

## Zuluaga Leads Santos Ahead of Colombia Presidential Runoff

By Andrea Jaramillo and Oscar Medina - May 26, 2014

Colombian opposition candidate Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, who threatens to suspend the government's peace talks with Marxist rebels, led the first-round of presidential elections and will face incumbent Juan Manuel Santos in a runoff.

Zuluaga, an ally of former President Alvaro Uribe, won 29.3 percent of the votes yesterday with 99.97 percent of polling stations reporting, ahead of Santos with 25.7 percent. To avoid a second round on June 15, a candidate would need more than 50 percent of ballots. Sixty percent of the electorate abstained. The peso traded little changed at 1,910.50 per dollar at the close in Bogota.

Former Finance Minister Zuluaga has repeatedly attacked the government's negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, demanding that the guerrillas declare a unilateral cease-fire and serve at least six years in jail. He told reporters today that if elected he would provisionally suspend the peace talks. Santos says Colombia has never had a better chance of ending the conflict.

"In three weeks, Colombians can chose between those who want an end to the war, and those who want a war without end," Santos, 62, said in a speech after the result. "We're going to show that there's a majority who want to end a conflict that has caused half a century of pain and blood."

### **'Full-Frontal Assault'**

A second-round victory for Zuluaga would mean the end of the peace negotiations, said Alejo Vargas, professor of political science at the National University, in a phone interview from Bogota.

"Zuluaga's triumph shows there's an important part of society that doesn't back the Havana talks," Vargas said.

The government and the FARC said May 16 they had reached an agreement to cooperate in the fight against illegal drugs, bringing closer a deal that might end the conflict. Santos rejected the FARC's offer of a bilateral cease-fire during the negotiations, arguing that this would allow them to regroup and give them an incentive to string the talks out for as long as possible.

“The President of the Republic can not and should not be manipulated by the FARC, the biggest drug cartel in the world today,” Zuluaga, 55, said in a speech after the results were announced. He pledged “a full-frontal assault on terrorism.”

## Second Round

Zuluaga, who studied public finances at the University of Exeter in [England](#), supports many of the economic policies followed by Santos, including free trade and a rule to curb the government’s ability to run deficits.

Colombia expanded [4.3 percent](#) last year, the fastest pace among major Latin American economies after [Peru](#), and the urban jobless rate fell during [every year](#) of Santos’ government.

Goldman Sachs analyst Tiago Severo said in a research note last week that both candidates are perceived as “business friendly” and will continue with policies that helped boost growth in Colombia.

Zuluaga will probably receive support from the majority of the 15.5 percent who voted in the first round for Conservative Party candidate Marta Lucia Ramirez, said Jorge Restrepo, economics professor at Javeriana University in Bogota. The majority of the 24 percent who voted either for the Alternative Democratic Pole Party or the Green Party candidates will swing to Santos, he said.

The second round is too close to call given yesterday’s result, Restrepo said.

“The risk that has been imposed on the peace process is enormous,” said Elisabeth Ungar, director of Transparency for Colombia, a Bogota-based anti-corruption group. “If the talks are suspended we probably won’t see them again for the next 10 to 15 years.”

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