy and care-work responsibilities (Ramírez-Bustamante, 2019). Women of reproductive age are less likely to be hired in formal employment due to the pregnancy employment protection, which more often leads to unemployment, inactivity, or transition to informality where no contributions are made (Ramírez-Bustamante, Tribín-Urbe and Vargas, 2015). For example, according to the Demography and Health Survey (2015), it is still a common practice to ask prospective candidates in the labor market for a pregnancy test. Also, dismissal during pregnancy has decreased slightly.

It should be noted that female participation reached 60% in 2009 and remains stable at that rate for years with a constant difference of 10 percentage points with that of men. The participation rate may be constant in time because there are not enough incentives to join the market. For example, the wage gap has been high for all this period, and it may give little

⁵² For the case of the United States, see Goldin (2014).

incentive to women to participate in the labor market. Galor and Weil (1996) explain that a rise in women's relative wages raises the opportunity cost of childrearing and increasing female labor supply. Therefore, a consistently large gap will not let women have enough incentives to search for a paid job. Graph 41 shows the wage gender gap controlling for sociodemographic characteristics from 2007 onwards; the gap is relatively high during this period, fluctuating between 21% and 23% for almost all of the period except for 2017 to 2019, when it fell slightly reaching 19%.⁵³

Besides Ribero and Meza (1997) argue that the gender wage gap in the expected rates of returns to education in Colombia persists due to the interruption of women's education associated with maternity. This event has a negative impact on women's accumulation of job experience.⁵⁴ Abadía and de la Rica (2011) analyzed three aspects that can affect the gender wage gap and the women's incentives to work in Colombia. Their analysis focused on changes in education, type of employment, and type of contract. The results reveal that the increase in the share of women with college education helped to reduce the gender wage gap. In addition, Olarte and Peña (2010) argue that according to the 2008 National Welfare Survey (*Encuesta de Calidad de Vida*), in Colombia there is a wage penalty for women for having children; the gender wage gap for women is around 9.4%, and the gap is bigger if the children are between 0 and 5 years old (18.4%). Additionally, the study shows maternity has a positive correlation with informality, which prevents women from contributing to the social security system or to access a paid maternity leave.⁵⁵

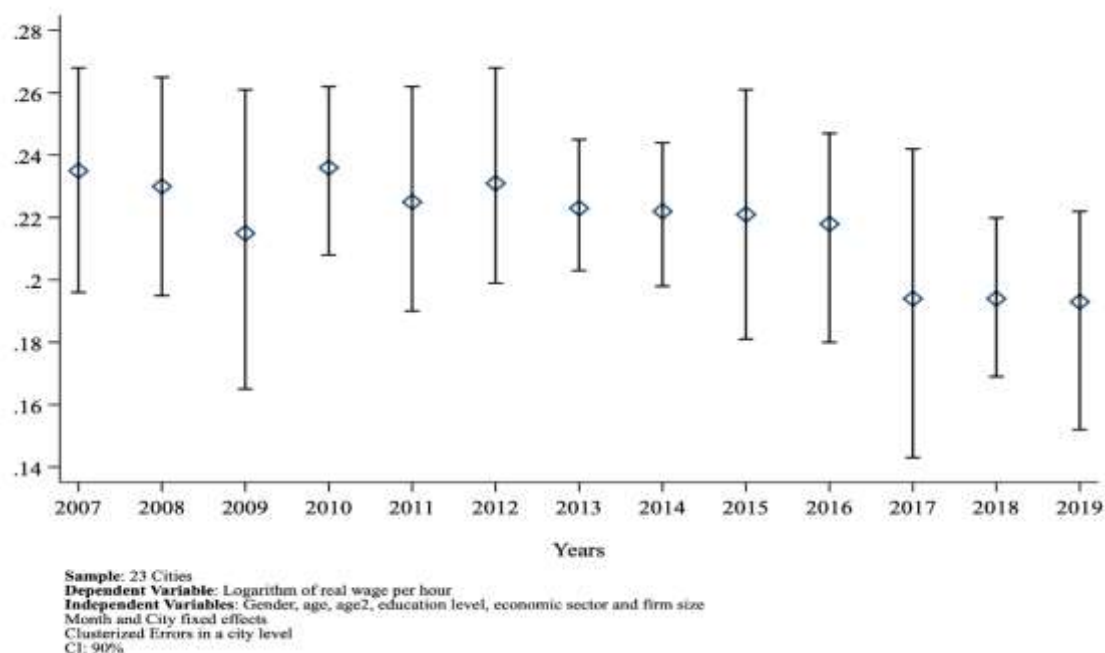
⁵³ Hoyos, Ñopo and Peña (2010) show that the gap narrowed at the beginning of the 21st century. Since 2000 the gap has remained relatively stable. Men and women in the middle of the wage distribution, which coincides with the minimum wage, are more equal than the rest, while in the extremes, the gap is much greater. Therefore, for the informal employees who earn less than the minimum wage and those who earn more the gap will be greater.

