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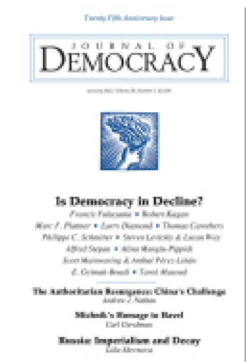

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Latin America

COLOMBIA AFTER URIBE

Eduardo Posada-Carbó

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"The referendum is dead, and Colombia's democracy lives." So wrote Robert Kagan and Aroop Mukharji in the *Washington Post* following the Constitutional Court's 26 February 2010 decision rejecting a proposed referendum meant to allow President Alvaro Uribe to run for a third consecutive term.[1] From that point on, Colombia enjoyed an extremely interesting electoral process that ended with a decisive June 20 presidential-runoff victory for Uribe's former defense minister, Juan Manuel Santos, who defeated former Bogota mayor Antanas Mockus of the young Green Party by 69 to 27 percent.

Writing just after the February court ruling, Kagan and Mukharji hailed Uribe as "the ultimate hero of this story," for in spite of his overwhelming popularity he had "allowed the court to do its job without interference." "Especially in a nascent democracy," they reasoned, "the integrity of institutions is as important as the will of the people." Shortly thereafter, U.S. president Barack Obama also praised Uribe for having accepted the magistrates' decision: Together with the ruling itself, said Obama, these developments demonstrated "how functioning democracies, like Colombia, are governed by the rule of law and an abiding respect for their constitutional framework."[2]

In reality, however, Uribe had not had much choice. For in Colombia's "nascent" democracy, there had in fact been a constitutional tribunal of last resort in operation since 1886 (it was the Supreme Court for 105 years, until a newly created Constitutional Court took over the role in 1991).[3] During these years, both the Supreme Court and its successor had often shown themselves ready to defend the constitution against

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decisions taken by the executive. Colombia's elected presidents, moreover, had always complied with the judiciary's rulings, unfavorable and favorable alike. In keeping with this long usage, the Constitutional Court had ruled against some Uribe administration measures, and the president—like his predecessors—had accepted the adverse judgments as valid and lawful. Obama was surely aware of Colombia's well-established constitutional traditions. Yet his praise for the Court's 7-to-2 decision and Uribe's acceptance of it as extraordinary events reflected a certain sense of relief owing to the evidence it provided that the trend toward Latin American presidents holding onto power could be stopped. In Argentina, the leading daily *La Nación* joined those who saw in Colombian developments important regional lessons about how to weaken populism and strengthen democracy.[4]

If neither the Court's ruling nor Uribe's acceptance of it was out of line with Colombian political traditions, the country was nonetheless passing through extraordinary times. Colombia has been independent since 1819. Since that time, no one else—not even the handful of dictators—had stayed in power for as many years in a row as Uribe. His reelection in 2006 had marked the first time in Colombian history that an incumbent chief executive had been voted back into office for a second term. That second term had been rendered possible by Congress's decision, during Uribe's first mandate, to pass a constitutional amendment allowing reelection. He remained exceptionally popular throughout his eight years as president, with an approval rating that never dipped below 65 percent and sometimes rose as high as 80 percent—which makes it easy to see why his followers would seek yet another constitutional change aimed at permitting him to run again.

Above all, Uribe owed his popularity to the successful results of his policy of "democratic security," which had served in particular to weaken the left-wing guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) after he came to power in 2002.[5] The rates of homicide and kidnapping dropped drastically during his tenure. Colombians regained a sense of confidence in their country and its future and, as the *Economist* put it, "partly because of the resulting boost in confidence, the economy [grew] strongly."[6] Despite a sharp slowdown toward the end of the period, the economy grew at an average annual rate of 4.8 percent between 2002 and 2009. Uribe also cultivated popularity by attending weekly *consejos comunales* (neighborhood-council meetings) throughout the country. At these gatherings, he and members of his government—including cabinet ministers—tried to address the problems of the communities he visited. As a dissident who had broken away from the Liberal Party (PL), he governed with the support of a coalition that included the newly created Social Party of National Unity (better known as the Party of the U or simply the U), the Conservative Party (PC), and the Radical Change party (CR). Although

Table—2010 First-Round Presidential-Election Results

Candidate	Party	%
Juan Manuel Santos	Party of the U*	46.6
Antanas Mockus	Green	21.5
Germán Vargas Lleras	Radical Change (CR)*	10.1
Gustavo Petro	Alternative Democratic Pole (PDA)	9.1
Noemí Sanín	Conservative Party (PC)*	6.1
Rafael Pardo	Liberal Party (PL)	4.4

*Party participated in the Uribe coalition.

