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LEGISLATIVO

FORTALECEMOS  
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DE AMÉRICA LATINA

STRENGTHENING  
DEMOCRACIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

MARCH 2022

# Colombia

## Legislative elections Pre-election report

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# Executive Summary

On March 13, legislative elections will be held in Colombia. Citizens will elect all 296 members of the Senate and House of Representatives to sit from July 20, 2022 to 2026.

Currently, the Colombian Congress consists of 172 deputies in the House of Representatives and 108 Senators. (This time round, 188 deputies will be elected). The candidate lists were finalized on December 13, 2021 and in total **16 were presented, made up of political parties with legal status as well as citizen groups** (independent candidates without established party backing.)

Almost a year on from the social unrest amid a divisive tax reform bill and an economy reeling from the pandemic, Colombia will now shake up its Congress entirely. **Latest polls predict little change to overall ‘party fragmentation’ with the traditional Conservative and Liberal parties set to retain their collective majority over incoming parties.** Worth highlighting is that in addition to electing lawmakers, voters will also be asked to pick presidential candidates ahead of the country’s general elections on May 29.

The coming legislative ballot will be fundamental not only for gauging which parties are the most popular, but because whichever group assumes the presidency on **August 7 will need strong support from the legislature** to promote social and economic reforms demanded by citizens.

## Content

- General considerations
- The election in numbers
- Political context
- Electoral features
- Main parties and coalitions
- Projections
- Conclusions

# General considerations

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## What is 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 are contestants elected?

In the Senate, 108 seats will be contested, among which 100 will be elected at the national level, two by the indigenous population, five will 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 will be 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 will be designated to representatives of the victims of the armed conflict, five to the Comunes party (Ex FARC) and one last seat, to whomever is the vice-presidential candidate of the ticket with the second highest number of votes in the presidential elections.

## When are the elections?

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

## Which parties and coalitions participate?

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 will participate 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 are 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 TO BE PRESENTED

IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS TO BE RENEWED IN THE CURRENT ELECTIONS. 108 SENATORS AND 188 REPRESENTATIVES.

296

188

IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES TO BE RENEWED

IS THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SENATORS TO BE RENEWED

106

39

MILLIONS OF COLOMBIANS WILL BE ABLE TO VOTE. BOGOTÁ IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DEPARTMENT.

IS THE PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORAL ROLL THAT HAS NOT YET DECIDED FOR WHICH PARTY OR ALLIANCE IT WILL VOTE.

9,1%

2.835

ARE THE CANDIDATES FOR A SEAT IN CONGRESS

# 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

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- 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 recent 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 topic for voters before 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.

# Electoral features

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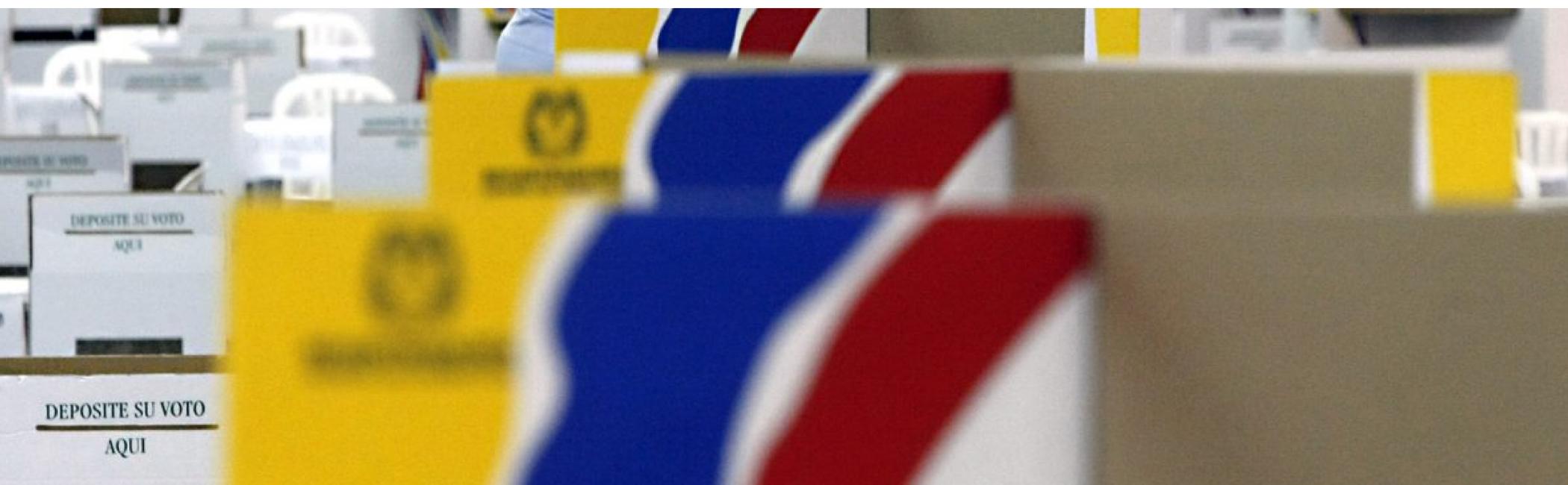
## Electoral System

