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BAROMETER OF PUBLIC OPINION ON THE PARTIES OF "NATIONAL UNITY" AND PRESIDENT SANTOS

RESULTS OF REGIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS IN COLOMBIA

Stefan Jost

Colombia combines its various elections into two sets held in successive years. The congressional elections thus took place in March 2010 and the presidential elections in May of the same year, while regional and local elections were held in October 2011. Just over 30 million Colombians were called upon to decide on who was to take up well over 18,000 positions, for which over 100,000 candidates were vying. People elected 1,102 mayors, several thousand district mayors, 12,063 municipal councillors as well as all the governors and all 418 deputies to the 32 department assemblies.¹ The significance of the outcome of the 2011 elections for all parties went beyond the elections themselves. With the government of "Unidad Nacional" (National Unity) of President Juan Manuel Santos having been in charge for just under 15 months, these elections were seen to provide the first country-wide barometer of public opinion with respect to the approval ratings for the government and the political parties. The outcome of these elections will also determine the distribution of power at regional and local level for the next four years and therefore also, at least indirectly, the strategic starting positions for the congressional and presidential elections in 2014.

1 | The number of eligible voters varies by electoral level; no governor or department assembly is elected in Bogotá, for instance, and not everywhere are district mayors elected depending on the local structure.

THE PRE-ELECTION CONTEXT – THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR STARTING POSITIONS

These regional and local elections took place in a very specific context. After taking office in August 2010, Santos formed a government of “Unidad Nacional”, which comprised four national parties and was joined by the small Partido Verde (PV)² towards the end of the first year of government. This gave Santos an overwhelming majority in the Colombian two-chamber Congress (Chamber of Deputies and Senate), allowing him to get most of his ambitious reform programme through Congress in spite of some disputes, which were fought out predominantly within the coalition.³

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The party configuration of the “Unidad Nacional” was not reflected throughout the country in equivalent candidacies at regional and local level. Instead, a great variety of coalition configurations emerged besides dominant independent party candidacies. However, in view of Santos’ high approval rating in the opinion polls and this mega-coalition, it was unlikely that there would be an election outcome that could not be interpreted in the government’s favour. From the beginning, the interest therefore focused on the performance of the different government coalition parties and of the remaining opposition, especially the leftist alliance Polo, as well as the alternative organisations competing with the political parties. These *movimientos*, referred to as *grupos significativos* by the electoral authorities, are organisations which were formed specifically for the purpose of these particular elections and which secured their candidacies by collecting signatures.

There are essentially three factors that have facilitated what has to be described as highly effective government management during the first phase of government. The first and most important is a coalitional presidentialism with a distinctly vertical structure. This structure comprises

- 2 | In terms of content, this “Green Party” cannot be equated with European parties of the same name.
- 3 | On the details see Stefan Jost, “Von Uribe zu Santos: eine Zwischenbilanz der ‘Unidad Nacional’ in Kolumbien”, in: *GIGA Focus*, No. 8, Hamburg, 2011.

on the one hand the gravitational centre that Santos himself represents and on the other hand a body consisting essentially of Santos and the party leaders, which takes decisions and then instructs the coalition parties and factions accordingly.

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The second factor is the Minister of the Interior Vargas Lleras (CR), who is responsible for coordination between government and Congress and who played a major part in

making the parliamentary committees toe the government line. Added to this are the coalition parties themselves, which don't pursue many policies of their own setting them apart from the presidential palace, or which are not prepared to leave the coalition over differences in opinion because they don't want to lose their share in power. This makes it difficult for an effective opposition to be put up against specific policies and further helps to sustain the vertical structure of the coalitional presidentialism.

The problem, and the associated interest in the outcome of these elections, was that the resulting strengthening of the government as a whole and the recognition granted to Santos as an individual don't benefit all parties equally. The way the parties are perceived has undergone quite a significant change under the Santos rule. On the one hand, this is due to the very existence of the "Unidad Nacional". While Santos' predecessor Álvaro Uribe relied predominantly on his own party "de la U" and the conservative party (PCC) in his government coalition, the inclusion of the Partido Liberal (PL), which had been excluded from government for twelve years, and of Cambio Radical (CR), which had left the preceding Uribe government in protest, has itself altered the power landscape. Added to this was the protagonism of the PL and the CR encouraged by the President. After a highly emotional appearance in front of the PL, Santos, who routinely refers to his liberal roots in contrast to his predecessor, actually had to spell out that "de la U" was still his party. The "Unidad Nacional" catapulted the liberals back up into the top echelon of national politics. Events have confirmed speculations, first voiced when the "Unidad Nacional" was established, that this historically rather unusual way of forming a government in Colombia was not only motivated by a

