



DIRECTORIO  
LEGISLATIVO

FORTALECEMOS  
LAS DEMOCRACIAS  
DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

MARCH 2022

# Colombia

## Legislative elections Post-election report

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# Executive Summary

On Sunday March 13, legislative elections were held in Colombia to renew all 296 members of Congress in the Senate (108) and the House of Representatives (188). Partido Conservador (allied to the ruling party) and Partido Liberal (independent) increased their representation in both chambers though the opposition coalition, **Pacto Histórico**, was the big winner on the day. Nevertheless, an alliance of the ruling centre-right parties – Centro Democrático, Partido Conservador, Partido de la U and Cambio Radical – could see it hold a majority in both chambers.

According to the National Registrar's Office, 18,034,781 votes had been tallied at the time of writing and around 99% of voting booths counted. As things stood, **Pacto Histórico and Partido Conservador were tied in both chambers** with 16 seats in the Senate and 25 in the House of Representatives.

**Partido Liberal, however, the second most-voted party**, would have 32 deputies and 15 senators. For its part, the ruling party **Centro Democrático is on course for its current 19 senators and 32 representatives to be cut to 14 and 16**, respectively, making it the biggest loser in terms of number of seats lost.

Intra-party polls were also held to choose the candidates to represent the three main political forces (Pacto Histórico, Coalición por la Esperanza and Equipo por Colombia) for the presidential elections to be held on May 29. **Gustavo Petro led with over 80% of votes for Pacto Histórico; he will line up against Federico Gutiérrez of Equipo por Colombia and Sergio Fajardo of Coalición por la Esperanza, among other candidates, later this year.**

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- Highlights of the Day
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- What will Congress 2022-2026 look like?
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# General considerations

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## What was at stake?

All seats of the Congress. **188 members of the House of Representatives and 108 members of the Senate will take office on July 20.**

## How were contestants elected?

In the Senate, **108 seats were contested, among which 100 were elected at the national level, two by the indigenous population, five represent the Comunes party (former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC), and the last seat will be earmarked for the vice-presidential candidate of whoever finishes second in May's presidential race.**

In the House of Representatives, **188 seats were at stake, of which 161 correspond to the 32 departments of Colombia and Bogotá, two to the Afro-descendant communities, one for the indigenous communities and one representing Colombians abroad. Of the remaining 22 seats, for the first time since the signing of the 2016 Peace Treaty, 16 were designated to representatives of the victims of the armed conflict, five to the Comunes party (Ex FARC) and one last seat will be given, to whomever is the vice-presidential candidate of the ticket with the second highest number of votes in the presidential elections.**

## When were the elections?

Legislative elections were held on Sunday, March 13, throughout the national territory. Unlike several countries in the region, voting in Colombia is not mandatory.

## Which parties and coalitions participated?

On December 13, 2021 the National Electoral Council approved the participation of **16 lists, formed by political parties with legal status and significant citizen groups.**

The most important parties and coalitions that participated in the electoral contest on behalf of the current ruling party and allies are: Centro Democrático, Partido Conservador Colombiano and Partido de la Unión por la Gente. The currently independent and opposition parties were the Comunes party, the Alianza Verde and Centro Esperanza coalition, Pacto Histórico, Partido Liberal Colombiano, Fuerza Ciudadana la Fuerza del Cambio, Partido Nuevo Liberalismo, Estamos Listas Colombia and Cambio Radical.

