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THEDIALOGUE

FEATURED Q&A

How Does the Case Against Uribe Affect Colombian Politics?

Former president and current senator Álvaro Uribe has accused the British intelligence agency, MI6, of colluding with foes to supply recordings that implicate him in crimes. // File Photo: Colombian government.

Q Former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe on Aug. 1 asked to withdraw his resignation from the Senate, which he had tendered the previous week, amid a Supreme Court investigation against him. While Uribe said he wanted to relinquish his Senate seat in order to concentrate on his defense in the witness-tampering and bribery case, his opponents had accused him of seeking to transfer the case to an ordinary court, rather than the Supreme Court, which hears cases against legislators and which Uribe has claimed is biased against him. To what extent does the case threaten Uribe's power and political future? Will the Supreme Court judge the case differently than would an ordinary court? What does the case against Uribe mean for the government and political standing of his protégé, newly sworn-in President Iván Duque?

A Luz Ángela Sánchez, senior director at Llorente y Cuenca in Bogotá: "From the more than 20 juridical complaints former President Álvaro Uribe has received, this is the only one that actually came into a second hearing before the highest judicial authority. Uribe loses credibility because of the fact that the investigation into his actions was originated by his own accusations against Senator Iván Cepeda, a case that was recently closed and did not have any results—on the contrary, the court found evidence to open a case against Uribe. However, Uribism in Colombia is such a strong political movement that those people who consider themselves 'uribistas' support him and truly believe that the situation is a political montage orchestrated by opponents. Uribe will maintain popular support, but the investigation

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TODAY'S NEWS

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Abortion Bill Suffers Defeat in Argentina

After a debate that lasted more than 16 hours, 38 lawmakers voted against a bill allowing abortions within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, while 31 voted in favor of it and two abstained.

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NAFTA Deal on Autos Could Come This Week: Report

Negotiators from the United States and Mexico expect to reach a deal this week on automobiles that would allow Canada to rejoin talks revising the North American Free Trade Agreement.

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Mexican Union Boss Released From House Arrest

The controversial former head of Mexico's powerful teachers' union has been released from custody after a court determined there were not sufficient grounds to proceed in a lengthy money-laundering case.

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Gordillo // File Photo: Mexican government.

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POLITICAL NEWS

Argentina Abortion Bill Suffers Narrow Defeat in Senate

Argentina's Senate on Thursday narrowly rejected a bill to legalize abortion during the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, The New York Times reported. After a debate that lasted more than 16 hours, 38 lawmakers voted against the bill, while 31 voted in favor of it and two abstained. Thousands of advocates on both sides gathered outside Congress to rally supporters. Just weeks ago, the abortion-rights campaigners appeared to have a good chance of success, but opposition hardened and senators from conservative provinces came under intense pressure to stand against the bill. "This bill did not solve anything," Senator Olga Inés Brizuela y Doria said after the vote. "We have to go to the causes of abortion and not abortion as a solution." Neighboring Uruguay in 2012 declared abortions legal before twelve weeks of gestation, after a five-day reflection

Olga Inés Brizuela y Doria // Photo: ines_byd via Twitter.

period. Brazil's Supreme Court is currently considering whether to allow elective abortions during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, as well, the Associated Press reported. More than 40 experts were expected to testify this week, but there is no timeline set for when Brazil's court could make a decision. In Chile, the Constitutional Court last year upheld legislation ending an absolute ban on abortions, permitting the procedure when a woman's life is in danger, when a fetus is not viable and in cases of rape. Several countries in Central America continue to ban abortion in all instances.