desire to safeguard a wide parliamentary base but also by aspirations to reunite the liberal camp comprising the PL, the CR and the best part of “de la U” in terms of party organisation.⁴ This strategy was already being discussed openly weeks before the regional and local elections, with the PL and the CR being strongly in favour, but with varying reactions from members of the “de la U”. The PL actually intended to put this issue to the people in a referendum in conjunction with the elections, but the Electoral Court rejected this. Ultimately, this is a decision for the parties to make; presumably a powerful motivation in this thinking was the idea that this referendum and the likely turnout in conjunction with the elections would help replenish the parties’ coffers thanks to the cost reimbursement per vote. Interestingly, the protagonism enjoyed by the PL and the CR was not balanced by the numerically much stronger representation of the “de la U” and the PCC in the cabinet.

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As a result of all this, the “de la U” and the PCC found themselves in a relatively difficult situation. The President’s party and the party that was the first to offer Santos its support in the second ballot of the presidential election campaign were the parties which saw themselves least represented in the government’s agenda and which were viewed by the public as critics of the President and some of his policies, while the liberals came across as the forces that dominated policy content and supported the President unswervingly. This and the distinctly vertical form of the coalitional presidentialism led to repeated minor disputes within the “Unidad Nacional”, which Santos however always managed to smooth over, bringing everybody back into line.

The “de la U”, which was said by one of its Senators and Senate President neither to be a party nor to have a structure or a programme during Santos’ first year in government, has been dominated by its solidarity with Santos due to the fact that he is “its” president. Matters have been different for the Conservative Party, which had not been particularly favoured, but taken seriously and treated consistently under Uribe. Sections of the party

4 | Ibid., 172 et seq.

are feeling betrayed by Santos where policy contents are concerned, their share of power within the administrative apparatus has become smaller due to the mega-coalition, and the party found itself in a coalition with its historic opponent, the PL, which was also increasingly gaining in influence within the coalition. Corruption allegations made against a number of conservative Members of Congress on account of their activities under the Uribe government, which the PCC considered a political manoeuvre by the Minister of the Interior Vargas Lleras, further soured the atmosphere in the coalition and diminished the chances of the PCC. At the same time, the PCC has been suffering internal disagreements and splits in various regions with respect to the respective candidates, which weakened the party especially in traditional strongholds.

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Although local and regional elections are subject to their own rules and influences and can only be seen as a vote for the national level to a degree, it was clear that these elections would also send signals about how the parties are being perceived at national level and about their roles and perceptions within the "Unidad Nacional".

Disregarding a few opposition splinter groups, the leftist Polo alliance has been at the centre of attention for over a year, with "opposition" in this case merely meaning parties and groupings which are not represented in the "Unidad Nacional" but do not necessarily consider themselves to oppose it. The background to this is the corruption scandal in Bogotá, which the Polo governed in the 2nd legislative period; Gustavo Petro, who was the Polo presidential candidate in 2010, had brought this scandal to the public's attention by waging a massive anti-corruption campaign, which led to the arrest of the two Moreno brothers – one of them mayor of Bogotá, the other a senator from the Polo. For the Polo, these elections therefore represented actual political survival.

This election campaign lacked major issues to set the sides apart. Instead, it was local matters that dominated, regarding both content and, above all, personalities. In spite of some relevant universal issues being up for debate, such as the structure of the new system of *regalías*, a type of

fiscal equalisation between the national level, the departments and the municipalities, the parties did not manage to pick up on these and develop country-wide answers.

GENERAL ELECTION FRAMEWORK

In Colombia, preparing elections always presents a particular challenge. Some parties do nothing else for months than try to make decisions on the so-called *avales*, explicit endorsements of potential candidates by the parties. Granting these is up to the respective national party executive, and quite apart from the usual disagreements about influence and positions, this is problematic

because the purpose of these *avales* is to exclude, or at least minimise, external influences as much as possible, especially those of the “groups operating outside the law”.

This term refers to the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the drug mafia as well as all other structures of organised crime. These groups have made increasing efforts to not only put candidates under pressure before or after the elections, but to try and determine candidacies from the start. This is also known as the attempt to “co-opt the state”.

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In some regions of the country, the conditions under which election campaigns are fought are highly irregular. In the run-up to the latest elections, 26 candidates were murdered, assassination attempts were made on four others, and five candidates were kidnapped. The *mapas de riesgo*, i.e. mapping of areas subject to risk with respect to free elections, which are produced by state and civil society institutions before all elections, are sadly only too relevant against this background.⁵ Further issues to mention are traditional problems such as the inflation of electoral registers, duplicate ballot papers and the practice of *transhumancia*, the registration of sets of electors in strategically selected towns or regions with the purpose of guaranteeing the desired election outcome.

