

# BACKGROUND GUIDE

## CONGRESS OF CUCUTA

Composed by Graham Billingsley & Kevin Sae-Tung



WMIDMUN-XXII

# DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Delegates,

I would like to welcome you all to this year's iteration of WMIDMUN. My name is Kevin Sae-Tung and I will be your crisis director for this conference's Congress of Cúcuta. I'm a Sophomore at William and Mary as a Pre-med undergraduate majoring in Chemistry.

The Congress of Cucuta represents one of those rare moments in history where a group of determined people came together with a dream to create a nation from scratch and I hope this committee will bring to you the infinite possibilities of determining the future of Gran Colombia. First time or not, I hope y'all have a great time at WMIDMUN and Williamsburg.

Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to WMIDMUN! We are very excited to meet all of you and cannot wait to work together for the weekend. My name is Graham Billingsley and I will be the in room director for your committee (Congress of Cúcuta). I am originally from Overland Park, Kansas and am currently a Junior at William and Mary studying history.

I'm very excited to be your director for this committee and am pumped to see you at your most creative while working out the intricacies of Gran Colombia. With that said I would like to remind everyone that although the congress took place in the past and some of the members of the congress may have not had the most modern views, no sexism, racism or violent speaking will be tolerated within the committee and that it is best to refrain from certain topics that are likely to upset your fellow delegates. I do not expect this to be an issue with you all, but it is an important reminder regardless. This is done to ensure both a safe and fun environment for all involved.

Even if it is your first time ever doing Model UN, I'm sure you will bring it your all to this conference and I cannot wait to welcome all of you to William and Mary. If you have any questions surrounding the committee or conference feel free to reach out to either Kevin or me. We look forward to seeing you soon!

**Kevin Sae-Tung**  
Congress of Cúcuta

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# HISTORY

## Introduction

At the end of the Wars of Independence, Simon Bolivar had a dream of a unified South America that was independent of Spanish rule. The Congress of Cúcuta, held in 1821, allowed for Bolivar to argue and fight for this dream, not against the Spanish, but instead his peers. For centuries, the Spanish Empire exerted control over the vast territories in South America, exploiting their resources and stifling aspirations for self-governance. However, by the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Spanish brutality and Enlightenment ideology among the South American colonies converged creating movements for independence across the continent. Against this backdrop of upheaval and rebellion, the Congress of Cúcuta emerged as a pivotal event in the struggle for independence. Meeting in the town of Cúcuta, located on the border between present-day Colombia and Venezuela, the congress brought together delegates from across the region to chart a course towards freedom and self-governance.

## The Prelude to Cúcuta: The Spanish American Wars of Independence

The Congress of Cúcuta was the culmination of years of sacrifice and fighting by Spain's Latin American colonies for independence from Spain. During the Peninsular War, Napoleon's campaign through Spain, the Latin American colonies formed regional juntas to organize local defenses against a French invasion. Later, King Ferdinand VII of Spain was pressured by the estates of Spain and the juntas of Latin America to relinquish absolute control over the colonies. However, after Napoleon's defeat, Ferdinand returned and cooped the estates, attempting to reestablish absolutism within the Spanish Empire, leading to conflict between factions of Patriots in favor of colonial autonomy and the Royalists loyal to the king. After years of guerilla warfare and devastation throughout Latin America, the conflict officially ended in 1821 with recognition of the new states of Latin America based on the boundaries of the original colonial administration, but fighting and Spanish attempts to retake its colonies persisted into the 1830s.

## The Fight Between Federalism and Centralism:

As a background for this congress it is important to recognize the differing political ideologies of the delegates present in Cúcuta. The main dispute arose between those favoring a federalist government and those who preferred centralism. Those in support of Federalism argued for a decentralized system of government where power was distributed among individual states or provinces. They believed that this approach would better protect regional autonomy and promote local governance tailored to the unique needs and preferences of each region. Advocates of federalism emphasized the importance of states' rights and viewed a strong central government as a potential threat to individual liberties and diversity within the nation.

# HISTORY



On the other hand, those in favor of centralism advocated for a strong centralized government with authority concentrated only on the national level. They argued that it was necessary to have a centralized system to promote unity, stability, and effective governance as the new state started out. They believed Federalism was a recipe for ineffective government and could potentially lead to state conflicts under Gran Colombia, allowing for Spanish influence to return once again.

The debate between federalism and centralism reflected deeper ideological divisions and historical contexts among the delegates present at the Congress of Cúcuta. Some delegates were influenced by Enlightenment ideals of democracy, republicanism, and decentralization, while others were motivated by pragmatic concerns for national security, economic development, and social cohesion. These differing ideologies should influence the decisions regarding the structure of the new republic and distribution of power between the states and central government as the congress goes on. It is important for a balance of interests if unity is desired and if one state holds too much power, disaster is likely to ensue.

