

Polygraph Testing in Colombia*

Manuel Novoa Bermudez and Sidney Wise Arias

Introduction

Geographically, Colombia is located at the top of South America straddling two hemispheres with access to both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It covers 1,141.748 Km² of land and 928.4460Km² of coast for a total of 2,070.408 Km².

Just to give you an idea of its immense territory and the complexity of its borders, suffice to say that Colombia has borders with 11 countries: Venezuela (2,219Km) Brazil (1,645Km) Ecuador (586Km) and Panama (266Km). Its maritime limits include Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Jamaica, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. Difficult to imagine?

Politically, Colombia is divided into 6 great regions: Andina, Caribe, Pacifica, Orinoquia, Amazonia and Insular. The estimated population in 2009 was 45 million of which 25% live in rural areas and the rest in the most important cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Pereira and Cartagena.

Colombia's geographic location so close to the Equator allows for a variety of climatic zones and ecosystems ranging from the vast region of the Andes with mountains 6,000 meters high (approximately 18,000 feet) to the Amazon and Orinoco jungles as well as extensive coastlines of the Caribbean and Pacific region.

Very difficult to govern, Colombia is certainly a country of contrasts. Just as other countries in the recent past, Colombia has had to face growing problems of violence especially during the 1980's and 1990's, mostly due to guerrilla and paramilitary

activities, drug trafficking and organized crime. These activities forced the Colombian government, the private sector and society in general, to develop security measures and systems in order to guarantee the normal flow of peaceful daily living as well as social and economic development. What is unique is the fact that they have been successful at it.

This need to fight corruption and crime in all its manifestations as well as its consequences brought to Colombia innovative approaches as well as state of the art technical assistance. Witness the birth of polygraphy as an efficient and reliable investigative tool in the detection of crimes such as kidnapping, infiltration and association with illegal groups.

History of Polygraph

There are no exact references as to the introduction of polygraph testing in Colombia but we know that by 1996 some agencies used polygraph examinations, mostly administered by foreign polygraph examiners.

In 1996, Defence Systems, Colombia, brought Richard O. Arther to train some polygraph professionals for the first formal intensive course with a duration of five weeks and 280 hours.

In 2000, the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, DAS, a government institution comparable to the US Secret Service, sent two professionals to be trained in Mexico's School of Polygraph. That same year Defence Systems, Colombia, brought Sidney Wise Arias to teach another intensive course to eight of its employees. This basic training had a duration of seven weeks and 290 hours.

*The authors wish to thank Aida Nunez Wise Arias for her careful translation of the original manuscript into readable English.

In 2001, Risk & Solutions, a Colombian private company, together with Nueva Granada Military University, organized a basic polygraph course taught by Sidney Wise Arias, this time with 8 weeks and 320 hours and 11 trainees. At this time, two other DAS investigators were sent to Mexico's School of Polygraph to train.

By mid 2001, the small group of polygraph examiners working in Colombia organized themselves into the Asociación Colombiana de Profesionales en Poligrafía - ACPP- the first professional association to gather examiners and promote the use of polygraph in both government institutions and the private sector.

Toward the end of 2001, again Risk & Solutions together with Nueva Granada Military University offered another polygraph course taught by Sidney Wise Arias and trained another ten professionals.

The Latinamerican Polygraph Institute (LPI) was founded in Colombia in August 2002. It was the first Polygraph School in Central and South America. It received accreditation by the American Polygraph Association (APA) in January 2003. That same year, LPI received the accreditation of the Latin American Polygraph Association (ALP);

to this date the only polygraph school in the country to receive such accreditation. Additionally, LPI has received official recognition from the American Association of Police Polygraphists (AAPP).

In 2006, Latinamerican Polygraph Institute received its second accreditation. That same year Colombian polygraph professionals proposed and eventually formalized the second professional association for polygraph examiners receiving the name of Sociedad Colombiana de Poligrafistas.