## When will the elected legislators take office?

The new senators and representatives **will assume their seats for 4 years next July 20, after the parliamentary recess that begins on June 20.**

# The election in numbers

16

IS THE NUMBER OF PARTIES AND COALITIONS THAT CONTESTED THESE ELECTIONS

IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS THAT WERE RENEWED IN BOTH CHAMBERS

296

188

IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES THAT WERE RENEWED

IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SENATORS THAT WERE RENEWED

108

46%

WAS THE TURNOUT OF THE ELECTORAL REGISTER

VOTER TURNOUT DECLINED COMPARED TO THE 2018 LEGISLATIVE ELECTION

2.3%

6.5%

OF THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL ROLL BY NATIONAL CONSTITUENCY VOTED BLANK

# Highlights of the Day

- **The most popular candidates.** All candidate lists for Congress were open to the public except for those of Pacto Histórico and Comunes; that is, **citizens voted for the candidates individually and not for their parties. Among the most backed runners were two from Centro Democrático** – the young politician Miguel Uribe Turbay and the divisive senator María Fernanda Cabal; Jonathan Ferney Pulido Hernández, a youtube personality, and Humberto de la Calle, a former presidential candidate, of the **Coalición Alianza Verde Centro Esperanza**; and a candidate from the **Partido Conservador**, the re-elected senator Nadya Georgette Scaff.
- **Few guarantees for the ‘peace seats’.** In these elections, 16 so-called peace seats had been added to the House of Representatives earmarked for the territories most affected by the armed conflict. **However, many candidates withdrew their candidacy only days before the election citing a lack of “guarantees for their political participation” and fearing they would fall into the hands of “political clans”.** According to the Registry's office, there was an abstention rate of around 57% for the election of these peace seats.
- **Violence on election day.** The Observation Mission of the European Union, the Organization of American States (OAS) and Inter-American Union of Electoral Bodies participated as observers of the electoral process. Security forces reported two attacks with explosive devices, in the rural areas of Meta and Caquetá, killing two military personnel and wounding a couple of others. The attacks have yet to be attributed to any organized groups. In addition, the National Registrar's Office, the entity responsible for managing the voter lists, was hit by cyber-attacks throughout the day of the elections.
- **The Francia Márquez phenomenon.** Francia Márquez, an Afro-Colombian environmental and women's rights activist and presidential candidate for Pacto Histórico, was one of the main surprises of the day. **Despite losing out in the party's internal elections to Gustavo Petro, she was the third most voted for contender overall, meaning she is likely to be invited to run as a vice-presidential candidate.**

# Highlights of the Day

- **The absence of former President Álvaro Uribe.** Uribe's no-show owing to an ongoing judicial process and voter dismay at the government of Iván Duque which lies at around 70 percent, was emblematic of a bad day for the Centro Democrático party. It is set to lose 21 seats in Congress and its presidential candidate, Óscar Zuluaga, has already withdrawn from the presidential race.
- **Pacto Histórico is well placed.** During the intra-party polls ahead of the May general elections, Gustavo Petro cemented his position as current favourite for the presidential ballot with over 80% of the votes. However, since this only amounts to 4 million votes in total it would be insufficient to win outright in the first round in May, which will require some 10 million ballots. Federico "Fico" Gutierrez will be the presidential candidate for Equipo por Colombia, while Sergio Fajardo will run for the Coalición por la Esperanza. Gutierrez is expected to be the main representative of the center-right.
- **The presidential candidates set to face off in the first round.** Until March 18 the presidential candidates may decline or modify their candidacies. If that does not happen, however, the following ten candidates will contest the elections on May 29:
  - Federico Gutiérrez, for Equipo por Colombia
  - Sergio Fajardo, for Coalición Centro Esperanza
  - Gustavo Petro, for Pacto Histórico
  - Enrique Gómez, for Movimiento Salvación Nacional
  - Germán Córdoba, for Cambio Radical
  - Ingrid Betancourt, for partido Verde Oxígeno
  - John Milton Rodríguez, for partido Colombia Justa Libres
  - Luis Gilberto Murillo, for Colombia Renaciente
  - Luis Pérez, for Colombia Piensa en Grande
  - Rodolfo Hernández, for the Liga de Gobernantes Anticorrupción