## Primary Issues

Although it is ultimately up to the delegates to decide what is the most desirable outcome of the congress. Here are a few of the main issues that were on the minds of the delegates in Cúcuta

1. **Political Fragmentation:** The early 19th century was marked by deep regional divisions among its various territories. Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama, and Peru each held distinct cultural and economic identities that could lead to tensions over governance and autonomy of each state.
2. **Economic Challenges:** The defeat of Spain came at a steep economic cost for the regions represented within the congress. However, certain states were affected more by the fighting, further causing division among those that held on to certain economic prosperities due to Industrial agriculture's success.
3. **Religion and Indigenous Rights:** Racial and socioeconomic inequalities remained from Spanish colonialism often hitting Indigenous Americans extra hard. Furthermore the entrenchment of the Catholic church among government officials often led to the clergy having considerable say within governance and especially targeted Indigenous citizens.



## **For the Future of Gran Colombia: Congress of Cúcuta**

With independence won, the states of Latin America had to define the political institutions and laws that they would abide by. In 1821, the Venezuelan Republic, under Simon Bolivar, proposed the union of the states of Ecuador, Venezuela Colombia, and others, into the single nation of Gran Colombia. This union was proposed due to the fact that the three regions had previously been administered under the colonial Viceroyalty of New Granada.

The Congress of Cúcuta is a pivotal moment for the future of not just Gran Colombia, but for all of Latin America. Participants in the Congress will have to deal with the process of not just the making of a new nation's institutions and constitution, but also dealing with the incorporation of three formerly separate states. Not all are happy with the idea of uniting the regions and their separatist sentiment to maintain the independence of the states or even form new ones are still high. There is also the fight between the Federalists who wish for a decentralized state with power to the regional governments vs the Centralists who wished to concentrate power in a single central government. The government is a newborn one and its ability to create and enforce laws of its own will need to be established if any new nation is to last long.

Additionally, the scars of the Wars for Independence have yet to heal, the economy has been ravaged by decades of war, the people displaced, and divisions still remain between Patriots who fought for independence and the Royalist loyalists who were so brutally persecuted during the war. Pockets of Spanish troops and strongholds still dot the country and decisions must be made to deal with them militarily or diplomatically. The military leaders who lead the revolution may also pose a threat to the dream of Gran Colombia. Many of the armies raised to fight the Spanish were not disbanded after the war, instead following the lead of former generals known as caudillos. These caudillos used their military might to gain economic and political influence, often challenging that of the government.

The Congress of Cúcuta will define the future of Latin America for decades to come. If the Congress succeeds and unites the region, Gran Colombia would be a regional power that could affect the balance of power in the Americas and influence its other neighboring Latin American countries. If not, then the states remain independent and free to choose their own path. And yet there may be many more paths to the future. With the opening of the Congress of Cúcuta, the debate for what could be begins.

# Committee Topics



## **Topic 1: The Political System**

With the creation of a new state comes the need to create a new system of government for the state. The main issues will be the creation of new constitution and the incorporation of regional and local governments into a new Gran Colombian government. The new constitution must determine the system of government, rights of the people, and create institutions for a functional state. A large aspect of this debate will involve the battle between a large central government or a more decentralized federal government delegating power to regional officials.

## **Topic 2: Healing the Scars**

Decades of war have crippled not only the economy of Northern South America, but also its people. Divisions between those who fought for independence and those who stayed loyal are high, especially due to strict laws discriminating against Spanish residents in Latin America during the war. Additionally, there are still pockets of Spanish resistance and semi-rogue caudillo warlords who defy the government at every opportunity. To create a future for a Gran Colombia all these issues must be addressed.

## **Delegates :**

(While these are actual delegates of the Congress, many had limited information on their views of the topics, we ask that all basis for characters come from their opinions based in the background guide to ensure equal footing)

### **Luis Ignacio Mendoza**

An advocate for centralized governance as a means to ensure national unity and stability in Venezuela. He believes that strong central authority is essential for driving economic development and maintaining social order. Mendoza prioritizes policies aimed at fostering growth and prosperity, particularly in rural areas. While he acknowledges the importance of inherent rights, his focus lies on maintaining political cohesion and national sovereignty.

### **Vicente Azuero**

From Bogotá, Vicente Azuero is a pragmatic advocate for a balanced approach to governance in Colombia. He supports a mix of centralized and decentralized policies tailored to the specific needs of different regions. Azuero prioritizes economic development and social welfare programs to uplift all Colombians. With a strong Catholic faith, Azuero works closely with the clergy in Colombia to ensure an upstanding moral and just society; he'd like to further this goal as a new state develops.

