

## **“Global” Episode Two: Colombia**

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** So, I had been very, very active against narco-traffickers, and that's why, in 1982, Pablo Escobar, that was the richest man in the world at that time, he threatened my life in 1982, saying that he was going to kill me.

**JT:** Sinclair, we're still on the air.

**SINCLAIR:** It's great, it's amazing.

**JT:** Sam, Stacy, and of course, Senator Lindsey Graham, did a great job. But now it's our turn to shine. I think we can top them.

**SINCLAIR:** Yes. I think so.

**JT:** What do you think we'll need to beat a sitting US Senator?

**SINCLAIR:** I think we have to go with a former president.

**JT:** Really?

**SINCLAIR:** Yes. I think we can do that.

**JT:** Maybe one that was kidnapped?

**SINCLAIR:** Well --

**JT:** By Pablo Escobar?

**SINCLAIR:** That would be an impressive interview to land.

**JT:** So, welcome to the second episode of Global. If you didn't catch the first episode of the podcast, Global is a monthly podcast focused on one country per episode. We take a deeper dive into each country to give listeners a holistic understanding of recent events, and a country's democratic trajectory. This episode, we will be talking about Colombia.

**SINCLAIR:** So, to be honest, I didn't really know anything about Colombia.

**JT:** It's Co-lohm-bi-yah.

**SINCLAIR:** Colombia.

**JT:** Not Co-lum-bi-yah.

**SINCLAIR:** I'm really trying hard to pronounce that correctly.

**JT:** I know.

**SINCLAIR:** And I don't know if I'm failing or succeeding half the time, but I'm aware that there's a difference now, at least.

**JT:** And you know, Sinclair, I didn't realize our generation gap until I talked to you about Juan Valdez.

**SINCLAIR:** Juan Valdez. Yeah.

**JT:** And you know --

**SINCLAIR:** So, yeah. What is Juan Valdez? Can you tell me?

**JT:** Well, Juan Valdez is this spokesperson. I mean, you know, it's a character, for Colombian coffee. And there were these cool commercials, which I'm sure we'll hear at some point during the show --

**SINCLAIR:** You'll insist on it.

**JT:** Well, we must.

**JUAN VALDEZ COMMERCIAL:** There is no sun like the sun of Colombia. It shines our land with special intensity, and for just a right number of days, to give our coffee a special richness. Humans such as Juan Valdez handpick their coffee with pride. There is no other coffee like the 100 percent Colombian.

**SINCLAIR:** So, JT. What do we need to know about Colombia? What are the fast facts?

**JT:** Well, Sinclair, I'm glad you asked. The population of Colombia is about 47 million people, and it is the second largest country in South America after Brazil. Colombia has the third largest Spanish-speaking population in the world.

**SINCLAIR:** Oh, okay.

**JT:** Colombia is the only country in South America that has coastlines on both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

**SINCLAIR:** Oh. Cool.

**JT:** While Colombia has a very violent history, and we'll learn more about that soon, the second city, Medellin, was once the murder capital of the world, with 17 murders every day in 1991.

**SINCLAIR:** Wow.

**JT:** Were you even born then?

**SINCLAIR:** Yes. I was born in 1991.

**JT:** How old were you?

**SINCLAIR:** I was two years old.

**JT:** Okay. Well, that's fair enough. Well, interestingly, Colombia also produces 60 percent of the world's emeralds. And finally, by some accounts, is the happiest country in the world.

**SINCLAIR:** The happiest?

**JT:** Yes.

**SINCLAIR:** How do we know that?

**JT:** Yes, according to a Gallup survey of 66,000 people from 68 countries, Colombia came pretty high up in terms of the happiness rating.

**SINCLAIR:** So, JT. On our docket today, we have the former president of Colombia, President Pastrana. Nick Miroff, from the Washington Post. And, IRI's own Gabriela Serrano, based in Bogota.