⁵⁴ For more details on this topic see for example Berry (1993); Vélez and Winter (1992); Tenjo (1993); and Magnac (1992).

⁵⁵ For more details on the motherhood penalty see Villa, Abadía, and Cárdenas (2020).

Graph 41

Wage Gender Gap



Source: Calculated by GAMLA, Banco de la República, using DANE's Household Surveys

Another factor that has prevented women from participating more in the labor market has been the burden of unpaid care to which they are exposed.⁵⁶ According to the Counting Women's Work Project for Colombia, 71% of household production is carried out by women, while 67% of market production is carried out by men. This means that an average Colombian woman spends 5 hours and 47 minutes a day in unpaid domestic and care work. Women are responsible for 63% of the care of children and older adults⁵⁷. Comparing among countries, Colombia ranks among the countries that have high participation rates (Graph 42), work longer hours (Graph 43), and have a higher ratio of time used for unpaid work (Graph 44), which causes women to be overloaded and with a double shift. The poverty of time that Colombian women experience reduces their chances of joining the labor market. Olarte and Peña (2010) find that having children in Colombia increases the time in unpaid care and

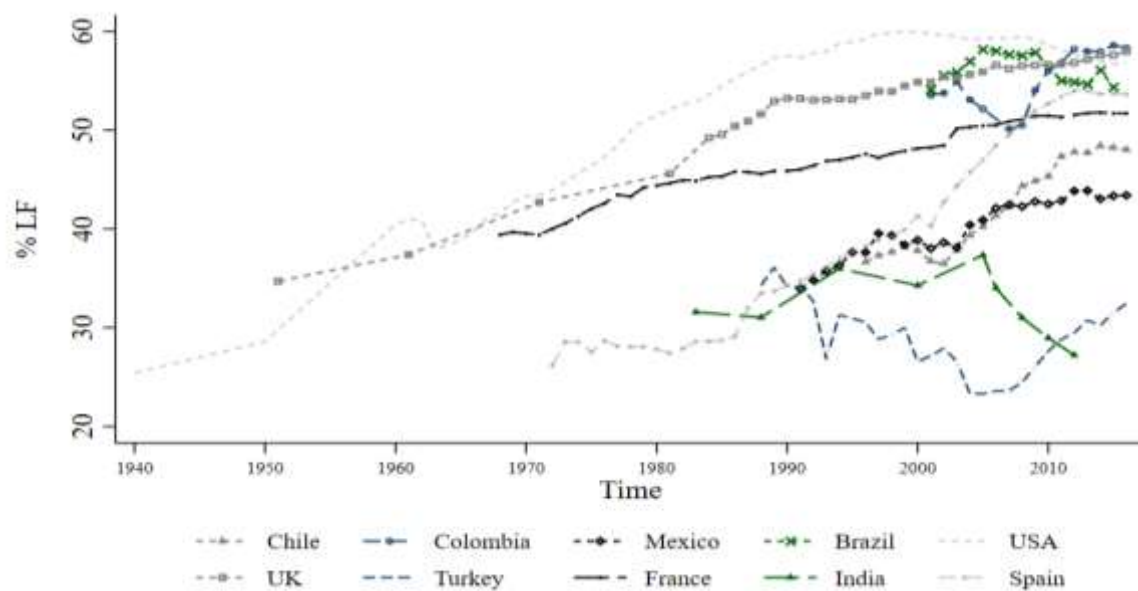
⁵⁶ For a detailed analysis of time use and gender in Colombia, see Urdinola and Tovar (2018) and <https://www.countingwomenswork.org/country-teams/columbia>