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.



# Electoral features

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## New seats

These elections will be characterized by the incorporation of peace seats in the House of Representatives, earmarked for the territories most affected by the armed conflict. Although the incorporation was approved in 2015, it was only in 2021 that the Constitutional Court endorsed it. In this way, 167 municipalities of the Special Transitory Peace Constituencies (Citrep) will be allocated to 16 Peace candidates. According to the Registrar's Office, there are 407 candidates for this victims' constituency on 204 lists.

Only candidates registered by victims', peasant or social organizations, who have been victims of the armed conflict and who have not participated in elections for political parties in the last five years, can run for the peace seats. Campaigns will be financed by the state and candidates will have access to regional media to carry out propaganda. On the other hand, political parties will not be able to present lists or candidates in any of the 16 victims' constituencies.

Despite the fact that an agreement should designate a seat in the House of Representatives for the indigenous Raizal community of the archipelago department of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, the seat will remain empty in the period 2022 - 2026, given that the provision for the occupation of the seat has not been regulated.

## 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.

# Electoral features

## Candidates who will not participate in the election

A peculiarity of the upcoming legislative elections is the absence of the former president Álvaro Uribe in the lists of congressmen. The former president between the years 2002 and 2010, who belongs to the ruling Centro Democrático party and who has been considered a key figure for Colombian politics since his administration, determined at the end of 2021 that he would not run for senator in the next elections. **Uribe had taken office as senator in 2018, although in 2020 he resigned from the seat due to the fact that he is going through a judicial process for allegedly manipulating witnesses to testify in his favor and disassociate him from allegations linking him to the conformation of a paramilitary group.** In this way, it is expected that the party, added to the wear and tear caused by the government of Iván Duque and the positive image of the president that deteriorates the image of the party, will feel the absence of the political referent and will lose representation in both Houses.

## Presidential Candidate Elections

On March 13, in addition to the legislative elections, inter-party consultations will be held to define the candidates of each coalition for the presidency. In this election, citizens will be able to choose among the pre-candidates that will represent the alliances in the presidential elections of next May 29.

These elections will define the candidates of the three main coalitions: Pacto Histórico, Centro Esperanza and Equipo por Colombia. Among the most outstanding figures for the current elections is the senator for Pacto Histórico Gustavo Petro, who has consolidated himself as the opposition referent of the Duque government and, according to all opinion polls, will be the most voted candidate in the presidential elections. For this reason, the eye will also be on what will be the volume of votes he will reach and on which candidate of the other coalitions is likely to dispute him in the May election. **It is expected that the center and right wing parties will support the candidate who will face Gustavo Petro, given that his platform proposes radical changes in Colombian politics and economy.**



# Main parties and coalitions

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

## 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

## 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

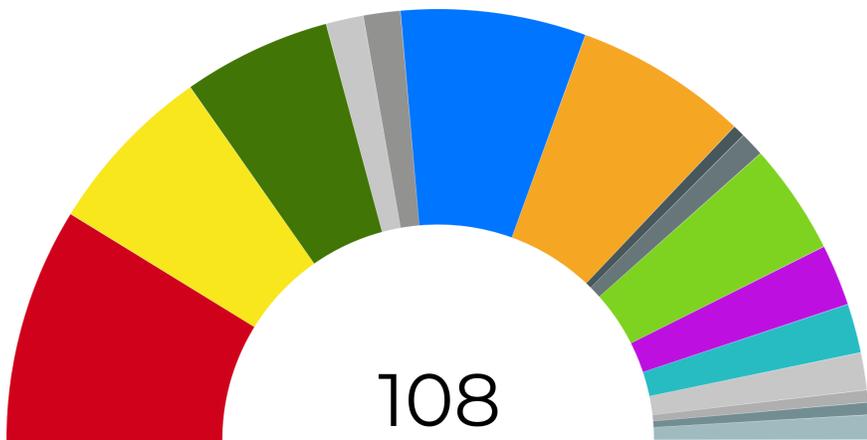
It is a center-right political party founded in 1998. It was part of the coalition of the government of former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez until 2009, and later was part of the coalition of the government of former president Juan Manuel Santos. Its main themes are the strengthening of democracy and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