Source: Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

the reelection project caused a few significant desertions, Uribe was able to keep his coalition together while displaying a confrontational style in dealing with his opponents in the PL as well as the Alternative Democratic Pole (PDA).

As the new electoral cycle took off, what was truly extraordinary was the degree of institutional uncertainty brought about by the prospect of Uribe's standing again as a presidential candidate. With little more than three months to go before the May 30 election date, presidential campaigning lay at a near standstill pending the outcome of an intricate constitutional-amendment process.

The Court's ruling put an end to the uncertainty, and a remarkable campaign to succeed Uribe began in earnest. Seven serious contenders offered voters a wide menu of choices, dissipating fears among Uribe's admirers that he would prove irreplaceable. "What an Election!" read the headline of the leading weekly *Semana,* expressing surprise as the campaign began to unfold in unexpected ways.

Santos, who ran on the Party of the U ticket, was sworn in on August 7. His large margin of victory—including his first-round showing of almost 47 percent, just a few points shy of the 50 percent needed to avoid a runoff—should not be allowed to obscure the reality that never at any time during the campaign was his win a *fait accompli*. It is thus worth examining the circumstances under which his election took place, and the impact of his ascent to power on Colombian politics. It is also worth exploring the nature and program of Santos's new government and whether or not his mandate will represent a continuation of Uribe's rule or a fresh departure. And what lessons, if any, can be drawn for democracy in the region from Colombia's recent constitutional and electoral processes?

Until the Constitutional Court's ruling, Santos was a presidential candidate in waiting. He had been so for the previous nine months, since giving up his cabinet post in May 2009. (In Colombia, a minister intending to run for office must step down from the cabinet a year ahead of the voting.) In announcing his resignation, he expressed his intention to run for the presidency only if Uribe was not a candidate. Uribe was constitu-

tionally banned from standing again, but the prospect of the referendum raised expectations about his new reelection.

The Referendum Process

The referendum process was a long, cumbersome, and unfortunate affair that cast a deep shadow over Colombian politics for more than two years. In February 2008, members of Uribe's party began collecting signatures in support of the initiative, but to be effective, it had to be approved after four hearings in Congress. Congress opened debate in September 2008, after the bill was presented as a citizens' proposal backed by five-million signatures. Finally passed by Congress in May 2009, the bill had then to be approved by the Constitutional Court before the referendum could be put to the electorate.

From the beginning, there were doubts about the constitutionality of the project, since permitting reelection might have meant undermining the balance of power among the respective branches of government that is enshrined in the Colombian Constitution. This was a substantial and powerful objection to the bill. A series of financial and procedural irregularities added concerns. For example, the referendum committee exceeded legal limits in terms both of its spending on the work of signature-gathering and the size of some of the individual donations that it took in. Moreover, the referendum question that Congress approved differed from what was in the petition that citizens had signed, while one of the formal readings of the bill in the 166-seat Chamber of Representatives took place during an extraordinary session convened in conditions that were not in compliance with the statute book. These and other irregularities were widely covered in the press, where opposition to the referendum was notable.

Supporters of Uribe's reelection, however, continued to back the bill: Mere legal formalities, they argued, should not be allowed to thwart the people's will. After all, opinion polls indicated that, if given the chance to do so, an overwhelming majority of the electorate would vote again for Uribe. Constrained to make his intentions public, Uribe sent ambivalent messages. Although he had categorically rejected the idea of a third term shortly after his 2006 reelection, his comments changed as the referendum campaign took shape. He still avoided any explicit statement about his own standing but insisted that his policy of "democratic security" ought to be "reelected."

