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FEATURED Q&A

What Do Local Election Results Mean for Colombia?



Among the winning candidates in Colombia's local elections last month was Claudia López, who was elected mayor of Bogotá. // File Photo: López Campaign.

Q Colombians on Oct. 27 voted for governors, mayors and regional legislators in the country's first local elections since its 2016 peace accord. Among the winners was Claudia López, the first woman to be elected mayor of Bogotá and the first openly lesbian candidate to be elected mayor of a Latin American capital. What were the most significant results of the elections, and why were so many pre-election polls off the mark? What do the local elections foretell about the country's presidential election in 2022, and how will the newly elected officials influence the presidential race?

A Maria Velez de Berliner, managing director of RTG-Red Team Group, Inc.: "Colombians elected leftist/progressive or independent politicians who must govern within the old or aging, enduring, plutocratic, oligarchic status quo that has dominated Colombian politics for most of her history. The major loser was President Duque and his party, Centro Democrático, headed by ex-President and Senator Álvaro Uribe Vélez. Centro Democrático's massive losses across the country, including its ideological center of Antioquia and Medellín, left president Duque and his inner circle politically isolated, and Duque's legislative agenda in peril in Congress. The election of Claudia López as mayor of Bogotá is significant not because she is a lesbian, but rather because she articulated a leftist/progressive, socially focused alternative that resonated in a country where political restiveness and desire for change are endemic. Should the expectations of those who voted for López and others go unfulfilled, they will flip their allegiance

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

Brazil Deep-Sea Auction Draws Few Bidders

Brazil's long-awaited auction to award drilling rights for offshore oil deposits fell short of expectations, with only state oil company Petrobras and some Chinese firms submitting bids. Two of the four fields up for bids received none.

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ECONOMIC

Chilean President Proposes Hike in Minimum Wage

Chilean President Sebastián Piñera proposed an increase to the country's minimum wage as part of an effort to quell protests.

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POLITICAL

Colombian Defense Minister Resigns Over Minors' Deaths

Colombian Defense Minister Guillermo Botero stepped down amid criticism that he did not disclose the deaths of several minors during a military operation against rebel dissidents.

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Botero // File Photo: Colombian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Colombian Defense Minister Quits Over Minors' Deaths

Colombian Defense Minister Guillermo Botero resigned on Wednesday after coming under criticism for not disclosing the deaths of several minors in a military operation against dissidents of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, guerrilla group, the Associated Press reported. He submitted a resignation letter to President Iván Duque listing his achievements in reducing crime and saying the current "political circumstances" prompted his decision to step down. "I've accepted the resignation," Duque said on Twitter. A day earlier, Sen. Roy Barreras accused Botero of failing to inform the public of at least seven minors he said had been killed in a military operation against FARC dissidents. Botero called the accusations "speculative information," adding that the military denied it knew that minors were present. On Wednesday night, the chief prosecutor's office confirmed that eight minors died in the late August operation.

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to whomever promises to fulfill them. The leftist/progressive or independent trend that began in 2018 seems to be strengthening in Colombia. For example, Fuerza Ciudadana, a leftist party, took control of the state of Magdalena, despite polls to the contrary. Polls' results depend on the size and composition of the sample and the structure of the questions. Therefore, Colombian pollsters must use different samples and structure their questions differently in future elections. Polls aside, those elected must ensure their leftist/progressive or independent policies benefit a majority of Colombians and that their policies are not equated with communism/socialism and, most important, Venezuela's Madurismo. Should those elected fail in their governance, Colombian voters might resort to extremes that will throw

ECONOMIC NEWS

Brazil Deep-Sea Oil Auction Draws Few Bidders

Brazil's long-awaited, largest-ever auction of deep-sea oil deposits fell short of expectations on Wednesday, with only Brazilian state oil company Petrobras and Chinese firms participating, Reuters reported. The auction of drilling rights in four oil blocks in the so-called "transfer of rights" area raised just \$17 billion, far below the nearly \$26 billion in licensing fees that the government had hoped for, plus tens of billions more in production compensation, the Financial Times reported. The government of President Jair Bolsonaro had hoped the sale would turn the South American country into the world's fifth-largest producer in the next 10 years, up from ninth last year. However, out of more than a dozen major oil firms that registered to participate in the auction, only Petrobras and Chinese state firms CNOOC and CNODC did, Reuters reported. Two of the four oil blocks up for auction did not receive bids. High prices, complex sharing rules

Colombia into a political, governmental and economic tailspin in the 2022 presidential and senatorial elections."

A **Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, director for the Andes at the Washington Office on Latin America:** "Colombia's local elections served as a referendum for the electorate's perspective on President Iván Duque's first year in office. The results show a lot of discontent with Uribismo and the current government's policies since many of Duque's candidates did badly. They failed to win the most important cities of Bogotá, Medellín and Cali. The most embarrassing was losing Medellín, where independent candidate Daniel Quintero Calle won. Uribismo also lost strongholds in Antioquia, Montería, Huila,

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NEWS BRIEFS

Gang War May Have Been Involved in Killing of Family Members in Mexico

A gang war between two criminal groups fighting for control in a region in northern Mexico is a focus in the investigation into the massacre of nine members, including six children, of a Mormon family in Sonora state this week, officials said Wednesday, The New York Times reported. Gen. Homero Mendoza Ruiz, Mexico's chief of staff for national defense, said the two groups had engaged in a shootout near the U.S. border before the family was attacked. Authorities identified the groups as Los Salazar and La Línea.