**JT:** Sounds like a great lineup. Let's get started.

**SINCLAIR:** Before President Pastrana and other experts on Colombia talk about modern history, I wanted to learn a little bit more about the history of Colombia before the 1950s. So, I did a little research. The first European to set foot on Colombia was not actually Columbus. It was one of his companions, named Alonso de Ojeda. He was so impressed with the richness of Colombia's natural resources and gold that it gave rise to this legend of El Dorado, the mythical kingdom and city of gold. And this legend pretty much drove the Spanish to continue conquering Colombia. As the Spanish Empire continued to grow, it created the vice royalty of New Grenada in 1717, with Bogota as the capital. It comprised the territories of what are today Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, and Venezuela. After the French invaded Spain, and Napoleon put his own brother on the Spanish throne, New Grenada rebelled, at first in support of the true Spanish throne, and then it became an independence movement. And the hero of that independence movement was Simon Bolivar, who won six battles against the Spanish in 1812, was defeated. The Spanish reconquered in 1817. Bolivar came back. He had the support of a British legion, and Venezuelan forces, and he reconquered all the way from the Andes over to Bogota. Simon Bolivar and Francisco Santander were the seeds of the two movements whose disagreement would dominate Colombian politics for the next hundred years. Simon Bolivar's were the forerunners of the Conservative party, which sought strong, centralized government, and had franchised an alliance with the Roman Catholic Church. Santander's followers were forerunners of the Liberals, wanted a decentralized government,

state rather than church control over education and other civil matters, and broadened suffrage. This disagreement resulted in eight civil wars, and dozens of insurrections in the 19th century.

**JT:** Eight civil wars?

**SINCLAIR:** Eight. And one civil war, which was The War of 1,000 Days, left more than 100,000 dead. The worst civil war that Colombia experienced, however, was La Violencia, and it occurred in the 1940s and 1950s.

**JT:** To learn more about Colombia's history, we have the incredible opportunity to discuss with a main character from Colombia's history. The 30th president of Colombia, Andres Pastrana. President Pastrana was the mayor of Bogota from 1988 to 1990, served as President from 1998 to 2002, and went on to become the Ambassador to the United States in 2005. Today, IRI is proud to have him as a member of our international advisory council.

**SINCLAIR:** President Pastrana is still very engaged in politics today. In full disclosure to our listeners, he, along with former President Uribe, were a part of the No Movement to reject the first peace deal with the FARC. The peace deal is also an incredibly complex agreement, dealing with decades-old grievances, and it's also very polarizing. 50.2 percent of voters rejected it, compared with 49.8 percent who voted for it. So, it's important to state that IRI takes no official stance on the peace deal. And throughout this episode, I hope that we deliver an unbiased understanding of the current situation. IRI is a non-partisan, non-profit organization.

**JT:** So, President Pastrana. For all our international listeners who are not experts on South American history, could you give us a brief historical overview of Colombia?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** First of all, thank you very much for the invitation to discuss some of the issues in my country. Colombia is the oldest democracy in Latin America. It's a country that, unfortunately, we have suffered more than 50 years of violence, different type of violence in Colombia. First, in the 50's, 60's, we had political violence. We used to have a bipartisan system between Liberals, that are similar to the Democrats in the United States, and Conservatives, like the Republicans in the States. And in the 60's, we agreed on a peace process, a political peace process. It was a time that we have basically two large guerilla groups that were acting in Colombia. The FARC, that used to be, or still is, a Marxist-Leninist group according to their ideology, and we have the ELN, that is a pro-Cuban movement, still very active in Colombia. In the 70's, or starting the 80's, we start having the problem of narco-trafficking, exporting first Colombia marijuana, and then we became the largest producers of cocaine. We had the two largest drug cartels in the world. Maybe you remember one of them is the Medellin Cartel, whose leader was Pablo Escobar, and the Cali Cartel, that was oriented by two brothers, the Orejuela brothers, that are now in the United States.