From 2006 to this date, some foreign polygraph schools have begun offering polygraph training in Colombia, some of them are: International Polygraph Studies Center, Academy for Scientific Investigative Training and Marston Polygraph Academy.

Polygraph at Present

At present there are approximately 478 polygraph examiners in Colombia; 331 work in the private sector and 147 in government institutions (Figure 1).

In government institutions, 89 work for the National Police, 18 work for the Air Force, 17 work for the Army, 14 work for the DAS and 9 for the Navy (See Figure 2).

Figure 1

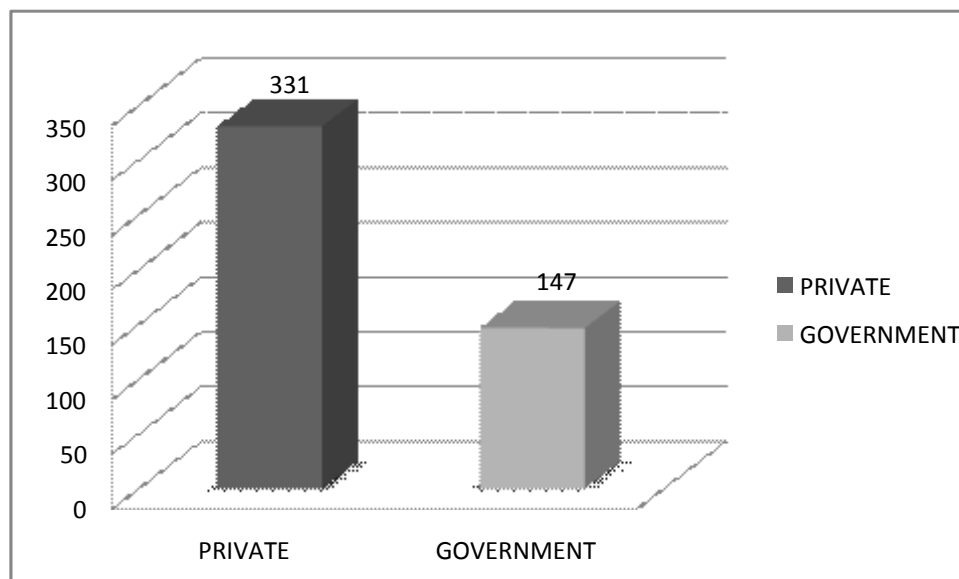


Figure 2

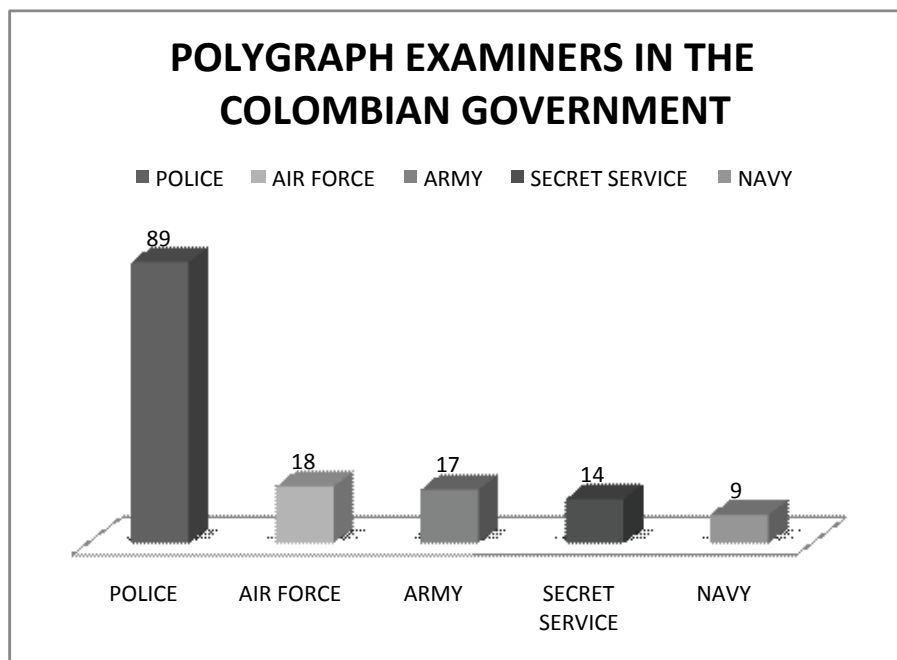
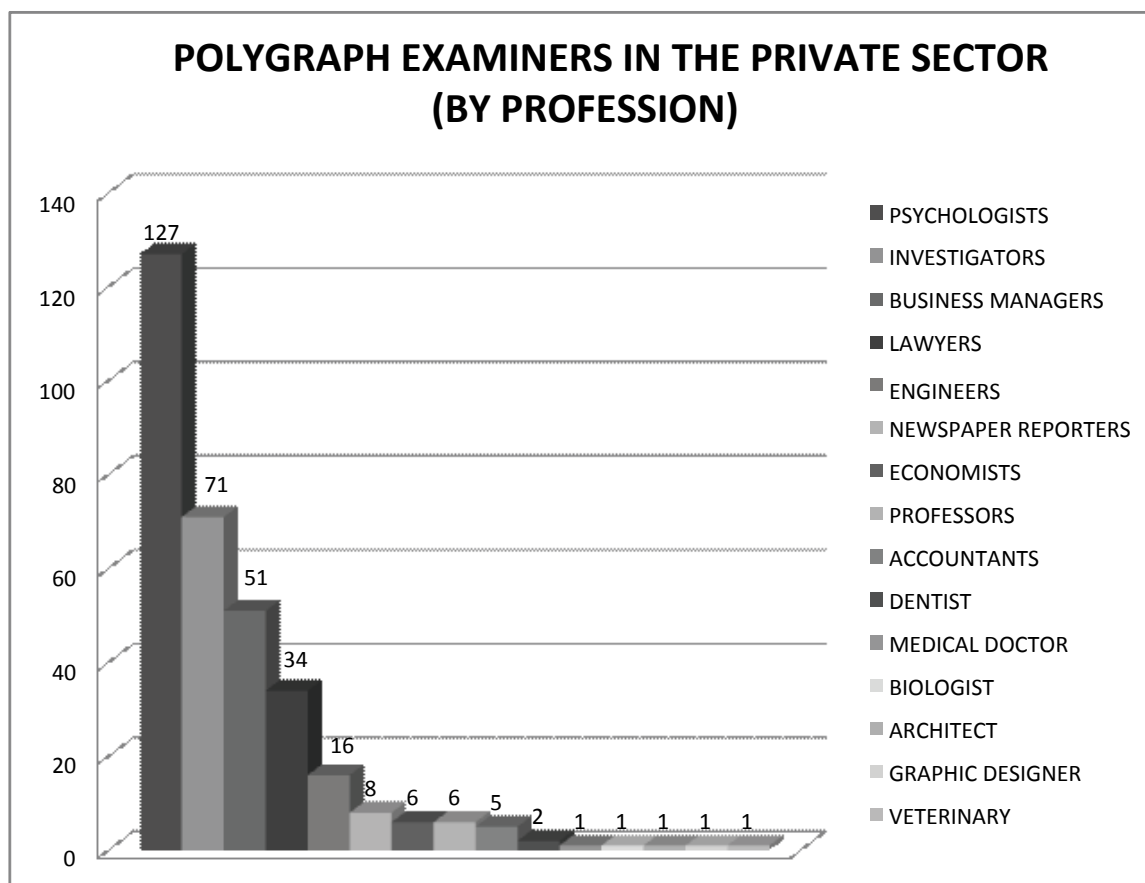


Figure 3



Those in the private sector mostly work for 42 companies that offer polygraph services in the main cities: Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena and Bucaramanga. A few work independently.