It is hard to imagine a more confusing political scenario in the middle of an electoral campaign. Faced with so many uncertainties, important analysts were of the view that Colombian politics had been "frozen." This was only partly true. Santos had indeed put his presidential aspirations on ice. But other close allies of the government decided to move ahead. Andrés Felipe Arias resigned his post as minister of agriculture

to seek the presidential nomination of the PC. Nicknamed "Uribito" for his staunch support of the president, Arias pledged to step aside should Uribe run again. Diplomat and former minister Noemí Sanín resigned her post as Colombia's ambassador to Britain in order to join the Conservative race as well. Unlike Arias, however, Sanín opposed the reelection project. In taking this stance, she joined her fellow presidential contender Germán Vargas Lleras of CR, who opposed reelection from his seat in the 102-member Senate even though his party was close to the Uribe administration.

Outside governing circles, presidential aspirations were less constrained. The Liberals and the PDA held primaries to select their respective candidates in September 2009. Liberals chose former defense minister Rafael Pardo while voters in the PDA's primary surprised many by nominating Senator Gustavo Petro over Carlos Gaviria, who had been the PDA's 2006 presidential standard-bearer (he finished a distant second behind Uribe). Meanwhile, independent candidates who refused to be labeled for or against Uribe were coming forward. These included Sergio Fajardo, a former mayor of Medellin (Colombia's second-largest city), plus three other ex-mayors who had recently joined the small Green Party. On 14 March 2010, elections for all the seats in both houses of Congress (these happen every four years in Colombia) plus Green and Conservative presidential primaries added further notes of dynamism to a political landscape that was far from frozen.

Yet the shadow of a possible third Uribe term fell darkly across the campaign trail. According to a June 2009 survey by IPSOS–Napoleón Franco, 57 percent of those who intended to vote favored Uribe. The rest split their preferences among other potential candidates, none of whom received more than 6 percent. Scandals involving allegations of illegal wiretapping of political foes and Supreme Court justices, extrajudicial killings by security forces, and a crisis in the health service, hit the government. However, March 2010 found Uribe enjoying an astronomical 77 percent approval rating. The plebiscitarian mood surrounding the president and his enormous, impervious popularity began to raise concerns about the future of Colombian democracy—concerns that found voice both inside and outside the country. "Uribe edges towards autocracy," warned the *Economist*, which in the past had repeatedly praised his achievements.[7]

Talk of autocracy proved hyperbolic, but the classic dilemma of constitutional limits versus majority will—in effect, the tension between liberalism and democracy that exists as a background possibility in all liberal democracies—was real enough. In this case, the Constitutional Court's ruling against the referendum settled things in favor of constitutionalism. The Court found that the "chain of irregularities" which marred the referendum process pointed to "substantial violations of the democratic principle." Even a majority must observe legal forms. Speak-

ing on nationwide television on the evening of February 26, President Uribe not only accepted but endorsed the Court's ruling. Minutes later, Juan Manuel Santos unfroze his presidential aspirations.

A Campaign Extraordinaire

Santos's decision to "freeze" his candidacy while the prospect of Uribe's reelection hovered in the air turned out to be a wise choice. Within a week of announcing his candidacy, Santos had opened up a wide lead in the polls. He had been able to show loyalty, and could now claim to be the keeper of Uribe's legacy. But other presidential contestants made similar claims. With the *uribista* camp divided, and a relatively large pool of candidates, it seemed as if it would prove hard to get the required 50 percent majority for an outright victory in the first round. Santos, the frontrunner, still had only 23 percent in the early surveys.

The results of the March 14 congressional elections were not easily transferable to the presidential race. There were important victories for the leading parties of the government's coalition. The U and the PC increased their totals of senators (from 20 to 28 and 18 to 22, respectively), and representatives (from 31 to 47 and 29 to 37, respectively).[8] Opposition parties, meanwhile, dropped seats. The PL lost one of its 18 senators and two of its 37 representatives, while the PDA saw its Senate delegation go from ten to eight and its number of Chamber seats halved to just four. Radical Change also seems to have suffered following its leader's distancing from Uribe, declining from 15 to 8 Senate seats and 19 to 16 Chamber seats. A surprise winner was the Green Party, which gained representation in Congress for the first time by obtaining five seats in the Senate and three in the Chamber. This sent the Greens' morale skyrocketing and had implications for the presidential race.