# 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 OF THE REPUBLIC



### Government

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

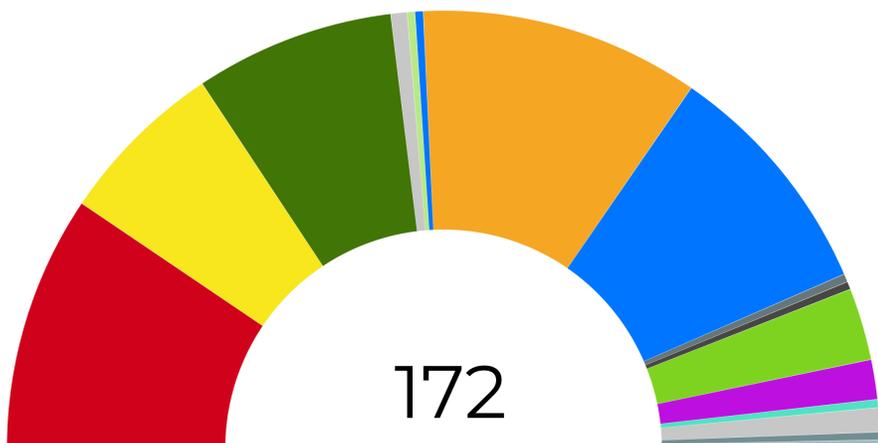
### Opposition

- 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

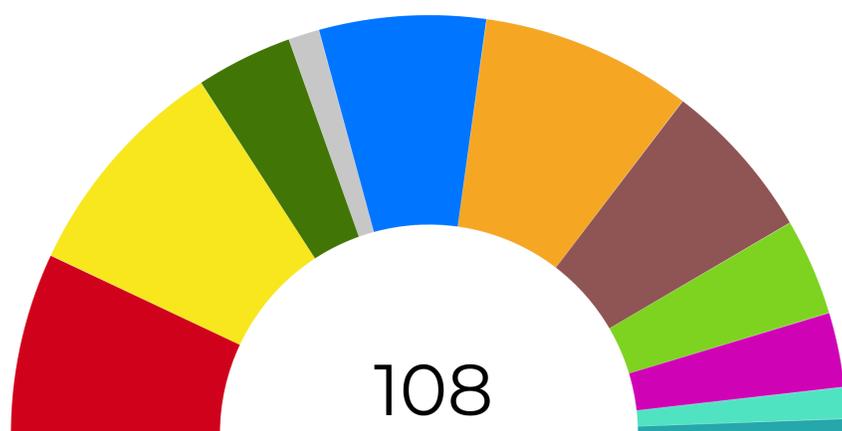
- CAMBIO RADICAL (30)
- PARTIDO LIBERAL (35)

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.

# Congress projections 2022-2026

Based on the various surveys conducted in recent months, the following projection of the distribution of seats in both Chambers can be made. It is essential to bear in mind that the projections contemplate a margin of error given the perceived high percentage of undecided voters.