⁵⁷ See <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2019-10-07-counting-womens-work>

domestic work for women even if they already have a fulltime job. Folbre (2006) explains that the increase in participation in paid employment is often purchased at the expense of time used for care. Although, women's entrance into the labor market probably could rise the resources available for the family, the demands on women's time are increasing. Since women in Colombia devote a lot of time to unpaid care, they are going to face a restriction of time that prevents them from entering the workforce.

Graph 42

Long-Run Perspective on Female Labor Force Participation Rates

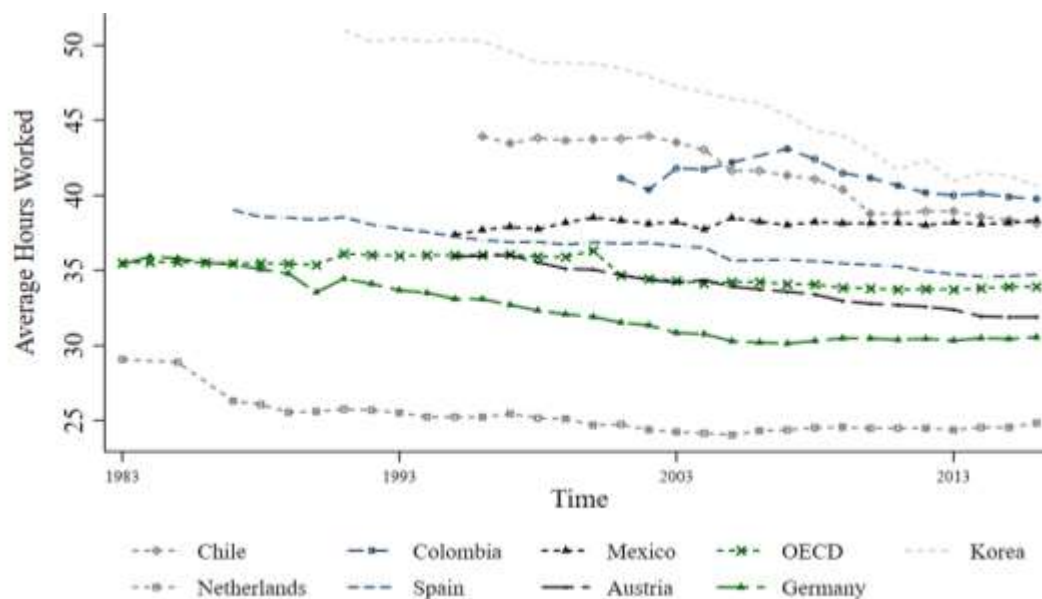


Source: Own elaboration using data collected from Our World Data.

Note: Proportion of female population age 15 and over that is economically active.