Overall, the composition of the new Congress, together with the picture of partisan affinities emerging from the opinion polls, raised questions about the behavior of the electorate while offering few clues about the possible outcome of the presidential contest. As the campaign season wore on, voters seemed to be increasingly identifying themselves with the various parties in an apparent reversal of recent previous trends. According to Gallup polls, Colombians—like citizens of many democracies—had for years been losing their appetite for party politics. In 2004, for instance, 74 percent of those surveyed by Gallup said that they did not belong to any party. A March 2010 Gallup poll, however, found this figure turned inside-out, with only 23 percent of those surveyed refusing to identify with any party. Interestingly, the partisan breakdown among voters revealed by the poll roughly tracked with the seat shares won in the new Congress by the three major parties: the U, the Liberals, and the Conservatives. This did not transfer to the presidential contest, however. There, for instance, Liberal standard-bearer Rafael Pardo re-

ceived only 4.4 percent support, even though his party polled at a much higher 19 percent.

Nonetheless, some party developments did impinge on the course of the campaign. As noted above, the March congressional elections were held on the same day that the Conservative and Green parties held a second round of presidential primaries. The former chose Sanín over Arias, closing the door on the prospect of a single government-coalition candidate and seriously dividing the PC. The Greens, by contrast, emerged unified and strengthened after choosing Antanas Mockus. Theirs had been a collegial, imaginative, and unique campaign, in which the three contenders had traveled the country sharing platforms and discussing their views before voters.

March 14 was also decision day for independent presidential candidate Sergio Fajardo, the former mayor of Medellin. His Civic Compromise movement had failed to gain any seats in Congress. The Greens had already told him that it was "party" time, an interval for building a wider movement and leaving messianic politics behind. Flying solo held no rewards. As Fajardo came to terms with the disastrous electoral results that March 14 had brought his movement, pressure to join the Greens mounted from within his own camp. Soon he did so, and became Mockus's vice-presidential running mate. Thus began a "green wave" that transformed the whole campaign landscape.

The first polls following March 14, when the menu of candidates was at last complete, had suggested that Santos and Sanín were the clear frontrunners at about 34 and 23 percent, respectively. Yet as earlier polls had suggested, with Uribe out of the picture the voters were feeling volatile. In December 2009, according to an IPSOS–Napoleón Franco poll, Gustavo Petro of the leftist PDA was trailing behind Santos by just a single percentage point, with Fajardo not far behind. By February, Santos had put more distance between himself and his competitors, while both Petro and Fajardo kept their positions. A month later, however, Sanín had replaced Petro as the likely runner-up. This had seemed to suggest that the campaign would turn into a contest between two candidates close to the Uribe administration and its policies. The surprising "green wave" soon changed all that, however, and injected a note of real uncertainty into what was beginning to shape up as a highly competitive electoral scenario.

Behind the wave's sudden rise lay the political appeal of four successful big-city mayors who collectively advocated a fresh approach to the country's future. "A candidate with four heads, it was a phenomenon that I had not seen elsewhere," said pollster Napoleón Franco. The bewhiskered, bespectacled Mockus, the son of Lithuanian immigrants and a former professor of mathematics and philosophy, soon became the symbol of a new way of doing politics. Pundits found their imaginations fired by the "outside the box" prospect of a president who had never

belonged to either of the two traditionally dominant parties (the Liberals and the Conservatives)—never mind that their bipartisan dominion had not really existed for a while. Foreign newspapers caught the mood, too. "A maverick upends Colombian politics," observed the *New York Times*. Similarly, *Time* magazine focused its attention on the "unlikely outsider" who had shaken the presidential race. "Colombians are on the verge of electing a leader who will transform their parasitic political culture," noted the *Guardian*'s correspondent in welcoming the arrival of a "green regeneration" in Latin America.[9] Indeed, the Greens' campaign acquired further international cachet when well-known academics including Jürgen Habermas and Jon Elster signed a public letter offering "strong support to the candidancy of Antanas Mockus to the Colombian presidency."[10]

By the time of the "green wave," Mockus was no longer an "outsider" in Colombian politics. He had first won election as Bogota's mayor in 1995, and had been involved ever since in the "parasitic political culture" that the *Guardian*'s correspondent so despised. As mayor from 1995 to 1997, and then again from 2001 through 2003, he won credit for transforming Colombia's teeming capital (home to nearly a quarter of the country's 45 million people) into what a *Guardian* editorial called "a model of civic improvement."[11] The 2010 campaign, moreover, represented his third try for the presidency. As never before, however, his chances of grasping the prize seemed real this time. At the beginning of May, Mockus overtook Santos in the polls. First-time voters were drawn to his campaign, in no small part through its able use of the Internet: At one point, Mockus was gaining ten-thousand new Facebook friends every day.

