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## FEATURED Q&A

# Which Candidate Has the Edge in Colombia's Runoff?



Leftist Gustavo Petro celebrated with his running mate, Francia Márquez, after their ticket received the most votes in the first round of Sunday's presidential election in Colombia. They will face populist Rodolfo Hernández in the second round. // Photo: Petro Campaign.

**Q** Colombia's presidential election on Sunday saw center-right candidate Federico Gutiérrez lose his second-place position to populist firebrand Rodolfo Hernández—who styled himself as an anti-corruption crusader. Hernández will now face leftist Gustavo Petro in a runoff election on June 19. What were the most surprising results of the election, and what are the implications for both candidates in the lead-up to the second round? Will Petro and Hernández alter their campaigns? What sort of political alliances might take shape before the runoff vote?

**A** Michael Shifter, senior fellow and former president of the Inter-American Dialogue: "For some time, it was clear that, consistent with a region-wide trend, this would be a 'change election' in Colombia. Sunday's first-round results dramatically underscored that assessment. As expected, the vast majority of Colombians are unhappy with the country's direction and distrustful of and fed up with the political establishment, especially with the center and right. A leftist government—represented by Gustavo Petro and his popular running mate, Francia Márquez—only became possible after the peace agreement with the FARC in 2016. Petro, who lost to Iván Duque in the second round in 2018, was always expected to perform well this time around. Although after the March primaries it seemed that the most likely match-up would be Petro and center-right candidate Federico 'Fico' Gutiérrez, most analysts understood that an anti-politics 'outsider' could emerge and overtake Fico. That's exactly what happened with Rodolfo Hernández, who in the end was seen as a better instrument to channel

Continued on page 3

## TODAY'S NEWS

### ECONOMIC

## Chilean Senate Ratifies Escazú Agreement

Chile's Senate on Tuesday ratified the Escazú Agreement, which urged the promotion of environmental rights. President Gabriel Boric signed the treaty in March in one of his first acts after taking office.

Page 2

### BUSINESS

## Mexico's Pemex Planning to Pay Back \$2 Bn in Debt

Mexican state-owned oil company Pemex announced that it will offer to pay back \$2 billion in debt to big-ticket suppliers through a refinancing program.

Page 3

### POLITICAL

## Nicaragua Closes 83 More Civic Organizations

Nicaragua's National Assembly overwhelmingly approved a request from the government of President Daniel Ortega to close 83 additional civic groups and nongovernmental organizations.

Page 2



Ortega // File Photo: Nicaraguan Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Nicaragua Closes 83 Additional Civic Organizations, NGOs

Nicaragua's National Assembly, which is dominated by supporters of President Daniel Ortega, on Tuesday ordered the closure of 83 additional civic groups and nongovernmental organizations, accusing them of violating the country's "foreign agents" law, Agence France-Presse reported. The law, passed in 2020, requires people and organizations that receive funding from abroad to register with Nicaragua's interior ministry as "foreign agents." The ministry alleged that the organizations had "violated and failed to respect their obligations" and had also "obstructed the control and surveillance" of their activities, AFP reported. The government has accused nongovernmental organizations that receive foreign funding of helping the United States to plot a coup against Ortega. The National Assembly dissolved the organizations without debate. The measure passed on a vote of 75-0, with 16 abstentions, the Associated Press reported. The action brought to 200 the number of civic and nongovernmental groups that the government has dissolved this year, the AP reported. Since protests against Ortega's government erupted in 2018, the government has shuttered 320 such organizations. Among the targeted organizations is the Nicaraguan Academy of Letters, which was founded in 1928 and included opposition writers including Gioconda Belli and Sergio Ramírez, the AP reported. Since Ortega was re-elected to a fourth consecutive term last November in a vote that has been internationally denounced as a sham, Nicaraguan judges have sentenced opposition leaders, including former presidential hopefuls and ex-Sandinista leaders who broke with Ortega, to prison sentences on charges of "conspiracy to undermine national integrity." Thousands more have fled into exile since authorities violently cracked down on protesters in 2018, the AP reported. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Feb. 22 issue of the Advisor.]

