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FEATURED Q&A

What Is the FARC's Political Future in Colombia?



Iván Marquez, the FARC's chief negotiator in its peace process with Colombia's government, may be among the group's members entering politics. // File Photo: FARC.

Q The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, rebel group announced on July 24 that it would launch its new political party on Sept. 1. As part of the peace deal that the FARC signed with Colombia's government in November, the party will be allocated 10 unelected seats in Congress through 2026. How will the presence of FARC members alter the political balance of Colombia's Congress and the legislation it passes? Who are the FARC members that are most likely to enter politics? What political and policy positions is the FARC likely to take?

A Adam Isacson, senior associate for the regional security policy program at the Washington Office on Latin America: "Unless it wins more than its allotted 10 seats, the FARC will have little legislative power. Five FARC legislators can do little in a 102-seat Senate and a 166-seat House. Their best options would be to join in a center-left coalition—something their more Leninist leaders may oppose—or serve as swing-vote 'kingmakers' if the rest of the Congress is evenly split. The new FARC party faces great political challenges. They're not popular: a post-accord polling bump that brought them over 15 percent approval has faded back to single digits. The Venezuela effect has hurt them: leaders' expressed solidarity with the Maduro regime goes down poorly in Colombia. Recent reports have also pointed to divisions between the group's moderate and hardline wings. Ex-guerrilla candidates face strong security concerns, too. Nine demobilized guerrillas and 11 of their relatives have been murdered in the past few months. So have dozens of social leaders in zones of longtime FARC influence. Add to

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

ELN Eyes Cease-Fire Ahead of Pope's Visit

The Colombian rebel group said it was considering a unilateral cease-fire during the time that Pope Francis visits the South American country in September.

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ECONOMIC

Peru to Award at Least \$6.15 Billion in Construction Contracts

The projects are planned following devastating floods earlier this year in the Andean nation.

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POLITICAL

Venezuela's Maduro Seeks to Meet With Trump

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro said he is seeking to meet or speak on the phone with U.S. President Donald Trump, whose administration has sanctioned Maduro and several other top Venezuelan officials, during the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York.

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Maduro // File Photo: Venezuelan Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Venezuela's Maduro Seeks Meeting With Trump

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro said Thursday that he seeking to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump in person or speak with him over the phone during next month's United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York, the Associated Press reported. During a speech to Venezuela's new pow-

 **Mr. Donald Trump, here is my hand."**

— Nicolás Maduro

erful constituent assembly, Maduro said he instructed his foreign minister to approach the United States to set up a meeting. "Mr. Donald Trump, here is my hand," said Maduro, saying that he wants Venezuela and the United States to have a strong relationship. Maduro made the remarks a day after the Trump administration sanctioned eight Maduro allies who were involved in the creation of the constituent assembly, accusing them of violations of democratic norms and human rights. The United States previously sanctioned several other top officials, including Maduro. On Thursday, Trump said he discussed the situation in Venezuela along with those of North Korea and Afghanistan with top aides, including Vice President Mike Pence. The vice president is scheduled to travel Sunday to Colombia where he is expected to discuss efforts to pressure Maduro following the installation of the constituent assembly, which on Tuesday declared itself superior to all other branches of Venezuela's government. "We had some very good meetings, some very good ideas, very good thoughts, and a lot of decisions were made," Trump said after the security briefing, without giving more details, the AP reported. Following the widely denounced constituent assembly election, Maduro's government is becoming more isolated from world financial

markets. Credit Suisse said Thursday that it has prohibited trading in Venezuelan bonds amid the country's recent developments and "political climate." The bank said it would subject any future transactions involving officials or assets from Venezuela would be subject to additional screening.