With strong academic backgrounds, Mockus and Fajardo contributed to what proved to be a series of high-quality televised presidential debates in which all candidates appeared together to discuss their platforms. There was no shortage of qualified and experienced contenders. Mockus and Fajardo had managed the complex affairs of big cities. Pardo of the Liberals had been a defense minister, senator, and presidential advisor on peacemaking. Vargas Lleras of Radical Change and Petro of the PDA could boast long and prominent parliamentary careers—the former as a member of the Bogota city council and senator, and the latter as a representative first elected to Congress in 1991, shortly after the successful peace process with the M-19 guerrilla group to which he had belonged. Sanín and Santos had not been legislators, but had administrative experience. After first working in finance, Sanín had served in various administrations as communications minister, foreign minister, and ambassador (with postings to Venezuela, Spain, and Britain). Like Mockus, she was making her third run for the presidency. Santos had overseen Colombian coffee interests in London and been a subdirector at *El Tiempo*—the leading daily then owned by his family—before en-

tering politics. His ministerial portfolios had included not only defense but also finance and foreign trade.

This was certainly a varied menu of candidates, although none represented extreme alternatives on either the right or the left of the political spectrum. All published detailed platforms, which merit further examination together with the debates in the media, including their responses to comprehensive questionnaires prepared by academic groups. While "security"—meaning especially the policies adopted to deal with the FARC—had been at the center of Uribe's two campaigns, his administration's success at combating these guerrillas had allowed other issues (such as joblessness) to come to the fore. Indeed, Uribe had changed the terms of the security debate. Even Petro from the leftist PDA acknowledged the achievements of Uribe's "democratic security" policy, though controversies over its failures and limits continued to simmer.

Despite the size and variety of the field, debate ultimately came to focus on a narrower choice as Santos and Mockus climbed in the polls and began to overshadow their competitors. The choice presented to the electorate became a clear one between continuity and change, embodied by Santos and Mockus, respectively. Some of their differences might have been matters more of nuance than substance—both, for example, believe in market economies, though Mockus favored higher taxes than did Santos. Beyond their policy differences, they represented distinctive political styles. According to Juanita León, director of *lassillavacia.com,* a website mostly devoted to Colombian political analysis, Colombians were deciding between a "leader who proposes to transform society [Mockus] and a manager who promises to continue the same route but with improvements [Santos]." In the language of the English philosopher Michael Oakeshott, this was an electoral campaign torn between "the politics of faith" and "the politics of scepticism."[12]

A Surprisingly Strong Victory

In the end, the major surprise was Santos's 46.6 percent showing in the May 30 first round, which outpolled Mockus's 21.5 percent by more than two-to-one and left Santos just a few points shy of the outright majority that would have spared him the need to face a runoff. Bogota is the stronghold of Colombia's so-called *voto de opinión* (votes not tied to any political machinery), and was supposed to be a Mockus bastion. Yet even there, Santos almost doubled his lead over Mockus between the first round and the runoff, bespeaking a victory of exceptional scale and depth. With the benefit of hindsight, this was perhaps an inevitable outcome. After its initial peak, the "green wave" flattened and then fell away, while Santos managed to recover the upward trend that had originally marked his candidacy.

Why did Santos win so overwhelmingly? Several reasons seem ev-

ident. First, Mockus, as he himself later ruefully admitted, had been the "head of the department of 'own goals' [self-inflicted gaffes] in the Green Party." And he had scored quite a few. On repeated occasions during the presidential debates, for example, he showed himself to be indecisive regarding key questions. His blunders included equivocations about his religious beliefs (Colombia is a religious country) as well as his mention in a radio interview of his "admiration" for Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez at a time when Chávez was attacking the Colombian government (Mockus later admitted that his use of the term had been a mistake). He also alienated both *uribista* and PDA voters—the former by suggesting that he would extradite Uribe and the latter by rejecting the notion of an alliance with the leftist opposition. The Green campaign lost its luster as the collective image of a team of can-do mayors gave way to the messianic figure of Mockus. The Santos campaign was quick to capitalize on these errors, effectively using negative campaigning (press criticism notwithstanding) against Mockus and identifying Santos even more closely with Uribe's party and symbols.

