Fighting for Education in a Globalized World: The Intersection Between Education Policy and Student Activism in Colombia and France

Caroline Magdalene Albacete

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Fighting for Education in a Globalized World: The Intersection Between Education Policy and Student Activism in Colombia and France

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International Studies Senior Thesis
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Access to quality education—the fourth UN Sustainable Development Goal—is one of the challenges that many countries around the globe have confronted. The types of policies governments choose to implement to address the issue, however, have begun to shift as globalization has intensified. Students, in turn, have responded to various changes in policy by creating movements that push for or against these policies. This thesis thus aims to describe the causal relationship between those policy shifts and student reactions by comparing educational policies in France and Colombia and student protest movements in both countries. The main factors analyzed include: 1.) accessibility patterns and different aspects of the issue of accessibility to education over the past century; 2.) the types of policies the Colombian and French governments have implemented and what issues they address, with a focus on the shift toward Americanization; 3.) student protest movements, their objectives, their outcomes, and their impact; 4.) the ideological roots of the division between students and their governments; and 5.) what government response to student activism looks like and what it implies for the relationship between students and their governments. This thesis has found that the most important factor in the relationship between educational policy and student protests is globalization itself, which plays an important role in determining the types of policies governments implement that students fight, and why each party takes the stand that it does.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis grew from and attempts to answer a deceptively simple question: Is there a relationship between educational policy—specifically changes to the system—and student activism at the university level? To many a reader, the question might seem to have a very obvious answer: Yes, of course. Students from across the globe have been protesting changes to educational policy for a very long time. My proposed hypothesis, based on a comparative study between educational policy and student activism in Colombia and France, was originally exactly that: Changes to educational policy do prompt student activism.

Yet that question—indeed, that response—only spawned more, and arguably more important, questions. What kinds of policies are prompting this activism? Or are students willing to protest any sort of change? How have governments responded to this activism? Do they actually take what the students say into consideration? Can student activism shape or influence educational policy?

The more I researched, formulated, and reformulated my arguments about the topic, the more one aspect of it stood out to me: the role globalization plays in creating a dissonance between the types of educational policies the governments of the countries I was comparing—Colombia and France—intended to enact and the student perceptions of what types of policies their governments should implement. And so my question grew in length (considerably) and became: Do changes to educational policies prompt student activism, and if so, what types of policies prompt it, for what reasons do they do so, and what are the implications of those student movements, specifically for their governments? Moreover, where are the policies coming from and why does that matter?
In response to those questions, in this paper I will argue that (some) student activism is not only prompted by changes to educational policy, but is also a manifestation of the role globalization has played in creating a disconnect between the goals of greater accessibility to education (and therefore a more economically viable future for students) and the policies that governments implement that seem to in reality make education less accessible. Central to this discussion will be explorations of the various problems the idea of “accessibility to education” encompasses, the ways in which the American education model has influenced French and Colombian policy, the ideological foundations and other impacts from the student movements of the sixties, and finally the significance of the governments’ response to student activism.

In this paper I have highlighted six student movements from the late 20th into the 21st century that speak to the disconnect globalization has helped create, as well as two movements in the sixties—one in France, one in Colombia—that lay the blueprint for those later protests. While the movements of the sixties are not directly tied to any particular shift in educational policy the way the later protests are, they provided a model for and had a considerable influence on those later protests and educational policies.

In an era where education is considered to be a fundamental right—it is the 4th UN Sustainable Development Goal—and students are constantly told that the only route to economic stability is through a university degree, governments are worrying more about their standing on the international stage than addressing the educational needs and desires of their people, specifically students and professors (United Nations). With this thesis, I hope to contribute to the discussion of globalization as a double-edged sword: On the one hand, the value of education has risen and become more recognized since globalization has intensified, yet on the other hand, the way governments have internalized certain aspects of globalization and created policies
because of that (i.e. the Americanization of their education systems), has proven detrimental to their relationship with their people (specifically, again, students). As an International Studies major writing an International Studies thesis, I want to complicate one answer to the continuously posed question of: How has globalization changed the world? This in itself is an important question because the baseline is that globalization has changed the world and we need to understand in what ways it has done so in order to create better, or at least different, policies moving forward.

A final note: To be clear, I am not making an argument here either for or against privatization and the American model of education. While there are merits and faults to the system, I am not casting judgment on it; I am exploring how students perceive that it plays a role in restricting access to the already overburdened education systems in their home countries. As a student myself and a product of the American system and thus aware of its heavy debt burden, my sympathies tend to lie with the activists fighting the privatization/Americanization of their educational systems, and while I think my bias might show through at times, I have done my best to remain impartial.
THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Countries Compared

I chose to compare Colombia and France, amongst all the countries I was semi-familiar with, for two reasons. First, because both, historically, have very strong ties to the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, in turn, has played a significant role in shaping educational policy, though in Colombia that meant complete control of the system until the mid-20th century and in France that meant a total separation of Church and state by the end of the 19th century. Second, because both countries have very well-known and well-documented histories of revolutionary uprisings and movements, which have continued on into the present day. As we will see, student activism is often an important part of those movements. While I was not initially sure that my project would reveal many similar threads between the student movements in either country, I found that there are themes that tie educational reform and student activism in both countries together and present a strong argument for the impact of globalization on the two.

Measuring Student Activism

According to John C. Dugas in his article “The Origin, Impact and Demise of the 1989-1990 Colombian Student Movement: Insights from Social Movement Theory,” one of the important parts of social movement theory is what he calls the “repertoire of collective action,” within which he includes activities like “the petition, the public meeting, the mass demonstration, the strike, the march, the boycott, the barricade, the teach-in, and the urban insurrection” (Dugas). His conception of the repertoire consists of actions and activities that social movements—student or otherwise—can take to have an impact and raise awareness of their goals. Each action essentially centers around a movement’s ability to gather support from a
relatively sizable number of people. The movements that have the most impact tend to be those that have wide networks of members and supporters.

The student movements I will explore are those that have gathered substantial support—enough to be able to call upon the activities included in Dugas’ repertoire. While many of the movements have at least a little bit of a focus on education, others are also reacting to general economic stasis and factors outside of the educational realm. As such, these movements have important relationships with political groups and workers’ right organizations. Part of the students’ activism is on their behalf, while part of the reason the students get as much traction as they do is because of their partnership with these other movements.

The bottom line is that student activism is collective action, particularly when paired with other movements, intended to change something students see as unjust. The movements can be either proactive, meaning they are advocating for a new change—such as a new constitution that addresses education—reactionary, meaning they are protesting against a proposed change—such as a piece of legislation that cuts education funding—or sometimes a combination thereof.

Using Dugas’ repertoire as a guideline, I chose to focus on eight movements in Colombia and France (four in each country) that included mass actions like strikes, marches, public meetings, demonstrations, and, in one case, barricades. I tried to use a mix of proactive and reactionary movements, but I based my case studies most heavily on the amount of media attention received—both nationally and internationally—by each movement. This in turn meant that the movements I explored are based on the number of participants, duration and severity (i.e. if activists were injured or died, if there was property damage, etc.) of the actions, and government response to the protests.
My second criteria for choosing these movements was their initial goals. Although many came to encompass broader objectives—calling out police brutality, favoring the peace processes in Colombia, protesting economic stagnation, amongst other topics—the catalyst for each was a change in the educational policy. The exceptions to these criteria are the movements of the sixties, which I included because of their notoriety and their impact on later movements.

**Source Overview**

I read a mixture of online newspaper articles, journal articles, general as well as specific histories, and referred to some data banks to complete this project. The newspapers were from a collection of local (such as *The Bogotá Post*), national (such as *France24*), and international (such as *The Guardian*) perspectives, but all articles were published in English. The newspaper articles mainly pertained to more contemporary issues, such as the student protests and educational policy changes in the 21st century. The journal articles were from a variety of publications, and almost all were published in English, with the exception of a few I read in Spanish. They covered contemporary and historical events and ongoing discussions, and included analysis of those events and discussions. Most of the books I read were general histories of Colombia, which covered the nation’s history since the 19th century or focused on the guerrilla-paramilitary conflict; they were originally published or translated into English. The specific histories I read had a narrow focus on the French education system and policies, and one covered the events and impacts of May 68; all were originally published or translated into English. Finally, the data I pulled from organizations like the Organization for Cooperation and Development (OECD) helped me create some of the graphs you will see and provided some of the statistics to back up the qualitative work.
Three works about France played a significant role in my research. The first, H.D. Lewis’ *The French Education System*, provides a comprehensive overview of the French education system and various policy changes from the late 20th century to the 1980s. Lewis’ work first gave me a better understanding of the way the *baccalauréat* exam works and its ties to accessibility. The second work, Bob Moon and Anne Corbett’s *Education in France: Continuity and Change in the Mitterrand Years 1981-1995*, tackled educational policy reform in the years following Lewis’ work, and gave very useful political context for the included changes. Moon and Corbett also brought up the issue of privatization, which, once I found a parallel in the Colombian sources, became central to my thesis.

The final source of note, Daniel Singer’s *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, gives a very detailed description of the actual events that transpired in France in May 1968, including a walkthrough of the protests themselves and how they went down. Singer analyzes and provides an overview of the different communist elements and groups at play amongst workers and students, as well as evaluating the role of the communist party in France and internationally. As I examined student movements after the sixties, the tension between communist and capitalist ideologies remained present and provided a different angle through which to look at the intersection between educational policy and student activism.

Of the sources I looked at for Colombia, there are several that I must highlight here. Marco Palacios’ *Between Legitimacy and Violence: A History of Colombia, 1875-2002*, is one of the definitive sources on Colombian history, and was the work that first sparked my interest in the topic covered in this project. Although Palacios does not write solely about educational policy and student activism—his work is a fair, generally balanced portrait of Colombia’s history from a social and economic perspective—he does include an overview of both subjects woven
throughout the other topics he covers. He also includes clear explanations of activist groups’ ties to the various schools of communism, which helped formulate some of my own ideas.

