

2018 CONCORDIA AMERICAS INITIATIVE

CONCORDIA | INSTITUTO DE CIENCIA POLÍTICA HERNÁN ECHAVARRÍA OLÓZAGA | FENALCO | NOTICIAS RCN & NTN24

CONTEXT

Analysts with deep knowledge of politics and public affairs in Colombia, such as Jaime Castro and Fernando Cepeda, have suggested that the 2018 presidential elections are likely to be the most important national elections of the century.

The citizens of Colombia are expected to approach the election day with divergent opinions around the proposed models for the country, therefore positioning the President elect as the leader of a society that lacks a consensus or popular agreement around certain fundamental issues. With slow economic growth over the past three years (1.6% growth in GDP in 2017), the incoming government will face a fiscal deficit and an increasing public debt, in addition to a reduced margin of tax extension. Even though the Fedesarrollo Consumer Confidence Index has been improving, the most recent statistics from December 2017 were still in negative (-6 points), a fact that reinforces pessimism and mistrust among democratic institutions.

This volatile political and economic context in which the new President will assume power makes it even more critical for citizens to vote in a responsible and informed way by basing their decision on verifiable information, rigorous analysis of government programs, and a clear understanding of the platforms of the various candidates on myriad of issues. In order to contribute to an informed public discourse, Concordia, the Instituto de Ciencia Política Hernán Echavarría Olózaga, Fenalco, Noticias RCN & NTN24 have established a five-phase partnership featuring:

- (i) a **Consultation Phase** (roundtables) with experts from different sectors to identify the challenges to be faced by the new government that assumes power on August 7th, 2018
- (ii) a **Presidential Debate** among the candidates featured on the electoral ballot of the May 27th elections (first round of elections)
- (iii) a **Panel of Experts** with national and international representation that will comment on the debate results
- (iv) a **Bogotá Debate** among the presidential candidates focused on the main challenges faced in the Capital

of the Republic of Colombia, and the relationships between the Capital and the National Government “Los candidatos debaten sobre Bogotá” (Candidates discuss on Bogotá)¹

(v) the **Concordia Americas Summit** in July with representatives from the elected government who will help formulate proposals to enrich the plans and policies process that will be implemented once the President takes office.

CONSULTATION PHASE

SCOPE

According to the most recent opinion polls (December 2017 and January 2018), the issues that most concern Colombians are the economy, employment opportunities, health service quality, corruption, and citizen security. Public services and the implementation of the Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict record different levels of relevance, according to the survey consulted.²

Based on the results of surveys and independent analyses conducted by the members of the partnership, the following issue areas will be addressed in the framework of the initiative:

RULE OF LAW AND INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

In Latin America, Colombia has been lauded for its democratic tradition and the integrity of its institutions, even in the context of various realms of violent conflict. Despite the strength of these institutions, the following pose risk to the Rule of Law and democratic principles by which Colombians abide:

- The implementation of the Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict
- Territorial control and the guarantee of a monopolized use of force by legitimate authorities
- The effective enforcement of policies that ensures the restraining of illicit crops, drug trafficking, and other criminal economies
- The guarantee of investigations and prosecutions in cases of corruption
- A better relationship between the national government and territorial entities, in order to promote more modern and innovative national and local governments (smart cities)
- The execution of foreign policy consistent with democratic principles and values, among many other issues.

1. “Los candidatos debaten sobre Bogotá” will count with the support of the Bogotá City Council, Probogotá, and the Chamber of Commerce of Bogotá, in addition to the members of the Partnership of the Americas Initiative 2018

2. Particularly, the Elections Survey 2018 Measurement # 3 of December 2017 (Invamer) and Datexco Opinometro of January 2018 reveal dissimilar levels of importance regarding these issues.

3. The Independent Commission Of Public Expenditure recommendations will be a point of reference when analyzing this topic.

Special attention will be devoted to the situation in Venezuela, whose governing regime is in violation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, causing a humanitarian crisis that has forced hundreds of thousands of people to leave their country. The increasing migration level of Venezuelans to Colombia, along with the public order and human security conditions in the frontier, will be carefully analyzed.

Roundtable: February 27th at Instituto de Ciencia Política

ECONOMY: REACTIVATION AND LONG-TERM GROWTH

Overcoming poverty and creating opportunities for societal progress depend upon sustained economic growth and a strengthened private sector. In order to achieve this, immediate structural reforms that must be addressed include:

- Pension and Tax Reforms that generate opportunities for competitiveness;
- Strong commitments that control the efficient allocation of public spending³ and the growth of borrowing;
- Establishing clear and stable rules with a regulatory approach that fosters private investment and the creation of employment;
- Seizing opportunities offered by free trade agreements and deepening economic integration mechanisms, such as the Pacific Alliance;
- Defining socially and environmentally sustainable parameters for natural resources regarding the exploitation of minerals and hydrocarbons;
- Advancements relating to formalization, financial inclusion and containment of criminal economies - such as drug trafficking, illegal mining, and smuggling - that obstruct the advancement of the formal economy, generate violence, and corrupt democratic institutions.