**JT:** Specifically, the Orejuela brothers are breaking rocks with other rocks in a federal correction facility in Butler, North Carolina, and Edgefield, South Carolina.

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** And in the 90's, we start to have another group promoting violence in Colombia that was the group of the paramilitaries. So, it's a country that we have suffered in the last 50 years a lot, regarding violence, but on the other hand, it's a country, if you see what happened in it was called "The Lost Decade of Latin America" in the 70's and the 80's, it's the only country that grew at that time, according to economics. We never fail to pay our foreign debt. We Colombians, we never -- we structure our foreign debt. We never had hyperinflations like many countries in Latin America. You remember you had countries that had 1,000, 2,000 and 3,000 percent of inflation. Colombia, at the worst, had 27, 28, 30 percent. So, it's a country that, economically, is an example for the region. Maybe it's an example of the world. Even all the difficult moments that we had with our violence in Colombia.

**JT:** To end La Violencia, the Liberal and Conservative parties had to agree to a power-sharing agreement, in which they would alternate control over the presidency for 16 years. Do you think this subverted Colombia's democracy, or saved it?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** As I told you before, we used to have two huge parties, big parties. The Liberals and Conservatives. And we started having problems of violence between the two parties. And in 1953, 1954, we started discussions on, how can we end the violence in Colombia? The political violence. And we agree, and this is something that I think could be an example, even today, for many of the countries in the Arab League or many of the countries that are having problems in the Middle East. We decide that we were going to have a National Front for 20 years. Every four years, we were going to change government. The first government was going to be held by the Liberals, the second four years by Conservatives, the third by Liberals, the fourth, by Conservatives. And the last period of those 20 years, it was going to be open between Liberals and Conservatives. But the important thing, Sinclair, is that you have, even if the president was of the Liberal party, half of the government was of the Conservative party. And that alternate for the four years. In those 20 years, Colombia has developed. We have a strength of our own parties. And that's why I told you before that Colombia is the oldest democracy, more than 150 years of democracy. It was very important, because we ended violence, and in 1978, the National Front finished. And there, we have open elections, and there has been alternation, also, in the government, with open democracy. Some terms have been in the hands of the Liberals, other ones have been in the hands of the Conservatives. And now, we have an open -- a more open democracy, because we have more parties.

**JT:** President Pastrana, before we move away from history, though. I wanted to ask you quickly about -- just a little bit about the origins. You talked a little bit about the guerilla groups, the drug cartels, the paramilitary groups. Where did all these groups come from?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** In the 50's, after the we ended the political violence in Colombia between the Liberals and Conservatives, some of these groups stayed in the mountains, and that group was called the FARC, the first group that was created in Colombia, the FARC. The FARC is -- because I already always said, John, that in Colombia, we have all types of different guerilla groups. First of all, the FARC. Marxist-Leninist group. Pro-Soviet Union, at that time, in the 50's, supported, at that time, by the Soviet Union. Trained and financed by the Soviet Union, until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Then, it was created also in the 60's, the ELN. ELN is

called the National Liberation Army in English. It was a pro-Cuban movement, or is a pro-Cuban movement, financed and trained by the Cubans, by Fidel Castro at that time, and still is active in Colombia. We had another group, that it was called the M-19. The M-19 was a Nationalist group. And they made a peace process in the 80's, at the end of the 80's and the 90's, and they now -- it's a political party in Colombia. Even some of them are in Congress. Some of them have been ministers, governors, mayors. Elected mayors and governors, and even Vice President of Colombia was from that guerilla movement. And then, we have the paramilitaries, the start -- end of the 80's, and the starting of the 90's, to be very active in Colombia. And that was a private right-hand group. Some of them financed by the private sector, and unfortunately, they were very active, doing a lot of massacres and violation of human rights. And the worst thing, I think, the curse that we had in Colombia, is narco trafficking. Because at the end, narco trafficking is the one, that it's financing all the guerilla movements. We had the largest cartel, as you know, Colombian is number one expert of coca, or cocaine, in the world. We used to have the largest cocaine cartels in the world in Colombia. And now, the largest cocaine cartel, according not to Colombia, according to the US, according to the State Department of the United States, the largest, the largest and richest drug cartel in the world is the FARC. The guerilla movement of Colombia. And that's why we propose, even during my tenure, during my term, Plan Colombia.

