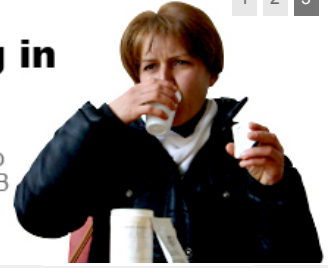


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## Colombia and FARC agree to combat drugs trade

Government and rebels announce "comprehensive solution" to trafficking a week ahead of presidential election.

Chris Arsenault Last updated: 17 May 2014 21:13

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The rebels also declared a week-long ceasefire during elections [AP]

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**Bogota, Colombia** - The Colombian government and FARC rebels have announced an agreement to combat drug trafficking, in a breakthrough just days before a presidential election.

In a joint statement, the FARC and government negotiators on Friday said the deal was part of a "comprehensive solution to the problem of illegal drugs" which has "financed the conflict" between rebels and the government.

A week-long ceasefire was also struck between the two sides as part of ongoing peace negotiations and as the country prepares to elect its next president on May 25.

More than 200,000 people have been killed and more than five million internally displaced during Colombia's civil conflict, which has its roots in the 1960s.

While the FARC is the largest single armed group, Colombia's government is battling a variety of fighters ranging from organised Marxist rebels to hired-soldiers linked to landowning elites.

### Election battle

President Juan Manuel Santos has staked his re-election campaign on peace negotiations. His closest challenger, Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, is running a hard-right campaign opposed to negotiations with armed groups.



Colombia and FARC reach agreement to end drugs

Most voters support peace talks with the FARC, according to polls, but many do not believe those alone will end the violence.

"I believe the peace process," Leonardo Saldana, a pastor who works with people displaced by the conflict told Al Jazeera. "But I believe it's still far away."

Two months ago, a clear victory was predicted for Santos. But a nasty campaign, and support for Zuluaga from Alvaro Uribe, the popular and controversial former president, has changed the political equation.

"I think this is not typical of a Colombian presidential campaign," analyst Jorge Restrepo told Al Jazeera's Alessandro Rampietti. "It is the lack of salient issues being discussed, or being contested, that is making this a very dirty campaign."

Zuluaga's campaign chief resigned following a computer hacking scandal, allegedly aimed at undermining peace negotiations.

### Political scandal

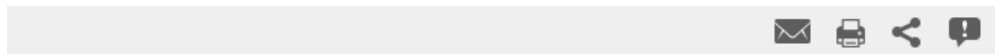
"They were trying to spy on the peace process," said Eduardo Montalegre, Colombia's attorney general. "They were intercepting emails of negotiators and senators."

Serious scandals hit both leading campaigns. A close Santos adviser resigned following widely published allegations that drug traffickers paid him \$12m to broker a possible plea bargain deal to avoid extradition to the US.

Some analysts believe the tawdry corruption accusations are symptomatic of a larger sickness - a product of decades of political violence.

"This conflict is just an excuse for parties [rebels and politicians] fighting over money and power," Saldana, the pastor, said. "Unfortunately, in Colombia, we don't know what's really going on."

Source: Al Jazeera



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