Graph 43

Average Usual Weekly Hours Worked, Women 15 years and Older

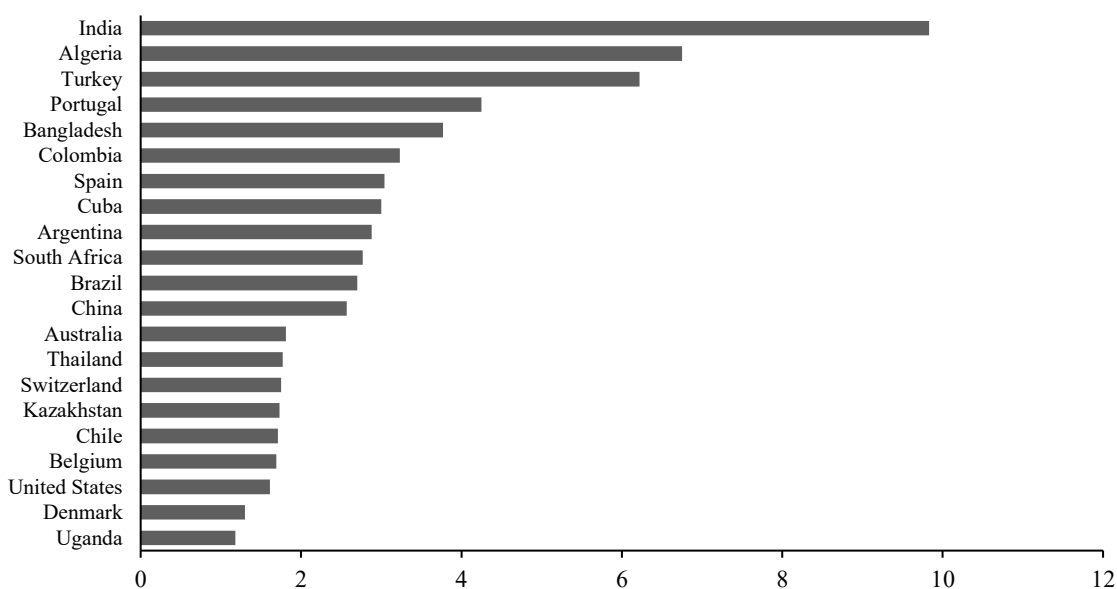


Source: Own elaboration using data collected from Our World Data using OECD Labor Force Statistics (2017)

Note: Average usual weekly hours worked on the main job, for women ages 15+. Includes part-time and full-time employment, as well as self-employment and dependent employment.

Graph 44

Female to male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care work



Source: Own elaboration using data collected from Our World Data using OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (2014).

Note: Unpaid care work refers to all unpaid services provided within a household for its members.

Women also face restrictions at the top of the labor market, the so-called "glass ceilings". For instance, corporate boards are dominated by men. According to the latest available data from the *Spencer Stuart Board Index* for 2018,⁵⁸ there have been some improvements in the composition of boards of directors, although Latina American countries occupy some of the last positions in the world ranking. In Colombia, only 12% of board members are women; however, it is one of the highest in Latin America: Brazil 10.5%, Argentina 8%, and Chile 7.4%, among others. In Europe, some countries are closed to 50%-50% composition: Norway, France, and Sweden.

To wrap up, in Colombia, women are more educated than men on average; however, this advantage has not been fully translated into equality in the labor market. There has been an improvement in all labor outcomes throughout the years, but women remain marginalized and experiencing lower participation rates, lower employment rates, and higher unemployment. These indicators have worsened as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, in May 2020, the women's unemployment rate (13 cities) rose to 27.2% compared to 13% the year before; the unemployment gender gap increased by 2 percentage points. The number of inactive women increased by 20% from May 2019 to May 2020, mainly as a result of the increase in care-work during the lockdown. Social and cultural norms determine that care activities are usually disproportionally undertaken by women, increasing the gender gap in the country (García et al., 2020). This early information indicates that the "staircase fall" is already in motion: women have started losing ground and status in employment.⁵⁹

D. Women's rights and political participation

The Political Constitution of 1991 recognized the equality of men and women and guaranteed the participation of women in politics. According to Fonseca-Galvis (2019), women in leadership and political positions help to weakening stereotypes against the presence of

⁵⁸ Taken from: <https://www.spencerstuart.com/research-and-insight/board-indexes>.