5 | Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE), *Mapas y factores de riesgo electoral. Elecciones de autoridades locales Colombia 2011*, Bogotá 2011.

Overall, 544 municipalities were rated as subject to risk.⁶ For all their efforts, the election authorities are in part simply powerless. In such cases, the best that can be achieved is a certain degree of transparency of what is only partly controllable, which can actually be regarded as an achievement in these areas. There were a number of complaints that are still to be investigated, but all in all the election process was peaceful.

THE BATTLE FOR THE CAPITAL CITY OF BOGOTÁ

The results for Bogotá had been expected with particular excitement. In the person of its mayor, the city of over eight million inhabitants and some 4.9 million eligible voters supplies the second most important political office in Colombia after the President. Eight candidates vied for the position.

The problem metropolis of Bogotá, characterised not least by massive migration from the country's interior and therefore a melting pot of political, cultural and mental factors, is subject to rules of its own during elections, and the situation is far more difficult to forecast than in other

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areas. Local party political structures range from highly diverse to almost non-existent, there is hardly any home-grown *liderazgo*, i.e. leadership. Due to its national significance, Bogotá is more of a stage for candidates who wish to use this local and simultaneously national platform for their wider-ranging political ambitions. This applied to several candidates in 2011, none more so than the candidate of the *progresistas*, Gustavo Petro, who was the presidential candidate for the leftist Polo alliance in 2010 and has not given up on these ambitions.

But Bogotá is also an example for how small the pool of competent people is even in the larger parties. The "de la U" was unsuccessful in its search; party leader Lozano rejected the candidacy. After some dithering, the "de la U" finally jumped on a bandwagon set in motion earlier by Uribe and gave its support to Enrique Peñalosa, the

6 | 351 of these at medium, 173 at high and 20 at extremely high level, according to the rating applied by MOE. Cf. MOE, n. 5, 51.

candidate of the Green Party and former mayor of Bogotá. After a series of public rejections by quite prominent candidates, the Conservative Party, for which Bogotá represents a problematic diaspora where voter potential is concerned, was the last to nominate a candidate, who then relinquished his candidacy after several weeks because of a lack of funds and insufficient support from the national executive as well as official demands by prominent PCC politicians for him to stand down. The PL resorted to a young yet definitely capable candidate by the name of David Luna. Cambio Radical, for its part, nominated the son of the presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galan, murdered in 1998, Carlos Fernando Galan, who is also leader of the CR.

The search for a candidate also took months for the Polo, which had taken responsibility in Bogotá once more until the end of the current term in the person of a female Polo politician appointed by President Santos after the suspension and arrest of the mayor and an interim period. Finally, the Polo was in a position to present the mostly unknown Aurelio De la Cruz as its candidate.

From the beginning, the candidate with the best prospects besides the afore-mentioned Peñalosa was Gustavo Petro, who had resigned from the Polo quite some time before and was standing for the Movimiento Progresistas, which he had founded; his campaign took an unexpectedly swift upward turn according to the polls. The only other person considered a potential rising star was Gina Parody, a former senator of the "de la U", who had laid down her mandate in protest against Uribe's intention of seeking re-election, left the party and had now gained the opportunity of a candidacy via signatures. She gained support through a pre-election agreement made just a few weeks before the election with the two-time Bogotá mayor and presidential candidate of the Green Party in 2010, Antanas Mockus. He had left his party under protest because of the Greens' coalition with Uribe and the "de la U" and initially pursued his own candidacy. But when it became obvious that he could not influence the election campaign configurations, he decided to back Parody's candidacy.

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Around six weeks before the election, it looked like it would be a neck-and-neck race between Peñalosa and Petro. Although Petro went on to gain an increasing lead, this did not induce the camp of the coalition parties of “Unidad Nacional” to agree on one candidate. Nor did the three young candidates (Parody, Galan, Luna) manage to come to an agreement between themselves, a possibility that had been discussed in various phases of the election campaign although none of the three had a realistic chance of winning. For all three, the battle for Bogotá was aimed less at winning than on creating a strategic basis for their ambitions with respect to their future careers, for which a respectable election performance is an important milestone.