### **Diego F. Gomez**

Gomez has a large role in the Quito government and advocates for a federalist system that empowers Ecuador's regions while maintaining national unity. He believes in trickling power to local governments to address regional disparities and promote cultural diversity. Gomez prioritizes policies that foster inclusive growth and social welfare programs to uplift marginalized communities. He seeks pragmatic solutions that balance decentralization with the need for national cohesion. Although he is willing to work towards unifying the region, he wants to ensure a unique Ecuadorian identity most of all.

### **Nicolas Ballen de Guzman (Peru)**

Originally raised in a rural community in Peru, Guzman is a staunch advocate for free-market policies and deregulation. He believes that fostering an agricultural-friendly environment is essential for Peru's economic growth. He wants to protect the countryside he grew up in and is worried about what a centralized government would do in the less politically active states it would accumulate. He believes that Peru deserves a voice just as much as the other states.

### **Antonio Maria Brizeño**

Born in Mérida, Antonio Maria Brizeño is a vocal advocate for decentralized governance and regional autonomy in Venezuela. He believes that empowering local governments can better address the diverse needs of different regions. Brizeño prioritizes policies aimed at fostering inclusive development and preserving cultural diversity. While supporting economic growth, he emphasizes the importance of protecting indigenous rights and promoting social justice at the local level.

### **Manuel Benitez**

A native of Medellín, he advocates for decentralized governance in Colombia. He believes empowering local governments is key to addressing diverse regional needs, such as rural infrastructure and urban services. Benitez prioritizes inclusive policies, aiming to improve rural access to education and healthcare while tackling urban inequality. He believes that this new government could be vital in propping Colombia up after its losses during the war and would like to see a societal shift towards liberalism.

### **Pedro F. Carbajal**

Originating from Guayaquil, Carbajal supports a centralized approach to governance, he believes that as long as there is equal representation among each state a central government would allow for a more rapid growth of a cohesive culture. Carbajal wants to dismantle some of the socioeconomic and racial hierarchy that had been created by the Spanish. Carbajal grew up around Enlightenment thinkers and would like to see these practices instituted.

### **Alejandro Osorio**

Born into a wealthy family in Pasto, the change in government does not affect Osorio to the same level as other Colombian politicians. Deeply connected to the clergy and the burgeoning coffee industry, Osorio cares more about profit than political change. However, societal upheaval can be bad for business, and even though he made it out unscathed during this war, if there was another his profits might dwindle. For that reason, Osorio is a moderate Centrist hoping that a strong national government can withstand long enough to stabilize the economy.

### **Joaquin Borrero**

Although Borrero originally tried to flee his town of Maracay, Venezuela due to his fear of being persecuted by the Spanish for his early work with Bolivar, now that the tides have shifted he's ready to see change. Borrero is passionate about a unified South American identity, but he recognizes that not all of the delegates are in agreement. He believes that a Federal government would help ease the other delegates into unification and aid in social reform. However, he hopes that eventually the states will recognize the importance of working in tandem and a central government will be created.

### **Salvador Camacho**

Native to Panama City, Camacho had originally worked for the Viceroyalty before switching sides during the extended conflict. Although he is glad that Panama is liberated from the Spanish he does not wish to see complete reform of the system. While he would like a more nationally run industry in the new state, he profited from the old government and is fearful of his position faltering with too much change. He believes that a Federalist government would be his best bet of remaining on top.

### **Casimiro Calvo**

From Iquitos, Casimiro Calvo focuses on addressing regional disparities through targeted government interventions and social programs. He believes in redistributive policies to uplift marginalized communities and reduce inequality. Calvo emphasizes the importance of sustainable development that respects Peru's cultural diversity and natural environment, prioritizing social welfare over unchecked economic growth.

### **Policarpo Uricoechea**

Uricoechea supports a balanced approach to governance in Panama. He doesn't fully grasp why the specific formation of government is the most important issue for many of the other delegates. Instead, he wants to ensure that equal opportunities are available to all citizens of the new state. Freedom of Speech is one thing that he believes is absolutely vital for ensuring the destabilization of the current social hierarchy. As a politician, Uricoechea is willing to negotiate with either side to ensure that he is victorious on societal change.

### **Dr. Ramon Ignacio Mendez**

Originally from Trujillo, Peru, Mendez seeks to expand innovation and industrialization to the new state to ensure that they remain economically independent of other American governments. Mendez will favor any form of government as long as it doesn't hurt his bottom line and the state continues to industrialize. He views modernity as the greatest form of success and cares little to alter the social hierarchy. Although Mendez strongly supports Peruvian culture he thinks a centralized government would help to rapidly restructure industry.

### **Mariano Escobar**

A staunch advocate of a proud Venezuela, Escobar is resentful that some wish to strip the government away from his great state. Rather Escobar believes that a loose confederation of states is vital in order to promote a diverse nation that remains stable. To him, a Federal system is the only way that the new state will be able to accomplish their goals of economic prosperity and unity without severe conflict. He views those across the isle as idealists who are seeking to only destroy the separate states instead of joining them together.