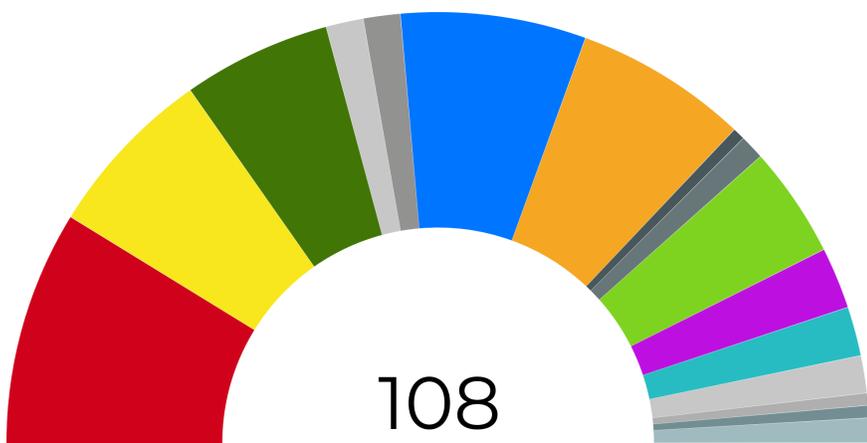
# Highlights of the Day

- **Weak results for Centro Esperanza and Cambio Radical.** The winning candidate of Centro Esperanza, **Sergio Fajardo**, was the fourth most voted for of all the fifteen presidential pre-candidates competing. In Congress, the Alianza Verde coalition and Centro Esperanza are similarly fourth in the pecking order of the Senate and risk having no seats at all in the lower house. Cambio Radical, too, saw big losses, obtaining 11 seats in the senate (five fewer than before) and with its number of representatives halved to 16.
- **Setback for Nuevo Liberalismo.** The Nuevo Liberalismo party did not gain the expected number of votes. The political party, once led by Luis Carlos Galán who was assassinated in 1989 during his presidential campaign, is now in the hands of his sons Juan Manuel and Carlos Fernando Galán. Despite not passing the threshold for holding seats in Congress the party has vowed to fight on.
- **Sportspeople and celebrities fail to make an impression.** Most of the political outsiders were not ultimately attractive enough to the electorate to displace the traditional politicians. Below, we summarise some of the candidates who failed to gain the necessary votes to enter Congress:
- **Caterine Ibargüen (Partido de la U)** The double Olympic medalist and head of the U Party's Senate list did not receive at the polls the vote she expected from Colombians. Ibargüen obtained a little more than 42,700 votes and was far from obtaining a seat.
- **Mabel Lara (Nuevo Liberalismo).** The journalist and news presenter was the head of the list, however, she came up empty-handed. Her party barely obtained 329,756 votes, that is, 2.02% of the total number of votes, so she did not reach the 3% threshold to receive a seat.
- **Vanessa Mendoza (Centro Democrático).** The former Miss Colombia received one of the lowest number of votes in Uribe. Her 4,367 votes were not enough to obtain a seat in Congress either.
- **Juan Carlos Henao (Gente en Movimiento).** The former goalkeeper of the Once Caldas soccer team, remembered for being a protagonist in the conquest of the 2004 Libertadores Cup, ran for the House of Representatives of Caldas for the Gente en Movimiento party. However, his 9,300 votes were not enough to reach the Chamber.

# Current composition of Congress

Currently, in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the ruling party Centro Democrático has a large majority, and a wide variety of independent parties with which it can negotiate to pass its bills. The opposition, on the other hand, has a weak and uncoordinated coalition that cannot push through bills on its own.

## SENATE



### Government

- PARTIDO CONSERVADOR (14)
- CENTRO DEMOCRÁTICO (19)
- PARTIDO DE LA U (12)