Table 1

Election results for Bogotá⁷

Party	Candidate	Result in per cent	City councillors
Movimiento Progresistas	Gustavo Petro	32.16	8
PV / de la U	Enrique Peñalosa	24.93	8 (de la U) 5 PV
Gina Parody Alcaldesa	Gina Parody	16.74	0
CR	Carlos Fernando Galán	12.70	8
PL	David Luna	4.16	6
MIRA	Carlos Eduardo Guevara	2.65	2
POLO	Aurelio De la Cruz	1.44	4
PIN	Gustavo Páez	1.29	1
AICO	Jaime Castro	0.46	0
PCC	No candidature	—	3 ⁷

Petro’s win could not come as a surprise in the end. Although all the polls indicated that he had only limited support just like Peñalosa, Petro had the advantage that this was his first candidacy for this position, and he also benefited from his attack on his former party, the Polo, because of the corruption scandals in the city, which Polo

7 | There are separate elections for mayors and city councils, which is why the PCC is represented in the city council.

Mayor Samuel Moreno controlled until roughly the middle of 2011. Against this background, Petro had succeeded in gaining a considerable number of the votes in the presidential elections in 2010, which amounted to nearly 44 per cent. But above all, his win was facilitated by the “Peru effect”, i.e. a splintering of the broad political centre in terms of candidates, where two parties, the PL and the CR, were part of the “Unidad Nacional”, not forgetting that Parody can also be seen to belong to this spectrum, if not in terms of party organisation then at least in terms of content.

OVERVIEW OF ELECTIONS FOR GOVERNORS, DEPUTIES, MAYORS AND CITY COUNCILLORS

These elections were decided by simple majority; no second ballot is required as is the case for presidential elections. One preliminary remark on the tables below: The figures in these tables are taken predominantly from the details provided by the *Registraduría*⁸, which themselves are not, however, based on the full count and do not represent the official final results. Those will be published by the CNE, the National Electoral Council. The appointments of city councillors in several of the departmental capitals as well as the time-consuming count for the members of the municipal councils and municipal mayors are still outstanding. Added to this are numerous instances of results being contested and demands for recounts as well as a by-election for a mayor at this time, all of which are delaying the publication of the official results. However, even at this point in time⁹ the fundamental trends can be identified on the basis of the results available so far.

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8 | <http://w3.registraduria.gov.co/divulgacion/estadisticas> (accessed November 30, 2011). Listing and comparison with 2007 put together by the author, as supported by official figures.

9 | The article was completed on November 16, 2011.

Table 2

**Positions and mandates won by the parties
for governors and deputies in 2011 and 2007
(in brackets)¹⁰**

Party	Governor Elections		Assembly Elections	
	Votes	Number	Votes	Numbers
de la U	2,050,610 (1,362,995)	4 (7)	2,311,484	77 (58)
PCC	1,154,245 (1,248,556)	1 (5)	2,059,706 (1,675,846)	67 (74)
PL	2,054,444 (2,674,495)	6 (6)	2,191,840 (1,974,425)	80 (102)
CR	310,396 (595,051)	1 (3)	1,403,816 (1,015,828)	51 (50)
POLO	169,090 (685,828)	0 (1)	482,822 (592,425)	8 (23)
PV	1,176,525 (372,032)	2 (2)	821,919 (117,917)	24 (10)
PIN	104,293	—	478,121	13
MIRA	41,293 (37,957)	1 (0)	357,218 (74,728)	6 (3)
Others	38,060 (207,740)	6 (4)	379,250 (142,614)	16 (13)
Movimientos	4,092,813 (3,478,929)	7 (4)	396,943 (1,591,096)	19 (85)
Coalition Candidacies	n/a	4		

One aspect to take into account is that the number of eligible voters differs depending on the level at which the election takes place. 30.6 million Colombians were, for instance, eligible to vote for mayors and city councillors, while those eligible to vote for governors and department assemblies numbered only 25.8 million.¹¹ And only 14.7 million people were eligible to elect district mayors.

10 | A party-based comparison with 2007 is only helpful to a limited extent, since there were a number of political parties in existence with a special regional focus, yet with an affinity to one of the major political movements in 2007, which were dissolved in the course of the "political reform" of subsequent years and subsumed into other parties or newly founded parties. MOE provides a good insight into this http://moe.org.co/home/doc/moe_mre/2011/elecciones_2011.pdf (accessed November 30, 2011).

11 | This is due to Bogotá's special position, since it elects a mayor and city council with an electorate of nearly five million, but does not have the status of a department with a governor and an assembly.

The turnout for the mayoral elections was around 57 per cent country-wide, 58.5 per cent for the governor elections, 57.5 per cent for the assembly elections and just over 52 per cent for the district mayor elections. However, these figures include abstentions and invalid or unmarked ballot papers, which means that the valid votes will probably be around the 50 per cent mark, a result that is usual for Columbian elections.