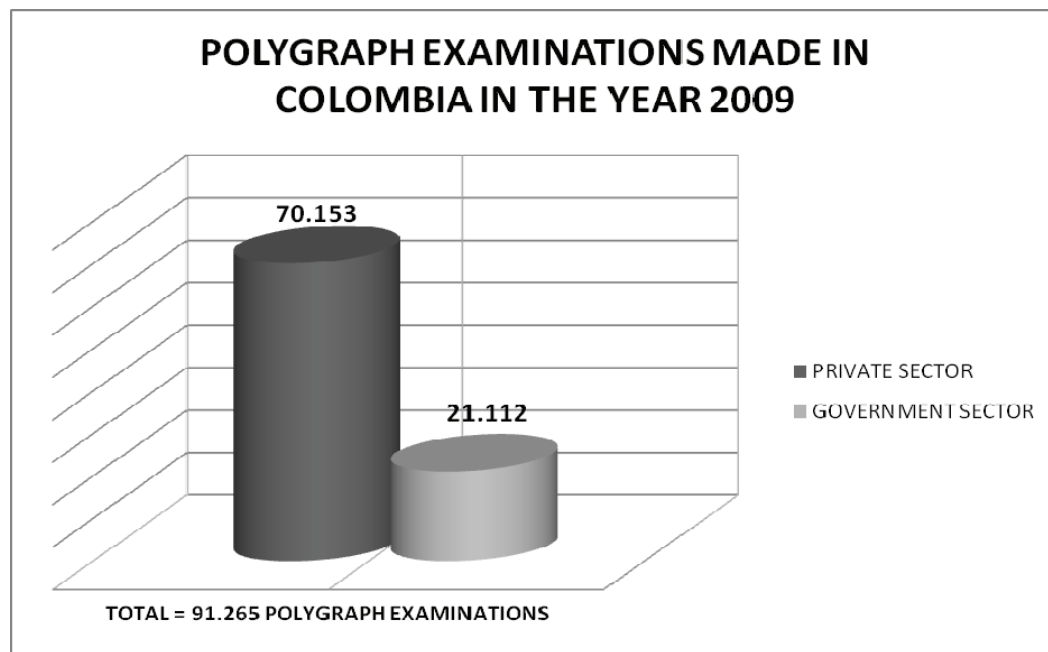
Out of the 331 examiners working in the private sector, we have professionals from the following disciplines: 127 Psychologists, 71 Investigators, 51 Business Managers, 34 Lawyers, 16 Engineers, 8 Newspaper reporters, 6 Economists, 6 Professors, 5 Accountants, 2 Dentists, 1 Medical Doctor, 1 Biologist, 1 Architect, 1 Graphic Designer and 1 Veterinary (See Figure 3).

In 2009, 91,265 polygraph tests were administered in Colombia. 70,153 tests were administered in the private sector and 21,112 in government institutions (Figure 4).

Sixty-five percent of the polygraph examinations administered in the private sector were Pre-Employment tests for a total of 45,599. Twenty-two percent were Routine (periodic screening) tests for a total of 15,434 and 13% were Specific-issue examinations for a total of 9,120 polygraph examinations (Figure 5).

In Government institutions, 13,000 polygraph tests were administered by the Colombian National Police equal to 60%. 3,200 tests were administered by the Colombian Army equal to 15%. 2,512 tests were administered by DAS equal to 12%. 1,400 tests were administered by the Navy, equal to 7% and 1,200 tests were administered by the Air Force equal to 6% (Figure 6).

Figure 4



Most polygraph examiners in Colombia use validated techniques in polygraph tests. Commonly they use the Utah Zone Comparison, Federal Zone Comparison, Relevant/Irrelevant and MGQT techniques.

Some private companies and the Air Force are using the AFMGQT and the National

Police uses the U.S. Government's LEPET technique.

Polygraph instruments in use at present in Colombia are Lafayette LX4000 and LX5000, Stoelting CPS II, Limestone Polygraph Professional Suite and Axciton.