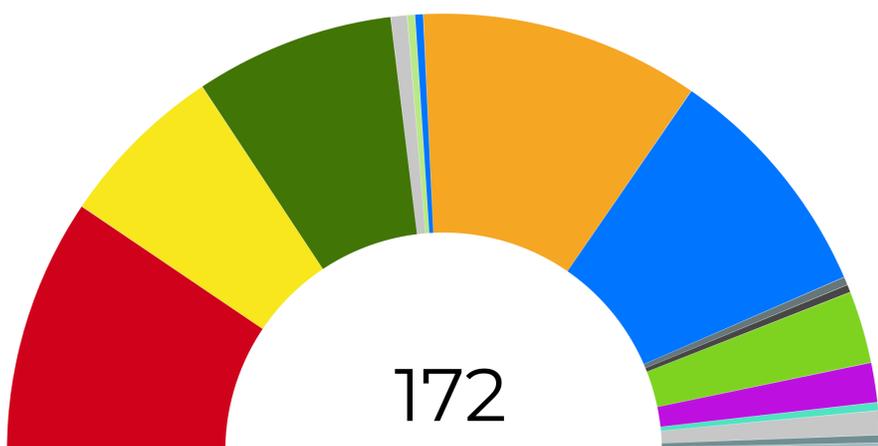
### Opposition

- ALIANZA VERDE (9)
- COMUNES (5)
- POLO DEMOCRÁTICO ALTERNATIVO (4)

### Independent

- CAMBIO RADICAL (15)
- PARTIDO LIBERAL (14)

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



### Government

- PARTIDO CONSERVADOR (21)
- CENTRO DEMOCRÁTICO (32)
- PARTIDO DE LA U (25)

### Opposition

- ALIANZA VERDE (9)
- COMUNES (5)
- POLO DEMOCRÁTICO ALTERNATIVO (1)

### Independent

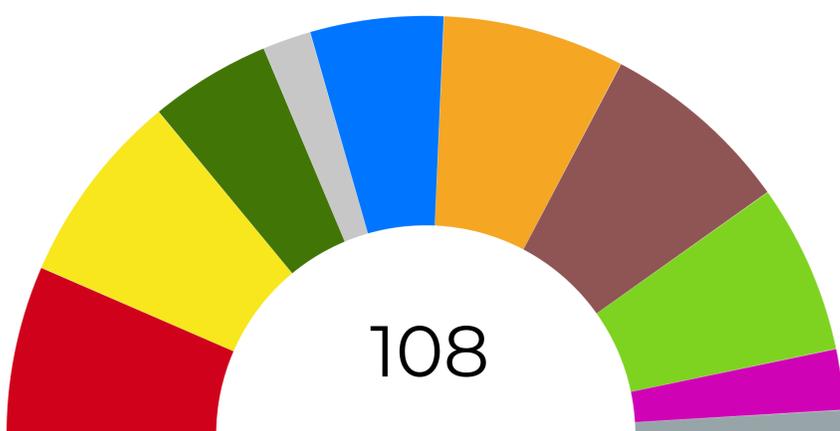
- CAMBIO RADICAL (30)
- PARTIDO LIBERAL (35)

The administration of Iván Duque (**Centro Democrático**) has a large majority in both chambers. Given that right-wing and center parties are in majority, there is the possibility of negotiating with independent parties to pass bills pushed from the presidency. **Centro Democrático**, in the 2018 elections, was backed by former President Álvaro Uribe, which explains the broad support it had from the citizenry. The opposition, however, presented itself fragmented, so it did not manage to occupy a space of power in Congress.

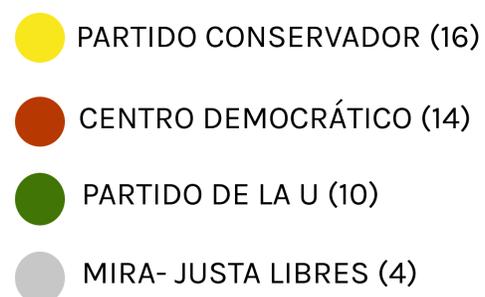
# What will Congress 2022-2026 look like?