## SENATE 2022-2026



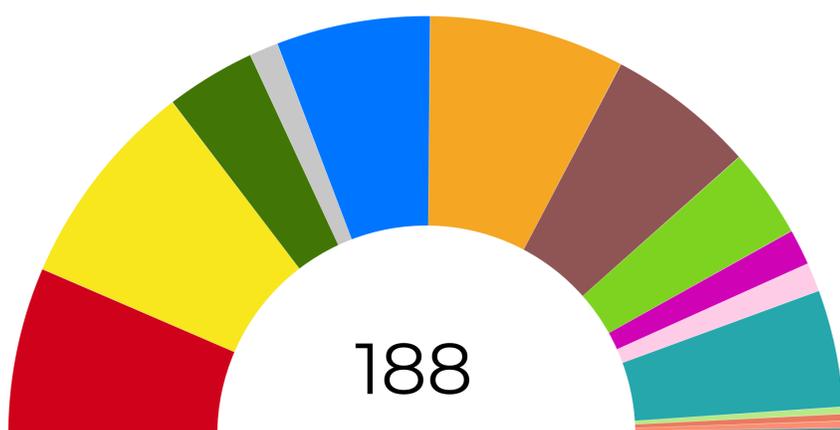
### Current government

- PARTIDO CONSERVADOR
- CENTRO DEMOCRÁTICO
- PARTIDO DE LA U

### Opposition or independent

- CAMBIO RADICAL
- PARTIDO LIBERAL
- PACTO HISTÓRICO
- ALIANZA VERDE
- COMUNES

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES 2022-2026



### Current government

- PARTIDO CONSERVADOR
- CENTRO DEMOCRÁTICO
- PARTIDO DE LA U

### Opposition or independent

- CAMBIO RADICAL
- PARTIDO LIBERAL
- PACTO HISTÓRICO
- ALIANZA VERDE
- COMUNES
- CURULES DE LA PAZ

If these projections are confirmed, it can be evidenced that there will be no major changes in the distribution of seats in Congress. This means that the ideological spectrum within the Congress will remain center and center-right, which may be conflictive in case Gustavo Petro wins in the presidential elections. However, given the high percentage of undecided voters, there may be surprises in the results. In addition, the incorporation of the peace seats, which represent almost 10% of the seats in the House of Representatives, will represent a significant change in the distribution of power in Congress.

# Projections

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## What can we expect from the new Congress?

On the basis of the polls analyzed, the following forecast can be made:

- **There is likely to be no significant change in the distribution of congressional seats as the traditional parties look set to retain a collective majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The new parties competing are unlikely to attract significant voter support, although it remains to be seen what role young voters will play.**
- Voter behavior in this legislative ballot would not necessarily mirror that projected for presidential elections, where polls are predicting 30% to 40% support for **Pacto Histórico**. The opposition coalition Pacto Histórico, of Gustavo Petro, will likely gain around 10% of seats, which even allowing for support from allies is far below what the coalition seeks.
- **The conformation of the new Congress will likely favor a future center-right president, that is, not Gustavo Petro should he be elected in May.**
- **The ruling party Centro Democrático, which is currently the party with most seats in both chambers, is set to remain as a key party despite losing the support of a large tranche of the population and so will be able to secure majorities for its bills.**
- **None of the parties is set to secure an absolute majority in Congress, so whoever occupies the Executive Branch will have to seek out allies and woo as many independent parties as possible. Getting the backing of the legislators occupying the ‘peace seats’ will be especially important for the traditional parties since these will represent around 10% of all Congress seats.**
- Because the poll margins are so tight, much will come down to the last minute decisions of the country’s undecided voters.

## Conclusions

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Next Sunday, March 13, legislative elections will be held in Colombia to renew the entire composition of Congress in the House of Representatives and the Senate for the 2022-2026 term, conditioned by strong social unrest with the current government of Iván Duque and an adverse economic situation due to the increase in inflation and poverty.

**The electoral race is characterized by variables such as the economic crisis resulting from two years of pandemic and complex health management, the resurgence of the armed conflict with the guerrillas, and accusations of corruption.** At the same time, the strong ideological polarisation between the ruling and opposition political forces has been intensified in recent weeks by the revitalisation of the debate on the decriminalisation of abortion, the legalisation of drugs and euthanasia.

**On the other hand, on the same Sunday, the intra-party election will be held to define the candidates of each coalition for the presidential elections on May 29. This is the main focus of public attention because the opposition coalition Pacto Histórico aspires to reaffirm itself as the main political force in the opposition, while the two coalitions Centro Esperanza and the right-wing coalition Equipo por Colombia hope to find a candidate who can challenge Gustavo Petro in the May elections.**

Based on the projections made, it is expected that the majority political inclination of representatives and senators will be centre and right-wing, with a strong Partido Conservador and a Centro Democrático that maintains an important part of the seats, despite the erosion of the last few years as a result of the management of the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis. **It is necessary to contemplate that the current coalitions in Congress will realign in terms of parliamentary support according to the outcome of the legislative elections and the political inclination of the next national government.**



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