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Chilean Senate Ratifies Escazú Agreement

Chile's Senate on Tuesday ratified the Escazú Agreement, which urges signatories to promote environmental rights, including access to information about the environment and protections for environmental activists, EFE reported. New Chilean President Gabriel Boric had signed the treaty in March in one of his first acts upon taking office. The Senate ratified the treaty in a vote of 31-3, with 11 abstentions. "This is a historic vote," said Foreign Minister Antonia Ur-



Urrejola // File Photo: Chilean Government.

rejola, EFE reported. The agreement, which two dozen countries have signed and 13 have now ratified, signifies "cooperation and solidarity between states in the face of a serious climate and human rights crisis," Urrejola added. "Chile is going to be part of an agreement whose central axis is cooperation in a fragmented continent hit by the climate crisis," she said. Urrejola added that is important for Chile to cooperate with other countries that do not have as robust protections for environmental rights activists "just as we require practices in defense of human rights defenders." Maisa Rojas, Chile's minister of the environment, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published April 1 that unity among countries is needed in order to address threats to the environment. "We are facing the worst environmental crisis in our history, and we need to face it in a united way," Rojas told the Advisor. "Therefore, we must move toward a form of development that contributes to well-being without exclusion, putting human

## NEWS BRIEFS

## At Least 11 Dead, 20 Missing as Hurricane Agatha Strikes Mexico

At least 11 people were killed and 20 more are missing after Hurricane Agatha struck Mexico's Pacific coast, Oaxaca Governor Alejandro Murat said Tuesday, the Associated Press reported. Rivers in the state overflowed their banks and swept people away, while mud and rocks buried other victims, the governor said.

## Petroperú to Present Financial Statements Audit by September

Petroperú is to present its 2021 financial statements audit by September, though it was due last month, the Lima-based state oil company said on Tuesday, Reuters reported. Bondholders approved the extension after accounting firm PwC refused to conduct the audit due to the oil company's recent corporate governance crisis. The company currently has two outstanding bond issues totaling at approximately \$3 billion, which are due in 2032 and 2047, and were used to finance Petroperú's new Talara refinery, the wire service reported.

## Banco Popular to Pay Fine for Allegedly Violating U.S. Sanctions on Venezuela

Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, or BPPR, is set to pay more than \$255,000 in a settlement with the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, or OFAC, following its alleged transactions with Venezuelan government employees, according to a May 27 OFAC enforcement release, Compliance Week reported. BPPR processed 337 transactions from bank accounts tied to Nicolás Maduro's government, totaling to \$853,126, in violation of an executive order under former President Donald Trump blocking property of the Venezuelan government, OFAC said.

rights at the center of public discussions, and guarantee that all people of present and future generations live in a healthy and sustainable environment." The Escazú Agreement is the first international treaty of its kind to protect environmental defenders, according to nonprofit group Global Witness, EFE reported. Latin America is the deadliest region in the world for environmentalists, according to the group. Other countries that have ratified the agreement include Argentina, Mexico and Ecuador.

## BUSINESS NEWS

# Mexico's Pemex Offering to Pay Back \$2 Billion in Debt

Pemex, Mexico's state oil company, announced Tuesday that it will use a peer-to-peer refinancing program to offer to pay back \$2 billion in debt with suppliers and contractors, the Financial Times reported. One of the world's most indebted oil companies, Pemex currently holds \$100 billion in outstanding debt. The company said in its announcement that it "structured a mechanism to exchange commercial debt for financial debt, an attractive opportunity to speed up payment to suppliers and contractors," Reuters reported. The state-owned oil company, whose debt to suppliers stood at \$13.5 billion at the end of the first quarter of this year, has been acquiring significantly more debt to suppliers in recent years, the Financial Times reported. Schlumberger and Halliburton, two rival oil services companies, noted in January that they were experiencing payment delays from Pemex. Nymia Almeida, an analyst at Moody's Investors Service, noted that the recently announced deal will be neutral to Pemex's credit profile, the Financial Times reported. "Everybody uses suppliers as a source of financing ... but this amount has increased in the last few years, it's actually becoming difficult for suppliers themselves to survive," she said. She added that it is positive that Pemex is attempting to address its rising debt.

## FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

the anti-Petro sentiment than Fico. Fico struggled to articulate a clear message and get traction. He became the candidate of continuity, with traditional parties behind him, whereas Colombians overwhelmingly desire change. Hernández benefited from a more unvarnished populist image, simple communication, and effective use of social media. Although anything can happen in the next three weeks, Hernández—who is likely to draw a huge proportion of Fico's supporters—seems to be in a stronger position. Petro was prepared to do battle with Fico. Now he will have to adapt and redo his campaign strategy before June 19."

