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## FEATURED Q&A

# Will Duque Find Support Among Lawmakers?



Colombia's new Congress will be seated on Friday. The country's House of Representatives is pictured above. // File Photo: Colombian Government.

**Q** Colombia's new congressional cycle will officially start on July 20, with 102 members of the Senate and 166 members of the House of Representatives elected in early March beginning their four-year terms. Conservatives gained strength, though the right wing's main parties failed to gain a majority, and centrist parties lost ground. Meantime, the former FARC rebels will have 10 seats in Congress that were guaranteed to them in their peace deal with the government, despite the fact that voters resoundingly rejected them at the polls. Will incoming President Iván Duque be able to form a strong coalition in Congress to advance his agenda? What role will former President and current Senator Álvaro Uribe have in Congress and in Duque's government? What can be expected from the FARC's faction?

**A** Oscar Ardila, senior associate at Avenida Capital in Bogotá: "Once the new congressional cycle starts on July 20, a government coalition that includes all center-right and liberal parties is expected to start pushing for President-elect Iván Duque's agenda. The consolidation of the coalition's power in Congress is clear. The center-right parties were the most voted in the Senate, accounting for more than 42 percent of the votes. Including the Liberal Party, the coalition represents 55 percent of the votes. Álvaro Uribe alone accounted for more than 860,000 votes and became the senator with the most votes in the history of the country. In the House of Representatives, the story is similar, where the Centro Democrático—Duque's party—gained 13 seats as compared to 2014, while Cambio Radical gained 14. Con-

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## TODAY'S NEWS

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## At Least 10 Killed in Latest Clashes in Nicaragua

Police officers and masked assailants entered several cities, including opposition strongholds on Sunday. Some 300 people have been killed in nearly three months of violence in the Central American country.

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## Cuba to Recognize Private Property in New Constitution

The change could eventually translate to more legal protections for foreign investors and private businesses.

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### POLITICAL

## Haitian Prime Minister Resigns

Haitian Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant resigned, following a series of riots that were sparked by the government's efforts to raise fuel prices. The price hikes were part of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund that is designed to modernize the economy.

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Lafontant // File Photo: Haitian Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## At Least 10 Killed in Latest Violent Clashes in Nicaragua

At least 10 people were killed Sunday in several locations in Nicaragua amid clashes between anti-government protesters and police and paramilitary forces, *El Nuevo Diario* reported. Six of the dead were civilians, and four were riot police, the newspaper reported. Among the civilians were minors, including a 10-year-old girl, according to the Nicaragua Human Rights Association. Three students were killed during violence at the main university campus in Managua, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. Meanwhile, as many as eight people were killed when masked gunmen attacked opposition members who had set up barricades in two provinces, the newspaper reported, citing the rights association. Armed assailants entered Masaya, a stronghold of the opposition and a largely indigenous city. Paramilitaries aligned with the government also entered the cities of Diriá, Niquinohomo and Catarina, according to human rights groups and Silvio José Báez, the auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Managua. "To everyone in these cities, I beg you to escape, protect yourself and save your lives!" Báez said Sunday morning in a posting on Twitter. "Avoid more deaths!" *The Wall Street Journal* put the death toll at 11. "It was butchery," said Álvaro Leiva, the rights group's spokesman. He said armed groups believed to have links with the government led attacks in several towns. Many of the assailants wore military-style fatigues as well as black ski masks. The clashes appeared to be an effort to subdue strongholds of the opposition following nearly three months of violent protests that have cost some 300 lives. The government of President Daniel Ortega has described the anti-government protests as an effort to force him from power. Ortega has been president since 2007, and his current term ends in 2022. The past week in the Central American country has been particularly bloody, with 25 deaths since last Tuesday amid attacks by police, who have been

working with armed gangs, on barricades that protesters set up in Managua on the campus of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua and in other parts of the country, *The Wall Street Journal* reported, citing local human rights groups, local news reports and leaders of the Catholic Church.