Other works of note about Colombia include Alexander Fattal’s *Guerrilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia*, which presents very interesting arguments about urban student involvement in M-19 and how that affected the way the group strove for media attention in its early days. Fattal’s anthropological study ultimately focuses on the guerrilla problem and demobilization efforts, however, and less on the student element of it. Á. Acevedo Tarazona’s article about the Atcon Plan (which will be discussed more in-depth later on), published in Spanish in the journal *Revista de Estudios Sociales* is another work that greatly influenced my paper. One of the few sources I read in Spanish, it was the first to highlight the issue of privatization in higher education that has become one of the central focuses of many student movements and a cornerstone of this thesis.

Though the six sources I highlighted are far from the only works I read, they played a significant role in determining the lenses through which I would analyze the intersection between educational policy and student activism. Namely, they helped bring the issue of educational accessibility to the forefront and emphasized the importance of the communist ideology prevalent amongst students in the sixties, which helps explain the push back against the privatized American education model that is present from the sixties through to the present day.

**Limitations**

This thesis project was completed—research, writing, and editing—in just about four months, so I know without a doubt that there are sources that could have contributed to my argument that I missed. In addition, due to Covid-19 restrictions, my access to libraries was inconsistent, so I worked mostly based off of online sources. While this worked well for my
more contemporary case studies—I found most of the newspaper articles I needed online without any problems—for some of the historical context I had a little more trouble finding sources that answered my questions.

If I had time to expand this project, I would look at more primary sources, by which I mean trying to find firsthand accounts from student activists about their experiences in the movements I looked at and official statements about changes to educational policy—i.e. drafts of the proposed legislation. I did analyze a translation I found of the 1991 Colombian constitution, but I think the paper would have benefitted from analysis of other official documents instead of descriptions I found about the proposed legislation in secondary sources or newspaper articles. Given the time constraints, however, it would not have been possible for me to read and analyze such works in their original language—I read Spanish and French more slowly than I do English—even if I had been able to access them.

A note about translation: Since most of my sources were in English, I have done very little translation work in this project. The translations of note are mostly in the captions of the graphics I have included; any mistakes in those translations are mine alone. I have also included English translations of any word, title, or organization name in Spanish or French directly in the paper itself when I initially introduced the term, but otherwise refer to them by their Spanish or French names or acronyms. Again, any mistakes in those translations are mine alone.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Context

The theme of underlying communist elements in student protests, particularly in the movements of the sixties, underscored almost every piece of literature I read about student activism in Colombia and France. Given the global context—the Cold War, communist revolutions in Cuba and other nations, and the rise of influential figures like Che Guevara and Mao Zedong, each who developed their own branch of communism—it is important to understand how communist ideologies played a role in shaping how student activism manifested itself.

Student activism in the sixties developed in a highly fraught political atmosphere. It was the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the battle between capitalism and communism. Amongst student activists and many worker unions, communism was a much more appealing option than the highly individualized capitalist perspective. But communism was not monolithic: each group had its own branch to which it adhered. In Colombia and France, two particular branches joined mainstream Marxism: the Maoist take, which appealed to French students, and the Guevarist school, which gained prominence in Latin America.

The Maoist school built on the ideas Marx first espoused in his *Communist Manifesto*. Like Marxism, Maoism revolved around a revolution from the working class, but unlike Marxism, Mao’s revolution centered on the peasant poor rather than the urban proletariat. Maoism also took a stand against the imperialist leaning and exploitation of the Soviet Union, which attracted French academics who did not appreciate the USSR’s aggressive expansionist policies within Europe and its attitude toward the people under its care (Haas).³ Because of the
USSR’s policies, the French were looking for a new version of communism to make their own—since the USSR had monopolized the Leninist school, which was closer to the original Marxist model—and Maoism appeared to be the solution. Moreover, Maoism emphasized the idea of a cultural revolution that would take place in a “social sphere,” which specifically appealed to French students looking to shake up the elitism that stifled their education system; it was time for a radical change (Haas).⁴

Yet while French students did follow the Maoist ideology—and it became one of the most popular ideologies post-May 68—they made it their own. Most French students had little idea of the bloody realities of Mao’s Cultural Revolution in China. Their stance took its own course. Ron Haas, a scholar on the topic of French leftism, writes that French Maoism even differed from Maoism in the rest of Europe and the U.S.; the most apt comparison would be to the “American Black Panthers or the Puerto Rican Young Lords” (Haas).⁵

The Guevarist school of communism came out of the works of Che Guevara and his time in Cuba and Bolivia. Like Maoism, it focused on the rural poor, which mattered to many Colombians because the majority of the population lived in rural areas in the sixties. But that focus was to a much greater extent than the French Maoists. Liberation, the Guevarists argued, “would come from the countryside” because “cities represented the bastions of imperialist domination and would corrupt active revolutionaries” (Palacios).⁶ Because many of the revolutionary guerrilla groups largely worked out of the countryside, their theorizing was in part a justification for their strategy. The Guevarist school also differed from Maoist tradition in that Maoism espoused a “prolonged popular war” where guerrillas “strived to be fish in the water of large regions rather than lords of small regions” whereas Guevarists sought control of area in a more militarily focused campaign (Palacios).⁷ While Colombian students did initially push the
Guevarist school of thought, the more militarized the guerrilla groups became, the more they pulled away from that aspect of the ideology.

**My Contribution**

Most of the arguments about education systems either look at those systems in isolation or within a regional context. The French system, for example, might be compared to its European neighbors or the Colombian to its South American counterparts (Llorent-Vaquero).\(^8\) But as far as I am aware, the two have never been directly compared before. The same goes for student protest movements—Colombian movements are often in conversation with Chilean and other Latin American movements, as the French are with European movements, but almost never with one another (Bierly).\(^9\) Which is not to say that students have never protested in solidarity across the ocean, but merely that few, if any, academics have drawn the parallel.

Furthermore, if there is a conversation around the connection between educational policy reform and student activism, it is a very quiet conversation. While many scholars have tackled the direction educational policies in France or—to a much lesser extent—in Colombia have gone in over the decades, student reactions have been a footnote in those surveys (Lewis).\(^10\) Similarly, while social protests, student activism, and their impacts have been studied, the direct connection to shifting educational policies is not often, if ever, included; when reading about student activism, it is much easier to find it grouped into the more general category of social movements and tied to economic objectives (Archila Neira).\(^11\)

Finally, the role globalization plays in the connection between educational policy change and student activism is even less studied, particularly for the two countries I have chosen to compare. My hope, through this thesis, is to not only contribute to the broader conversations about globalization and its impacts, but also to focus those conversations around the issues of
accessibility to education, government action, and student reaction. While France is usually considered to be a part of the developed world and Colombia a part of the global south—and thus very different nations—there are ways in which globalization has affected both their education systems and tied their student movements together that are worth exploring.
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

EDUCATION: History and Important Reforms

The basis for both the French and Colombian modern education systems has roots going back to the end of the 19th century and is planted in religious tradition. For France, however, that meant turning away from hundreds of years of Catholic control, while for Colombia, at least for another half a century, it meant embracing Catholic tradition wholeheartedly. Reforms to both systems revolve around issues of accessibility and privatization, both of which are closely tied to the question of funding.

In this section, I will explain how the education systems in France and Colombia are structured and will lay out notable reforms and programs aimed at updating the systems. While I will give relevant historical context—particularly with respect to the Catholic’s Church’s role in education—and explore reforms made to the education system as a whole, the focus will largely be on the second half of the 20th century to the present and on reforms to tertiary (higher) education.

France: Education System

France has long been a Catholic country, with its past monarchy closely associated with the Catholic Church and the divine right of kings. Yet in the Revolutionary and then again in the post-Napoleonic period of the latter half of the 19th century, there was great backlash against the role of the Church in government, and more specifically, in education. At the end of the 19th century, France began to move toward the strictly secular model that it still maintains today.
In the 1880s, France overhauled its education system, releasing a series of edicts that would make primary education compulsory, free, and lay (Estivalèzes). That idea, of a “lay” education, would be the first step on the path towards laïcité; the goal, initially, however, was simply to separate the private and public spheres. Religious instruction would be the responsibility of the parish priests and conducted at the discretion of the family. To that end, by 1905, French schools, with the exception of private religious institutions, were entirely secular.

Laïcité—there is no exact translation of the word—is the singularly French idea of the separation between religion and education, taken almost to extreme lengths and adhered to almost religiously. Teachers in public primary and secondary schools today are not allowed, and indeed often feel uncomfortable, speaking about religion beyond its broad historical relevance, and even there the subject is broached with care (Esitvalèzes). Religious symbols are forbidden in public school buildings. The mere idea of reflecting upon religion is taboo, even in philosophy classes where it is difficult to skim the topic (Williams).

The French have created a sense of national identity through their education system and tied to laïcité. The education system is meant not only to teach a pupil essential life skills, but also imbue in them a sense of citizenship and loyalty to the idea of France itself (Williams). Laïcité ensures, in theory, that religion does not become a divisive point for French students but instead allows them to focus on and internalize Republican values (Moon and Corbett). This idea that the education system creates French citizens might shed light on how the government has reacted to student activists who have protested the structure of the system, especially in light of May 1968, which we will return to later. And this model had its roots in turn-of-the-century France.
Another essential aspect of French education is its history of elitism. Like the majority of education systems, the French system has faced criticism for making it difficult to enroll in institutions of higher education, and to succeed within the existing system if the student does not come from the upper class. This elitism is all the more distinct because of the way the French schooling system is structured.

The French break their schooling up into various phases. The first round is known as the *enseignement élémentaire*, or primary school. It is roughly equivalent to the elementary school years in the U.S. Then comes the *enseignement secondaire*, or secondary school. The school students attend for their *enseignement secondaire* is essential to their ability to achieve a tertiary education. Within the *enseignement secondaire* is the *collège*, which is equivalent to middle school in the US, and the *lycée*, which is equivalent to high school in the US. A comparison of the structure of the French and American systems is depicted in Figure 4.

The transition from *collège* to *lycée* is a very important one for the French. This is primarily because the French have an exam called the *baccalauréat* (or the *bac* for short) that determines a student’s ability to go to university or enter into higher education in general. The students take the *bac* at the end of their time at *lycée*. While having passed the *bac* exam means that students are entitled to a university education if they so choose, the *lycée* a student attends can determine which version of the *bac* they take, and therefore which type of higher education institution they can go to. Should they take a certain type of *bac*, the students end up at a vocational school with the idea that they will then go directly into the workforce. Other *bacs* allow for entrance into different types of universities.