**JT:** Okay. This is important to understand. Because Plan Colombia was a game-changer in Colombia's history.

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** And that was indeed what happened that changed Colombia, is what, when I create Plan Colombia, at that time, with President Bill Clinton, and then with the support of President Bush. And it was a plan that basically was conceived, first of all, to go after drug trafficking, narcotics. But also social investment in many of the areas in Colombia. Training and strengthening of our army, but also strengthening our institution, basically the Justice. That's, very quickly, the history of how all these different groups grow in Colombia. But at the end, today, the worst problem that we're having is that, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, now with the end of the Castro Regime in Cuba, where are they getting all these resources? From narco trafficking.

**SINCLAIR:** Yes, and we also understood that you have your own personal experience with the drug cartels. Weren't you kidnapped at one point?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** So, when I was a journalist, and I was an editor of a news program, I had been very acting against narco trafficking. Because I think that's one of the worst crimes that we have today. Not only destroying our society, corrupting our political systems, destroying our young, the young people, the young generation. So, I had been very, very active against narco traffickers, and that's why, in 1982, Pablo Escobar, that was the richest man in the world at that time, he was the most powerful man in Colombia, because he has all these private armies. He threatened my life in 1982, saying that he was going to kill me. And six years after that, I was kidnapped when I was running for Mayor of Bogota, in my political headquarters. I was kidnapped in Bogota. Next day, they took me to Medellin, closer to Medellin. I was blindfolded and handcuffed, and they took me to a city close to Medellin. And a week after, fortunately for me, unfortunately for a good friend, the Attorney General, I never

knew where I was, because they took me by helicopter. I never knew where I was. It was, one hour, one hour and a half flight, blindfolded and handcuffed. And Pablo Escobar and the Medellin cartel decided to kidnap the Attorney General of Colombia. And the Attorney General was kidnapped when he was arriving to the Medellin airport on Monday. And in the rescue operation of the Attorney General, they found me. They found me, the police saved me, but unfortunately, the Attorney General, after Escobar knew that the police freed me, he decided to kill the Attorney General, and he was shot. I think 25 or 26 times, he was shot and he was killed by the Medellin Cartel.

**JT:** Well, President Pastrana, that is quite a story. And you know, we've heard a lot about the impact of the guerilla groups, cartels, paramilitary. Very tumultuous times of political violence.

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** Let me talk a little bit what happened with this peace process with President Santos -- that that's what worries us in Colombia, the people have to know. On October 2, 6.5 million Colombians, we vote "No" for the peace agreement with the FARC. The "Yes" got 6.3. We won that referendum by a very small margin. We said no to that agreement, it means that the President and the government need to start a new process. The President called the leaders of the No, he called me, he called President Uribe, he called members of the Christian churches, members -- victims, no. I said -- we said to the President, "Mr. President, it's not a winning of war, it's a winning of peace, what happened today in Colombia." And I said to the President, "Today, Mr. President, you have 99 percent of the Colombian population in favor of the peace. But we need to do some changes. That is, the 'yes' won the elections, or the referendum, on the agreement that the FARC was going to be part of the Colombian Constitution." So, we said to President Santos, "You cannot change the Colombian Constitution, you have to respect the Constitution." Second, what I told you about the narco trafficking. Imagine, these people have killed so many peoples in Colombia. They have bribed so many peoples in this country. They finance their violence for many years with narco trafficking, and we cannot take them to jail? Even that we cannot extradite them to the United States? How can we go to the United States today, after actually Plan Colombia, more than \$10 billion. How can I explain to them that you gave me \$10 billion dollars to fight with their defense? And third, if we're going to talk about narco trafficking, who are your funders? Why the President didn't ask the FARC saying, who are your funders? He didn't ask the FARC to give us the roots, and how are you exporting drugs to the United States and to Europe? And give us the laps, where you do your processing of the drug in Colombia? And the most important thing. It's where do you have the money? According to Forbes, the FARC is the third largest terrorist group in the world. Where is all that money? He never asked those things. Also, that money is very important to pay the victims in Colombia.