Table 3

Positions and mandates won by the parties for mayors and municipal councils in 2011 and 2007 (in brackets)

Party	Mayoral elections		Municipal council elections	
	Votes	Number	Votes	Number
de la U	2,590,958 (1,300,644)	219 (119) 260 ¹²	2,551,342 (1,571,746)	1,599 (1,339)
PCC	1,707,714 (1,451,269)	193 (242) — ¹³	2,166,586 (1,663,977)	1,429 (2,129)
PL	2,648,995 (2,213,995)	181 (206) 182	2,357,623 (2,074,420)	1,567 (2,236)
CR	41,293 (37,957)	1 (0)	357,218 (74,728)	167 (393)
POLO	282,294 (1,368,618)	8 (21)	594,920 (805,198)	16 (13)
PV	707,937 (223,252)	51 (22)	1,131,804 (311,411)	520 (311)
PIN	425,378	36 (—) 34	845,804	406
MIRA	226,862 (33,888)	1 (1)	322,936 (147,913)	25 (38)
Others	21,565 (958,697)	65 (43) 108	1,376,877 (414,493)	678 (499)
Movimientos	4,643,298 (5,204,392)	155 (329) 70	1,435,936 (3,166,465)	539 (3,775)

12 | Where MOE comes to different results based on preliminary polls, these are inserted in bold.

13 | In an overview prepared by MOE, 260 mayors are attributed to the "de la U". Cf. n. 11.

Table 4

Results of the mayoral elections in the department capitals 2011 and 2007 (in brackets)

Party	Mayors in the department capitals
de la U	5 (3)
PCC	3 (5)
PL	7 (7)
CR	6 (4)
POLO	0 (1)
PV	3 (1)
PIN	1
MIRA	0
Others	2 (5)
Movimientos	3 (6)
Coalition Candidacies	2

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ELECTIONS

In the press response, winners and losers were quickly identified, albeit in sometimes dubious ways. One look at the election results at the different levels, and especially the question of which previous election results to use for comparison purposes to pinpoint wins and losses or even predict the demise of some parties indicates that a more detailed analysis is required. In view of the highly differentiated results of the different elections, no party can consider itself the outright winner. The results available to date allow the following conclusions to be drawn.

1. The discussions within the “de la U” that started on election night itself bear no relation to the party’s performance. While some people predicted that the “de la U” would be drowned by a “liberal wave”, the results say otherwise. The “de la U” is the party that gained most votes in absolute terms. It supplies by far the largest number of mayors and city councillors, but it had to accept losses where governor posts were concerned in spite of attracting more votes.

Since Santos came into office, the President’s party “de la U” has been in a quandary that has frequently

been visible to the public, torn between a need to support Santos and the loyalty due to Uribe as former President and party founder. The motivation behind discussions within the “de la U” is therefore two-fold in origin. One short-term issue is that of party leadership. Here, the Members of the Congress, most of whom probably favour Santos, come up against the proponents of *uribismo*. The strategic background to this dispute, however, is the fundamental question as to the stance the “de la U” should take in the ongoing process of reunification of the liberal forces.

People are awaiting the outcome of this power struggle in the “de la U” with some apprehension, since it will provide new impetus to the liberal reunification on the one hand, but might well also result in the emergence of a new organisation in the conservative spectrum or in the conservative section joining with the PCC.

2. The PL has been widely described as the winner, as the resurrected political force. This might be true at first glance, when comparing the current election results with the disastrous presidential election performance by the top liberal candidate Pardo of May 2010, when the PL was left far behind in sixth place with 4.38 per cent of the votes. A comparison between the current results and those of 2007, however, provides a more differentiated and more realistic picture. It shows that the PL was able to stand its ground with respect to the departmental capitals and increase its votes in the municipal council and mayoral elections while it lost mandates elsewhere. The governor elections represent an exception, since the party was able to win six departments in spite of a considerable downturn in votes.
3. The results of the CR are not clear-cut either. Pre-dominant increases in votes are balanced by some losses of governor posts. Overall, however, the party was able to consolidate as a political force throughout the country, with some spectacular performances in places such as Barranquilla. This makes it stand out

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as an independent force in the reunification process of the liberal parties and also strengthens the long-term presidential aspirations of its founder Vargas Lleras.

4. The performance of the two liberal parties PL and CR, favoured openly by Santos in the "Unidad Nacional", has taken the project of reunifying the Colombian liberal camp one step further forward. Following the merger of the factions of the PL and the CR in Congress last year after the Liberal Party leader Pardo had been appointed the new Labour Minister, it was announced that a new collective party leadership of the PL would be formed to include a CR representative. With a view to the congressional and presidential elections in 2014, it is likely that this process will be pushed forward during the next few months and that pressure on the "de la U" in particular will increase. To what extent the question of a possible re-election of President Santos, which Liberal Party leader Pardo had thrown into the debate prematurely in the eyes of most people, will be used internally as a cohesion factor in the discussions on this matter remains to be seen. However, such a reunification of liberal forces would alter the Colombian party landscape considerably while probably not taking the country back into the historic two-party system.