Tertiary education is also divided up. The public universities, which host the majority of students, will bestow the equivalent to a bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, or a doctorate; there
are also some private universities of religious, mostly Catholic, affiliation. Finally, there are the *grandes écoles*, which are universities intended to feed students directly into the professional world—students who graduate from these universities are practically guaranteed high positions within the government, business, or other realms. The *grandes écoles* are much harder to get into, and function more like private entities than do the public universities in that they can charge a steeper price for tuition and might require other exams along with the *bac* for enrollment.

In theory, the *bac* is the great leveler—if a student can do well on the *bac*, then they should have the ability to access higher education, full stop. But systemic problems, like the quality of education received in the *lycée* or ability to pay tuition at a *grande école*, help or hurt certain students, providing advantages or disadvantages that can make university that much more difficult to access. The government has attempted, to some extent and at certain points in time, to rectify the situation, especially as a response to student protests about the perceived elitism in the education system and feelings of stagnation in different decades, but it is an uphill battle.

Despite the hurdles, enrollment in and completion of higher education has been steadily increasing over the years, and government expenditure on education has gone up as well. While in 2000 only 22% percent of the population had attained tertiary education, by 2012, that statistic had gone up to 31% (OECD).\(^\text{17}\) When broken up into age groups, the data shows that in 2012 43% of French people aged 25-34 had attained a degree, which was up from 31% in 2000, and in the 55-64 age group, in 2012 the percentage was 20% versus 13% in 2000 (OECD).\(^\text{18}\) These statistics are illustrated in Figure 5. Meanwhile government expenditure on education has more than doubled since 1980, “increasing by an average of 2.8% a year” (Weisenburge).\(^\text{19}\)
Educational Reforms in France

One of the most important overhauls of the French education system I have already touched upon: the turn-of-the-century Jules Ferry proposal and adherence to the idea of *laïcité* and promotion of free and mandatory primary education for all students. The system established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries did not face any major challenges until the establishment of the Fifth Republic after World War II.

In 1958, the de Gaulle administration came to power. A year after General Charles de Gaulle gained the presidency, the Ministry for Education proposed the Berthoin reforms, which “decreed that all pupils would transfer to a true secondary system and that no one should be left behind at primary school” (Lewis). Before 1959, many pupils left the education system at or before the age of 14 to go into the labor force (Lewis). The Berthoin reforms aimed to make secondary education available to more students, and potentially encourage more of France’s youth to then complete their tertiary education. Implementing the project, however, proved to be difficult, primarily because there was a scarcity of secondary schools in the countryside, which is where they were most needed. Despite this, the reforms were a first step toward greater accessibility to education.

The Berthoin reforms also created a contract between the flagging Catholic Church and the state. Private Catholic institutions provided religious education to students, and often provided a better quality of education than the public schools; despite the French adherence to the idea of *laïcité*, some parents preferred to send their children to religious schools. Many parents—particularly those who could afford it—chose Catholic schooling more for the advantages that came from private schooling than because of the religious aspect. That tradition carried on well into the 1980s, when 16% of pupils attended Catholic school, and still persists
today in some regions, like Brittany (Lewis; Moon and Corbett).\textsuperscript{23} Regardless of parental motivation for choosing Catholic institutions, however, the Berthoin reforms provided state funding to keep the religious institutions open and functional.

The next notable set of reforms were a direct reaction to the student protests of May 1968 (which will be detailed in a future section). In the fall of 1968, the de Gaulle government passed the \textit{loi d’orientation de l’enseignement supérieur} (in English, the guidance law for higher education), which ostensibly gave university students a greater voice in how their universities were structured (Lewis).\textsuperscript{24} While initially the law was well-received, students' involvement in the process slowly dropped as students realized that having a minority say in how their institutions were run actually gave them very little power. Universities did, however, gain more financial autonomy, which was important for them; before this, universities were forced to have all their spending approved by the ministry for education. As it was, even after the reforms, university budgets were still strictly monitored by the French ministry for education.

The Haby reforms were introduced in the late 1970s, during a time of economic stagnation. They were not ever fully implemented and were intended mostly to appease the general public, who were looking for change. Lewis writes that the Haby reforms’ “22 articles are sufficiently full of good intentions and couched in such general terms to be qualified as vague” (Lewis).\textsuperscript{25} The reforms had five main aims: “to ensure equality of opportunity; to give a balanced education; to affirm the value of technical and vocational; to educate the future citizen and to make the school a focus for collaboration” (Lewis).\textsuperscript{26} But the failure to fully implement these vague reforms led to the disillusionment of the voting public, and more turned to Catholic education to provide the learning environment they desired for their children.
In the early 1980s, the Gaullists lost control of the government, which began to move slightly leftwards under the direction of François Mitterand. Under the leadership of Alain Savary, the ministry for education began to implement a whole slew of reforms aimed at making education more accessible and balanced. The Legrand Report, an in-depth and comprehensive report about the state of education in France, helped guide the reforms Savary proposed.

One of the lasting legacies of the Mitterand reforms included the creation in 1981 of *zones d’éducation prioritaire*, or ZEPs, which translates to “educational priority zones” (Langan). These areas would cater to students who grew up in disadvantaged areas, usually of a specific ethnicity or socioeconomic class. The goal was to give such students additional assistance so that they could compete with students who had grown up surrounded by privilege and attended the best public or private schools (Langan).

In conjunction with the creation of the ZEPs, Savary’s reforms worked to decentralize the education system. He acknowledged that trying to make rules work across the board that primarily suited Paris’ needs was not the best way to go. Rural areas in particular needed regulations that catered specifically to them (Lewis). This was another effect of the protests of May 1968, which had brought together students from across the country, although the events of the month were primarily centered on Paris. Figure 6 shows how the distribution of universities in regions across France had contributed to the closely centralized system before the Savary reforms; in the Île-de-France region, there is a much higher concentration of universities.

Some of the reforms of the eighties also targeted universities. One significant law, for example, worked to eliminate selectionism in universities. It made it so that anyone with a *bac* could attend any university within reason, instead of allowing universities to pick and choose as suited them. This law was particularly important because a “large proportion of the country’s
young people in higher education was seen as a guarantee of the nation’s future economic strength” (Lewis). It also made universities more accessible to a greater number of students.

Finally, the Savary reforms aimed to delay specialization in the first years of university, so that students could get a better-rounded education and so that the type of bac—i.e. scientific, technical, or literature-specific—they had taken would not play as important a role (Lewis).

This measure, however, was not well-received. Students attacked the idea of limiting their ability to specialize because they thought it worthless to spend a year or more of their life studying information that would not be useful in their future careers.

Just a few years after the Savary reforms, in 1986, the right wing swept the elections, and Jacques Chirac, who would later become the president, was appointed prime minister under President Mitterand. Chirac’s attempts to influence educational policy largely fell short due to the activism of students, but one of his failed reforms is worth noting for continuity purposes: the Devaquet proposal. The Devaquet project proposed allowing universities to limit the number of students who could enter in a given discipline—which meant that even if a student passed the bac they would not be guaranteed entrance to a university, as per tradition—granting individual institutions more power over the type of diploma they conferred to students, and establishing the cost of entrance according to the individual university, rather than keeping it on the national scale (Bryson).

The reforms Devaquet proposed would have shifted the public university model France had with one aligned more with the privatized, American model. The cost/tuition stipulation, which would have made university more expensive for students, was a particular sticking point. While the reforms seemingly granted universities more autonomy, professors and students alike
rejected the proposal. The Devaquet project never passed, but some of its proposed reforms would make an appearance under different, future laws.

Approximately 20 years later, President Nicolas Sarkozy succeeded where Devaquet and Chirac failed. Sarkozy and his minister for education, Valérie Pécresse, passed reforms to the higher education system that, on the surface, granted universities more autonomy. Under the Universities Freedom and Responsibility law (LRU), universities now had greater control over their own budgets, recruitment, and pay (Marshall). The LRU included the stipulation that universities could seek funding outside the state, which meant that they could turn to private organizations for donations or hike up the tuition to cover costs (Marshall). Additionally, Sarkozy’s reforms targeted professors and researchers, establishing that they would undergo performance reviews of their teaching and ensuring that they were continuously coming out with publications. Their salaries might depend on those reviews, at the university’s discretion. These small reforms were ostensibly an attempt to make French universities more competitive internationally, and followed a more American model, to the protests of students and professors.

In 2018, President Emmanuel Macron proposed to carry on where Sarkozy had left off, with a plan to continue the privatization of the French university system. His proposal suggested that entrance to public universities should be precipitated on a grading system rather than through the passing of the bac (Euronews). While as of the date of the writing of this paper the reforms have not been formally passed or implemented, it seems that French education is slowly moving towards the American model.

Under different administrations, the reforms instituted by the French government have moved toward the idea of a more accessible and equitable education system or a privatized, costlier model. The various administrations, as we shall explore further later on in this thesis but
have already seen hints of, were spurred on by student activism and feelings of frustration with a stagnating system that did not provide students with the ability to succeed in the job market upon graduation.

**Colombia: Education System**

Colombia’s education system was, for an extremely long time, tied to the nation’s two most influential political parties. Whenever one party was in power, it changed the structure of the system, and when the opposing party took back the power, it completely restructured the system. As such, Colombia’s education system, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, fluctuated constantly; it went back and forth between progressive ideals of education for all when the Liberal party controlled the government and closed off elitism based on religious values when the Conservative party controlled the government.

In the latter half of the 20th century, however, different issues arose to affect the way education could be implemented in Colombia. In the National Front and post-National Front years, the parties no longer clashed over the role of religion in the education system—instead, they were trying to deal with the question of how to educate the millions of displaced people, especially children, who were moving around the country to escape being caught in the crossfire between the guerrilla insurgency and paramilitary brutality. As such, while France and Colombia both face problems of education accessibility, very different forces drive the issue in the two countries.