⁵⁹ The staircase fall means that the burden of care-work that falls heavily on women would make those employed in the formal sector become informal, those in the informal sector become unemployed, and the unemployed would become inactive, further relegating women towards domestic work (García et al., 2020).

women in positions of power, which could have spillover effects by becoming role models for girls and young women, and could contribute to defend women's interests.⁶⁰

Important legislation was enacted to promote women's participation during this period. For example, Law 581 of 2000, known as the "quota law", decreed that 30% of the highest decision-making positions and all other decision-making positions in the public sector have to be held by women. This law fostered the employment of women in the public sector. According to the *Departamento Administrativo de la Función Pública* (2019), in November 2019, 43% of the highest decision-making positions and 46% of all other decision-making positions were held by women. In general, the 30% quota was met in all branches of public power.

In particular, the designation of women as vice-ministers and ministers had a noticeable increase since the 1990s, compared with the previous decade where there was no presence of women in the high government (Wills, 2007). Graph 30 shows that in the Pastrana administration (1998-2002) there were four female ministers and with Álvaro Uribe Vélez, which was in power for two terms (2002-2010), there were six out of 13 ministers.⁶¹ In the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018), of the 65 ministers that took office during the eight years, only 17 were women. It was only with the current government of Ivan Duque that the proportion of women ministers reached 50% in 2018. According to the Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, by 2019 only 11 countries had parity in their cabinet, which shows that this equality achievement is unusual worldwide.⁶²

Despite the improvements, the "glass ceiling" still remains, where women are usually appointed in the Ministries that generally match gender stereotypes (Archila, 2014; Wills, 2007); specifically, those related to home care and educational or cultural activities. Until today, no women have ever been appointed as minister of finance.

⁶⁰ For more details, see also Beaman et al. (2009) and Beaman et al. (2012).

⁶¹ For a detailed analysis of this period, see Wills (2007) and Archila (2014).

⁶² Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka is United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women. Taken from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-conference-government-equality/head-of-un-women-on-drive-to-double-gender-equal-cabinets-by-2020-idUSKCN1T71EM>.

A crucial for the political participation of women was introduced in 2011. Law 1475 determined that for collegiate body elections, the lists with 5 or more candidates for popularly elected corporations must be made up of at least 30% of one of the genders. Pachón and Aroca (2017) found that the adoption of the quota in 2011 increased the percentage of female candidates at all levels of government. Nevertheless, most parties chose to compete under an open list, which allows voting directly for the candidate and not the party.