5. The Conservative Party has no doubt less reason to be happy about the results although it increased its share

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of the votes, in parts quite considerably, in all elections other than the governor elections.

It is, however, no longer the leading force in local politics, landing in fourth place in the governor elections, in third place in the

department assembly elections, in fifth place in the mayoral elections and once again in third place in the municipal council elections. It lost two important department capitals, Tunja and Cali, and four of five governor posts. This poor performance is partly due to splits in the party in important regions, such as Norte de Santander, Antioquia and Boyaca. Given this situation, its partly successful involvement in coalitions is not really reassuring anybody.

What the party lacks is a recognisable influence on the policies of the “Unidad Nacional” as well as a convincing leadership structure and leading figure at national level. It looks like the PCC is heading for difficult times, both in party-internal matters and with respect to its position within the “Unidad Nacional”. Even the conservative daily newspaper *El Nuevo Siglo* is not pulling its punches in its criticism and actually states that “its future is in question”. Former conservative President Andrés Pastrana has made his voice heard once more as well, as he has done repeatedly over the last few years, and criticised his own party. Amongst other things, he called it a “provincial association”, which was responsible for a “historic disaster” due to its corruption. What echo this criticism will provoke from the rank and file of the party and what consequences it will have remains to be seen.

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6. The Partido Verde joining the government was a media coup for Santos, which did not have any direct consequences for the internal relationships within the coalition nor affect the starting position of the Greens in the elections, as far as one can see. Clear increases in votes in all elections and especially winning the conservative stronghold of Antioquía, which was above all down to an agreement between the PL and the PV on the candidacies for the Governor of Antioquía and Mayor of Medellín, show that the disagreements about Bogotá did not have any repercussions in the country as a whole. However, there is no doubt that the coalition with the “de la U” as well as the personalised support by Uribe, which prompted Antanas Mockus’ subsequently exit from the party, represent a topic that will exercise the minds of the PV. Current party leader Luis Garzón has announced that the PV will be making a decision about its remaining in the “Unidad Nacional”.
7. The election outcome for the leftist alliance Polo is a debacle that was not unexpected and that puts the survival of this alliance into question. In Bogotá, the Polo has shrunk down to the size of a splinter party after eight years of political responsibility. Other posts,

such as that of Governor of Narino, were lost. At the same time, the incoming mayor of Bogotá, Petro, is making partially successful efforts to draw certain leading personalities of the Polo into his new movement. Party-internal discussions and the development of the heterogeneous leftist alliance will show whether there is sufficient voter potential for a revamped Polo besides a re-energised political liberalism¹⁴ and Petro's Movimiento Progresista, which is expanding at national level.

8. Another point worth mentioning is that former politicians and people currently in prison (*narcopolítica*) are still able to pull strings from within the prison walls. They managed this, for instance, via parties such as PIN, AFROVIDES and MIO, which achieved respectable results during local and departmental elections (two governor posts). On the other hand, candidates from the *parapolítica* also picked up some wins on behalf of democratic forces in places such as Magangué and Santa Marta.
9. One of the election losers is Santos' predecessor Uribe, even though some candidates he supported were able to win through. He has not gone into political retirement, but joined the political debate, sometimes contributing on a daily basis. He made efforts to put forward a claim for political leadership or codetermination to ensure the continuation of the politics that he had shaped originally. However, he is incapable or only capable to a limited extent of achieving this within the "de la U" alone.

Uribe made efforts to put forward a claim for political leadership or codetermination to ensure the continuation of the politics that he had shaped originally.

Uribe's activities are also increasingly in opposition to the Santos government, since he can see his political legacy in jeopardy. He has tried to enhance his influence by targeting his support at specific candidates. Since February 2011, he has been conducting so-called *talleres democráticos* (democratic workshops) with former fellow campaigners but also current "de la U" politicians at his own expense in order to forge

14 | One should note that the PL is a member of Socialist International.

topics, candidates and coalitions and strengthen his own influence especially in the regions. He has only had very limited success in this endeavour. Candidates whom he backed were not able to win through, especially in traditional conservative strongholds such as his home region of Antioquia, where the capital Medellín as well as the governor post were lost, but also in Bucaramanga and Bogotá. No doubt his successor Santos sees this as a welcome signal, since it reveals Uribe's loss of influence. But we will probably not have seen the last of the dispute between Uribe and Santos for some time to come.

