

2018 elections in Colombia: A test for peace?

SUMMARY

2018 is an important election year in Colombia, with legislative elections held in March, and the presidential election due on 27 May, with a second round probable, on 17 June, if no candidate gets over 50 % of the vote. It is also the first time in more than 50 years that elections are being held in peace, after an agreement was reached, and is now being implemented, with the guerilla, FARC. The legislative elections have left a fragmented Congress dominated by the right, and the presidential race, though still uncertain, seems to be polarised by a right-wing candidate, Ivan Duque, and his left-wing opponent, Gustavo Petro.

Of the six candidates for the presidency, only Ivan Duque, from the Democratic Centre, has openly opposed the agreements made with the FARC, and has promised to make 'structural modifications', in particular regarding the Special Justice for Peace mechanism.

The EU, which has actively supported the peace process in Colombia, has sent an electoral expert mission to follow the elections, and the European Parliament will also be present, through a multi-party delegation of eight MEPs.



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Introduction

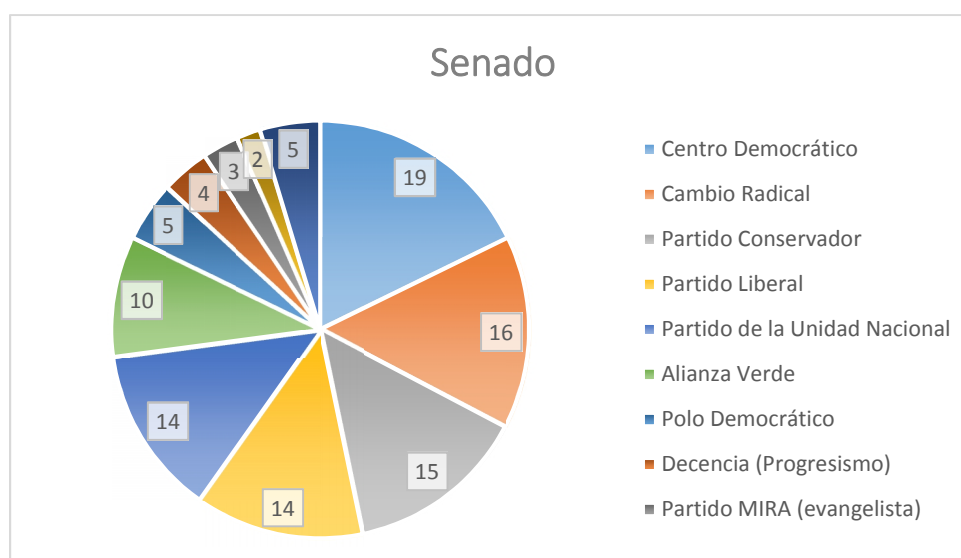
2018 is an important election year in Colombia, as legislative elections were held in March, and presidential ones will be held on 27 May, with a second round likely on 17 June, as no candidate is expected to gain over 50 % of the vote. It is also the first time in more than 50 years that the elections are being held in peace, after the peace agreement, now being implemented, was reached with the FARC – now converted into a legal political force; negotiations are now being held with the National Liberation Army (ELN), which has declared a ceasefire before and after the elections. The legislative elections have left a fragmented Congress dominated by the right, and the presidential race, though still uncertain, seems to be polarised by right-wing candidate, [Ivan Duque](#), and his left-wing opponent Gustavo Petro. In the event of a second round, the final outcome depends, of course, on which two candidates receive the most votes, but also on the support they may receive from supporters. Ivan Duque has promised that, if he wins, he will make structural modifications regarding the peace agreements.