According to data from the National Registrar's Office, **both Partido Conservador and Partido Liberal, as well as Pacto Histórico, have been the main winners of this election, taking the majority of seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives.** On the other hand, **Centro Democrático, the current ruling party, will lose representation in both chambers.**

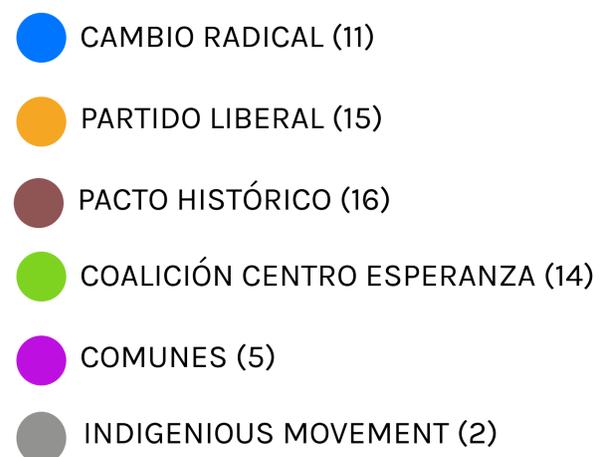
## SENATE 2022-2026



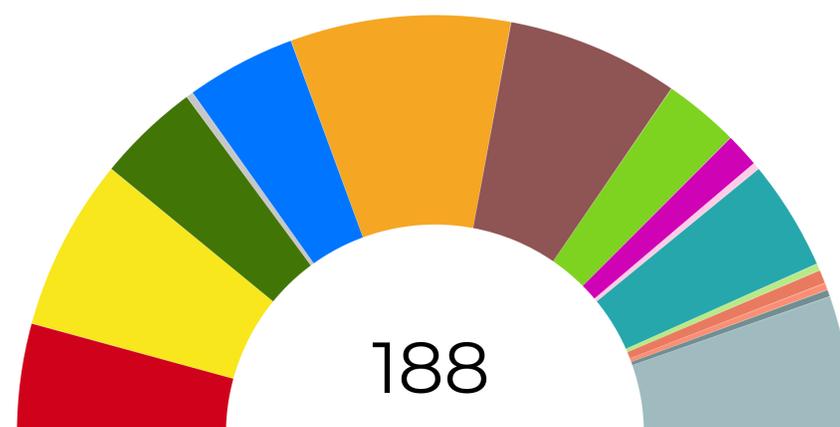
### Current government



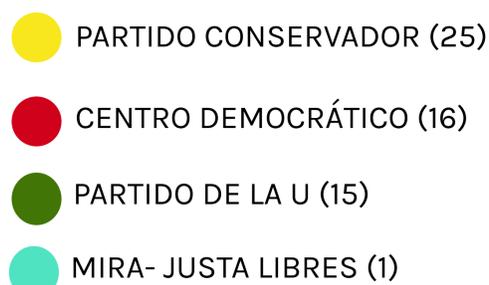
### Opposition or independent



## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES 2022-2026



### Current government



### Opposition or independent



Although Pacto Histórico (left) and Partido Liberal (centre-left) will be the parties with most seats, the results show that **it will be difficult for them to become the majority forces to pass bills without the need to form alliances.** Partido Conservador, Centro Democrático, Partido de la U and Cambio Radical **will be able to form alliances to oppose an eventual government of Gustavo Petro,** should he win the presidential elections. In this way, the role of the minority parties in the Senate, including Comunes, and the peace representatives in the House of Representatives will be fundamental, given that they could add their parliamentary support to the main coalitions in order to achieve a majority in the debate on particular bills.

# Electoral system

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The Legislative Branch has a bicameral system, composed of the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Republic. Every four years, citizens elect by direct popular vote all senators and representatives, who are eligible for re-election and, on this occasion, will serve until 2026.

This year, the House of Representatives will expand from 172 to 188 members due to the addition of 16 seats for victims of the armed conflict. Of the total number of seats up for grabs, 161 correspond to the departments and Bogotá. According to the [National Constitution](#), each of the 32 districts (departments) has two representatives, and one more for every 365,000 inhabitants. Thus, most departments have between 2 and 5 legislators, except those with the largest populations: Bogotá has 18 representatives, Antioquia 17 and Valle de Cauca 13.

