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Colombia's surprising election result ushers in a new political era in that country

The people of Colombia have given Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez the opportunity to walk a different path for the country. The presidential ticket will face opposition from a divided Congress.



Colombia made history this week. The progressive Gustavo Petro — a former member of the M-19 guerrilla movement, current senator and former mayor of Bogotá — won the second round of the presidential elections that were held on Sunday, June 19. Petro's running mate, Francia Márquez Mina, will be Colombia's first black vice president and both will constitute the first leftist government in the country's history. The Petro-Márquez presidential ticket obtained an all-time record of votes, more than any other presidential formula in Colombian history.

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Vice President-elect Francía Márquez is a prominent Afro-Colombian environmental activist, land and water advocate, and winner of the 2018 Goldman Environmental Prize. Marquez addressed his supporters on election night: "Brothers and sisters, we have made progress in a very important step. After 214 years we achieved a government of the people."

Unlike recently in the United States, Petro's electoral contender, Rodolfo Hernández — a right-wing, populist-leaning millionaire businessman — conceded defeat on election day.

Cuántas generaciones se necesitan para salir de la pobreza

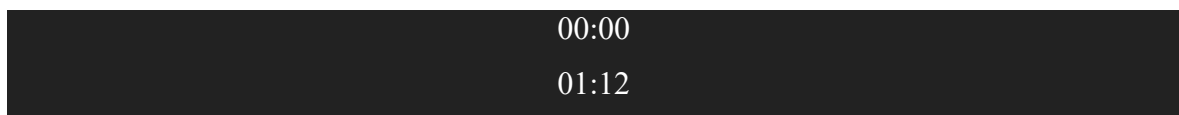


Colombia is estimated to be the most unequal country in Latin America. A recent report on Colombia's economic outlook by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) concluded that it would take eleven generations for Colombian families that make up the country's 10% of the country's most disadvantaged population to lift themselves out of poverty and into the middle-income sector of society. Colombia's systemic inequality was exacerbated by the pandemic, which plunged millions more into poverty and food insecurity. Several protests recently shook the country and were violently repressed by the Colombian police and Armed Forces, leaving several people dead.

On election night, in another historic milestone, Jenny Alejandra Medina, mother of Dilan Cruz, an 18-year-old student who was killed by police during widespread protests that erupted in Colombia in 2018, took to the stage where Petro and Márquez were celebrating victory. The hurt mother took the microphone and said:

"I raise my voice for my son, because I demand justice. And I welcome you, President, because in you is the hope of all of us, of justice. In you is the hope of us the poor, of the needy."

Video player



In conversation with Democracy Now, Francia Márquez said in March of this year: "Mothers go to work in family homes and, when they return, they return to bury their children. That's the story of our country."

During that interview, Márquez described his vision of the country's future:

"In Colombia a new governance is possible, a governance built from the black, indigenous, peasant peoples, from the diverse sectors of the LGBTIQ + community, from the youth, from women, from the Colombian peasantry, from the nobodies who have not had a voice in the Government, who have not had a voice in the face of the vindication of our rights as a people."

Francia Márquez continued: "And today it is up to us to put ourselves to the nobodies, to those who have not had a voice, to occupy the State and write our own history. A history that allows us to live in dignity, to live with justice, to live with equity, with equality. May

it allow us all to turn the page on violence, armed conflict, and live peacefully with social justice."

The failure of the ruling class to "turn the page" on Colombia's long history of violence also contributed to Petro's triumph. In 2016, the government signed a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army, or FARC-EP, a rebel group that waged an armed insurrection in the country for more than fifty years. In exchange for laying down their arms, the former FARC guerrillas received a promise of reintegration into civilian life, as well as economic opportunities and political representation. However, low-income rural communities still suffer murders and disappearances at the hands of right-wing paramilitary groups.



Francia Márquez explained in this regard: "The Constitutional Court has just recognized the unconstitutional state of affairs, of the failure of this Government to advance peace. And so this whole situation of armed conflict and neglect in terms of social investment must be stopped. And it's not going to stop from the privileged elite of white men who have ruled us historically. I think it is the people who have to stand up to write their own demands."

On the night of the elections, standing next to Vice President-elect Francia Márquez, herself a descendant of enslaved people, Gustavo Petro said: "We are going to develop capitalism in Colombia, not because we adore it, but because we have to first overcome premodernity in Colombia, feudalism in Colombia, the new slavery, the new slavery; we have to overcome atavistic mentalities linked, there, to that world of servants."

The people of Colombia have given Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez the opportunity to walk a different path for the country. The presidential ticket will face opposition from a divided Congress. Describing the challenges ahead, Colombian doctor and community activist Manuel Rozental told Democracy Now!: "An obstacle has been overcome by winning the elections, but the main obstacle, which is the establishment, the established power, cannot be changed by the government. It is the people who have to confront it and make it change."

Amy Goodman and Denis Moynihan

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