The March 2018 legislative elections

The electoral year in Colombia started on 11 March 2018, with the elections to Congress. As forecast by the polls, the right wing obtained a clear majority in both chambers (House of Representatives and Senate). The main force was the Democratic Centre (*Centro Democrático*) of former president Álvaro Uribe (around 16 % of the votes), with 19 seats in the Senate and 32 in the Chamber of Representatives (around 16 % of the votes), followed by Radical Change (*Cambio Radical*), with 16 senators and 30 deputies (and 14 % of the votes). Other parties with relatively good results were the Liberals (*Partido Liberal*), the Conservative Party (*Partido Conservador*) and President Juan Manuel Santos's National Unity Party (*Partido de la Unidad Nacional*, also known as *Partido de la U*) – although the latter lost many seats, followed by the Greens (*Alianza Verde*). The main left-wing party, Democratic Pole (*Polo Democrático*), only obtained 5 senators and 2 deputies.¹ The FARC Party (*Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común*), representing the former FARC guerrilla, participated for the first time in the elections, and had extremely poor results, but were guaranteed five seats in each chamber by the Peace Agreements.

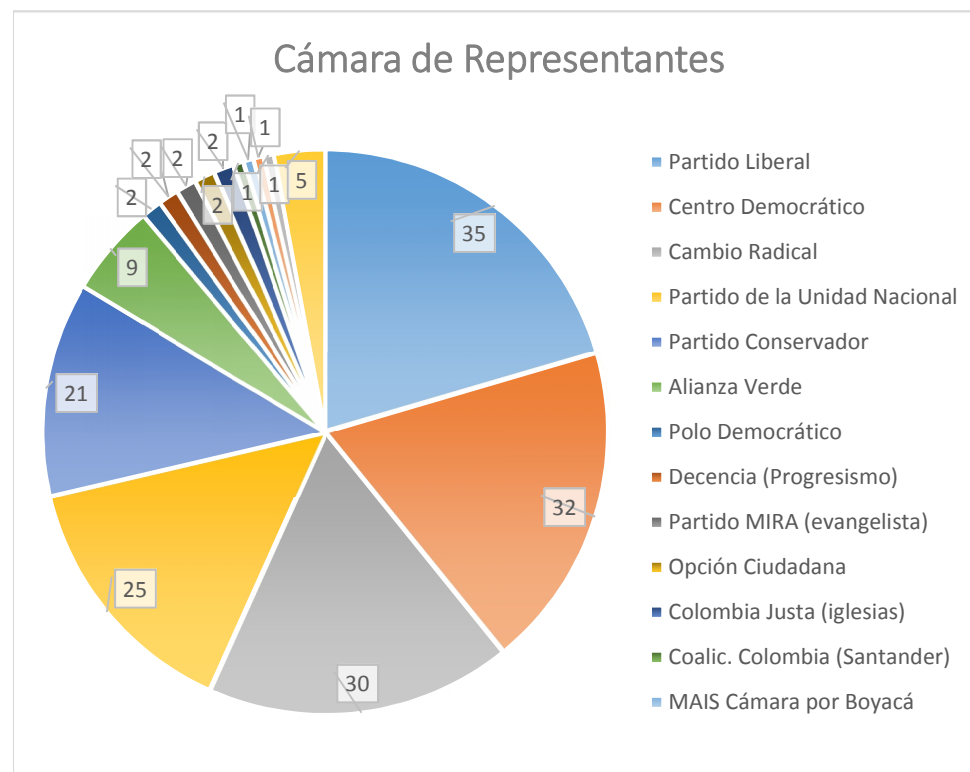
The number of seats may still see slight variation, as the final results are not yet available. The new Colombian Congress will take office on 20 July 2018.

Figure 1 – New Senate composition



Source: [Informe Post Electoral Colombia](#), Legislativas 2018, CELAG, with provisional CNE data.

Figure 2 – New Chamber of Representatives composition



Source: [Informe Post Electoral Colombia](#), Legislativas 2018, CELAG, with provisional CNE data.

Inter-party consultations

Two [inter-party consultations](#) were held simultaneously with the legislative elections, in order to elect candidates for the presidential elections (a sort of primary):

The first one was held by the right-wing coalition [Great Alliance for Colombia](#) (*Gran Alianza por Colombia*), between Iván Duque (Democratic Centre) and conservative candidates Marta Lucía Ramírez and Alejandro Ordóñez. Duque won with 67.7 % of the votes; Ramírez, who was second with 25.8 %, was chosen as his vice-presidential candidate.

