



# Colombia: Presidential Elections in 2022

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On June 19, 2022, Colombian voters elected as president former senator Gustavo Petro in a close but decisive victory over [Rodolfo Hernández](#), a construction magnate and one-term mayor. The runoff garnered the highest turnout for a second round presidential vote since 1994, with Petro winning **50.5%** of the vote followed by Hernández at **47.3%**. President-elect Petro is set to become Colombia's first leftist president and leads a coalition of left parties known as the Historic Pact. The president-elect is a longtime leader of the political opposition and was once a member of the [M-19](#), a leftist guerilla group that demobilized in the late 1980s. [Petro](#) (62), successful in his third run for the presidency, is scheduled to be inaugurated August 7. [Hernández](#) (77), as the runner-up, qualifies for a seat in the Colombian Senate, although reportedly, he [may decline](#) it.

Colombia is the third most populous country in Latin America and a close U.S. ally. Many Members of Congress maintain a keen interest in Colombia, particularly on issues regarding narcotics trafficking, responses to Venezuela, trade, human rights, climate change, and the [peace process](#) with former insurgent forces. Petro's victory may potentially shift Colombia's position on several of these issues.

## Economic Uncertainty, Security Challenges, and a Divided Legislature

Petro's victory [unsettled markets](#) due to concerns about his economic policies and potential to redefine the two-decade partnership with the United States. On June 21, Petro received a congratulatory call from President Joe Biden, which Petro characterized as "[very friendly](#)."

Petro has advocated for the maximum implementation of a peace accord that the government [signed in 2016](#) with Colombia's then-largest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). His top policy objectives include bolstering institutions related to peace and reconciliation processes; addressing unequal access to land and increasing rural inclusion; fighting poverty; and reducing food shortages.

Colombia [faces](#) a complex security environment that poses significant [challenges](#) to the incoming administration. Areas of concern include the 1,400-mile border with Venezuela, Colombia's neighbor that reportedly provides a safe haven for criminals; the expansion of the National Liberation Army (ELN), now the largest leftist guerrilla group seeking to expand its control of illicit mining and drug trafficking; and the increasing cocaine exports managed by an array of criminal groups, including dissidents from the FARC peace accord.

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Petro's economic platform proposes major changes such as reducing the nation's dependence on hydrocarbon exports (petroleum currently makes up half of Colombia's export earnings), increasing taxes on the wealthy, free higher education, and potentially [updating free trade](#) agreements, including the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement. Given rising poverty levels—with just under 40% of the population living in poverty in 2021—some [observers suggest](#) that the pace of “decarbonization” may have to slow to increase government earnings from oil while its price is high to address fiscal deficits.

Francia Márquez, a human rights lawyer, is to be Colombia's first Afro-Colombian vice president. Her presence on the Historic Pact ticket may have contributed to its winning majorities in departments (states) where marginalized Colombians live. Petro and Márquez won largely in coastal areas of the country and in the capital city of Bogotá, where Petro served as mayor. Márquez is [recognized](#) as an environmental activist and advocate for Colombia's often-neglected ethnic and rural communities.

Petro and Márquez have few links to Colombia's traditional center and center-right parties that continue to represent many who [reject](#) their ambitious redistributive agenda in the traditionally conservative country. Petro's Historic Pact coalition gained seats in Colombia's lower [house](#) and the [senate](#) in the March legislative elections, but the coalition will [struggle to build](#) a governing majority in the 2022-2026 congress. Although Petro has allies in the legislature, reportedly he [lacks skills](#) as a coalition-builder.

Nevertheless, Petro will likely try to build a national consensus. Several [analysts maintain](#) that key cabinet appointments by Petro will be critical for improving his ability to govern with the fragmented legislature. The congress and courts may hinder his [anti-establishment policies](#) perceived as a [significant break](#) with past governments. Petro has advocated for drug legalization (possibly [to include cocaine](#)), abortion rights, engaging in new peace talks with the ELN, and normalizing relations with Venezuela.

## U.S.-Colombia Relations and Outlook

Colombia has endured more than half a century of internal armed conflict, leaving over 9 million conflict victims. Since 2000, Plan Colombia, a joint U.S.-Colombian program focused initially on counternarcotics and later on counterterrorism, laid the foundation for an enduring security partnership with the United States. Bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress and U.S. Administrations resulted in more than \$13 billion in U.S. foreign assistance appropriations for Plan Colombia and its successor programs.

Peace consolidation, which remains a major element of U.S. policy, has faced significant challenges. Colombia's current and former governments failed to assert [control in rural](#) areas when the FARC demobilized, thus intensifying violence by armed groups. The government's implementation of the peace accord has lagged, according to the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, which was designated in the accord to [monitor implementation](#).

Among other challenges likely to face the new government are the lingering economic and social effects of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that increased poverty and worsened inequality. Colombia was a [top recipient](#) of U.S. vaccine and other assistance. Colombia faces some of the highest inflation in the region, as well as the burden of hosting some two million Venezuelans who have fled their country.

Congress may monitor changes in Colombia's security cooperation with the United States, especially in counternarcotics. Following two decades of close partnership, Members of Congress who have expressed support for [deepening the relationship](#) with Colombia may consider potential effects on cooperation in areas such as trade, response to climate change, and regional migration. In addition, Colombia has been a strategic partner to the United States in promoting democratic governance and has worked to oppose the authoritarian government in Venezuela. Congress may monitor changes in Colombia-Venezuela relations under the incoming Petro administration.

For more background, see CRS Report R43813, *Colombia: Background and U.S. Relations*.

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