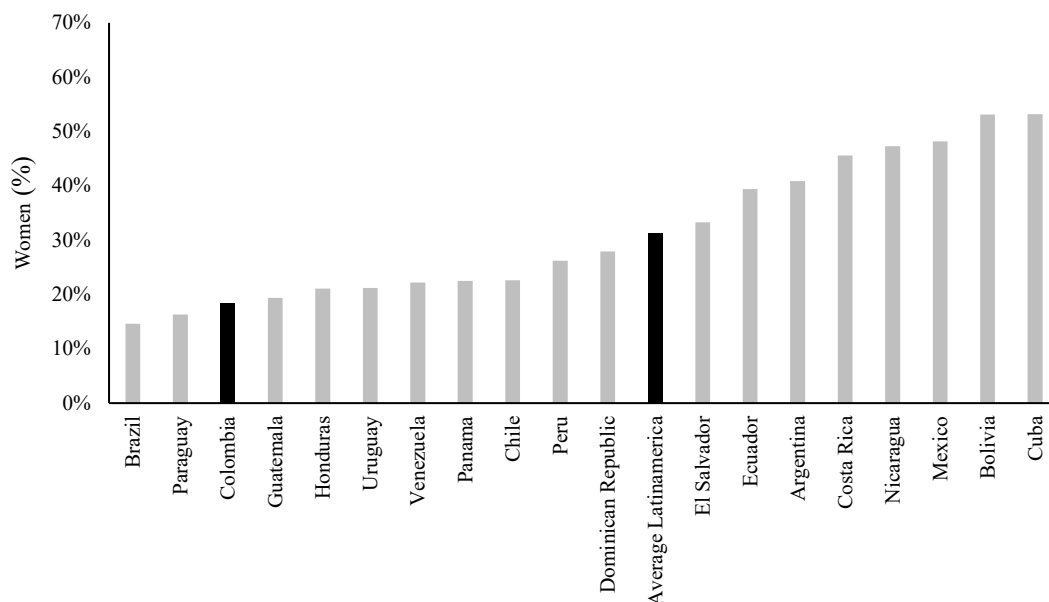
In the case of Parliament, the quota law has increased the number of candidates and the number of women elected, although the increase of the latter does not even reach the minimum quota (Graphs 28 and 29).⁶³ Indeed, the country continues to be well below many of its Latin American peers regarding the percentage of women who hold seats in the parliament (Graph 45). Schwindt-Bayer (2006) show that in Colombia and other Latin American countries, gender affects bill-initiation behavior: women sponsor more bills in issues directly affecting women including concerns such as reproductive health freedom, domestic violence protection, etc. Without them, those issues that concern more than half of the population will be ignored.

For the presidency, there have always been few female candidates (Graph 46). Between 1986 and nowadays, they fluctuate from 0 to 3, while for men candidates vary between 3 and 15 and there has never been a woman president. In some elections, no woman has been presented, as in 2006. It is worth mentioning that in the 2018-election, a first woman was elected as vice-president of the country. In local governments, the participation of women has also been low (Graph 47), reaching the highest percentage of women candidates in 2015 with 14%; but only 12.6% of the country's mayors were occupied by women. During the last local elections (2019), the percentage of female candidates for mayors was 15.2% and 12% of mayors were occupied by women. For the first time; a woman was elected mayor of Bogotá. Neither of these two instances is covered by the quota law, the low percentage of women in these positions of power urges the importance of imposing quotas, which fell short in representation compared with collegiate bodies as proposed by Fonseca-Galvis (2019).

⁶³ For more details on the results of the women elected in the Parliament see Fonseca-Galvis (2019)

Graph 45

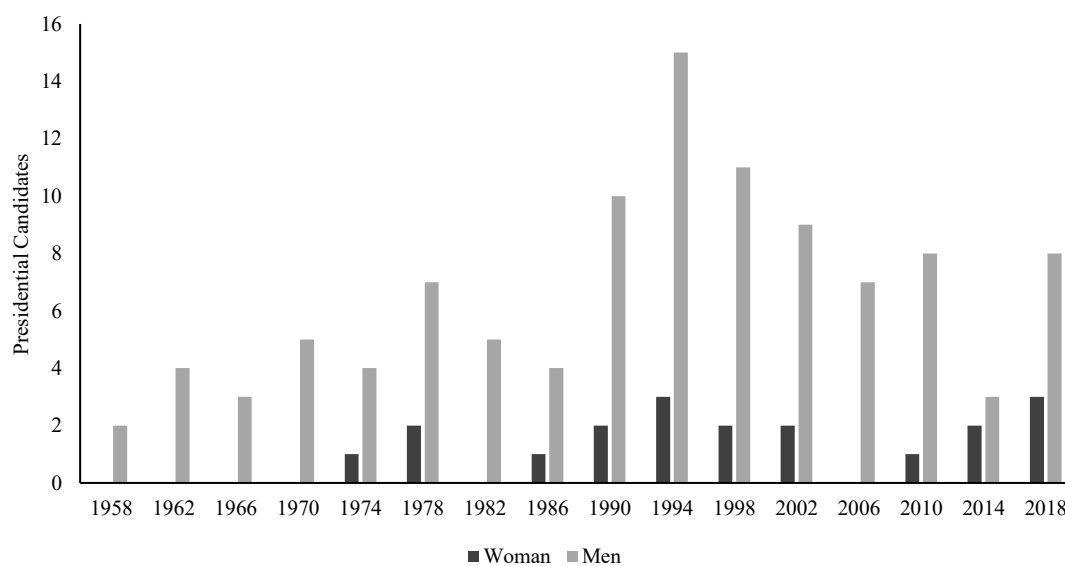
Percentage of woman who currently holds seats in the Lower Chamber of the Parliament