Colombia's ELN Eyes Cease-Fire For Pope's Visit

Colombia's National Liberation Army, or ELN, may declare a cease-fire for when Pope Francis is expected to visit the country next month, said a leader of the Marxist rebel group, which was originally led by radical Roman Catholic priests, Reuters reported. "His holiness Francis is a pope who has returned the church to think in terms of the impoverished and excluded majorities. He is a progressive pope, and anything we Colombians can do to receive him is a gesture for the support he gives to the peace process," said Pablo Beltrán, the chief negotiator of the ELN in the ongoing peace talks with the Colombian government. The two sides have been negotiating a peace deal in Ecuador. "We're going to make all the necessary effort so that the cease-fire is bilateral, but if it's not achievable we will consider the possibility of making it unilateral," Beltrán said. The Colombian government and the ELN began formal peace talks in February, after years of behind-the-scenes discussions on the agenda of the talks and logistics for the negotiations. The government did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Peru to Award at Least \$6.15 Bn in Construction Deals

Peru's government is planning to award at least \$6.15 billion in construction contracts follow-

NEWS BRIEFS

Nine Killed, 11 Injured in Mexico Prison Fight

Nine inmates were killed and another 11 sustained injuries when a fight broke out in a prison in the northern border city of Reynosa, the government of Tamaulipas State said in a statement Thursday, Reuters reported. Mexico has seen a significant increase in violent crime this year, making 2017 one of the deadliest years in recent history for Mexico. At least four inmates were killed in July during a riot that broke out in a prison in Acapulco.

Brazilian Gov't Delays Announcement of New Fiscal Target Until Monday

Brazil's government is delaying until Monday its announcement of a new budget deficit target, an announcement that had been expected on Thursday, Reuters reported, citing two people with knowledge of the matter. The wire service had earlier reported that President Michel Temer's government was likely to boost its budget targets for this year and next year to 159 billion reais (\$50 billion) annually, a rise from the current targets of 139 billion reais and 129 billion reais, respectively.

Mexico's Central Bank Holds Key Interest Rate Unchanged

Mexico's central bank held its overnight interest rate at 7 percent, following its own guidance of closing an aggressive hiking cycle in June, despite an increase in consumer prices in July, the Financial Times reported. The bank said that a key rate of 7 percent was consistent with helping the economy reach its inflation target of 3 percent, plus or minus one percentage point. The national consumer price index went as high as 6.44 percent in July, above market expectations, but policymakers are forecasting that consumer prices are nearing stabilization.

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these challenges the specter of embarrassing war crimes trials next year. The FARC hasn't yet chosen its candidates for the 2018 congressional elections, but the list is bound to include longtime leaders. Among them is chief negotiator Iván Márquez, who served in Congress during a failed 1980s cease-fire. But Márquez and other leaders face accusations of ordering serious war crimes. During the next congressional period, Colombia's new transitional justice system may sentence them to confinement. This would raise the bizarre scenario of FARC legislators making laws by day and returning to some sort of house arrest at night. The peace accord does not prohibit that outcome, but Colombia's courts might."

A **Juan David Escobar Valencia, director of the Center for Strategic Thought at the Universidad EAFIT in Medellín:**

"The agreement between the government and the FARC, which the Colombian people rejected, included innumerable benefits for the terrorist group that endanger Colombia's institutions. The granting of at least 10 seats in Congress for two presidential terms and the possibility of accessing 16 additional seats in the House of Representatives may not represent a change in congressional control, but it is a poor precedent for democracy because it institutionalizes that in Colombia it is not necessary to win votes or offer alternatives to society to reach power. Do not be convincing, just dangerous. The agreement is designed so that no matter what happens, the FARC gains political power, while those who have been in politics for decades honestly will not have exclusive radio stations, television channels or the economic advantages that the drug trafficking group will have on account of the national budget, in addition to an immense illegal fortune that will return from Venezuela for campaigns. This money will feed the FARC's political campaigns for municipal councils, mayors' offices and governorships

in more than 160 municipalities of Colombia contemplated in the agreement, in which the 'social organizations' are supposed to be the only ones who can engage in politics.

“ It is a poor precedent for democracy..”
— Juan David Escobar Valencia

However, those municipalities are those that are dominated by the FARC and that coincide with the areas of coca cultivation that quadrupled during the negotiation. The FARC elite would become congressmen, and local guerrilla commanders would be in political and economic control of many territories in Colombia."