Mexican Union Boss Released From House Arrest

The controversial former head of Mexico's powerful teachers' union has been released from custody after a court determined there were not sufficient grounds to proceed in a lengthy money-laundering case, the Associated Press reported. Upon her release, Elba Esther Gordillo, 73, said she would make no further comment until Aug. 20, her attorney said. Gordillo long operated as an influential figure in the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, akin to union bosses a half century ago in the United States. For years she could reliably deliver teachers' votes to the PRI, but then she switched her allegiance to the conservative National Action Party, helping them break the PRI's reign with wins in 2000 and 2006. Her arrest came under the current administration of the PRI's Enrique Peña Nieto, who sought an education reform that had been opposed by teachers and undercut some of the union's strength. Her arrest came after the reform was enacted over union objections and street protests. She was arrested in early 2013, accused of embezzling some $160 million and living lavishly with homes abroad, plastic surgery and a private airplane. She was blamed for misusing union funds and arrested the day after the education reform that she opposed was signed into law. Gordillo denied the charges and described herself as a political prisoner. The case was investigated as organized crime, but she was never convicted. President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been critical of Peña Nieto's education policies and on the campaign trail pledged to repeal the reform. Teachers dislike aspects of the new policy, such as too quickly dismissing teachers who fail to pass evaluations. But López Obrador's incoming education minister, Esteban Moctezuma, has said instead that some aspects would be maintained, Deutsche Welle reported last week. López Obrador has also proposed a scholarship of about $130 to ensure poor student do not abandon their studies for economic reasons.

NEWS BRIEFS

Peru Agriculture Exports Rise 19 Percent This Year

Peru's agricultural exports grew by 19 percent through June this year as compared to the same period in 2017, totaling $2.75 billion, the Association of Peruvian Farming Producers said Wednesday, state news agency Andina reported. Agriculture remains the country's second-largest export sector, boosted by fresh fruits and vegetables, particularly avocados, grapes and asparagus, which are mostly shipped to Europe and the United States.

Liberty Latin America Sees Revenue Decline

Colorado-based Liberty Latin America announced today its revenue in the second quarter fell 2 percent compared to the same period last year, to $922 million. The telecommunications and entertainment service provider, which operates in over 20 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean under the consumer brands VTR, Flow, Liberty, Más Móvil and BTC, said its revenue for the first half of the year fell 3 percent to $1.83 billion. The company noted that revenue has fallen $73 million this year to date in Puerto Rico, primarily attributable to last fall's hurricane damage.

Bolivian Police Arrest Thief Who Mistakenly Stole Presidential Medal

Police in Bolivia said Wednesday they have captured one of the thieves who had stolen the historic presidential medal and sash out of a car that a military officer had left unattended, La Razón reported. Two other accomplices have fled to neighboring Peru, according to the report. When the thieves realized what they had stolen and the likelihood they could not sell it for cash easily, they left the bag in a local church and called a media outlet to tip off police. The gold medal is studded with emeralds and dates to the country's founding in 1825.

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ECONOMIC NEWS

NAFTA Deal on Autos Could Come This Week: Report

Negotiators from the United States and Mexico expect to reach a deal this week on automobiles that would allow Canada to rejoin talks revising the North American Free Trade Agreement, Bloomberg News reported Wednesday, citing people familiar with the discussions. Canada's inclusion would allow all three nations to tackle major remaining barriers, such as dispute resolution and the so-called sunset clause, which would automatically put NAFTA up for reconsideration after a

Seade // File Photo: @JesusSeade via Twitter.

given number of years. The administration of President Donald Trump claims lower wages in Mexico have drawn manufacturing jobs away from the United States. Mexican Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo, Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray and Jesús Seade, a representative of President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador, met Wednesday with U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer in Washington on the issue. "We are definitely encouraged to keep on working," Guajardo told reporters after the meeting. The group plans to resume discussions today. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau this week has been holding phone calls and meetings to make Canada's case for the trade agreement with governors of U.S. States including Texas and Indiana, both of which voted solidly for Trump in the 2016 election, as well as the chief executives of major businesses, such as David MacLennan, the CEO of food and agriculture trading giant Cargill.

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will empower his opposition in Congress, which could be an important factor for those congressmen or parties that have not decided to support or oppose the new government—they could be inclined to oppose it definitively. On the other hand, even if both the Supreme Court and the ordinary jurisdiction act under the same values of neutrality, the fact that the highest authority of the judicial branch is in charge of the investigation and the future trial means that there will be greater exposure, an aspect that makes the case more sensitive. Finally, Uribe is the leader of President Duque's party, which now represents the strongest political force in Congress, but at this moment, it still needs support from other parties. Anticipating the legislative reforms they have planned, and given this investigation, many congressmen could distance themselves from the Democratic Center Party and the current government. However, if the results of the investigation favor former President Uribe, this could empower and give legitimacy to the perception that he is the politician Iván Duque's government needs to take Colombia forward, a common view among many citizens."