**JT:** How do you think the world sees Colombia today? Thinking broadly, now. Of course, a lot of people know about the drug cartels, the FARC peace deal, and a number of other issues. But how do you -- I'm a normal person on the street, out in India. How do you see Colombia in the world today?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** I think that the perception of Colombia in the last 20 years is completely different of what happened in the last 50 years. But I think that perception in

Colombia today is a different one. We have been fighting for the drug cartels in the last 20, 30 years. Plan Colombia, with the support of the United States, changed this country.

**JT:** So, what can other countries learn from Plan Colombia?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA** A lot. Because you can learn, first, the strengthening of its institutions. I think that's very important. The strengthening of the justice system is very important. How can we solve problems, for example, with social development? In the case of Colombia, we have to design new programs of alternative development in the cocaine areas.

**JT:** President Pastrana, I only knew one thing about Colombia growing up. And that was Juan Valdez. Have you ever met Juan Valdez?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** Yes.

**JT:** Does he exist?

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** Yes. At that time, when we were young, Juan Valdez -- when we start Juan Valdez, it was a publicity done in the United States. The first one Juan --

**JT:** Yes.

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** -- Valdez, was from Puerto Rico. Imagine. But now, some years ago, about 25, 30 years ago, we decide to do a -- we decide to select Juan Valdez from Colombia. So, Juan Valdez today is an original coffee grower of Colombia.

**JT:** Well, thank you so much, President Pastrana, for joining us. You've been such a great friend of IRI.

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** Thank you.

**JT:** You've been a great guest on our Global podcast. So, thank you so much.

**PRESIDENT PASTRANA:** Thank you, John. Thank you to Sinclair, also, for all the questions.

**JT:** We're joined now by Nick Miroff of the Washington Post. Nick has been reporting on Latin America for the past seven years, and been with the Post for about ten.

**NICK MIROFF:** I'm always happy when anybody's paying attention to Colombia. I think it's an important story, and so, happy to contribute and answer your questions.

**JT:** As President Pastrana touched on, there was a referendum on a peace deal that was brought to the people. The referendum was rejected. President Santos reworked the peace deal. The President then decided to not go back to the referendum, but to bring the peace deal directly to Congress. It passed. To give our listeners some background, and a greater



understanding of how this came about, could you tell us a little bit about the de facto type of government and how it works?

**NICK MIROFF:** Sure. I mean, Colombia is a liberal democracy in the way that we would recognize one, with free elections, free press, free speech, and a very stable government. And I think a country with a fairly robust civil society, at least relative to other nations in the region.

**SINCLAIR:** Could you explain the policy of democratic security under the former Uribe Administration?

**NICK MIROFF:** Yes. Uribe basically -- the democratic security initiative was basically part of a counter-insurgency program with support from the United States, but also an effort to rebuild Colombian institutions. And I think, by most accounts, given that Uribe's popularity rating when he left office, it was successful on many levels, even though it was also an era of a lot of human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings.

**JT:** On what platform was the Santos Administration elected to in 2010?

**NICK MIROFF:** Santos was Uribe's defense minister, and ran essentially as the continuation of Uribe. But he also recognized, I think, an opportunity to finally get a peace deal with the FARC, and so, I believe in about a year, I think, of him taking office, he went into secret negotiations that were later made public. And that produced a very loud and difficult break with Uribe, and their political rivalry has ended up really dominating Colombian politics ever since. And so, the controversy over the peace deal was very much a split between Santos and his coalition and Uribe, who went on to found his own party, and who maintained that Santos was really giving away too much, and that the peace deal was going to be a vehicle for the FARC to take power in Colombia.