## Haiti's Prime Minister Resigns Following Riots

Haitian Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant resigned Saturday, prompted by a series of riots that took place from July 6 to July 8 in response to government efforts to raise fuel prices by as much as 51 percent, the Associated Press reported. President Jovenel Moïse accepted Lafontant's resignation on a national television address Saturday night, *Le Nouvelliste* reported. He also vowed to meet with multiple sectors of society in order to have a "more inclusive government" and develop agriculture, energy and infrastructure, as well as boost investment, employment and stability. The increase in prices for gasoline, diesel and kerosene that sparked protests was part of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund that seeks to modernize the Haitian economy, the AP reported. At least seven people were killed and dozens of businesses suffered from looting during the riots, which caused Lafontant to cancel the planned price hikes last week. But opposition groups and some businesses continued to protest, pressuring for Lafontant's resignation, *Le Nouvelliste* reported. Moïse is to nominate a new prime minister who would then be subject to Senate confirmation.

## Peña Nieto Urges U.S. Officials to Reunite Separated Families

Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto on Friday urged Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other top U.S. officials to act quickly to reunite

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Colombian President-elect Names Foreign, Agriculture Ministers

Colombian President-elect Iván Duque announced key members of his cabinet last week, naming Carlos Holmes as foreign minister and Andrés Valencia as agriculture minister on Friday, Reuters reported. Holmes has previously served as interior minister and education minister, and has held several diplomatic positions. Duque also announced Nancy Patricia Gutiérrez as interior minister and Gloria Alonso as head of the national economic planning department.

## Peru's Vizcarra Fires Justice Minister

Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra fired his minister of justice, Salvador Heresi, after an audio recording of a phone conversation between Heresi and a judge accused of influence peddling was made public on Friday, Reuters reported. The audio shows Heresi asking Judge César Hinostroza to counsel him on a legislative proposal. Hinostroza is under investigation after various secret recordings of other phone conversations, in which he appears to be negotiating favors, were released by local media, Reuters reported. Heresi and Hinostroza have both denied wrongdoing.

## Brazilian Prosecutors File Charges Against Former Vantage Drilling Executive

Prosecutors in Brazil have filed corruption and money laundering charges against the former chief executive of Houston-based oil contractor Vantage Drilling, the Associated Press reported Friday. Federal officials allege that Paul Bragg paid some \$30 million in bribes to a former executive of state-owned energy company Petrobras in order to help Vantage win a \$1.8 billion contract in 2009 to charter a drill ship.

migrant families that had been separated at the countries' shared border, the Associated Press reported. Pompeo, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen and White House advisor Jared Kushner, U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, were also among the officials who traveled to Mexico City to meet with Peña Nieto and Mexican President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Marcelo Ebrard, whom López Obrador has designated as his foreign minister, said the meeting was "frank, respectful and cordial."

## ECONOMIC NEWS

# Cuba to Recognize Private Property Under Constitution

Cuba's new constitution will recognize private property for the first time in decades, state-run newspaper Granma reported Friday. Private property was banned after Fidel Castro and the Communist Party seized power in 1959, but property sales have been allowed since 2011, BBC News reported. The draft constitution would recognize all private property, which could eventually translate to more legal protections for foreign investors and private businesses, though it vaguely mentions limits to property transactions and the state's preferential right to property, Granma reported. The proposed constitution also clearly emphasizes the continuance of central planning and state enterprise, BBC News reported. Moreover, it limits presidential terms to two consecutive five-year terms, creates a prime minister position, and bans discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin or disability. LGBT activists also hope it will include the legalization of same-sex marriage, which the national assembly proposed be included in June. The national assembly is expected to approve the new constitution later this week, and the charter will then be put to a popular referendum by the end of the year for final approval. It will replace the current constitution, which the Communist Party approved in 1976.

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sidering Congress members from minority parties, Duque is expected to have majority support in both chambers, at approximately 62 percent in the Senate and 65 percent in the House of Representatives, according to our estimates. On the contrary, the FARC, as a political party, will have to deal with major challenges during its first term in Congress. They are expected to spend most of their time defending their seats while Duque pushes forward the changes to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace that would jeopardize them, and at the same time, they will have to deal with internal turmoil as the investigations being conducted on Jesús Santrich evolve. Regarding Uribe, he continues being a strongman in the country, and his voice of support will most likely be a defining force in driving the coalition's agenda."