In turn, of the remaining 22 seats, 16 will go to representatives of the victims of the conflict, five to the Comunes party (ex-FARC) and one last seat to whomever is the vice-presidential candidate of the runner up in the presidential elections.

Furthermore, the Senate of the Republic has 108 members in total, of which 100 are elected according to national district. This means that citizens can vote for a candidate anywhere in the country, i.e. senators represent the whole country and not a particular department. Of the remaining 8 seats, five are for the Comunes party (ex-FARC), two are for the special indigenous constituency, and the last seat goes to whoever comes second in the presidential elections to be held on 29 May 2022.

## Open and closed lists

The lists of political parties and movements in Colombia may be, according to the electoral system, open or closed. In the closed lists the political parties are voted for and not the candidates, so the lists are assembled by the party, with a candidate as head of the list and the following ones are listed, so they enter the Congress based on the amount of votes received by the party. In contrast, in open lists, voters can vote for the candidate of their choice. Those who obtain the highest number of votes are the ones who will assume a seat in the chamber.

The main party that will run with closed lists is Pacto Histórico, with the purpose of guaranteeing gender parity in its senators and representatives. The Comunes party will also run with a closed list. On the other hand, the Partido Conservador, Partido Liberal, Centro Democrático, Partido de la U and the Coalición Alianza Verde- Centro Esperanza will run with open lists.

# Main parties and coalitions that contested in the elections

In total, 16 lists of parties and coalitions will be presented, including the Partido Conservador, the Partido Liberal, the Centro Democrático, Pacto Humano, Partido de la U and the coalition between Centro Esperanza and Alianza Verde.

## Partido Conservador Colombiano

This political party, one of the oldest in Colombia, is considered a space oriented to the christian right, whose objective is to protect social and religious traditions together with the promotion of policies based on economic protectionism. Likewise, it is in favor of proposals that promote higher levels of security and the fight against terrorism.



## Partido Liberal Colombiano

This party, founded in 1848, is ideologically oriented towards the democratic center-left, progressivism and reformism based on a protectionist agenda that seeks to solve social problems through state intervention. Currently, it is among the forces with more representatives in the Congress of the Republic.



## Centro Democrático

Founded in 2013 by former Colombian president Álvaro Uribe Vélez, this proclaimed right-wing party to which current president Iván Duque belongs has as its main ideals the respect for democratic security, investor confidence, cohesion and social dialogue together with a decentralized State. It is the only space to have formally declared its opposition to the Peace Process signed between President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC guerrilla group.



# Main parties and coalitions that contested in the elections

## Pacto Histórico

It is a leftist political coalition launched on February 11, 2021, composed of 18 political parties and social movements of socialist, communist, progressive and social democratic ideologies. Its intention is to present to the country an alternative government proposal built on social bases centered on social justice and peace. The political parties of the coalition have been able to overcome fragmentation, generating a left-wing alliance made up of the Colombia Humana, Polo Democrático Alternativo, the Partido Comunista and Movimiento Alternativo Indígena y Social, among others.



## Alianza Verde - Centro Esperanza

It is a political and electoral coalition of the center, founded in June 2021 and integrated by 5 political parties and social movements. Its ethical principles are the collective construction, the protection of life, the defense of freedom, equality and human dignity, promoting the care of biodiversity and the protection of territories.

## Partido de la Unidad Nacional (Partido de la U)

It is a Colombian center-right political party, founded as a movement in 2005 to support the reelection of the then president of Colombia Álvaro Uribe. For the 2010-2014 legislature it was the political party with the largest participation in the Congress of the Republic, and in 2018 the party decided to become part of the coalition of the government of the current president of the Republic, Iván Duque. The Partido de la U recognizes the family as the basis of society, supports the implementation of a market economy and promotes globalization, emphasizing education, science and technology.