Source: Own elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union Open Data. Ranking as of 1st June 2020.

Graph 46

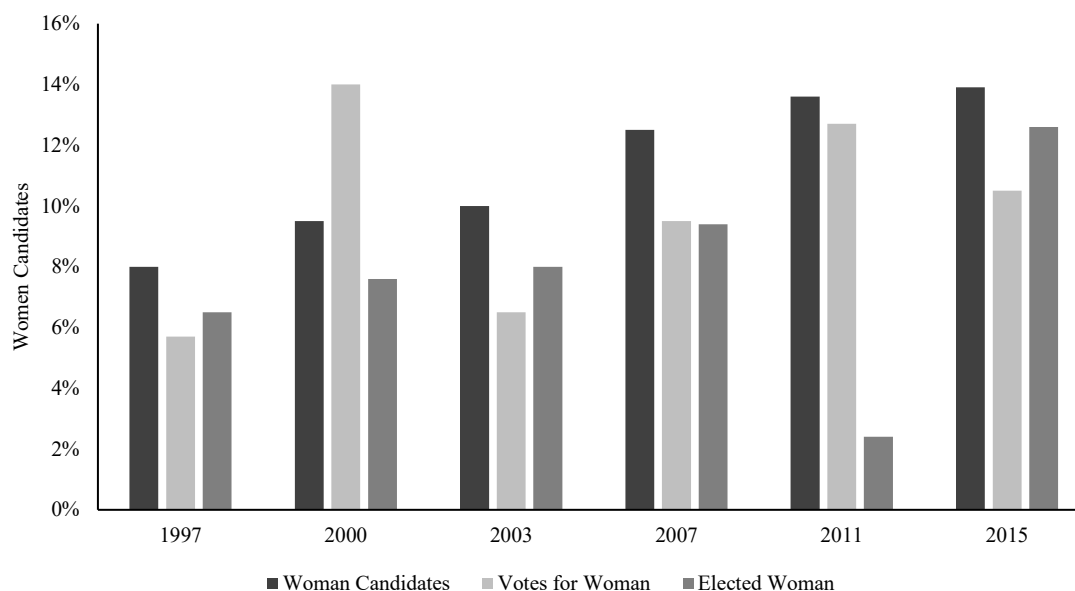
Presidential candidates: 1958-2018



Source: Taken from Fonseca-Galvis (2019)

Graph 47

Share of woman candidates, votes and candidates elected for mayor: 1977-2015



Source: Taken from Fonseca-Galvis (2019)

Although the political participation of women has improved, there are still many obstacles that prevent gender gaps from closing in holding positions of political power, such as: discrimination, lack of budget for female candidates, exclusion on the main political parties, but also a resistance of the women themselves to participate.⁶⁴ For example, Pachón, Peña, and Wills (2012) point out that occupation, income level and marital status of women could be associated with their political activism in Latin America.

Finally, it is also interesting to review the proposals of Esther et al. (2012) to foster women political participation. They argue that Colombia needs to work on two fronts: first, empowering women to acquire skills that enable them to survive in a hostile and exclusive space, and second, generating proposals for transforming the sexist political culture within political parties, Congress, Assemblies, and Councils. This could be done through training for men, leaders of political parties, campaigns, etc.