**A** **Maria Velez de Berliner, managing director at RTG-Red Team Group, Inc.:** "Iván Duque will need all his political acumen to form the coalitions he needs 'to unite and heal Colombia' through his legislative agenda, as he promised. Senator Gustavo Petro, the losing presidential candidate of the Colombia Humana party, and Senator Jorge Enrique Robledo, leader of the Polo Democrático Alternativo party, will be formidable opponents, particularly regarding any amendments to the FARC peace agreement, to the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and to the newly enacted legal protections and concessions made by the Santos administration to organized criminal groups to facilitate their demobilization and surrender. The recent assassinations of four leaders of Colombia Humana in Antioquia, as well as the opposition of a majority of Colombians to the demobilization's requirements, especially for Cartel del Golfo and the Oliver Sinisterra group, are making it hard for Duque to form coalitions, given that Duque can count on only 40 percent of senators and representatives. Also complicating Duque's agenda are the alleged plans of the U.S. government to

use Colombia as a platform to effect regime change in Venezuela. And the last thing Duque needs is the pugnacity of Álvaro Uribe and any attempts by him to shape Duque's

“**Iván Duque will need all his political acumen to form the coalitions he needs 'to unite and heal Colombia'...**”

— Maria Velez de Berliner

governing agenda. Uribe's meddling can only undermine Duque's credibility as his own man. Regarding the FARC's miniscule percentage of votes in the congressional elections, it will use its guaranteed 10 congressional seats to ally with Petro's opposition to Duque, but its direct legislative influence remains questionable."

**A** **Andrea Saldarriaga Jiménez, international political analyst:** "The most recent presidential elections in Colombia leave the country at a crossroads. While many voters were convinced by more centrist projects, evidenced by Sergio Fajardo's 4.5 million votes, a majority of Colombians voted for Gustavo Petro and Iván Duque, two extremes on the political spectrum. Many wounds must be healed in order to overcome the current polarization. President-elect Duque will have to appeal to the 40 million voters who did not support him. With a majority in the newly elected Congress, it is very likely that Duque will succeed in building a strong coalition to advance his agenda. Economic reforms are likely to find allies across the aisle, given the need to reinvigorate the economy. However, the opposition will fiercely resist reforms to the peace deal. The delay in the approval of the normative framework

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of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in June already gives us a taste of what is to come. The FARC's political party will likely play an active role in defending this peace agenda. It is yet to be seen how much influence Senator Uribe will have on Duque's government. Recent announcements about confirmed or potential cabinet members seemingly indicate an administration very much in line with Senator Uribe. The newly confirmed minister of finance, Alberto Carrasquilla, held that position during Uribe's first term as president. As new confirmations come in, Duque will continue to unveil the path he intends to take. What is certain is that, given his short trajectory in politics, Duque would not be able to withstand a fierce confrontation with Uribe in the first few months of his presidency, given that he owes his political capital to Uribe."

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

"It is an illusion to think Congress and its dynamics will be dramatically transformed. The mechanics will not be very different from those of a government that needs to achieve majorities with other sectors whose sails are useless if the government wind does not blow on them, even if they know they have enough ships at sea. President Uribe seems to have understood what his visible level of prominence should be, given President Duque's characteristics. The

Democratic Center's bench will be the basis of the government's legislative support. The Conservative Party, or what is left of it, will know how to value its seats. The same

**“ It is an illusion to think Congress and its dynamics will be dramatically transformed.”**

— Juan David Escobar Valencia

goes for what remains of the Liberal Party. The Unity Party is an endangered species and knows that, without bureaucracy, it will die sooner. Former candidate Vargas Lleras will be fundamental in the government's aspirations, given his weight in Congress. In the United States, they insist Colombia has centrist parties, but that is incorrect. The opposition will try to play its role, but the profound differences between its members suggest that it will not be easy for it to organize a monolithic structure. The FARC narco-terrorist group's bench will be symbolic and probably represented by people other than the ringleaders, who will be more occupied with not being extradited to the United States."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gene.kuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gene.kuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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