Santos's strong first-round showing also had much to do with his overall projection of himself as the most capable candidate in the field. Above all, as the Gallup polls suggested, voters saw him as by far the best choice to tackle security problems, including those posed by guerrilla groups and other forms of organized crime. This was to be expected. As Uribe's defense minister, Santos received credit for some of the most successful strikes against the FARC, including the July 2008 operation that freed onetime presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and fourteen other victims from FARC kidnappers after years in captivity. Voters also rated Santos above Mockus (by 41 percent to 27 percent) even when it came to expectations about who was best-suited to carry on the anticorruption fight—a major component of the Green Party platform's signature "democratic legality" concept. Mockus did rank higher than Santos in the area of education policy, but across most other socioeconomic issues and concerns, both candidates were perceived as similarly capable (or at least they were during the brief interval when Mockus was peaking in the polls). Santos also made important efforts to broaden his appeal. He chose Argelino Garzón, a former union leader of humble and leftist origins, as his running mate.

Having reached the second round despite his inauspicious start was in itself a significant victory for Mockus, but he failed to exploit it. As the first-round results came in, one journalist who observed Mockus speaking at Green Party headquarters said that he seemed more like "a preacher in a trance facing a prayer group rather than a presidential candidate whose followers expected a reassuring speech."[13] Santos, meanwhile, addressed not only his followers but the wider electorate, including his opponents, whom he invited to join him in a future government of national unity. Leaders and members of the Liberal, Conserva-

tive, and Radical Change parties soon moved into his camp. The PDA called on its supporters to stay home during the second round. There followed three weeks of further debates, during which Santos was able to strengthen his final drive to a landslide victory. With slightly more than nine million votes—the largest number any candidate has received in Colombian history—Santos had won a clear, strong mandate to replace Uribe in the Casa de Nariño.

Uribismo Without Uribe?

There is no doubt that Santos reached the presidency in the shadow of Uribe's government and popularity. In the introduction to his own campaign manifesto, Santos himself framed the choice in stark terms: "In the coming elections . . . we will be deciding if we wish to honor the best government our country has had for a long time, the government of President Alvaro Uribe, or if we bury his legacy." Some of Uribe's supporters in the press announced Santos's victory as the chance to consolidate Uribe's program, the coming of *uribismo* without Uribe. Some of Santos's critics have suggested that his election is in fact the equivalent of a third Uribe term. For some analysts outside Colombia, Santos was thus just a "dauphin," a successor handpicked at will by Uribe.[14] After barely fifty days in office, however, Santos had already proved to be his own boss, with his own agenda.

Santos of course shares with Uribe some fundamental principles and values. In addition, they are both hard-working and ambitious politicians. The 59-year-old Santos in particular has a renowned sense of discipline traceable to his days as a teenaged naval cadet in Cartagena. Both originally advanced their political careers in the Liberal Party. Santos's great-uncle, Eduardo Santos, was a leading Liberal and served as Colombia's president from 1938 to 1942. Nonetheless, their differences are significant. As a critical campaign-period profile published on *lasillavacia.com* noted, "Santos is different from . . . [Uribe] in almost everything." According to this profile, the former feels at his best in the close atmosphere of social clubs, while the latter rejoices in public encounters at the *consejos comunales*; one is "cosmopolitan," the other "provincial"; Santos is a "pragmatic, centrist," while Uribe is "an ideological person, with inflexible rightist convictions."[15] These characterizations may not be accurate, but it ought to be acknowledged that both have different personalities and indeed political views. Within evident lines of continuity, Santos is also offering some important fresh departures from Uribe's rule, in style and in substance.

Santos was not Uribe's favorite to succeed to the presidency. That would have been former agriculture minister Andrés F. Arias. Santos's candidacy benefited from the perception that he was Uribe's heir, yet Santos's achievements were also the fruits of his own efforts. It was

Santos who had organized the Party of the U for Uribe, and Santos who had maintained good relations with Congress throughout a varied ministerial career. Already during the campaign, some of Santos's decisions suggested that he was not going to be Uribe's pawn: The choice of Garzón for the bottom of the ticket was not well received within hardcore *uribista* circles. As president-elect, Santos announced key cabinet appointments that clearly signaled his independence. He tapped Conservative Party stalwart and Uribe foe Juan Camilo Restrepo to be minister of agriculture, and chose a critic of some of the previous president's economic policies (Juan Carlos Echeverry) to take the finance portfolio. The ex-*uribista* and referendum opponent Germán Vargas Lleras was slated to become interior minister. Santos visited the Supreme Court, a body with which President Uribe had come into conflict, as if to mend fences. He also met the PDA's Gustavo Petro to discuss the latter's proposal to open a dialogue with the opposition around the issues of land reform, water rights, and justice for victims of the armed conflict.