10. One outcome that was seen as remarkable was the performance of the *movimientos*, i.e. the groupings that are not part of the (traditional) party spectrum, but whose top candidates secured their right to stand for election by collecting signatures. These candidates are generally viewed as being "independent", which is practically a virtue in itself in the eyes of the public.

However, this type of generalisation is subject to questioning, since a large number of these *movimientos*, not least the *progresistas* in Bogotá, are actually led by traditional party politicians. Also, the label of "independent candidacy" is often a euphemism for candidates who are looking for backing in the form of signatures after having had party *avales* refused or who are realising their philosophy of personalism in the course of their political career, moving from one political grouping to the next. Political culture in Colombia is conducive to such conduct.

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In view of the fact that the assignment of mayors and municipal councillor posts is still outstanding, the positions of these *movimientos* may yet undergo some change in terms of numbers, especially in smaller municipalities. In spite of this, the existing election results don't indicate the impending demise of the party political system, even if the *movimientos* represented the strongest "party" in the governor and mayoral elections. It should be noted, however, that

interestingly they only increased their vote in the governor elections, while they experienced partly considerable losses at all other levels.

Petro's intention is to prepare the organisational basis to stand for president, be it in 2014 or 2018. It remains to be seen how wide an alliance this movement will be able to muster.

11. Petro announced on election night itself that the Movimiento Progresista would implement a strategy of national expansion on the back of these local elections. It is obvious that the intention here is to prepare the organisational basis for Petro to stand for president, be it in 2014 or 2018. It remains to be seen how wide an alliance this movement will be able to muster, which programmatic proposals and compromises it will therefore put forward, and to what extent it can become a platform for different currents of the left-wing spectrum – and thereby “the last opportunity for the left” as Petro sees it.¹⁵

12. Looking at Bogotá, a greatly differentiated situation is emerging for the parties. It is a grim picture of failure for the “de la U” and Uribe, but it also represents a bitter defeat for the Partido Verde. Thanks to Luna’s result, the PL just managed to get above the threshold for reimbursement of the election expenses, while the fourth place of the CR candidate represents a respectable performance.¹⁶ The Polo virtually disappeared, and the Conservative Party has once again lost its ground in the capital. It is remarkable that two platforms founded specifically for these elections, the *progresistas* and Parody’s candidacy, were able to attract some 49 per cent of the votes between them in just a few months. In addition to the previously outlined problems the parties are facing, this also demonstrates the volatility of the electorate in conjunction with the great influence of personalism in the (electoral) culture of the country. As incoming mayor, Petro will be faced by two problems: how to create a coalition in the city council capable of governing effectively and how to

15 | César Rodríguez Garavito, “Petro, o el último chance de la izquierda”, *CaracolTV.com*, <http://caracolTV.com/elecciones-2011/columna-petro-o-el-ultimo-chance-de-la-izquierda> (accessed December 23, 2011).

16 | President Santos has since appointed Luna Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Labour, which is headed by the Liberal Party leader, and Galán head of the anti-corruption authority.

fulfil the extremely high and cost-intensive expectations that his campaign raised in the first place over the next four years.

13. The party configuration of the “Unidad Nacional” was not reflected in country-wide equivalent candidacies in the regions and municipalities. Instead, there were independent party candidacies as well as numerous different coalition configurations. The election results can therefore not be interpreted as the results of the “Unidad Nacional” as such. Still, President Santos can be more than happy with the results with one exception. The liberal part of the coalition has been strengthened, the power held by “de la U” has been expanded and consolidated throughout the country, and a coalition partner not much beloved by Santos, the Conservative Party, has been weakened by the election results.

The liberal part of the coalition has been strengthened, the power held by “de la U” has been expanded, and a coalition partner not much beloved by Santos, the Conservative Party, has been weakened.

The above-mentioned exception refers to the election of Petro as mayor of Bogotá. This means that a representative of the few forces outside the “Unidad Nacional” is now exercising the second most important political function in Colombia. But both Santos and Petro know that a confrontation purely for electioneering purposes might be detrimental to their pursued objectives. This is why Santos has praised Petro’s election as an example of the integration of former guerrilleros (Petro was a member of the M-19 guerrilla organisation), and Petro for his part knows that he must make his time in Bogotá a success if he wishes to become President; and that will not work in the long term in opposition to the national government. And for these reasons one can expect the two inveterate pragmatists to develop a working relationship with each other.