Colombia’s education system is set up more similarly to the U.S.’s than is France’s. The system is split into four major parts: *la educación básica primaria* (basic primary education), *educación basica secundaria* (lower-secondary education), and *educación media* (upper-
secondary education) comprise the primary and secondary education, while higher education is largely administered by universities and technical institutions.

Elementary education goes from grades one to five, and is mandatory, as is the lower-secondary education, which goes from grades six to nine. After completion of the basic education, students receive a certification stating they have completed basic academic requirements. Upper-secondary education, which is two years from grades ten to eleven, is not compulsory, but is necessary to enter into higher education; at the end of the second year, students sit for a national exam, called the Saber exam, that will allow them entrance into a university. Unlike the French bac, however, the Saber exam is not an automatic guarantee of entrance to a university; it is more similar to the American SAT or ACT. Each university has the autonomy to require a minimum score for entrance and include other elements for admission at their own discretion.

Higher education is split between universities of academic standing and technical institutions. While universities tend to draw more students, they have a history of elitism—in 2016, around 60% of upper class families have children who attend university, whereas only 20% of lower class families have children enrolled in higher education (Carroll).36 (See Figure 7 for further statistics.) This is an ongoing problem for Colombia, where income inequality is a very pressing problem—in 2018, Colombia ranked as one of the nations with the highest levels of wealth disparity in the world (Beaubien).37 Additionally, there’s about an even split between students enrolled in private institutions versus public institutions (Carroll).38 Although there are more private institutions in Colombia, they tend to be smaller and thus enroll fewer students.

Moreover, the best institutions of higher education in Colombia tend to be private Catholic institutions. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church has not controlled the education
system in over 80 years, it has a lasting legacy within the realm of education. Of “the main private universities, 14 are Roman Catholic and 26, nonsectarian,” and the most renowned university is the Jesuits’ Javeriana University in Bogotá (Hudson).\(^{39}\)

Enrollment in the education system has been steadily increasing over the past 50 years in Colombia. In 1970, for example, nearly 70% of children living in rural areas did not attend primary school, in part because of the lack of institutions as well as because of the civil war (Carroll).\(^{40}\) After the introduction of the \textit{Escuela Nueva} (New School) movement in the 1980s, that number went up. By 2018, the number of students enrolled in primary schools had surpassed 90% (UNESCO).\(^{41}\) Enrollment in tertiary education has also increased overall, going from a 39% enrollment rate in 2010 to a 55% enrollment rate in 2018 (UNESCO).\(^{42}\)

As student protests throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century have gained momentum advocating for greater accessibility to education, the government has fluctuated between acquiescing to their demands and ignoring them altogether. The topic of private versus public education has increasingly become a sore subject, with students very divided about the views their government advocates. And the political parties in power do still play a role in how likely the government is to listen to students’ opinions on the matter.

\textbf{Educational Reforms in Colombia}

In 1886, at the same time France was implementing its strict notions of \textit{laïcité}, Colombia began the process of creating an entirely new constitution that addressed educational matters. It placed the education system solely in the hands of the Catholic Church, declaring that “public education must be conducted in accordance with Roman Catholic doctrine” (Hudson).\(^{43}\) Essentially, for both public and private institutions, the Church had the power to decide what was
taught, and to whom, including mandatory religion classes. That would not change for approximately the next fifty years.

In the interim, other changes outside the government’s control contributed to how the education evolved. In 1898, for example, Pope Leo XIII passed an edict stating that Catholic primary and secondary education must adhere more closely to the principles of the Council of Trent, including rejecting naturalism, liberalism, rationalism, and socialism (Palacios). Those limitations would become points of contention for many students in the 20th century.

Additionally, because of the Church’s power, the number of educational institutions run by religious orders expanded considerably in the early 1900s. In 1880, 20% of Bogotá’s secondary students attended church-run schools, but by 1920 it was 80% (Palacios). Most religious orders, however, existed within cities, so there was quite the disparity between educational availability in the cities versus rural areas. Those who lived in rural areas also tended to be impoverished, whereas city-dwellers were more likely to be wealthy, so education became centered around the issue of elitism.

In the 1930s, however, the Liberal Party came to power and made one of its goals the overhaul of the education system as part of its Revolución en Marcha (Revolution in Progress). The administration of President Alfonso López Pumarejo got rid of the Church’s monopoly on education, in an attempt to bring school curriculums into the modern era and open institutions up to more than the elite. In the period following these reforms, between 1950 and 1967, 24 universities were founded, the majority of them public institutions (Acevedo Tarazona). The government also allowed the teaching of Marxist and other socialist theories in universities for the first time as part of the reforms, an amendment that would influence generations of students to come.
In the early sixties, Rudolph Atcon released a document about how to modernize the university systems in Latin America. His proposal centered around two ideas: first, that universities needed financial autonomy and should thus seek private funding and not be dependent on government funding, more similar to the American model, and secondly, that universities restructure their hierarchies and create a very strict administration (Acevedo Tarazona). Following the release of his proposal, Colombia developed *el Plan Básico* (Basic Plan), which aimed to follow his ideas. The Plan, however, was ultimately rejected because students were strongly opposed to the idea of privately funded universities. It would become a recurring issue, where the government attempted to follow the American model while students protested.

The late sixties through the early seventies also introduced the creation of the *Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior* (ICFES, the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education), which would run the national exams at the end of the secondary education that students needed to pass to enter into higher education (Acevedo Tarazona). The exam set a certain standard for university admission.

The late seventies then saw the creation of the system called *Escuela Nueva*, which aimed to allow disadvantaged students in rural areas access to better education. The motto on the emblem in Figure 8 illustrates this by referring to the idea of bringing education back to the common people. The *Escuela Nueva* model encouraged education that was personalized to each student’s needs, as well as the use of technology where available. It has been a very successful model, in some cases even comparable to or surpassing the success rates of elite institutions within cities (Luschei and Vega).
In 1989, the first calls for a complete overhaul of the Colombian constitution began to sound, with an emphasis on the education system. A National Constituent Assembly was called in 1991, and they created that new constitution. The constitution stipulated that education would be “mandatory between the ages of five and fifteen years” and free at all “state institutions, without prejudice to those who can afford to defray the costs” (Article 67). The government would still be involved in the “management, financing, and administration of state educational services,” but autonomy was guaranteed for universities (Article 67, Article 69). This meant that while universities would receive funding from the government, they could also seek it in the form of tuition or private donations. Finally, the new constitution stated that parents would be allowed to choose the type of education they wanted for their children, but that in “state institutions, no individual may be obliged to receive religious instruction” (Article 68).

It was quite a change from the Church-controlled system in place not even 60 years before.

Partially as a response to the upheaval of the nineties, the Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN, ministry for education) created its Revolución Educativa—an educational development plan—whose aim was to bring Colombia’s education system into the 21st century. The plan hoped to address some of the country’s biggest issues: “(a) the concern for social peace, inclusion, and social integration; and (b) the need for economic development in an era of competitiveness and globalization” (Light et al.). As part of the Revolución Educativa, from 2002-2006 the MEN developed the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (PND, national development plan) to specifically address these concerns.

One of the steps the MEN took was to increase the decentralization of the education system, allowing regional and local administrations to make the calls necessary for the institutions in their areas, at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. MEN moved to make
itself more of a support for local governments, rather than a director handing down orders across the board (Light et al.). Additionally, it supported schools by introducing technology to track attendance and enrollment, to ensure that students, particularly at the secondary level, were able to get to and remain in school. Finally, it has disseminated new technologies that can be integrated into the curriculum to create learning platforms for educators to use to collaborate with students and make education more readily available to students (Light et al.).

In 2011, the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos proposed a plan to expand the privatization of universities allowed by the constitution of 1991. The proposed law, Ley 30, was intended to invest in higher education, but specifically by expanding the private, for-profit university system to increase the number of graduates (Keller). The plan was withdrawn about a month after it was proposed, but the seeds were there for future attempts at privatizing the higher education system. The Santos administration would not be the last to try it.

Three years later, the Santos administration took a different approach to influencing the number of college graduates and ostensibly making higher education more affordable and accessible to students from lower socioeconomic groups. In 2014, the administration initiated the Ser Pilo Paga program. Essentially, the program gave students below a certain income level who had certain test scores and grades the opportunity to apply to several universities at no cost, and so long as they maintained a certain grade point average while studying and graduated on time, the government would write off the amount invested in the students (Bogotapost). Over the course of the four years the program ran, it turned out that the percentage of low-income students enrolled in higher education increased from 36% to 66%, and that many of the students it helped had been direct victims of the Colombian armed conflict (Bogotapost).
Despite the positive effects of the *Ser Pilo Paga* program, however, it was surrounded by controversy, mostly because of the allocation of resources. Many of the students in the program opted to go to private institutions—because they offered a better quality of education—but which cost the government much more than it would to send them to public universities. Those opposed to the program said that the money would have been better invested in the public university system, which could have served over 500,000 more students as opposed to the 40,000 *Ser Pilo Paga* helped (Bogotapost). Ser Pilo Paga, on top of the continued attempts to privatize higher education, was perceived as a threat to the public system.

In 2018, the same year he ended the *Ser Pilo Paga* program, President Iván Duque Márquez promised to invest 4.5 trillion pesos ($1.42 billion) in public education (VOA). The money would go toward fixing facilities (many of which were in disrepair) and investing in the overall quality of the education. A year later, however, the money had not appeared, which led to student strikes across the country.

In conclusion, Colombia’s educational system has long been tied to rifts within the governing parties, to the Catholic Church, which has helped promote a history of elitism within the system, and to a division between rural and urban areas. Funding has been a problem that has contributed to continued efforts to privatize the system. Yet over the years, the Colombian government has made efforts to make education more accessible to the entire population and equitable for marginalized groups, particularly displaced people in rural areas. The larger problem has been attempts to model the system after American education, which has been a cause for a great many student protests.
CASE STUDIES

STUDENT ACTIVISM: Student Movements in Colombia and France

While the sixties had the most explosive and infamous activist movements in both France and Colombia, student movements have only grown since then. Not every student group has achieved its goals, but many have, and even more have spurred movements beyond their original intention. Most begin by fighting for or against some form of reform, but by the end have joined with labor unions and non-students movements to advocate for changes outside of the educational system.