These appointments and meetings in themselves set a new tone of government, the arrival of consensual politics to replace Uribe's more confrontational style. (During Uribe's eight years in office, he never held a formal meeting with the head of the PDA.) In his victory speech, Santos expressed the view that he did not recognize "enemies" inside or outside the country. Chávez was invited to his inauguration ceremony. This was too much for Uribe, who repeated charges that Chávez was sheltering FARC elements in Venezuela, thereby provoking a serious diplomatic crisis with a neighbor just days before leaving office.

Turning the Page

"Let us turn over the page of hate, of divisions," Santos continued in his victory speech, reiterating his campaign promise to form a government of national unity, evoking the 1977 Moncloa pacts that had sealed Spain's democratic transition. A week before his inauguration, the president-elect met with the leaders of the parties that had joined his coalition: the Party of the U as well as the PC; Radical Change (originally close to Uribe but distanced from him during his second term), and the Liberals. The latter had been in opposition for the preceding eight years. Not all parties came aboard. While Petro was open to dialogue with the new president, the PDA refused to allow him to speak on its behalf and its leadership vowed stalwart opposition. Mockus and the Greens took a middle road, promising to "support the good and reject the bad" among the new administration's policies. Even together, however, the PDA and the Greens represent a small minority. The government coalition holds about 80 percent of the seats in Congress—enough to make some analysts express worries about a lack of opposition. Reflecting long-held misconceptions about the nature of Colombian party politics,

Semana saw fit to “raise the alarm” about the “dangerous” prospect of a “sort of Colombian PRI or a reedition of the National Front . . . a more hegemonic regime than has been seen in the past.”[16]

When Santos met with the party leaders from his coalition, the presidents of the Senate and the Chamber were there too. Their presence seemed crucial. As the coalition lines up behind an ambitious legislative agenda, implementation will hinge on changes in how the executive branch works with the legislature. To replace the usual piecemeal negotiations with individual senators and representatives, Santos has set up an informal *mesa de acuerdo* to seek agreements with party leaders, who are then supposed to induce their followers in each house to go along.

The sweeping reform package that Santos presented to Congress shortly after his inauguration embraces nearly every area of government. To bring previous opponents into the coalition, the administration incorporated some of their campaign pledges. These included the PL’s idea of seeding the tax system with incentives designed to fight unemployment. Some proposals, such as centralizing the management of royalties from the exploitation of mineral and energy sources—a prerogative in the hands of local governments since 1991—will certainly meet with resistance from representatives of the most affected departments and municipalities, regardless of party affiliation. Other projects will also test the muscle of Santos’s “national-unity” government. Bills with strong Liberal Party backing that address problems of land tenure and compensation for victims of armed conflict have already met with criticism from the *uribista* parties as well as the former president himself.

Uribe’s aspirations to “reelect” his policy of “democratic security” were certainly achieved with Santos’s victory. Yet this does not mean that security policies, including the government’s approach to resolving the armed conflict, will remain untouched. “The door to dialogue is not locked,” was Santos’s inauguration-day message to the illegal armed groups. But he insisted that his government would only negotiate on terms that require these groups to give up their arms and stop their kidnappings, narcotrafficking, extortion, and intimidation.

The FARC and the ELN (another leftist insurgency) responded with attacks that killed forty soldiers and police officers during the first three weeks of September. This upsurge of guerrilla violence fed the fears of those who worried that Uribe’s departure would mean a drop in security. On September 22, however, the government struck back with what President Santos called the “most resounding blow against the FARC in its entire history”—an armed-forces raid that killed Mono Jojoy (real name: Victor Julio Suárez), the FARC’s most feared military chief.