China's Huobi Group Investing \$100 Million in Argentina Data Center

China-based Huobi Group, which is among the world's largest cryptocurrency trading platforms, said Wednesday that it is investing \$100 million to establish a new data center in Argentina, Reuters reported. The facility will be the largest of its kind in Latin America, the company said. Huobi Argentina has said it will create a gateway to convert Argentine pesos to cryptocurrency.

Mexico's Inflation Rate Holds Steady, May Lead to More Interest Rate Cuts

Mexico's inflation held steady in October, in line with the central bank's target of 3 percent and paving the way for further interest rate cuts this month, The Wall Street Journal reported today. Inflation rose 0.54 percent from the end of September, leaving the annual rate at 3.02 percent, practically the same as the previous month, the national statistics institute said. Banks in a Citibanamex poll unanimously expected a 25-basis point reduction in the interest rate target to 7.5 percent at the central bank's Nov. 14 meeting.

and a broader reticence about Brazil seem to have been the factors dissuading firms from submitting bids, the Financial Times reported. "The fact that two blocks were not auctioned does not reduce the importance of the result of this event," the Brazil Oil Institute said in a statement. "This is the first auction of its kind, offering large volumes already discovered, which reduces risk," it added. However, energy analysts saw the tender as a big disappointment. "Total disaster is the best way to describe this ... round," Ross Lubetkin, chief executive officer at Welligence Energy Analytics, a consultancy, told Bloomberg News. "Not one major participating is a glaring failure," he said. In total, the four pre-salt fields are estimated to contain as much as 15 billion barrels of oil. The oil fields that received no offers—Sépiea and Atapu—and the block that received just one offer from Petrobras—Itapu—are expected to return to auction next year under different rules, the Financial Times reported. Meanwhile, Petrobras will operate the Búzios field, with a 90 percent stake, in consortium with CNODC Brasil Petróleo e Gás and CNOOC Petroleum Brasil, each with a 5 percent stake.

Chilean President Proposes Increase in Minimum Wage

Chilean President Sebastián Piñera on Wednesday sent Congress a proposal for a minimum wage increase, part of a series of measures aimed at quelling almost three weeks of anti-government protests, the Associated Press reported. The proposal would guarantee workers a minimum salary of approximately \$470 a month. He sent lawmakers the measure as demonstrations continued, with protesters clashing with police in Santiago and a caravan of hundreds of vehicles honking and causing huge traffic jams as drivers demanded lower tolls. Piñera's government has responded to the protests with several changes that are subject to legislative approval. However, many demonstrators say the proposals are little more than a stopgap that fails to address the country's social inequality. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Oct. 28 issue of the Advisor.]

Save the Date

Nov. 14

5G and the Evolution of Smart Cities in Latin America and the Caribbean

FEATURED SPEAKER

The Hon. Ernesto Muyschondt
Mayor of San Salvador,
El Salvador

PANEL DISCUSSION

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Chief Investment Officer,
International Finance Corp.

Luis Fiallo
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China Telecom Americas

Margaret Myers
Director, Asia and Latin
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Ed Roach
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Córdoba and Sucre. The electorate showed fatigue with polarized extremes supporting alternative candidates and those in favor of peace. The first female and first lesbian mayor of Bogotá, Claudia López, a champion against para-politics and corruption, won. In Buenaventura, civic strike committee leader from the Black Communities' Process (PCN) Víctor Vidal won. In Chocó, the powerful Sánchez Montes de Oca political clan's machinery failed to win the governorship and the mayorship of Quibdó. We have also seen for the first time an Afro-Colombian elected governor of Cauca. A second takeaway is that the polls were incorrect and that there was manipulation of media to elevate candidates who in the end did not win."

A **Juan David Escobar Valencia, director of the Center for Strategic Thought at the Universidad EAFIT in Medellín:** "The election results were not really revolutionary, as there were no significant surprises—except for the pollsters' forecasts, which on this occasion seem to have receded in their ability to predict results. Or did they forget to do their job and offer desired results to those who pay for the surveys? The main cities and regions of the country continue to show conventional results as there were no dramatic changes in the political groupings that came to power. What was confirmed in

this election is that the atomization of political parties and the proliferation of political movements sponsored by the constitutional reform of 1991 is causing no strong results, and in the face of such segmentation, candidates with not very robust percentages end up ruling. It is not the majorities that govern

“**The Duque government's performance will facilitate or prevent the empowering of Bolivarian socialist movements.**”

— Juan David Escobar Valencia

the departments and the mayor's offices, so a two-round system should be established. With regard to the implications of these results in the next presidential contest in 2022, it would be irresponsible to suggest any. The local elections will predict little about the presidential vote. The Duque government's performance will facilitate or prevent the empowering of Bolivarian socialist movements. Those who think Colombia is immune to these evils should think again."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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Advisor Video

Latin America's Autumn of Discontent

An Inter-American Dialogue discussion with
Monica de Bolle, Johns Hopkins SAIS
Michael Penfold, IESA
Michael Shifter, Inter-American Dialogue

View a webcast of the Nov. 6 discussion.

PLAY