In this section, I will explore and explain four student movements from each Colombia and France. The movements of the sixties—May 68 in France and the guerrilla-related movements in Colombia—will receive special emphasis because they are so well-known and well-studied, and because of their impact on future movements and government response. The movements I have chosen that take place after the seventies are notable because of their size, i.e. the number of students and allies who took part, and because of their initially education-related goals.

Student Movements in France: May 68

France in 1968 felt tired because of its stagnant economy and adherence to Gaullist tradition, and its university students sensed that. Their prospects for employment upon graduation were low, yet their continued enrollment in the university system signaled their role in the perpetuation of a system that rewarded the privileged minority—though the rewards they were promised (better careers, social advancement, competitive wages, etc.) because of their degrees seemed unlikely to manifest. As Singer writes, “when two thirds of an institution’s
members are doomed to failure, it is a perfect hunting ground for political activists”—the mixed feelings of privilege and exclusion were a powder keg (Singer). At the same time, the university system itself had become oppressive because of a hierarchy that allowed the students little voice in how the universities were run. In a country whose history is steeped in violent revolution and active protests, little else was needed to strike a match that would set the nation ablaze.

The May 68 protests were precipitated by another movement: the 22 March Movement. In March, students occupied a building in the University of Paris at Nanterre to make a point about the elitism and discrimination of the higher education system and call for a reexamination of the distribution of funding within universities. The occupation ended after the police arrived, but the issues the movement wanted addressed persisted. Because of the lack of official response, sporadic back and forth between students and police continued throughout the spring. Some of the instigators of the occupation, including Daniel Cohn-Bendit, would go on to play a role in the May movement later that same year.

The infamous May 1968 movement, which would come to be recognized as a symbol of protest across the world, really began on May 3rd, 1968, when a small gathering of students at the Sorbonne, one of France’s oldest universities, was shut down by the police as a show of force intended to intimidate other protesters (Singer). The students had gathered to discuss and protest what was happening in Nanterre. The situation quickly escalated, however, when the police jailed some protestors as more and more demonstrators arrived to stand by their fellow students in solidarity against the police.

By May 6, student leaders had called a general strike and march, and set an ultimatum: that the police leave the university, that the Sorbonne reopen, and that the protestors who had
been arrested be released (Singer). May 6, the day that became known as Bloody Monday, and the following Tuesday’s Long March, culminated in thousands of protestors marching toward the police-occupied Sorbonne in the Latin Quarter. The police refused to back down, and bloody clashes between the protesters and police ensued. Students erected barricades in the narrow alleyways, while police threw grenades that American forces had tested in the conflict in Vietnam (Singer). The French police’s reputation as a “violent and repressive riot unit” proved true in these conflicts (Reynolds). Figure 9 captures one of the violent confrontations, which continued throughout the week.

Popular sentiment was with the students rather than the government and law enforcement. By May 13th, the major workers’ unions had called for a general strike and demonstration. The unions drummed up quite a lot of support—“the number of wage and salary earners involved in the stoppage was loosely estimated at between nine and ten million” (Singer). The movement had spread beyond Paris; it now resounded with French citizens across the country. And whereas “a month of academic strikes throughout the country would only cause a stir. A general industrial strike, crippling the economy, rapidly raises the question of political power in the country” (Singer). The movement needed student-worker solidarity to truly be effective and call attention to the issues of stagnation.

But whereas the student-led movement had clear goals and its leaders, like Cohn-Bendit—for the most part—understood and advocated for those goals, many workers had various differing opinions about their ends, and the union leaders were at odds with the union members. The Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT, or General Confederation of Labor), the most well-known of the organizations, was actually not happy with the strike movement as a whole; its leaders tried to encourage workers to be as peaceful and officious as possible and focus on
economic demands. The workers, however, urged on by the students, sought radical change and wanted a complete overhaul of the government, in some cases even demanding the resignation of the president (Singer).68

When the CGT’s leaders began negotiations with the de Gaulle government, initially there was hope for a peaceful resolution. The Grenelle accords, as they became known, included three key details: a minimum increase in hourly rate for wages, a gradual reduction in working hours, and a promise to increase medical reimbursements (Singer).69 But when the workers learned of the results of the negotiations, they argued that the agreement did not do enough and shot it down. It was back to the streets and back to square one.

The situation took a turn when, on May 29, President Charles de Gaulle left the country without a word about his intentions, including where he planned to go; some speculated that this meant that he could feel control slipping from his grasp (Singer).70 For about half a day, no one knew where the French president was—even George Pompidou, who had stepped up to handle the government side of the situation, was left in the dark. It was later discovered de Gaulle had gone to speak with military leaders in Baden-Baden. He returned to Paris the next evening, but his flight left the revolutionaries feeling empowered. On May 30, during a meeting of the Council of Ministers, hundreds of thousands of workers and students gathered to protest for a change in government (Singer).71

The Revolution of May 1968 came to a close not with a bang, however, but with a whimper. The ministerial meeting on the 30th concluded with the call for a general election in June, which satisfied most of the revolutionaries, though the army surrounding the city most likely encouraged them to accept the deal (Singer).72 After a month of almost non-stop striking and marches, life slowly began to return to some semblance of normality. The election in June
would ensure that the Gaullist government stayed in power, at least partially because their opponents were very divided and largely at odds with one another. Despite its infamy and how large it was, in the short term, the May 68 movement actually accomplished very little; it would only be years down the line that the effects of the movement would make themselves known.

Student Movements in France: 1986, 2007, and 2018

The 1980s saw the impact of May 68 clearly for the first time. Savary’s reforms addressed some of the grievances, such as the rigid structure of the education system and the exclusionary nature of higher education, but more importantly, the government’s fear of a student uprising at the level of May 68 made them reconsider key educational reforms—like the Devaquet proposal. That fear would not stop the government forever, however, nor would the students’ unhappiness with the educational accessibility issues, but the government’s readiness to employ the police to violently quell protests would only grow. A continuity in the types of reforms the government wanted to implement and student reactions began to emerge after the eighties, and is still apparent today.

1986

In 1986, the Devaquet project, which looked to an American model as inspiration for French reforms, brought students out onto the streets of Paris and other cities across the nation. The students objected to what they saw as reforms which would devalue the bac: if universities selected students based on criteria other than that exam, then what would the point of the struggle to pass the bac have been? Additionally, the bac granted students an unofficial “traditional and legal right” to pursue a university degree; the Devaquet proposal would effectively eliminate that right in the eyes of the students (Bryson).73
The proposed changes in diploma conferral would lead to some diplomas holding more weight than others, i.e. the diplomas from universities with stricter entrance regulations would be more appealing to future employers. Moreover, the sliding scale of cost for entrance to the university would create a separation between the “*facs d’élite*” (elite faculties) and “*facs-poubelles*” (poor faculties) (Bryson). As Bryson argues, the students thus came to the conclusion that money/greater family income and better diplomas would lead to employment, whereas less money/lower family income and less impressive diplomas would lead to unemployment (Bryson). They saw in this system an echo of the extremely competitive and capitalist American system and soundly rejected the idea of going down that path.

Beginning November 23, students organized and protested. On November 27th, over 400,000 students participated in protests and marches across the country, over 200,000 in Paris alone (Bernstein). They planned to continue the protests until the meeting of the National Assembly to vote on the bill. The meeting was delayed, and so the movement carried on, with reports of extreme police brutality and the death of a student on December 5th. The next day Devaquet resigned his position in the Ministry of Higher Education, and two days later Chirac withdrew the proposal. The students, it seemed, had carried the day.

2007

Just over 20 years later, President Nicolas Sarkozy picked up where Devaquet and Chirac had left off, the worry of students’ reactions still lingering in the air. His plan once again strove to privatize the French higher education system, making university costs potentially much more of a burden for students. Although Sarkozy put off the vote over his educational reform plans
more than once in hopes of avoiding student protests, when he did present that plan in late 2007, sentiment amongst students and professors was not in his favor.

In 2009, when Sarkozy made a public address discussing his plan in more detail and its implementation—a speech in which he gave “a withering critique of French higher education, characterizing it as an “infantilizing system” of “weak universities” that paralyzes creativity and innovation—students and teachers immediately took to the streets (Labi). They organized strikes that lasted on and off from January through April, a four month period that was the longest disruption the French education system had seen since May 68. 15-20 universities took part (Labi).

Despite the efforts of activists, however, Sarkozy’s reforms did go into effect, starting with a limited number of institutions in France, and were to be implemented over a period of several years. Students and teachers remained unhappy with the policies even years after the fact, and in 2019, laid the blame for students’ increasing poverty squarely on Sarkozy’s doorstep.

2018

In 2018, President Emmanuel Macron declared his intention to reform the education system once again in an attempt to orient universities towards the privatized American model, proposing that entrance to universities be precipitated on a grading system rather than through the passing of the bac. Students immediately pointed out that the reform would lead to a more elitist system and also expressed frustration with youth unemployment rates, which hovered around 20% (Barreda). Students began occupations of over 15 universities buildings and sporadic strikes as a form of protest, but the movement did not really catch hold until 2019.
In November 2019, a student made a Facebook post about his despair over the economic situation for students, blaming in part Sarkozy’s policies from a decade before for escalating the situation, and proceeded to set himself on fire (Godin). While he did not die, other students immediately took to the streets in protest, demanding a “re-evaluation of university tuition and changes to scholarships” and “more student housing and better health services on campuses” (Godin). One in five French university students lived below the poverty line in 2017, and with Macron’s proposed reforms threatening educational policy and therefore access to potential employment post-graduation, the situation reached a tipping point (Godin). The government’s response thus far has been to say that there are financial resources available for students that they are simply unaware of. There has been no resolution as of yet, and the movement was somewhat cut short by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Student Movements in Colombia: Revolutionary Groups in the 60s and 70s

If France in the sixties was abounding with discontent and a breeding ground for revolution, Colombia in the sixties was even riper for explosive action. The government, coming off a brief dictatorship, had basically closed itself off from any newcomers—only deeply entrenched politicians, many of them wealthy landowners, were able to hold onto their offices. The majority of the population, meanwhile, still lived in rural areas and were farmers, though they did not own the land on which they worked. Within the cities, there were also reasons for the growing feeling of revolution; students in particular were tired of their communist aspirations being totally ignored by the government and the never-ending cycle of poverty, even with their university degrees.
The first and best-known revolutionary guerrilla group was founded in 1964 as a response to the worsening situation. The group was composed primarily of peasants: las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (in English, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People’s Army, or the FARC, sometimes FARC-EP). The FARC operated mainly out of the countryside, and was, as the name indicates, an armed movement right from the get-go.