Sergio Guzmán, independent political risk consultant based in Bogotá: "The Supreme Court case against former President Uribe elicits great passion among his supporters and detractors. Uribe's case, paradoxically, was rooted in Uribe's own accusations against senator Iván Cepeda for witness tampering—the same crime that is now pinned on Uribe. Through its extensive investigation on Cepeda, the Court found that it was Uribe, not Cepeda, who was acting to tamper with witness testimony. It is important to state these facts, as there is an ongoing campaign by Uribe and his supporters to discredit the court system, the magistrates and judges as utterly biased and acting against him. However, the case will not be determined by the court's credibility, but by the weight of the evidence presented. Uribe himself is not unused to being investigated, as there are more than 276 ongoing investigations against him. However, the Supreme Court's subpoena of Uribe, without giving him the chance to offer his 'free testimony' of events, signals that the case is advancing more rapidly than Uribe and his legal team foresaw—as a reference, the case against Cepeda began in 2014 and was only resolved in February of this year. This, added to the backdrop of Uribe and Duque's proposal to reform the judicial system by merging the courts into one, raises the stakes. Although Uribe will not likely lose power or influence with the new government as a result of the court's proceedings, he will not emerge unscathed from this event. Duque will have to decide if he is more loyal to Uribe or the Constitution which he swore to defend on Aug. 7."

Juan David Escobar Valencia, director of the Center for Strategic Thought at the Universidad EAFIT in Medellín: "Politically speaking, former President Uribe is the most powerful individual in Colombia. This makes him the person with the most enemies in the country, and for that reason, this will not be the first or the last accusation against him, whether it's justified or not. He has, with or without valid reasons, various enemies, many internal and some external. Among the internal enemies, there are some criminal groups, such as guerrillas and the so-called paramilitaries, as well as political and legal sectors linked to them. If we understand power as the ability to influence others, in the hypothetical case that Uribe is accused and sentenced by whomever has final jurisdiction, his physical presence would be affected, as well as his ability to influence political decisions and, to a lesser extent, the feelings of his supporters. The nature of his leadership and follow-

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ers, of the way in which the investigation has taken place, and of those who accuse him, and those who have been involved in the Court process, suggests that his loss of influence would not be as great as it would be for another person. For President Duque, a hypothetical absence of Uribe in Congress has a considerable symbolic cost, but is not as significant in real terms. It could even be beneficial. Since his party did not have definite majorities in Congress, Uribe's absence would make it difficult for his opponents to radicalize their attacks and could even facilitate certain agreements, given that hatred for Uribe would no longer have Congress as its stage."

Maria Velez de Berliner, managing director of RTG-Red Team Group: "Most Colombians have mistrust of and contempt for the country's four highest courts and the Attorney General's office, currently undermined by the scandal of a group of judges in these courts who, allegedly, sold favorable decisions to the highest bidder. Contempt for and mistrust of the courts will favor Uribe, if he appears for questioning before the Supreme Court on Sept. 3 and if a criminal case against him ensues as a result. Uribe's superior acumen and ability to manage political drama to his advantage ensure his power and political future will continue. Which court will ultimately hear Uribe's case, if there is one, depends on the particulars of the case and on the jurisdiction each high court has, given Uribe's position as a senator or former president. So far, Uribe's case rests on accusations and counter-accusations made by witnesses of questionable credibility. As they are now, these accusations would be difficult to prove in a court of law that must decide under the rules of evidence and pretrial and trial hearings as codified in Colombia's criminal code. It does not benefit Duque to be identified as the president who cannot govern or enact his agenda without Uribe as senator. Duque is an honorable and capable politician who must be left to govern Colombia without Uribe's shadow and, least of all, Uribe's direction. Uribe's legal problems speak of Colombia's past. Duque represents her future, which Uribe's legal entanglements should not mar."

> **"It does not benefit Duque to be identified as the president who cannot govern … without Uribe as senator."**
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> **— Maria Velez de Berliner**

Advisor Video

Las Diferentes Caras de la Migración Venezolana: Retos y Soluciones

Una Discusión del Diálogo Interamericano con Pedro Leya, Presidente de la Asamblea de Cúcuta; Francisco Márquez de Visión Democrática; y Miryam Hazan de la Organización de Estados Americanos

Vea el **video** del evento del 1 de agosto

EN ESPAÑOL

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