

5-12-2006

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### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Vote Fraud Allegations for ex-chief of Secret Police." (2006). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/13484>

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## Vote Fraud Allegations for ex-chief of Secret Police

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Colombia

Published: 2006-05-12

Jorge Noguera, the former head of the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (DAS), the national secret police agency, is facing charges that he helped the 2002 presidential campaign of President Alvaro Uribe gain 300,000 illicit votes. In November 2005, he had to resign from the DAS during a corruption scandal and shortly afterward was named consul to Milan, Italy. Noguera had to resign his post as consul in Milan and return to face investigations of vote fraud and much more serious allegations that he allowed paramilitary groups to infiltrate his agency, leaked intelligence to criminal organizations, misappropriated funds, and sought to violently destabilize the Venezuelan government. It is improbable, however, that the accusations against Noguera will substantively harm President Uribe's run for re-election.

Attorney General Mario Iguaran filed charges against Noguera on May 9, forcing the official to resign as consul. He had been a campaign chief for Uribe before he was named DAS head, when, the allegations say, he fabricated votes for his boss in seven departments along the northern coast. The fraud, if proven, would not invalidate Uribe's 2002 win, "but it would seriously diminish his legitimacy," according to a member of the Procuraduria General de la Nacion (PGN) who spoke to Miami newspaper El Nuevo Herald. The attorney general's decision lent credibility to the accusations against Noguera from his former friend and ex-chief of information for the DAS Rafael Garcia, now jailed in Bogota because of accusations that he erased information about drug traffickers from the agency's archives.

Garcia said that in 2002 Noguera did work on fraudulent activities, which was backed by paramilitaries who promoted the Uribe candidacy. In those elections, Noguera was presidential campaign chief in the department of Magdalena, the epicenter of the scheme, says Garcia. Garcia claims that the scam was ordered and financed by Rodrigo Tovar, alias Jorge 40, the head of one of the military wings of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) Colombia's main paramilitary umbrella organization.

Jorge, 40, supposedly held multiple "institutional" meetings with Noguera during that period. Noguera denies Garcia's accusations. "I want to reply before the courts without the government's backing," said Noguera. "I alone will assume responsibility."

Minister of the Interior and Justice Sabas Pretelt said on Radio Caracol, "With this avalanche of accusations, how good it is that Dr. Noguera comes to the fore and assumes his defense." Pretelt recently denied all the charges against Noguera in a congressional debate, but he did accept that there was infiltration within the DAS.

Other allegations: destabilize Venezuela, kill unionists The Procuraduria plans to continue investigating other charges that Garcia levels against Noguera, like killing trade unionists in cooperation with paramilitaries and conducting a terrorist plan to destabilize the government of

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. According to these accusations, Noguera, as DAS director, exited the country and went across the Venezuelan border, accompanied by paramilitaries, to capture people who were later transported back to Colombia and killed. Such activities led to a diplomatic crisis between Colombia and Venezuela (see NotiSur, 2005-01-28 and 2005-02-18). Since Garcia's accusations have come out, Venezuela's government has been demanding an investigation into the supposed conspiracy against President Chavez.

Political-opposition figures say the vote fraud is the least of the accusations against Noguera. "Here there is a set of crimes and the most serious are having directed public funds from Colombia and the US to paramilitary sectors and permitting the filtration of intelligence information to criminal groups," said Deputy Gustavo Petro of the Polo Democratico Alternativo (PDA), a left-wing party opposed to Uribe. The vote fraud allegation, said Petro, "is the least serious accusation and the easiest to prove." Petro says that US\$13 million from the US military-aid program Plan Colombia went to Jorge 40. Garcia says that, under Noguera's watch, narco-traffickers and paramilitaries infiltrated the DAS and lists of union members to be killed were delivered to the illegal armed groups.

Colombia is one of the world's most dangerous places to be a union organizer. Uribe still strong in polls for May 28 vote. In 2002, Uribe won the presidency in the first round and opinion polls indicate that he will enjoy a similar victory in elections May 28. His allies have taken control of Congress, (see NotiSur, 2006-03-31), he takes credit for declines in kidnapping and other violent crime rates, and his nearest competitor in the race, Horacio Serpa of the Partido Liberal (PL), trails him by an extremely wide margin. Prior allegations of the president's links to paramilitary groups be they familial, financial, or political have done little to reduce Uribe's popularity (see NotiSur, 2004-06-04, 2005-06-17, 2004-12-17, 2005-07-22, and 2006-02-03).

Recent polls found that the respondents' intention to vote for Uribe stands at about 56%. The conservative president has such media success that a recent revelation that he discussed putting microchips in Colombian immigrants living temporarily in the US may not do much harm to his public image.

Details of Uribe's conversation in April with US lawmakers were revealed by Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) in a report he read into the congressional record. Specter and Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) met with Uribe during their visit to Colombia on April 7-9. During the informal meeting, Specter expressed concern about seasonal workers who immigrate to the US to work temporarily on farms and then do not return once their visas have expired.

"President Uribe said he would consider having Colombian workers have microchips implanted into their bodies before they are permitted to enter the United States to work on a seasonal basis," said Specter in a speech entered into the congressional record April 25. "I doubted whether the implantation of microchips would be effective since the immigrant worker might be able to remove them."

Uribe refused on April 27 to say whether he proposed microchip implants, acknowledging only that he encouraged the senators to replace "draconian" immigration laws with a temporary-worker

program that treats Colombian workers humanely, like ones the country already has with Spain and Canada. "If the US, with all its technology, computers, and chips, doesn't have the means to know who enters or leaves the country then where are we?" he said during an interview on City TV. Human rights advocates and Colombian migrants rejected microchips.

"If the US wants to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country, it should find a better way than treating humans like animals," said Diana Lozano, an architecture student who spoke with The Associated Press. An estimated 1.5 million Colombians live in the US and many more have considered migrating north to escape economic hardship or the country's four-decade civil war.

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