**SINCLAIR:** So, for some context for our listeners, could you tell us a broad overview of what the initial peace deal looked like, and then how the new one differs from the old one?

**NICK MIROFF:** Yes, okay. This is a very complex document, because it's over 300 pages, and it's more than just a peace agreement, it's sort of a promise to transform politics in Colombia. And so, the peace deal, it really has several key points. One is a commitment to invest more in rural development and rural infrastructure, to help Colombian small farmers, who are really the base of FARC's guerilla movement. There's a commitment to end the drug trade, that FARC was going to get out. It's committed to ending the drug trade, and hoping to move beyond the illegal economy. It guarantees FARC to be able to participate in democratic politics. It set the terms of how that participation will work and how that transition will go. And then probably the most important and contentious element was, what will be -- how will these FARC members be processed judicially? Will those who have been convicted of war crimes and other major abuses, what will their -- how will their cases be processed? And then finally, it was about, how will the disarmament work? And what they eventually agreed is that FARC will go into these UN-monitored camps, where they will do a phased disarmament. Not really -- they didn't want it to look like a surrender to the government or to the Colombian military, so it's very much like they're going to hand over their weapons to UN monitors over the

course of six months, and then those camps will close. And so, that was basically the broad outline of the first peace accord. And the new agreement isn't significantly different. I would say it had some major changes to the judicial part. It walked back some of the commitments on rural development. It restored the government's ability to use herbicides, and the forced eradication of coca. And so there were little tinkering details. But one of the big things that Uribe and his coalition had opposed, which was really the ability of the FARC leaders to get into democratic politics. That wasn't changed, and that was one of the reasons why Uribe said he couldn't go along with the new version either. And so, the deal is now finalized, and we're in the initial state of implementation.

**JT:** How does this transitional justice process work? How will be people, maybe who were convicted of some political crime, such as rebellion and things like that, how will they be reconciled with the state?

**NICK MIROFF:** Well, under the terms of the accord, basically the lower-level FARC fighters, whose only crime is essentially something called rebellion, kind of like taking up arms against the state. Those folks will receive a blanket amnesty. And then, the other FARC members, who have convictions for things like drug trafficking, terrorism, kidnapping, murder, all of those things, they will enter this transitional justice program in which they have to fully attest to their crimes, and fully disclose their role in them, kind of like a truth and reconciliation process. Then they will be eligible for alternative sentencing, which would involve being at -- they would have some kind of restriction on their liberty, on their freedom of movement, so that maybe -- a work camp or things like that. And the government has made it clear that this is not impunity, that this is an effective restriction on their ability to move around, and their ability to participate in politics as well, and that if they don't honestly and truthfully and completely disclose what they did, then they will be referred to the ordinary Colombian criminal justice system, where they could face up to 20 years in prison.

**SINCLAIR:** You mentioned that the new peace deal walks back some of the regional development that they were going to do in response to the FARC demobilizing. Isn't that kind of necessary, as part of the whole reintegration and solving the root of the conflict problem? To make it not a power vacuum, where you had the FARC before?

**NICK MIROFF:** Yes. This is a really critical point, and this is one of the things that's really the most important to the FARC. Because the FARC came to this process, really giving up on their long struggle to transform Colombia's economic and political model. And so, the thing that they really could hang their hats on was this idea that they were going to get the government to commit to a bigger investment in rural development and rural infrastructure, to really help the small farmers who they claim to be fighting for. There's a big worry about, what happens in these areas where the FARC has been dominant, and people survive mostly by growing coca? Can the government rush to fill the power vacuum in those places as the FARC pulls out? And one of the things that we've seen, that's kind of a discouraging sign so far, is that the state hasn't really effectively gone into those areas yet, and the FARC is being replaced by more criminal elements who are looking to take over the drug trade in that area.

