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Poll Reveals Increase in Support for Peace Process in Colombia

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A poll conducted for *Semana* magazine found support growing inside Colombia for the ongoing peace process between the leftist rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the government after the head of the guerrilla group, Timoleon Jimenez, and President Juan Manuel Santos signed an important agreement regarding transitional justice.

The poll, conducted by Ipsos-Napoleon Franco, found that 46 percent of respondents now felt optimistic about the peace talks, a dramatic increase over results in July that found only 29 percent felt optimistic.

Respondents who felt negatively about the peace talks still outpaced the optimists, however, with 52 percent feeling pessimistic, a drop from 69 percent in July.

The poll also found that 55 percent of the respondents felt that the whole country would win if a final deal was signed. About 28 percent thought the FARC would win, 8 percent said the government, and 9 percent said no one.

The approval ratings of President Santos had been steadily dropping over the last year but shot up to 47 percent with the news that the government was close to reaching a final deal with the FARC.

The poll served to reveal that his approval rating is closely linked with the progress of the peace negotiations. Santos was re-elected president in 2014 largely on the basis that he would secure a peace deal.

Both parties agreed to have a deal signed by late March 2016, though 58 percent felt that the deadline would not be met.

News of the historic meeting between FARC Commander Jimenez, better known as Timochenko, and President Santos reached 8 out of 10 Colombians, with 55 percent viewing the meeting as positive.

Nonetheless, there is still a lot of progress to be made in winning public support for a final deal. Despite the prevailing optimism at the negotiating table, 65 percent of respondents believe the talks could still be interrupted.

The FARC also have their work cut out for themselves as 67 percent believe they will not honor a final deal. Timochenko received a slight bump in public perception with 9 percent holding a favorable opinion of the rebel leader.

In a sign that the FARC is committed to peace, Timochenko tweeted last Wednesday that FARC combatants would no longer undergo combat training and would instead focus on political and cultural education.

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