Figure 5

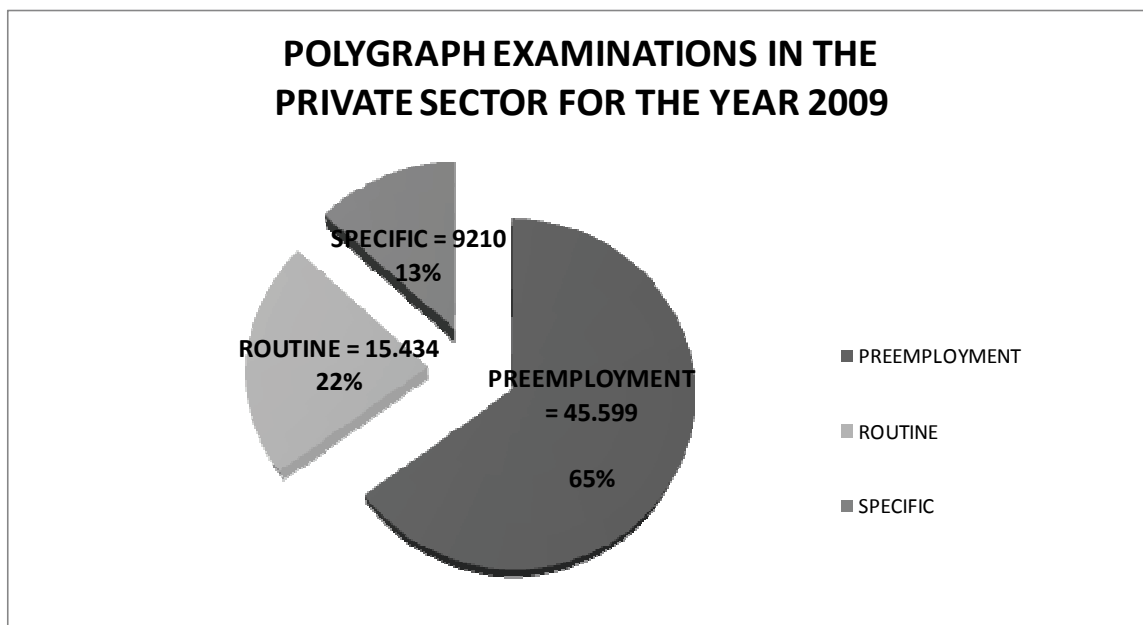
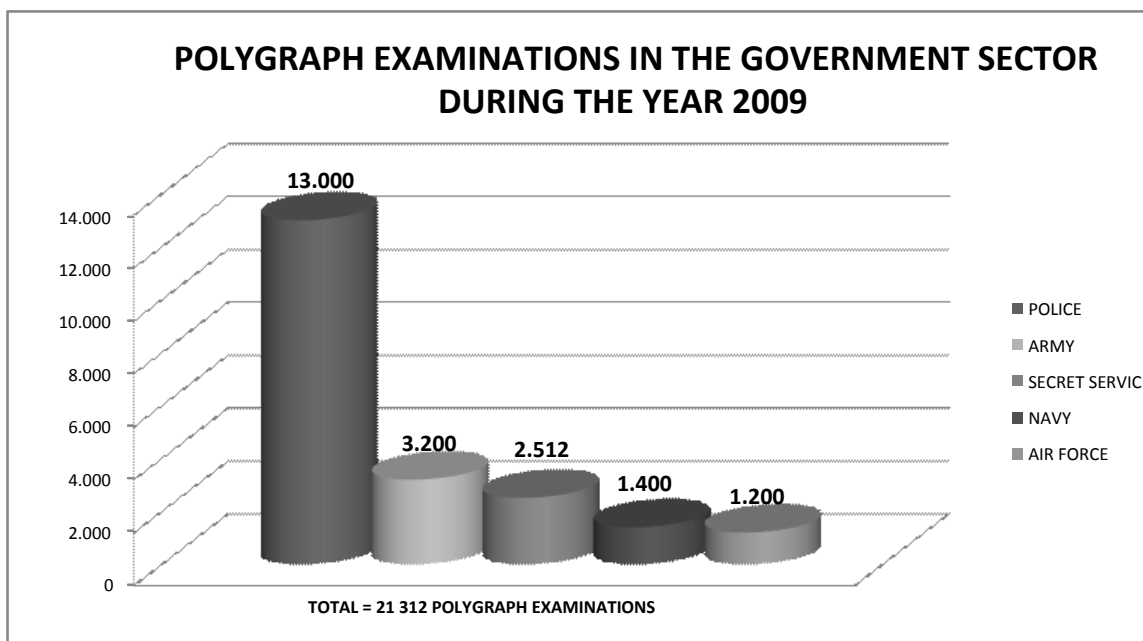