**SINCLAIR:** What do you think FARC political participation will look like?

**NICK MIROFF:** The FARC is pretty sophisticated, and already has a lot of people who have been working in civilian-level politics. It's not as if everybody in the FARC is a hardened armed fighter.

There are -- almost half of the FARC members, I think, are women, and in the communities where the FARC is present, they have been doing local-level politics for a long time. And so, I think that they will be able to win seats in some of those areas right away, and it remains to be seen whether they will be effective on a larger, national level.

**SINCLAIR:** And so, what do you think is going to be the end result of this peace deal? Do you think it's going to be successful in ending the conflict, or do you think it will lead to other problems?

**NICK MIROFF:** You know, I think that this is the end of the FARC as we know it, and I think that one of the big risks is that a lot of the lower-ranking guerillas, if things don't go well, if they feel vulnerable to assassinations, and they feel vulnerable in their communities, will they re-arm? Either as a different group, or would they potentially join some of the criminal or drug trafficking groups as hired muscle, so to speak?

**JT:** Well, thank you so much, Nick. I really appreciate the time that you've taken here, and thank you so much for your time.

**SINCLAIR:** Thank you so much.

**NICK MIROFF:** My pleasure. Hope it was useful for you guys, and I just appreciate the interest in Colombia.

**SINCLAIR:** To discuss the future of Colombia, we're now joined by Gabriela Serrano, who currently serves as IRI's Regional Program Director in Bogota, where she is responsible for programs in Colombia as well as Peru. Gabriela has worked for IRI for the last 12 years, and has worked in Colombia for the past six. Gabriela, thank you for joining us.

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** Yes, let's do it.

**SINCLAIR:** What do you think is the most important thing that the government needs to do, or that needs to happen, in order to make this peace process and the demobilization successful and beneficial for Colombians?

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** Well, definitely it is -- reaching out to those communities that have been affected by the 50-year conflict is fundamental. Just bringing all -- what a state has to provide to its citizens, in terms of roads, services, safety. These people probably don't even have an ID. If they don't have a national ID, they cannot have access to the social programs, and their kids cannot go to school, and they don't have access to the health programs either. So, all these, I think it's fundamental, so that these people feel that they are a part of Colombia.

**SINCLAIR:** Do citizens have faith that the Colombian government can be trusted to fill in?

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** So, the challenge for the government is that they will fight corruption. This is something that, in Colombia, corruption is something that has been present for a long time, and it's in a very level. But it has not been addressed as a main problem. It affects most of the government system, the municipal government, it affects politics. One of the problems the Colombian electoral processes have, it's the fraud and the writing of the votes that takes place here a lot. And that's what affects people's trust.

**JT:** What can we expect from the next election in 2018?

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** Well, it's going to be the first election with the FARC not fighting, so I think that's going to be great. But, as I mentioned before, it's evident that the country's polarized. President Santos won in 2014 with a 51 percent of the vote. In 2016, the map of the country was very much similar to that 2014 map. The politicians have to really look into what the debate will include. I expect that some political groups will continue to talk a lot about the peace, but it's also clear that corruption might be the main topic, and what they will propose to do to fight that. Colombia has some of the oldest political parties in the continent, in Latin America, the Liberals and the Conservative parties. But there is also clear that they will need to make alliances to really have good options to reach some representation in Congress, and to support the presidential candidates. What we are seeing now is, there are a several pre-candidates that are more interested in running as an independent than as a party candidate.

**JT:** Is Colombia's future now secure with this new peace agreement?

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** Undoubtedly, it's been a huge step. But, it doesn't end there. It doesn't end with the agreement. The agreement needs to take place, and the building of the peace is the key part now, and it's probably more complicated than reaching the agreement, which was complicated by itself. You know, Colombia has 25 percent of the population afro-descendant, and this is not something that's generally known Colombia for. They need to integrate that population, and when you see the map, these afro-Colombians are located in the areas where the conflict took the strongest hit. So, you can even say that war in Colombia -- it has afro-Colombians as their main victims.

