

Uncertain Peace in Columbia

What is the issue?

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- The Columbian leftist militant group FARC had entered into a peace accord with the government of President Juan Manuel Santos in 2016.

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- While further negotiations are already on a wobbly path, results of the recent parliamentary elections have complicated matters further.

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What are the political developments in Columbia?

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- FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) was an armed leftist militia that was involved in a protracted civil war with the Columbian government.

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- **Peace** - The rebels reached an understanding (accord) with the Columbian government in 2016 to surrender arms and demilitarize permanently.

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- Colombia's presidential election is due in May 2018, which is critical for the fragile peace accord with FARC that ended a 50 year civil war.

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- Also, President Santos was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for having piloted the peace initiative despite political pressures.

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- Notably, Mr. Santos has been implementing the accord in bits and pieces despite strong right-wing opposition led by former President Álvaro Uribe.

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- **The Setback** - Parliamentary elections in Columbia were held this month and the results have presented a clear setback to peace-backers.

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- In the parliamentary vote, Mr. Uribe's Democratic Centre Party has emerged

as the largest bloc in the Senate with 19 seats.

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- Also, two other right-wing parties, Radical Change and Conservative Party, finished second and third with 16 and 15 seats, respectively.

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- While the anti-accord parties haven't managed a clear majority, they now account for 50 of the 102 seats, implying that they do enjoy popular support.

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- The ruling Social Party of Mr. Santos's won just 14 seats and FARC which contested polls for the 1st time couldn't even muster 1% of the votes.

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- But FARC will still get an assured representation in parliament as agreed in the disputed accord.

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How has the Peace Accord worked thus far?

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- Though the implementation of the peace accord thus far has been patchy, major strides were made in demilitarisation and disbanding of the FARC.

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- Also, there are clear indications that FARC is transitioning into a genuine political force that has completely shunned violence.

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- The accord also granted protect to mainstreamed FARC leaders and vouched to prevent right-wing militias from targeting its members and sympathisers.

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- Yet, several left-wing activists and trade union leaders have been assassinated by right-wing militia groups, thereby hindering effective reconciliation.

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- Also, such trends are making it harder to get other currently armed insurgents to give up militancy as they fear rightist attacks.

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What is the way ahead?

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- As the verdict of the parliamentary elections show, the pro-accord forces will have to strengthen public support for their efforts in order to sustain it

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- It needs to be recognized that the memories of the civil war are still quite raw among many and genuine reconciliatory efforts are needed.

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- Dedicated steps to overcome the urban-rural disconnect and economic disparity is needed for a permanently reigning in violence.

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Source: The Hindu

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