# Main parties and coalitions that contested in the elections

## Coalición MIRA – Colombia Justa Libres

It is a center-right political and electoral coalition, for the religious sector in Colombia, which was launched in September 2021. It is composed of the parties Justa Libres - founded in 2017 - and the Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta (MIRA) founded in 2000.



## Comunes



It is a far-left political party originally founded under the name Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC) in August 2017 by former combatants of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), following the signing of the Peace Accords between the Government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP in 2016. As of January 24, 2021, it officially changed its name to Comunes to avoid associations with the guerrilla organization.

## Cambio Radical

It is a center-right political party founded in 1998. It was part of the coalition of the government of former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez until 2009, and later was part of the coalition of the government of former president Juan Manuel Santos. Its main themes are the strengthening of democracy and transparency, the fight against corruption and violence, economic prosperity, equity and dignity of the population.



# Political Context

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## Social Unrest and Economic Situation

- The last few years in Colombia have been characterized by strong and unusual social unrest in opposition to the economic and social policies implemented by the government of president Iván Duque. **The president's economic policies, the handling of the peace accords with the FARC-EP, accusations of corruption and deaths of social activists triggered unrest throughout the country driven by various social movements, labor unions and opposition parties. These protests, labeled "Paro Nacional #21N", have continued albeit less fiercely to the present day.**
  - **In 2021, the so-called Comité de Paro, which unites the main opposition political actors, gave voice to and channeled public dismay over the government's ill-fated tax-increase proposals for the middle classes and over the price of basic goods and services. The resulting demonstrations prompted the withdrawal of the reform bill from Congress and the resignation of the then Minister of Finance, Alberto Carrasquilla.**
  - **The pandemic deepened the country's economic woes, driving up poverty and inequality.**
- Since its start the Colombian peso has devalued significantly and inflation reached record levels; a year on from the protest movement and poverty has risen by some 7%

## Armed conflict

- **The Peace Accord was sealed in 2016 between the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP guerrilla** hoping to put an end to the armed conflict dating back to the 1960s. Through the accord, different points of agreement were established between the parties including the renunciation of armed conflict, guaranteed provision of congressional seats for the FARC-EP and the establishment of a comprehensive 'agrarian development policy'.
- Electoral periods tend to be accompanied by an upsurge in violence directed at civilians, and the final stretch of the Duque administration is indeed seeing heightened insecurity in both large cities and less urban areas. **Implementation of the Peace Accords has been meager and the government has failed to provide full security guarantees for the demobilized groups.**

# Political Context

- The presence of new armed groups and resurgence of old ones has led to increased civilian security threats: 96 massacres (335 victims) and 136 forced displacements (46,321 people in the first 8 months of 2021) were registered in 2021.

## Political polarization

- The Colombian political scene is highly polarized. In view of the strength shown in polls by the opposition group Pacto Histórico, parts of the ruling party have sought to undermine it by framing it as "chavist" or "communist".
  - In previous weeks the discourse has revolved around divisive issues such as the legalization of drugs resolving the armed conflict, legalizing euthanasia and decriminalizing abortion.
- As a result of a Supreme Court ruling allowing abortion in Colombia, the discussion on whether it should be legal or not has re-erupted in recent weeks. Given how divisive this is and the key role of Congress on the issue, abortion has become a decisive point for voters when it comes to deciding which party to vote for in the legislative elections. While left-wing parties are in favor of decriminalization, much of the population leans towards the more conservative parties' oppositional stance.