It may be too early to talk about the FARC’s demise, but the September operation—the latest in a series of successful attacks—marked another step toward settling the armed conflict that has troubled Colombia for so long. In the short term, it reconfirmed President Santos’s

credentials for tackling security problems. Not surprisingly, his popularity soared to 88 percent after this success.

As Uribe's "heir," Santos is already grappling with his predecessor's mixed legacy. The new president can surely build on some of Uribe's successes, especially improved security and the renewed confidence in Colombia's economy and overall future that come along with it. Aside from that, however, Santos must also confront an accumulation of unresolved and serious problems: unemployment, poverty, income inequality, corruption, fiscal deficit, inadequate infrastructure, a health sector in crisis, rising urban crime, drug dealing, and persons displaced by continuing armed conflict in some areas. Uribe has both friends and foes guessing about his political future. He may decide to run for mayor of Bogota, or just lead rallies in support of his favorite candidates in the October 2011 local elections. He will no doubt exercise some power, perhaps more than other former Colombian presidents. But his days are past. In dealing with Uribe, Santos is engaged in a delicate balancing act. Looking to his own reelection in 2014, the new Colombian president will be pushing ahead with his own agenda.

From the foregoing, a few major conclusions emerge. The first among them must be the realization that the referendum process—how it was handled, and especially how it was ended—underlined the relative vitality of Colombia's key liberal-democratic institutions, even if most scholarly writing on the country undervalues, despises, or simply ignores them.[17] Without institutions such as the Constitutional Court, the populist push for a referendum that would have threatened the separation of powers and evinced scant respect for law would have prevailed. Instead, Colombian democracy emerged strengthened, and showed further vigor during the presidential contest that followed soon thereafter. As we have seen, liberal-democratic institutions are far from novelties in Colombia's almost two-centuries-long history, and have a significance that democracy promoters would do well to note. As democratization studies take a "historical turn,"[18] Colombia may have more lessons to offer.

NOTES

1. Robert Kagan and Aroop Mukharji, "In Colombia, Democracy Is Stirred but Not Shaken," *Washington Post,* 9 March 2010.

2. President Barack Obama to President Alvaro Uribe, Washington, 10 March 2010, available at *http://web.presidencia.gov.co/sp/2010/marzo/11/carta.pdf*.

3. See Manuel Cepeda, "La defensa judicial de la Constitución: Una tradición centenaria e ininterrumpida," in Fernando Cepeda Ulloa, ed., *Fortalezas de Colombia* (Bogota: Ariel-BID, 2004), 537–700.

4. "Uribe y la lección colombiana," *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), 9 March 2010.

5. See Eduardo Posada-Carbó, "Colombia Hews to the Path of Change," *Journal of Democracy* 17 (October 2006): 172–85.

6. "Third Term Temptation," *Economist,* 8 January 2009.

7. "Uribe Edges Towards Autocracy," *Economist,* 16 May 2009.

8. Instituto de Ciencia Política, "Los retos del nuevo Congreso"; available at *www.icpcolombie.org/archivos/conceptos/los_retos_del_nuevo_congreso.pdf.*

9. "A Maverick Upends Colombian Politics," *New York Times,* 7 May 2010; "An Unlikely Outsider in Colombia's Presidential Race," *Time,* 25 May 2010, and "Green Regeneration in Colombia," *Guardian,* 30 April 2010.

10. "Grupo de intelectuales de varios países anuncian apoyo a Antanas Mockus," available at *www.elespectador.com,* 25 May 2010.

11. "In Praise of. . . Antanas Mockus," *Guardian,* 28 May 2010.

12. See Juanita León, "El líder vs. el gerente," 11 June 2010; available at *www.lasillavacia.com.* See also Michael Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

13. María Jimena Duzán, "Reflexiones en la derrota," *Semana* (Bogota), 1 June 2010.

14. "La tarea de Santos," *El País* (Madrid), 2 June 2010.

15. Juanita León, "Juan Manuel Santos, el político del poder," 18 April 2010, available at *www.lasillavacia.com.*

16. "¿Sin oposición?" *Semana,* 27 June 2010.

17. On Colombia's liberal-democratic traditions, see Eduardo Posada-Carbó, *La nación soñada: Violencia, liberalismo y democracia en Colombia* (Bogota: Norma, 2006).

18. Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, "The Historical Turn in Democratization Studies: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond," *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (July–August, 2010): 931–68.