14. The election results will not have direct, short-term effects on the operation of the “Unidad Nacional”. Nonetheless, observers will have to keep an eye on the future development of disagreements which have already become apparent during the first 15 months of the government without, however, fundamentally compromising the coalition structure. Much will depend on how

fiercely and at what point in time the liberals, possibly with surreptitious support by Santos, will tackle the organisational reunification of the liberal parties and whether and when Santos will come out in public regarding his intentions to stand for election once more. In this context, it remains to be seen how the “de la U” will respond and whether, in the event that he does intend to stand again, Santos will disregard the Conservative Party and the uribista section of the “de la U” and rely solely on a reunified liberal camp.

15. President Santos can go forward into the coming phase of government with his power base strengthened. He can be sure of a wide majority in Congress for the foreseeable future. The fact that this is not enough to ensure success was made clear by the failure of the planned education reform due to massive country-wide student protests and by the difficulties experienced in Congress with respect to the judicial reform. It will be essential for the long-term success of his government that the reforms passed in the first year of government are actually put into practice.

Table 5

Results of the 2011 governor elections

Department	Party	Candidate	Number of votes
Amazonas	Partido Verde	Carlos Arturo Rodriguez Celis	7,757 (33.75%)
Antioquia	Partido Verde	Sergio Fajardo Valderrama	922,403 (49.44%)
Arauca	Partido Social de Unidad Nacional	Jose Facundo Castillo Cisneros	34,988 (44.41%)
Atlántico	Partido Liberal Colombiano	Jose Antonio Segebre Berardinelli	337,473 (46.45%)
Bogotá DC	—	—	—
Bolivar	Partido Liberal Colombiano	Juan Carlos Gossain Rognini	272,302 (43.42%)
Boyacá	Coalición Gobernación de Boyacá	Juan Carlos Granados Becerra	279,528 (51.78%)
Caldas	Alianza gobierno de todos y para todos	Guido Echeverri Piedrahita	150,355 (42.80%)
Caquetá	Movimiento “MIRA”	Victor Isidro Ramirez Loaiza	54,945 (45.77%)
Casanare	Movimiento Político Aforvides	Nelson Ricardo Mario Velandi	54,531 (35.63%)

Department	Party	Candidate	Number of votes
Cauca	Partido Alianza Social Independiente	Temistocles Ortega Narvaez	192,911 (45.78%)
Cesar	Partido Social de Unidad Nacional	Luis Alberto Monsalvo Gneco	172,064 (49.21%)
Chocó	Cambio Radical – Conservador, ASI y Verde	Luis Gilberto Murillo Urrtuia	50,206 (41.62%)
Córdoba	Partido Social de Unidad Nacional	Alejandro Jose Lyons Muskus	339,499 (52.67%)
Cundinamarca	Coalición Cundinamarca	Alvaro Cruz Vargas	609,241 (67.76%)
Guainía	Partido Liberal Colombiano	Oscar Aarmando Rodrigues Sanchez	4,483 (39.21%)
Guaviare	Partido Alianza Social Independiente	Jose Octaviano Rivera Moncada	9,729 (34.98%)
Huila	Partido Social de Unidad Nacional	Cielo Gonzalez Villa	147,325 (34.99%)
La Guajira	Partido Cambio Radical	Juan Francisco Gomez Cerchar	125,067 (52.31%)
Magdalena	Respeto Por El Magdalena	Luis Miguel Cotes Habeych	170,824 (41.97%)
Meta	Vamos pa'lante	Alan Jara	149,538 (41.89%)
Narino	Unidad Regional por un Narino Mejoro	Segundo Raul Delgado Guerrero	270,850 (48.62%)
Norte de Santander	Un norte pa'lante	Edgar Jesus Diaz Contreras	291,389 (59.76%)
Putomayo	Partido Conservador Colombiano	Jimmy Harold Diaz Burbano	53,797 (53.29%)
Quindío	Quindío firme	Sandra Paola Hurtado Palacio	86,071 (40.22%)
Risaralda	Unidad Nacional Incluyente con Resultados – UNIR	Carlos Alberto Botero Lopez	127,168 (38.45%)
San Andrés	Partido Liberal Colombiano	Aury Socorro Guerrero Bowie	14,269 (61.01%)
Santander	Santander en Serio	Richard Alfonso Aguilar Villa	481,362 (56.15%)
Sucre	Partido Liberal Colombiano	Julio Cesar Guerra Tulena	204,683 (65.49%)
Tolima	Partido Liberal Colombiano	Luis Carlos Delgado Peon	243,712 (49.22%)
Valle	Movimiento de Inclusión y Oportunidades	Hector Fabio Usechede la Cruz	446,810 (33.02%)
Vaupes	Movimiento Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia	Roberto Jaramilla Garcia	6,206 (61.26%)
Vichada	Partido Alianza Social Independiente	Sergio Andres Espinosa Florez	9,049 (44.46%)