⁶⁴ The political culture survey carried out by DANE shows that in 2019 about 50% of women still believe that the main reason why women do not participate in public positions is discrimination, followed by the lack of support of political parties.

VI. Conclusions

In this document we analyzed long-run trends in the process of historical transformation of women in Colombia from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. This historical perspective allowed us to identify four major stages in this process: Between 1905 and 1935 that we called “women left behind”; then between 1936 and 1965, “first steps towards women’s empowerment”; next between 1966 and 1985, “the rise of women’s empowerment”; and from 1985 onwards, “moving forward: still a lot to catch up”. These stages are related to long-term trends in female education, labor participation, fertility rates, and gains in civil and political rights.

In general, during the period of analysis, female education increased substantially. At the beginning of the twentieth century women have little access to secondary education, let alone higher education. Furthermore, gender inequality in human capital was very large. Currently, the enrollment rates of women in both secondary and higher education exceed those of men, and even an inverse bias is emerging in favor of women. Despite the fact that enrollment rates in higher education are still low, Colombia's gender parity index is very close to countries like Spain and Finland. It is also worth mentioning that over the years women have been moving away from highly feminized areas and into previously male-dominated subjects. However, women continue to lag in STEAM fields which could be translated in lower earnings.

The increase in female enrollment in higher education has had benefits on several fronts. For example, it contributed to the reduction of fertility rates over time, from about 6.4 children per woman, during the first half of the twentieth century, to around 1.8 children per woman, less than the replacement rate, at the end of the study period, although there remain significant differences across regions and income quintiles.

The increase in education and the reduction in fertility were key factors in fostering women’s labor participation. Indeed, we observed a remarkable increase in female labor participation

in the last 60 years, from 20% in the 1960's to 60% in 2010. Since then, it has remained almost constant, perhaps due to the burden of housework and care that relies disproportionately on women. Therefore, this additional unpaid work could deter women from joining the job market or impose a double shift on them that prevents them from achieving all their potential.

We also found reductions in gender wage gaps in recent years, perhaps, in part, by the increasing educational attainment of women. However, there still persists an important wage gap of about 19%. This gap could be the result of the dominant role of women in care, the motherhood wage penalty, the still presence of gender norms that restrict female employment, discrimination, and poor labor conditions for women.

Moreover, women gained civil rights and political participation, although they still face some obstacles that prevent gender gaps from closing in holding positions of political power. For example, discrimination, lack of budget for female candidates, exclusion on the main political parties, and resistance of the women themselves to participate.

In terms of public policy, despite the improvement in women's education and the reduction in fertility rates, large gaps in the labor market still persist. Therefore, it is important to increase public awareness about the barriers associated with female employment and to eradicate gender segmentation and the wage gap in certain economic sectors as suggested by Klasen (2019). One of the main obstacles for female labor participation is the care burden, of children and the elderly. In order to overcome this limitation, it is necessary to redistribute care work within the household and to provide public and private care infrastructure to support greater female labor participation. In addition, to acknowledge the importance of unpaid care work, three interconnected dimensions have to be addressed: Recognition, reduction, and redistribution (see for example Elson, 2017). Recognition, measures the time used in household work and the need to integrate it into national statistical systems. In turn, reduction refers to lessening the care burden on women, as mentioned, by expanding access to key infrastructure for care, and investing in time and labor-saving technologies. Lastly, redistribution alludes to allocation of care work between adults in the household, the State

and other institutions. Lastly, policies such as maternity and paternity leave, and quality public care services could contribute to eliminating gender wage gaps and promoting more equal working conditions for women.

Regarding political participation, it is important to empower women to obtain the necessary political skills to succeed in the political arena. Moreover, it is worth promoting a cultural change within political parties and across all levels of power to reach a gender balance in political decision-making.

Finally, despite the gains in terms of demographic indicators and education, which have brought the national average closer to international standards, important regional differences still persist in Colombia. Therefore, it is required to implement public policies to ameliorate these regional gaps.

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