Figure 6



Detected Problems in the Development of Polygraph

Some clients in the private sector express concerns that the use of polygraph testing is not contemplated in the actual laws of Colombia. There is no specific legislation at this time that authorizes and regulates the use of the polygraph.

For example, in 2008 one TV station presented a series of programs showing polygraph testing being used in relation to political, moral and sexual issues. This program affected the prestige and credibility of polygraph testing.

Another problem that presented itself is the Computerized Voice Analyzer that has been introduced in the Colombian market at much lower prices than polygraph instruments and insisting that this is much more effective than polygraph in the detection of deception.

As far as the polygraph profession, some administer tests without proper training and necessary qualifications, offering their services at much lower prices. As expected, their tests are of poor quality. This, in turn, has generated distrust in the reliability of results.

The lack of interest of most examiners for continued education and advanced courses also affects the quality of examinations. This may be due in part for the significant expenses of traveling to the USA and courses offered by LPI and other schools don't seem to be of real interest to many examiners and they are poorly attended.

The co-existence of two polygraph professional associations has generated division and jealousy among practicing examiners.

Important Achievements

One of the most important achievements has been the commitment and support of responsible polygraph professionals within the Asociacion Colombiana de Poligrafistas Profesionales (ACPP) to promote and make known polygraph testing in academic activities, universities and other professional associations.

The active participation of these professionals in the preparation of Resolution #2593 of December 11, 2003 issued by Superintendencia de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada resulted in the regulation of the use of polygraph by private security companies.

At the same time, ACPP members participated in the preparation and presentation to the Colombian National Congress of a draft that will consider the inclusion of Polygraph in the new legislation of the Code of Penal Procedures. Additionally there is work being done at present in the structuring of another draft that would regulate, by law, the use of polygraph testing in Colombia.

The results of an Evidentiary Polygraph test that had national impact were successfully presented and sustained at the Supreme Court level as well as other Evidentiary tests in different courts of Colombia. These have contributed to the promotion of polygraph testing in the Colombian Justice System. These successes have resulted in the inclusion of polygraph testing within the field of forensic psychology as a viable technique in cases of sexual abuse.

Since 2009, work has been done in the development of scientific investigations involving polygraph testing. LPI and Catholic University of Colombia are pioneering an alliance. At present LPI and Catholic University are involved in the investigation of characteristics of social-demographic culture in examiners and subjects as well as the investigation of the impact of Directed Lie Questions in the Colombian population.

The Future of Polygraph in Colombia

We firmly believe polygraph testing will continue its growth and acceptance in the private sector, the judicial system, and the government institutions.

However, in order to achieve a sustained and adequate growth it will be necessary to support training programs elevated to higher levels such as the Masters Degree in Psychology with emphasis in Credibility Assessment that is actually being prepared within the alliance of LPI and Catholic University of Colombia.

The positioning of polygraphy into the Forensic Credibility Assessment discipline will allow the implementation of new technologies for their use and acceptance as evidence in the legal courts of Colombia.

The implementation of these new technologies and scientific developments will

demand from serious and responsible institutions such as APA, AAPP, ALP, American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) and Colombian Academy for Advancement of Science and Technology (ACAC), the creation of innovative and accessible programs for training and continued education.