# Political context

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## Institutional Violence

- The social protests that rocked Colombia were violently suppressed by the National Police, with the Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD) sent by the government to control the demonstrations accused of widespread human rights abuses. The excessive use of force which left around 80 dead and several injured together with numerous instances of police violence led to an outcry. **Despite the government's attempts to reform police protocols and training, its overall support for the police actions at the time weakened its popularity even further.**
- **Many candidates have failed to cut ties with those accused of corruption or have family members under investigation, which aggravates the trust deficit.** The most notable case is that of Alejandro Char, former mayor of Barranquilla for the Liberal Party, who backed the campaign of former Conservative Party representative Aida Merlano, accused of purchasing votes for her congressional campaign. Pacto Histórico, for their part, have denounced alleged vote-buying by the coalition Equipo por Colombia. According to several polls, **Congress has a public disapproval rating of around 90 percent.**

## Corruption

- Corruption has emerged as one of the most important issues in the election campaign. Government institutions in Colombia are widely distrusted by the public. Currently **31 members of Congress who were in office in 2019 are being investigated over misappropriation of funds, illicit enrichment and vote-buying among other accusations.** Mistrust in Colombian institutions is voiced by legislators themselves as well as by former presidents, ministers and military leaders and others.

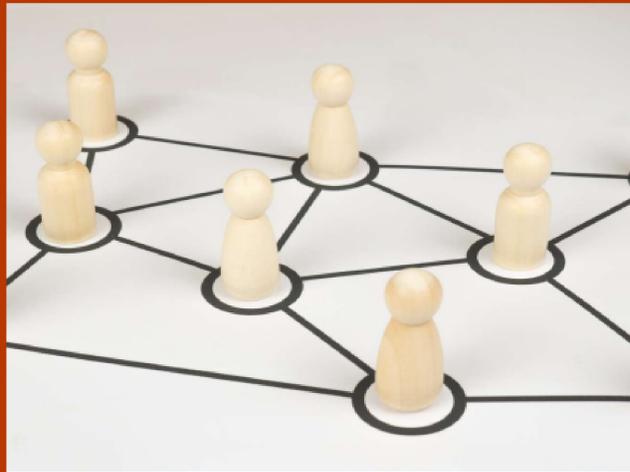
# Conclusions

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Based on the results of the legislative elections and the intra-party ballots (for the presidential candidates), the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Given that **the traditional parties increased their representation and the center-right parties will be able to ally with the next government**, the distribution of political forces in Congress is unlikely to change significantly. That said, Pacto Histórico, while gaining fewer seats than it had hoped for, has emerged as an appealing alternative for voters opposed to Duque's government, seeming to have swayed a number of undecided voters.
- **Gustavo Petro's strong backing ahead of the presidential elections of May 29th was expected to favour, to some extent, the center-left coalition in the legislative elections.** But evidently not too significantly, with the make-up of the next Congress promising to better suit a center-right president and meaning Gustavo Petro, should he be elected, will need to seek allies to push through his agenda.
- **The ruling Centro Democrático party, until now the biggest in Congress, will lose seats in both chambers but will remain a considerable force, capable of gathering majorities to advance bills of interest.** Its presidential candidate, however, Óscar Zuluaga has dropped out of the presidential race and aligned himself with Federico "Fico" Gutiérrez.
- None of the parties will have an absolute majority in Congress, so **whoever occupies the Executive Power will have to look for allies and gather the support of as many independent parties as possible for its proposals.** The legislators occupying the 'peace seats' will be of value here for they represent about 10% of the total number of seats.
- **Gustavo Petro won overwhelmingly in the coalition primaries, cementing Pacto Histórico as one of the leading forces in the Senate, with 16 seats (so far).** He gained almost the same level of support as the center and the right candidates combined, so Federico "Fico" Gutiérrez will have to forge alliances to contest the presidency. Since **it is possible to predict that the right wing will line up behind the candidate of Equipo por Colombia, both coalitions will seek to capture the vote of the center electorate, to which the Centro Esperanza coalition did not effectively appeal.**

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✉ [info@directoriolegislativo.org](mailto:info@directoriolegislativo.org)



## **BUENOS AIRES**

Av. Entre Ríos 258 3o E  
(1079), CABA. Argentina  
+ (5411) 5218-4647



## **WASHINGTON D.C.**

1110 13th St NW, Suite 800  
Washington DC 20005, USA  
+ 1 (786) 828-0875



[www.directoriolegislativo.com](http://www.directoriolegislativo.com)