That same year, another group came into existence: el Ejército de Liberación Nacional (in English, the National Liberation Army, or the ELN). The ELN, unlike its contemporary, had a much more varied composition. University students, peasants, and oil workers came together to form this group (Palacios). The young activists from the universities established the ELN’s ideological base, inspired by Che Guevara’s emerging school of communism, which focused on the rural poor, positing that “liberation would come from the countryside,” while the “cities represented bastions of imperialist domination” (Palacios). The students’ emphasis on the armed struggle in rural areas would come back to haunt them.

The FARC and the ELN were joined by other groups: in 1967, el Ejército Popular de la Liberación (in English, the Popular Liberation Army, or the EPL), another student group, and in 1973 the 19th of April Movement or M-19, which eventually became a political party (Fattal). Together, these four groups were the most notorious and powerful guerrilla groups. While they started small, mainly operating armed forces in the countryside and working on media campaigns and increasingly dangerous stunts in the cities, their operations steadily grew and gained attention over the next thirty years (Murillo).

Unlike the French May 68 movement, the story of uprising in Colombia does not follow a neat and linear path charted over the course of a month. While M-19 did not last quite as long as
a revolutionary group as the others, its story still played out over a span of about fifteen years; the FARC has only begun peace talks and demobilization efforts in 2016, 52 years after it was created, and as of the writing of this paper, the ELN is still keeping up with its guerrilla activities (though a ceasefire was called during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic). The EPL is also still active, though the group currently has just over 100 members.

Student involvement in the guerrilla movements, however, did not last long. While students were key in guiding the groups’ ideological foundations, by the mid-70s their involvement had waned, largely because of forces within the groups themselves. Instead, students focused on protesting within cities and universities, drawing inspiration from the guerrilla groups for actions that would garner attention. In 1966, for example, students staged an occupation of several universities as a protest against university administration and *el Plan Básico* that culminated in them trapping President Carlos Lleras Restrepo and American Nelson Rockefeller at the Universidad Nacional de Bogotá (Archila Neira). The army was brought in to rescue the two, but the situation bore a marked resemblance to the type of action favored by guerrilla groups: kidnapping of important figures for either extortion purposes or as leverage for a political goal.

That same year, however, the students’ involvement in the guerrilla groups turned into a tragedy, exemplified by the martyrdom of Fr. Camilo Torres Restrepo. Torres Restrepo, a university professor and espouser of Liberation theology, had joined the ELN because of its radical stance. He, along with some untrained students, was sent into an armed conflict for the purpose of tempering them for combat, and was killed as a result (Palacios). Remaining students began to divorce themselves from the group they had helped found and instead stick to education-centered activism.
In 1970, 1971, 1976, and 1981, against the backdrop of increasing guerrilla action in the countryside—largely the focus of media attention—students occupied universities and proposed strikes. They protested American involvement in higher education proposed by Rudolph Atcon and *el Plan Básico*, university budgets and administration, cost of tuition, and the lack of student participation in that administration (Archila Neira).\(^8^9\) Cooperation between students from private universities and public institutions also increased because of their shared goals.

The final cleavage between students and guerrillas occurred in 1985, along with the dissolution of M-19. Up until that year, M-19 had received moderate support from young activists because of its attention-grabbing urban stunts, such as stealing Simón Bolívar’s sword in 1974 to declare that it had “returned to the struggle” and tunneling into a Colombian Army weapons depot and stealing all the arms stored there in 1978 (Fattal).\(^9^0\) But in 1985, the group grew bolder and brought the guerrilla fight to the capital. On November 6th, the group planned to make a statement by occupying the Palace of Justice in Bogotá and taking most of the Supreme Court hostage. The next day the Colombian army responded with a counterattack that resulted in the deaths of most of the group and many of the hostages, including half of the Supreme Court justices (Palacios).\(^9^1\) Both the Colombian government—particularly President Belisario Betancur Cuartas—and M-19 received overwhelmingly negative press about the situation and how it was handled, particularly from the international community (Fattal).\(^9^2\) Soon after, M-19, left with little manpower and even less support, entered into demobilization discussions with the government, and students returned to less violent means of protest.

While student activists played a significant role in the inception of the guerrilla movements in Colombia, the groups, for the most part, outlasted student involvement. Students parted ways with the guerrillas because of the violence they took part in, though their own
movements often faced threats from the army or violent government response—though not to the extent of the bloody government-aligned paramilitary response to guerrillas in the early 2000s. In the next half a century, students would focus on their own mobilization in urban areas to fight for their educational rights, while the guerrilla groups continued to (literally) gain ground in the countryside.

**Student Movements in Colombia: 1989, 2011, and 2018**

The cooperation between students in public and private universities that had begun in the seventies continued on into the next decades. Mass protest movements—such as manifestations, marches, and strikes—helped Colombian students stop proposed legislation that would have made higher education less accessible. Despite their successes, however, Colombian students still face considerable opposition from their government as they try to advocate for better quality and affordable education.

**1989**

In 1989, the murder of the presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán prompted students to gather en masse and join together in a common cause. After the former Minister of Education’s funeral, 15,000 students made the silent march to Galán’s grave, where they reaffirmed everything the candidate had stood for—namely, against political corruption and for progressive education policies—and pledged to change the system that oppressed them so (Dugas).  

In the days and weeks that followed, the students created a movement that would become known as Todavía Podemos Salvar a Colombia (We Can Still Save Colombia, which later split off into the Movimiento Estudiantil por la Constituyente, Student Movement for the Constituent Assembly). Their goal: to gather enough votes to call for a National Constituent Assembly to
rewrite the constitution of 1886. Dugas writes that “the primary motivation of the student
movement was to create a more open and democratic political system by means of a thorough
revision of the country’s constitution” (Dugas).94 Their efforts were initially met with little
support, until workers’ organizations threw their weight behind the movement. Together, the
groups were able to reach the voting Colombian population, who, during the election cycle,
voted to call together a National Constituent Assembly.

The student movement lost momentum after the vote, however, so the students had little
say in the rewriting of the constitution itself. Yet their efforts did lead to the revisions, which
included the measures that schooling would be mandatory and free (at public institutions) until
the age of fifteen and that the government would finance public institutions—even at the tertiary
level.

2011

20 years after the passage of the new constitution, students found themselves taking to
the streets to protest government action rather than inaction. The movement focused very
specifically on protesting against a proposed educational reform law, *Ley 30*. The Santos’
administration’s proposed law intended to invest in higher education, but specifically in private,
for-profit universities, to increase the number of graduates (Arce).95 Additionally, the law was
“intimately bound up with the Free Trade Agreement between the US and Colombia” and would
increase foreign influence in Colombia, which many students saw as contributing to the vast
socioeconomic inequality in their country (Arce).96

In response, students took to the streets in a month-long university strike, arguing that the
law would push the privatization of the university system as well as decrease university
autonomy and quality of public education. They demanded instead that the government provide better-quality higher education that would be free for all. The strike culminated in a nationwide protest on November 10th that drew over 200,000 people in a march through Bogotá and other urban centers (Martínez).97

Though the month-long strike was largely peaceful, police and students clashed at various points. The Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) used clubs and tear gas on students in Bogotá in October (Arce).98 It would not be the last time the government deployed ESMAD against student activists, but in November, the government conceded and dropped the proposed law, which brought the strike to an end. It seemed that activists could pressure their governments into listening to their constituents.

2018

In 2018, students once again took to the streets over the question of the funding of universities. After the rewriting of the constitution in 1992, universities had received nearly 100% of their funding from the state; nearly 30 years later, that amount was cut down to 50%, forcing universities to depend on private donors (Bierly).99 While funding had not changed, the number of students enrolled had increased, putting some universities on the edge of bankruptcy (Bartter).100 In response, students organized a strike across 45 institutions of higher education and a march through Bogotá. After ten weeks of continuous striking and student conversations and meetings to outline their demands, President Iván Duque Márquez committed to spending “an additional 4.5 trillion pesos ($1.42 billion) on public higher education” during the four years the president would be in office (VOA).101
Almost exactly one year later, however, students had returned to protesting. A corruption scandal precipitated the protests—officials at the Universidad Distrital had been accused of embezzling millions from the university—but was actually a manifestation of the students’ discontent with Duque’s failure to act on the terms agreed to in 2018. In other words, the money that Duque had agreed to allocate to public institutions had failed to fully appear and students were upset (City Paper Staff).102

As the protests continued throughout the month of October and into November, the focus of the movement expanded. Still driven by students, now joined by other unions, the activists protested against police brutality, for an end to corruption, against cuts to the minimum wage, and in support of the peace processes with the guerrilla groups, which they thought the government was not progressing on, in addition to the continuing challenge for improved public education (Parkin Daniels).103 The protests lasted until late November, with increasing police presence, particularly that of the ESMAD, which led to the death of several students, when movement organizers called for a Paro Nacional (national strike) across all sectors (Sandoval).104 There was no clear resolution, and the strikers took a break for the winter holidays. The movement picked back up again in January, but the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 stalled further activism for a time.
DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

Globalization has fundamentally changed the types of policies governments enact; educational policies are no exception to the rule. While on the one hand that has meant that governments have striven to make education more accessible to many of their people, it has also meant that they have placed a great deal of importance upon remaining competitive—usually through the quality of education offered at the university level—on the international stage. To meet that second goal, as well as shift the cost away from the government itself, the French and Colombian governments have, since the late 20th century, begun to attempt to emulate the American educational model. Many students, however, perceive that shift to be contrary to the first goal of providing education to a greater proportion of the population. In response, they take to the streets in protest. That activism is not simply a reaction to changes in educational policy: It is a manifestation of the role globalization has played in creating a disconnect between the goals of greater accessibility to education (and therefore a more economically viable future) and the policies that seem to in reality make education less accessible. The government response to those protests—usually in the form of police or riot squad deployment—underscores that disconnect by setting the administrations up in opposition to the students they are meant to serve. Finally, the politico-economic ideological roots of the student versus government standoff offers an added dimension to the role globalization has played in sparking this dissonance.