Roundtable: March 15th at Casa Fenalco

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Colombia's future depends upon an accessible, high-quality, socially and economically strong education for all citizens. Ensuring these conditions means defining an ambitious policy that addresses the following:

- Allowing all children in the country to have the same opportunities to access high quality educational services, beginning with early childhood education
- Educating citizens in terms of democracy, their rights and duties, and state autonomy
- Rigorously evaluating the quality of education offered and the resources allocated
- The discussion around educational policy should be relative to the curriculum content development. Controversial topics such as sex education and the inclusion of history courses should be included. On the funding side, the investment of public resources in research, science, technology, and innovation, will be covered.

Roundtable: March 21st at Instituto de Ciencia Política

METHODOLOGY

Each roundtable will be composed of 20-30 experts Guild and business leaders, academics, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and individuals with significant experience and trajectory in public service will be invited. These curated discussions will last two hours and be developed under the Chatham House Rules. Based on a Methodological Guide and a set of guiding questions, the moderator will lead the conversation that seeks to identify the priority issues to be faced by the incoming government. The above issue areas will guide the construction of questions to be posed to the candidates at the presidential debate taking place on April 19th at *RCN Televisión* facilities. The Panel of Experts will also provide inputs to outline public policy recommendations, which will be announced at the *Concordia Americas Summit*, to be held in July, 2018.

PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE AND PANEL OF EXPERTS

- The debate will be held in the format of a “*Town Hall*”
- The participants will be the candidates who are on the ballot for the election day on May 27th⁴
- Candidates will answer questions from the moderators and the audience It will be an inclusive debate attended by approximately 200 people representing all sectors of the population (large, medium, and small entrepreneurs; representatives from guilds, the academy, and civil society organizations; students and ethnic communities, among others). There will be a convening process that ensures the participation of people who do not usually have access to this type of events. All phases of the initiative are by invitation only.
- Students will be invited to apply to a contest to receive an invitation.
- The event will be broadcast live from *RCN Televisión* studios.

Participants will not have access to the questions in advance. They will only have knowledge of the general agenda of the debate.

PANEL OF EXPERTS

The Partnership will convene a group of nationally and internationally recognized experts to perform an analysis the day after the debate. This panel-style analysis seeks to deepen the understanding of the proposals raised by each of the presidential candidates, compare their answers, and put into perspective the commitments they promised while answering inquiries posed by the moderators and audience. The panel of experts commentary also seeks to enrich the content that will be covered at the *Concordia Americas Summit* in July, 2018.

This panel will be held the morning of **April 20th** in Bogotá (exact location to be determined) and will be live-streamed through the *Noticias RCN* portal.

4. The partner organizations will determine the candidates that will be part of the debate, based on the most recent polls.

“LOS CANDIDATOS DEBATEN SOBRE BOGOTÁ” (“CANDIDATES DISCUSS ON BOGOTÁ”) DEBATE

(To be developed)

CONCORDIA AMERICAS SUMMIT

Following Concordia’s successful Americas Summit in 2017, the *2018 Concordia Americas Summit* will convene again in the city of Bogotá in July 2018.

The Summit will bring together renowned political, guild and business leaders, academic experts, and representatives of national and international non-governmental organizations to discuss the current situation in Latin America, within the framework of the electoral marathon that took place throughout the year⁵ and its potential effect on politics, the economic and diplomacy. As part of the agenda, a special section will be dedicated to discuss the situation of Venezuela, pursuing the consolidation of partnerships aimed at providing humanitarian assistance to the increasing number of Venezuelan migrants to different countries in the region, and generating opportunities of inclusion in the hosting countries. Furthermore, a discussion will be held on the role that countries in the region should play in the restoration of democracy, the guarantee of full validity of Human Rights, and the achievement of a stable economic environment for Venezuelan citizens.

The Colombian President Elect and his cabinet members will be invited to discuss their future plans, impending challenges, and the public policy recommendations that the Partnership had collected through the exercises developed during the first semester of the year.

The Summit will last for a full day and will be live-streamed through the *Noticias RCN* portal, while some of its segments will be retransmitted in the news sections of *Canal RCN* and through *NTN24*.

5. Throughout 2018, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Venezuela*, Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil will hold presidential elections.