A **Jason Marczak, director of the Latin America Economic Growth Initiative at the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council:** "The upcoming launch of the FARC's political party is a major step in the process of reconciliation, but it is unlikely to affect the balance in Colombia's Congress. Staunch opposition to the group's political aspirations and a polarized landscape will limit the FARC's influence in the near future. It has weak legitimacy as a political actor and will have to convert historical presence in rural territories long-overlooked by the central government into actual political support. However, it is important for Colombian democracy to open up the political space to these new members of society. Party rhetoric will most likely focus on social development and land reform. As the FARC transitions from an armed organization to a political entity, its leaders will not participate in what promises to be a fierce 2018 presidential election. FARC leaders Timochenko

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ing the country's devastating floods earlier this year, the country's reconstruction czar, Pablo de la Flor, told Reuters. The contracts will be awarded through 2021, he said. Projects totaling nearly \$600 million are scheduled to begin this year, said de la Flor.

BUSINESS NEWS

Petrobras Sees 68% Drop in Q2 Profit

Brazilian state-owned oil company Petrobras saw its second-quarter net profit drop by 68 percent year-over-year to 292 million reais, or about \$92.3 million, the company said Thursday in a filing, Market Watch reported. Revenue was down 6.1 percent to 67 billion reais, due to lower fuel sales in the domestic market. The company said lower sales and a higher tax bill were partially to blame for the drop in earnings. Chief Executive Officer Pedro Parente also pointed to "nonrecurring factors" that signifi-



Parente // File Photo: Petrobras.

cantly affected the number, including rulings in tax cases that forced Petrobras to pay 6.23 billion reais. Petrobras also had to provision 818 million reais due to a dispute over an offshore drilling vessel. Aside from the nonrecurring factors, executives said the company saw a decent second-quarter result. Free cash flow was positive for the ninth-consecutive quarter, Parente said. Petrobras has total debt of \$113.84 billion as of June 30, down from \$115.12 billion at the end of the first quarter. Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization decreased by 6.6 percent to 19.09 billion reais in the second quarter.

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and Iván Márquez—closely associated with Venezuelan chavismo—will remain at the forefront of political discussion around reforms needed to complete peace accord implementation. Meanwhile, the FARC will likely push for legislative measures tailored to Colombia's left-wing base. The real question for its political future will be whether it can bring forth effective rural development policy proposals. Political allies will be hard to come by in such a polarized domestic scenario. If attention can be deflected away from the organization's violent history, and toward an agenda that addresses Colombia's pressing rural development concerns, the FARC will have validated its political efforts and will potentially cement its position in the political space."

A Sergio Guzmán, analyst for global risk analysis at Control Risks in Bogotá: "The FARC will pursue its political objectives through the formation of a party called the Broad Front for Colombian Reconciliation (FARC), maintaining the FARC acronym, which is not considered a very significant re-branding exercise. According to local media sources, FARC negotiators Iván Márquez and Pablo Catatumbo will likely be selected as senators in the upcoming Congress. This move is likely to draw strong rebuke from opposition leaders. Although the FARC's entry into politics will provoke increased levels of polarization in Colombian politics, accompanied with hardline political rhetoric, it is unlikely the move will radically change

the composition or legislative leanings of Congress. The 10 seats allotted to the group are unlikely to tilt the balance or secure the passage of legislative initiatives. For reference, the Democratic Pole has been in

“The 10 seats allotted to the group are unlikely to tilt the balance or secure the passage of legislative initiatives.”

— Sergio Guzmán

Congress since 2001, and although its members have led important legislative debates, they have not passed any significant legislation. The FARC members of Congress and future candidates—who remain committed to Marxist communism—will likely campaign on populist platforms opposing extractive industries and promoting income redistribution. Furthermore, although the FARC is extremely unlikely to win the 2018 presidential election, it has called for the creation of a coalition in support of the peace agreement. It will look to established leftist parties, such as the Democratic Pole and the Patriotic March, and left-wing candidates including Gustavo Petro and Piedad Córdoba, to form alliances."

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