I will begin this discussion by analyzing the different forms of accessibility that have an impact on the overall ability of students to enter into and thrive within their respective education systems. From there, I will discuss the policies the French and Colombian governments have implemented to address those issues and how those policies have shifted over time to reflect the American model rather than continue to focus on accessibility issues. I will look to the student
response next, and highlight which policies students have protested against and why that matters. Finally, I will briefly explore the ideological roots of the issue—making a clear connection to the influence of the protests in the sixties and the broader global context—and look at the governments’ reaction to student movements and what that can tell us.

**The Issue of Accessibility**

There are many sides to the issue of accessibility to education that both students and governments must consider as policies are created and implemented; I will address three of them specifically. First, there are structural problems with historical roots, such as elitism, which raise questions about who can quite literally access the education system, about the process of getting into certain schools, and about the quality of education that those schools offer. Second, there are funding problems, which tend to be the government’s primary concern once the country has reached a point where most of the population can actively attend school. Both the first and the second issue are tied to questions of socioeconomic class and wealth disparity. Finally, there is the globalization problem, which is really the issue of the promulgation of the privatized American education system—one of the most competitive in the word (both in the sense that it has institutions that offer better quality education relative to other schools across the world and in the sense that those institutions have higher standards for students and professors, making it increasingly difficult for students to “get into” those institutions).

In France and Colombia, the structural problem is seen most clearly through the issue of elitism, which has manifested in different ways. One such way in which it remains entrenched is through either country’s history with the Catholic Church and the private institutions that still exist in the Church’s name. In France, though the separation between Church and state—and thus Church and public education—officially came at the end of the 19th century, private
institutions still existed (and continue to exist) that were administered by the Catholic Church (alongside non-religiously affiliated institutions) (Lewis). These schools tended to offer a better quality of education at a higher price—which many could not and still cannot afford. Their prestige encouraged a division between private school students and public school students.

In Colombia, meanwhile, the separation between Church and state did not officially happen until the 1930s, but because of the Church’s ties to the wealthier Conservative party, the elitism of the education system became all the more apparent. Educational institutions were largely built in cities to cater to the wealthy while the Church had control of the system (Palacios). After the divorce between the Church and state, it would take years for the state to find a way to reach rural areas, where the majority of poorer students lived. Furthermore, because the Church had been so entrenched in Colombia’s system, it retained many private institutions (Hudson). Like in France, cost of attendance at those institutions was higher, but in exchange they also offered a higher quality of education, particularly at the university level, which is still true today.

Control of the education system, alongside the division between private and public and rural and urban institutions, has contributed to the sense of elitism in both the French and Colombian school systems, which both the government and students have noted through the years. For those reasons, the governments have, to a certain extent, worked to ameliorate the situation, with student support. But there is another structural problem related to elitism: Quality of education has highly specific implications about elitism that come into play when discussing higher education because of the bac exam in France and the Saber exam in Colombia. Additionally, the quality of higher education is important when considering what it means for employment prospects after graduation.
In France, the type of *bac* students take at the end of their *lycée* years, combined with how well they do on the exam, determines what route they can take through their years of tertiary education. This, in turn, affects their employment prospects post-graduation. While passing the *bac* is a guarantee that a student can enroll in a tertiary institution, it does not mean every form of higher education is available to them. *Grandes écoles*, for example, prefer that students take the scientific *bac* and might require a minimum score, and students who attend *grandes écoles* are more likely to a.) be employed after graduation and b.) earn a sound salary (Moon and Corbett). Public universities, on the other hand, will accept any form of the *bac*, but students may be less sure of securing a job fitting their level of education after graduation and thus might struggle to justify or bear the cost of attending the university (Lewis). Which *bac* a student takes and how well they do on it is very closely associated with the institution they attended during their *lycée* years, which circles back to whether they had the resources to attend public or private institutions. The very system is stacked against certain students, and while the government has at times attempted to equalize the system—such as during the Savary reforms—there is no simple solution.

In Colombia, the *Saber* exam is relatively new; it was developed in the seventies, around the same time as the *Escuela Nueva* system, which was the first to make inroads into spreading education to rural areas. Unlike the *bac*, the *Saber* exam is not a basic guarantee of entrance to higher education, but like the *bac*, better scores give students a better chance of getting into a more elite university—usually a private institution (Carroll). If students receive better quality secondary education, they are more likely to score well on the *Saber* exam. This means that students who live in urban areas (which generally have greater access to private education) are more likely to go onto higher education than their peers from rural areas, which helps trap
students from rural areas in a cycle of poverty (Palacios). The future is determined by the education system, and that education, to some extent, perpetuates a cycle of elitism, where the rich continue to flourish and the poor continue to grow poorer.

Part of that cycle is determined by familial wealth because of the difference in cost and related education quality between private and public institutions. The obvious solution would be to invest a greater percentage of the nation’s budget into the public education system, so that the quality of public institutions would go up without shifting the burden onto individual students, their families, and universities themselves. The alternative, which both the French and Colombian governments have favored, would be to allow or force universities to look for money elsewhere. Doing so, however, usually results in increased tuition—the fastest and easiest source of revenue—that makes university more inaccessible to students from lower socioeconomic groups. It is a neat and simple solution for the government, on the one hand, but a burden for students, on the other hand. It is also the solution that the U.S. example provides.

Higher education in the U.S. is entirely privatized; even public institutions charge high tuition rates to students, and how expensive the university or college is generally proportional to the quality of education it provides. In the sixties, as we can see through the Atcon Plan, the U.S. attempted to export its system to the rest of the world (Acevedo Tarazona). While neither Colombia or France immediately adopted it—though not for lack of trying on Colombia’s part—on the global stage it seemed that the U.S. could show the results of its system; U.S. institutions consistently hold the majority of spots in the top 100 universities ranked internationally (QS Top Universities). When Sarkozy argued that French universities needed to become more internationally competitive, it was the U.S. system he wanted to replicate in France—globalization is here at play (Labi).
Policy Changes

Some of the policies the French and Colombian governments have implemented have responded directly to the issues explored in the previous section, specifically the structural issues related to elitism. Separation of Church and state, for example, allowed for the establishment of public institutions that could reach more students. That separation was usually accompanied by an edict to make education free and mandatory for all students up until a certain age, which again touches upon the issue of accessibility. In France, that separation came in the form of the Jules Ferry reforms in the 1880s, and in Colombia it came with López Pumarejo’s Revolución en Marcha in the 1930s.

The Savary reforms in France in the 1980s addressed structural problems by moderating the selectionism of the bac, and decentralized the education system to better address the needs of students in more rural areas (Lewis). Moreover, by creating the ZEPs, the Mitterand administration attempted to improve the quality of education for students who lived in areas with poor education but who could not afford private schooling (Lewis). In Colombia, the Escuela Nueva system in the late seventies similarly worked to address the needs of students in rural areas (Luschei and Vega). As did the MEN’s early 2000s PND, which addressed the issue of decentralization, which was particularly important for students who were displaced because of guerrilla-paramilitary warfare. Students, in turn, rarely objected to these sorts of policies because they benefited from them directly.

The conundrum is that by making education more accessible, which in theory improves the economy and country’s prestige, more students enter the system, which means that more money is needed to cover the cost of their education if they attend public institutions. And as the U.S. remained under the international spotlight, the American system drew the eye as a viable
alternative for funding the education systems. While there was no single moment that marked the
switch from addressing accessibility issues to Americanizing their respective systems, there has
been a marked shift in the types of policies both the French and Colombian governments
proposed.

Colombia turned to the U.S. model first by attempting to follow the Atcon plan with its
*Plan Básico* in the 1960s, but that first try did not make it very far. The implementation of the
*Saber* exam in the seventies, however, did create a standard for university admission that
modeled itself partially off of the U.S.’s SAT (Carroll et al.). In 1991, the new constitution
allowed for universities to seek outside funding, which could take the form of tuition. The 1991
constitution was followed by further attempts at privatization—Santos’ *Ley 30*, which went
nowhere—and a government disinclination to provide further funding for an education system
sorely in need of it, as evidenced by Duque’s refusal to follow the terms of the agreement
reached with students in 2018. Furthermore, even policies like *Ser Pilo Paga*, while they helped
fund the education of some poorer students, favored private universities (Bogotapost). Most of
the more recent policy proposals in Colombia, it would seem, hold the American model as
something to which the nation should aspire.

France has faced a similar tendency toward privatization in its more recent educational
policies. While the first major attempt at privatization and shifting university admissions policies
came in the 1980s—twenty years after Colombia’s battle began—and did not succeed, more
recent privatization projects have been more successful. In 1986, Devaquet’s measures failed,
but in 2009, Sarkozy passed a bill, the LRU, that encouraged universities to seek outside
funding, largely in the form of tuition (Marshall). In 2018, Macron proposed to follow a
different part of the American model by devaluing the *bac* and instead having entrance to
university depend on grades and other admissions requirements. His proposal would presumably mean that students with better grades would have prioritized access to higher education, as in the American model with its all-important grade point average.

In the 21st century particularly, both the French and Colombian governments have proposed changes to the educational policies of their countries that would align their educational systems more closely with the American model. Those policies have mostly been about funding, but they have also sought to change admissions requirements for higher education. It is the combination of these policies that students, in turn, have protested against.

**Student Reactions to Policy**

For French and Colombian students, every aspect of accessibility to education is a battle to fight; students have supported changes to the system that make education available to more people while protesting changes that create barriers to quality education. Thus, when their governments propose changes that would do exactly that, students have taken to the streets.