**A Silvana Amaya, senior analyst at Control Risks:** "For decades prior to this election cycle, Colombian elections were predictable enough, with traditional parties playing a decisive role and allowing only right-wing and centrist candidates to have a shot, but never the left. A month ago, very few people thought Rodolfo Hernández would have a chance to pass through to the runoff. Now, after the first round, many are asking who this independent, antiestablishment populist TikTok star, whose slogan 'neither Petro nor Uribe' really is. Rodolfo, a former mayor of Bucaramanga, has stuck to a very simple discourse around fighting corruption and putting the criminals who steal from the state in prison. From his successful time as a businessman to his striking performance as mayor, when he displayed a polarizing, intense and full-of-drama leadership, Rodolfo managed to take advantage of the perfect storm to become the strongest candidate to win the presidency. Leftist Gustavo Petro still remains the front-runner by 12 percent—having received 2.5 million more votes than Rodolfo—but is in a less favorable position ahead of the runoff election on June 19. The message is clear: Colombians are demanding a change of the socioeconomic paradigm, and a change that restores their hope, because everyone is tired of the status quo.

But the trick is that Petro isn't the only one who offers that change. Rodolfo has taken full advantage of this and stands poised to capitalize on fear of a left-wing government, making him the most likely candidate to win the runoff."

**A Sergio Guzmán, co-founder and director of Colombia Risk Analysis:** "The results of the election are clearly bad for traditional political parties, especially President Iván Duque's right-wing party, Centro Democrático, which now must endorse Rodolfo Hernández, a candidate who has been highly critical of political elites in the past. Both Gustavo Petro and Hernández represent radical visions of change, with Petro a change to the economy and social

**“ Petro now has three weeks to spin his campaign narrative on its head...”**

— Sergio Guzmán

order and Hernández a challenge to the political class. Now the onus will be on Petro's camp to explain how their version of change is better for the country. This also gives Sergio Fajardo, who previously has hinted at an alliance with Hernández, an opportunity to land a position in a Hernández government. Ingrid Betancourt could smell the blood in the water and smartly quit last week ahead of the first round. She will likely play a key role as a power broker. Petro earned an important win in Sunday's election, but he is now at a huge disadvantage: I think he was preparing to campaign on a choice between continuity and change, where he strongly represents the change needed to defeat continuity. Petro now has three weeks to spin his campaign narrative on its head and try to cast Hernández as an extreme right-wing Nazi sympathizer and a proxy of

Continued on page 4

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 3

former President Álvaro Uribe. He is unlikely to succeed in this effort. But Petro has also been heavily critical of any centrists who refused to fold into his campaign, and he will have a harder time now trying to seduce or coerce them into joining his camp.”

**A** **Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli, director for the Andes at the Washington Office on Latin America:** “Colombian voters sent a clear message on Sunday to the political establishment that they want change. This was expected given President Iván Duque’s unpopularity, rising insecurity and last year’s national civic strike and protests. The surprise was the rise of Rodolfo Hernández, a populist real estate mogul known as the Colombian Trump whose campaign focused on anticorruption. Hernández broke Colombian political campaign etiquette by not attending most debates, positioning himself through social media and giving his post-election speech via Zoom from his kitchen table. The question now is what type of change Colombians want. Gustavo Petro came out on top in the Pacific, Cauca and Valle del Cauca provinces, where we see humanitarian crises, a high rate of killings of social leaders and multiple armed groups vying for control of territories for illicit activities (drugs, mining and extortion). While Hernández was highly popular in areas

that border Venezuela, especially Arauca and Catatumbo, where the ELN guerrillas maintain strongholds. Both men have said they will advance the 2016 peace deal, with Petro having a more developed set of proposals of how he would do it. With regard to the ELN,

“**Colombian voters sent a clear message on Sunday to the political establishment that they want change.**”

— Gimena Sánchez-Garzoli

Hernández—whose family suffered from the armed conflict with kidnappings and killings—said he’d offer the guerrilla group the opportunity to add themselves to the 2016 peace accord. Petro said he would open up new peace talks with the ELN. For Hernández to beat Petro, he needs a million votes from those who supported Fico and centrist Sergio Fajardo. The question is whether this will happen, or whether Petro will be able to convince some of those voters to side with him.”

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

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# Q&A

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