**SINCLAIR:** So, you think that the trend is shifting, and there's more awareness of the need to include more afro-Colombians in politics?

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** There's still a lot more to do. The Colombian Constitution have two seats in Congress that are -- the House of Representatives -- that are assigned to afro-Colombian descendants, and in the last general elections, these seats were given to none afro-Colombians because of the lack of ability of afro-Colombian groups to advocate for their rights.

**SINCLAIR:** Wait. How is it possible, if they're 25 percent of the population, that they couldn't fill two seats in the Congress?

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** If I'm not mistaken, there were two seats, and there were, I want to say 120 candidates for those two seats. So, just imagine how dispersed was the voting. You see? If they could come together into five, 10 candidates, that will definitely make it more probable to elect someone that represents them the most.

**SINCLAIR:** We ask this one light-hearted question every episode. So, if an international time capsules was shot off into deep space, what would Colombia put it in it?

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** Oh, definitely a Juan Valdez coffee bag.

**SINCLAIR:** Really?

**JT:** Oh, man.

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** It has to go there, yes.

**JT:** Now, the aliens will be very happy.

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** And, we'll need to find a way to put pieces of the music they have here. You know, it's not only -- it's the Salsa, it's the Vallenato, it's the Cumbia, which is really one of the strongest characteristics of these people.

**JT:** Well, thank you so much for sharing your expertise with us, Gabriela.

**GABRIELA SERRANO:** Ciao.

**JT:** Sinclair, what are the big three takeaways at the conclusion of this podcast that our listeners need to know?

**SINCLAIR:** I think one thing is that Plan Colombia was a major success, and there are many lessons to be learned from it, especially for other conflict-ridden countries.

**JT:** I would say the second is, Colombia can't leave a vacuum. The work isn't done. Yes, the country was in the spotlight over the peace agreement, but the hard work is actually starting now.

**SINCLAIR:** I agree.

**JT:** There's a lot more that needs to be done.

**SINCLAIR:** I agree, and I think it's going to take a lot of commitment on the part of politicians. And I think this is a third takeaway, is that the politicians really need to see this through, and they need to work together towards the ultimate goal, that I think everybody wants, which is peace in Colombia.

**JT:** Political will is everything here.

**SINCLAIR:** Very special thank you to the former President of Colombia, President Pastrana.

**JT:** Nick Miroff of the Washington Post.

**SINCLAIR:** And IRI's own Gabriela Serrano, based in Bogota. Our theme was composed by Alex Hollinghead. And throughout this episode, you heard Colombia's national anthem, and Yo Me Llamo Cumbia, by Toto La Mampolina. Many thanks to Gabriela Serrano for the music recommendations.

**JT:** Thank you again for listening to our podcast. If there is a country you would like to learn more about, leave a comment in our review section. While you're there, rate our podcast and let us know what you think. But please, no comments about my New Jersey accent. IRI works in over 80 countries worldwide. If you would like to learn more, go to [iri.org](http://iri.org), or follow us on Twitter @IRIGlobal.

So, if people are still listening, Sinclair, let's give a hint at our next episode.

**SINCLAIR:** Okay. Well, I have a really great trivia question about this.

**JT:** Uh-oh. Hit me.

**SINCLAIR:** What capital city is named for a variety of cotton fabric, that's rich in exquisite patterns?

**JT:** I have no idea.

**SINCLAIR:** You don't know your cottons?

**JT:** I do not know my cottons. Except wrinkle-free.

**SINCLAIR:** Well, if any of our listeners knows the answer, leave it in our review section, and we will give you a shout out at the end of episode three.

**JT:** Bold promises, Sinclair. I'm not so sure you can write that check, but let's see.