In France, students shut down the Devaquet proposal in the 1980s by marching and demonstrating because they thought that privatization would create a significant divide between those who could afford university and those who could not (Bryson). In addition, they saw the move to change admissions policies—to devalue the bac—as a step backwards in the fight against elitism. The students’ success in halting the proposal only solidified their commitment to the fight against Americanization, though their next battle would not be as successful: Sarkozy was able to begin implementing his privatization reforms in 2009 despite student strikes. As a result, student poverty rates rose over the next ten years; it seems that while the reforms did not stop students from actually entering the university system, they did place a strenuous economic burden on the students who enrolled (Godin). The 2018-19 protests, centered around Macron’s
admission proposal, were also inspired by the students who saw themselves as unable to bear that economic burden (Godin).\textsuperscript{123}

French students supported the Berthoin reforms of the fifties and the Savary reforms of the eighties because they addressed issues of enrollment and elitism, but they fought against the the Devaquet, Sarkozy, and Macron reforms because rather than continuing to fight for greater accessibility, they made higher education a less economically viable option for students. As sound employment prospects increasingly depend on students’ attainment of a Bachelor’s degree, the burden becomes one that students feel they must shoulder, and so their best recourse is to protest the systems that shift towards this American model where student debt is the norm.

In Colombia, the situation has progressed in a similar manner, though not quite yet to the same extent that it has in France—i.e. there have been no reports of student self-immolation in recent years that I am aware of. Students have been protesting the Americanization of their education system since Atcon’s plan influenced \textit{el Plan Básico} in the seventies. In 1989, they achieved a mixed victory with the new constitution of 1991—accessibility to education at the primary and secondary levels was ensured, but while the government promised to be involved in the financing of public universities, it also gave them room to seek other means of funding (Max Planck Institute).\textsuperscript{124} And when the government failed to increase funding for those universities over the next thirty years despite the increase in enrollment, universities did turn to tuition to make up those costs. In 2011, when the Santos administration attempted to make that a more permanent solution, as well as increasing foreign (namely American) investment in education with \textit{Ley 30}, students fought against the proposal (Arce).\textsuperscript{125} They won, ensuring that the American model would not influence the Colombian system as much as the government might have wished. In 2018, students took a more proactive stance; they took to the streets over the
funding that had failed to increase since the passage of the 1991 constitution and demanded that
the government invest in their futures. The Duque administration caved to their demands, though
a year later when the money did not appear students felt compelled to take to the streets once
again.

While Colombian activists have achieved more recent victories against the
Americanization of their education system than the French, they have also been fighting against
it for longer. Additionally, their system—with the Saber exam and university admissions
process—is already more similar to the American model. But like the French, Colombian
students have recognized the difference between policies like Escuela Nueva that increase
accessibility and policies like Ley 30 that place a heavier economic burden on students. And like
the French, Colombians understand that their employment futures might look brighter with a
university education, which makes the economic burden they might have to shoulder all the more
dire.

Ideological Roots

While student protests, especially in the 21st century, were primarily movements against
the Americanization of their education systems—which, as the very word “Americanization”
indicates, was already shaped by globalization—they were also part of a broader ideological
movement whose flames were fanned by globalization. The sparks that lit the fire emerged in the
sixties, and found continuity into the 21st century.

The height of the Cold War was in the late sixties, which coincided with the most
explosive student movements in France and Colombia. While the American hegemony in the
Western hemisphere had its supporters in many Western governments, students looked upon it
less favorably. The ELN, for example, adhered to the Guevarist school of communism, while the
French students who rallied during May 68 followed the Maoist school. Both saw communism as a better alternative than the capitalist ideology the Americans espoused and their respective governments would buy into. Both schools of communism are anti-imperialist—which greatly mattered to many Colombian students because they could witness firsthand the legacy of American imperialism on their continent—and advocated for the rural poor—which mattered to both French and Colombian students who wished to see more access to education in non-urban regions in their nations (Haas). As the issues of accessibility rose to the fore, these communist ideologies seemed to address them more clearly than did capitalist ideologies.

Over the years, the prominence of blatant communist alignment amongst students faded, but the anti-capitalist sentiment never did. Students in protests in both Colombia in 2011 and 2018 and France in 2007 and 2019 expressed disappointment in their governments’ reform policies because they were in part “neoliberal” and too American (Barreda). For many students, these protests are not solely about protesting the debt burden they might have to bear should the reforms pass, but also about an ideological divide between themselves and their governments. A wedge has only been further driven into that divide by the governments’ response to student protests.

**Government Response to Student Protests**

The French and Colombian governments responded to student protests in the sixties by escalating the situation through the deployment of police (France), the national army (France and Colombia), and paramilitary troops (unofficial response in Colombia). The use of state and state-affiliated law enforcement to quell student activism was often perceived as hostile by the students, and when that deployment led to the deaths and injuries of students, that perception of hostility was not without reason.
The movements of the 21st century garnered a similar response from the French and Colombian governments. In 2018, French students were “violently evacuated” from a university they were occupying as a protest action, while Colombian students clashed continually with ESMAD in both the 2011 and 2019 movements (Marshall). In 2019, those clashes culminated in the deaths of several students (Sandoval). If students are dying at the hands of government agencies, it begs the question: Is there a possibility of reconciliation or mediation between governments and the students they are meant to serve?

There is no clear answer to that question. The dissonance between what the people—in this case students—think is in their best interest and what the governments think is in their people’s best interest is strong. If the concessions granted by the Colombian government in 1991, 2011, and 2018 are any indication, then there is a possibility that governments will capitulate to students by dropping certain legislation, even if they deploy police to keep protests from getting out of hand. They will not, however, necessarily follow through on investing in the student population the way students might demand, i.e. refusing to actually put money into public institutions. Similarly, the French government will concede to student protestors when they come out in enough force, as they did—with reservations—in 1968 and 1989. More recently, however, in December 2020, the French government has faced controversy surrounding laws about the way it handles police brutality, which is not necessarily a positive sign for future student activists (Al Jazeera).
CONCLUSION

The student protests and educational policy proposals in 2019 in both France and Colombia were temporarily put aside in light of the Covid-19 pandemic that has swept the globe. Yet the pandemic has only raised more questions about how globalization has affected educational policy and whether or not students will benefit from these new policies or how they will react to them. While it might be some time before we find definitive answers to these questions, we know from the ways in which globalization has complicated educational policies and student reactions to them in the past that there will not be a simple nor straightforward answer.

I began this thesis by attempting to establish a connection between educational policy and student activism in Colombia and France in order to answer the question: do changes to educational policy prompt student activism? While I think the answer is an emphatic “yes,” I also found many factors that I had not anticipated that add nuance to that response. I have thus come to the conclusion that globalization, in particular, has played a role in creating the connection between educational policy and student protest by showing issues of accessibility to education from different angles, making it possible for the American model to become so influential and controversial in light of ideological differences between students and their governments, and underscoring the reactions of the French and Colombian governments to the protests of their students. Studying the history of educational reforms highlighted the shift toward more Americanized educational policy that is less focused on accessibility, while exploring the eight student movements demonstrated why students protested and the ideological roots of those protests. Looking at the government response through police deployment only
further underscored the growing divide between students and their governments that has intensified alongside globalization.

This thesis is only the beginning of a broader conversation about the connections between educational policy and student protest, and the role globalization plays therein. There is still much research needed to get a better picture of the answer and many countries—particularly non-Western nations—whose policies and protests might yield a different approach to the question. But it is my hope that this thesis provides a fresh perspective and interesting answer to the debate about educational policy and student protest as pertains to Colombia and France.
Fig. 1. Colombia (top) and France (bottom) on world maps. Source: ontheworldmap.com, 2020.

Fig. 3. One of the most well-known pictures of the Argentine revolutionary, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, whose take on communism inspired many Colombian organizations. Source: Wikipedia, November 2020.
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<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Moyenne Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Grande Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 7</td>
<td>1st Grade</td>
<td>Cours préparatoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 8</td>
<td>2nd Grade</td>
<td>Cours élémentaire 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - 9</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
<td>Cours élémentaire 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 10</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
<td>Cours moyen 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 11</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
<td>Cours moyen 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 12</td>
<td>6th Grade</td>
<td>6ème</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 - 13</td>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>5ème</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 14</td>
<td>8th Grade</td>
<td>4ème</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 - 15</td>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>3ème</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 16</td>
<td>10th Grade</td>
<td>2ème</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 17</td>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>1ère</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 - 18</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
<td>Terminale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 4.** A model of the French education system as compared to the American system. Source: Renée Z. Wang, October 2016.

**Fig. 5.** A comparison of the percentage of the French population to have achieved tertiary education in 2000 and 2012, divided by age group. Source: Data taken from the OECD, 2014. Graph created by author using Microsoft Excel, 2020.
Fig. 6. The number of universities in France, according to which region they are located. The Île-de-France region, where Paris is located, plays host to the greatest number at 17 universities, more than double the region with the next highest number of universities. Source: decasia.org, January 2010.

Fig. 7. A comparison of the percentage of Colombians of university age enrolled in higher education, divided by income level. Source: WENR, June 2020.
Fig. 8. The symbol of the Escuela Nueva foundation, which reads “volvamos a la gente,” in English “let us return to the people.” Source: Fundación Escuela Nueva, 2020.

Fig. 9. Police clash with student protestors in Paris in May 1968. Source: The Guardian, May 2018.
Fig. 10. Protestors in Paris in 2009 hold a sign that reads “Sauvons l’université!” in English “Let us save the university!” Source: The Chronicle of Higher Education, July 2009.

Fig. 11. The ELN’s symbol, which reads “Ni un paso atrás, liberación o muerte,” in English “Not a single step back, liberation or death.” Source: Wikipedia, 2017.
Fig. 12. Activists lay the Colombian flag next to the spot where Dilan Cruz, a student protestor, was fatally wounded during protests in 2019 in Bogotá. Source: The New York Times, November 2019.


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Figure 3: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Quotations_from_Chairman_Mao_Tse-Tung_bilingual.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Quotations_from_Chairman_Mao_Tse-Tung_bilingual.JPG)
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Figure 5: [http://www.oecd.org/education/France-EAG2014-Country-Note.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/France-EAG2014-Country-Note.pdf)
Figure 6: [https://decasia.org/academic_culture/2010/01/08/geographic-centralization-of-french-universities/](https://decasia.org/academic_culture/2010/01/08/geographic-centralization-of-french-universities/)

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Figure 11: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Liberation_Army_(Colombia)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Liberation_Army_(Colombia))

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