### **Bartolomé Osorio**

Osorio cares deeply about the environment in his home state of Peru. Conversation to him is vital and he is afraid that those wishing to industrialize may seek to harm the natural resources within Peru. In his eyes, a central government would have the best chance of protecting the bountiful harvests that could remain for centuries in the state. Osorio worked tirelessly with the Indigenous People of Peru to ensure that they weren't struggling during the war and he feels a special kinship to them due to their shared appreciation for nature.

### **J. Prudencio Lanz**

Born in Valencia, J. Prudencio Lanz supports a decentralized approach to governance in Venezuela. He believes that empowering local communities can better address their unique needs and challenges. Lanz prioritizes policies aimed at promoting grassroots participation and preserving cultural diversity. While supporting economic growth, he emphasizes the importance of protecting indigenous rights and promoting social justice at the local level.

### **Sinforoso Mutis**

From Quibdó, Sinforoso Mutiz advocates for a federalist system that empowers Colombia's regions while maintaining national unity. He believes in devolving power to local governments to address regional disparities and promote cultural change. Mutiz prioritizes economic policies that foster inclusive growth and social welfare programs to uplift marginalized communities. He seeks pragmatic solutions that balance decentralization with the need for national cohesion.

### **Dr. Feliz Restrepo**

Dr. Felix Restrepo, based in Machala, supports a decentralized approach to governance in Ecuador. He believes that empowering local communities can better address their unique needs and challenges. Restrepo prioritizes policies aimed at promoting grassroots participation and preserving cultural diversity. While supporting economic growth, he emphasizes the importance of protecting indigenous rights and promoting social justice at the local level.

### **Juan Ronderos**

Ronderos started out as a farmer in Colon, Panama. Although his family was not incredibly well off Ronderos was able to attend a seminary school where he became ordained. While it is likely under these new circumstances he will not be appointed a cardinal anytime soon, he wants to ensure that Catholicism remains in the new government as a positive force. As a community leader Juan wants to ensure that the states remain culturally distinct to prevent fighting, however he does believe that a central government could be beneficial in ensuring the longevity of a Catholic identity.

### **Gabriel Brizeño**

Gabriel Brizeño, from Santiago de Veraguas, is a vocal advocate for central governance in Panama. He believes that empowering local governments can better address the diverse needs of different regions, however it is necessary for a strong central government to protect those who have originally been hurt by the state. Brizeño prioritizes policies aimed at fostering inclusive development and preserving cultural diversity. While supporting economic growth, he emphasizes the importance of protecting indigenous rights and promoting social justice at the local level.

### **Lorenzo Santander**

Santander has a lot to lose if the state of Ecuador loses its regional government. A large industrialist with roots in agriculture, Santander benefits a lot from Ecuador's loose policies around monopolizing and land grabbing. He fears that if a central government were to be created the harsh economic reforms could be disastrous to his business, which remained afloat after many others collapsed during the war. While he does agree that there needs to be a solution to the rapid economic degradation, he does not wish for it to impact his current endeavors.

**Carlos Alvarez**

Alvarez is not as wealthy as many of the other delegates, however this gives him the advantage of understanding the needs of the common man. Born in Huancayo, Peru, Alvarez believes that a fair distribution of wealth is necessary to ease the social tensions that have been festering. Furthermore, he recognizes that for many citizens they wish to maintain their autonomy and culture. These factors push him towards federalism with the desire to allow for regional differences to unite and not divide the new government.

**Cerbellon Urbina**

Urbina wants to see the prosperity that he knows is capable of his home state of Panama and he believes that a centralized government would both give his state more voice in matters often dominated by Colombia and Venezuela as well as help promote economic success. He believes that it is necessary for the region to modernize if it wants to maintain its independence and will fight to ensure that enlightenment values are being taken seriously when deciding what should be created in this new government.

**Ildelfonso Mendez**

Native to Tunja, Colombia, Mendez seeks to promote the interests of indigenous South Americans within the new government. He sees the changes that his counterparts would like to implement, yet he is fearful that they will only apply to the current elite without trickling down to those that had been the most oppressed by the Spanish rule. Although he is willing to compromise on structure, Mendez personally believes that a centralist approach to government would likely prevent the same change to Indigenous status that he would like to see, with the new government likely being too preoccupied to shift societal norms.

**Domingo B. y Briceño**

A staunch military supporter from Ecuador, Briceño was happiest during the war and is less occupied about how the state will function. However the one thing he holds close to his heart is the welfare of those he fought in battle with. Too often he believes that Veterans lack the security that has been promised to them during the fight and he would like to see more social programs that could directly benefit those who helped make this nation a reality. He holds no real ties to Ecuador specifically, but a South American identity would be best to ensure that the state would be taken seriously on the battlefield.

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