The second was organised by [Social Inclusion for Peace](#) (*Inclusión Social por la Paz*), a left-wing coalition formed by the Human Colombia Movement, the Alternative Indigenous and Social Movement (MAIS), the List for Decency coalition and the Patriotic Union. Gustavo Petro (85 %) won Carlos Caicedo (15 %), and this has left Petro well positioned for the presidential elections.

The presidential elections

The following six candidates aspire to the presidency of Colombia:

- 📌 [Iván Duque](#), for the Great Alliance for Colombia coalition, formed by his Democratic Centre party, the Standing Fatherland Movement and the Movement for an Honest and Strong Colombia (which includes a sector of the Conservative Party led by vice-presidential candidate Marta Lucía Ramírez). He is the main right-wing candidate and representative of the position held by former President Uribe against the peace agreement (called *uribismo*). He has promised to launch a pact for Colombia across the political, social and economic sectors, with tax, health, education, pension and justice reforms. Regarding the peace agreements, he opposes amnesty for drug trafficking and other serious crimes. He is the main favourite according to the polls.

- [Gustavo Petro](#), for the left-wing Social Inclusion for Peace alliance (formed by his own Human Colombia Movement, the Alternative Indigenous and Social Movement (MAIS), the List for Decency coalition and the Patriotic Union). A former mayor of Bogotá, he is the main left-wing candidate and second favourite in the polls. He is also supported by sectors of the Green Alliance and the Alternative Democratic Pole. His main proposals for the presidency are to overcome segregation, by implementing a new social and political pact; to strengthen the public sector, and guarantee the fundamental right to health and education; and to fight climate change using clean technologies. His vice-presidential candidate is Ángela María Robledo, from the Green Alliance.
- [Sergio Fajardo](#), for [Colombia Coalition](#) (formed by his Citizens' Compromise movement and majority sectors of the Alternative Democratic Pole and Green Alliance). He is a centre-left candidate, whose main proposals are supporting young people by bringing them opportunities; promoting education and science; fighting corruption; reconciliation, supporting the peace agreements and promoting citizens' culture and security; and fight against inequality. He runs with Green Alliance senator, Claudia López.
- [Germán Vargas Lleras](#), for the *Mejor Vargas Lleras* movement (supported by an important sector of the centre-right, which includes his Radical Change Party, the Conservative Party and the Party of National Unity). A former vice-president under Santos, and minister, he aims to improve the economy to generate employment and reduce taxes; to improve public safety and reduce impunity; and to improve education, making it more accessible. His vice-presidential candidate is Juan Carlos Pinzón.
- [Humberto de La Calle](#), for the Colombianist Alliance (formed by his Liberal Party, the Independent Social Alliance and the Our Party is Colombia Movement: He was the [chief negotiator](#) for the peace agreements, a former minister and vice-president. Among his proposals are promoting peace, by improving employment and education, and promoting investment in areas affected by the conflict; protecting the environment and fighting climate change; economic growth, a fairer and more progressive tax system and fighting tax evasion and fraud; improving the health system by introducing new service providers; supporting young people and women; and fighting corruption. His vice-presidential candidate is Clara López, a former minister and presidential candidate.
- Jorge Antonio Trujillo, representing the evangelical *We Are All Colombia (Todos Somos Colombia)* Movement. A former senator and evangelical pastor, he is the least known of all candidates. He intends to represent the Christian community, and his vice-presidential candidate is Freddy Obando Pinillo.

Two women candidates, Piedad Córdoba (Citizens' Power Movement) and Viviane Morales (*Somos* Movement), have retired from the race. Although the [FARC Party](#) was initially going to present its leader Rodrigo Londoño (alias 'Timochenko') as its candidate for the presidential elections, they quit the competition for the presidency due to his fragile health.

If one of the candidates gets over 50 % of the votes on 27 May, he will automatically become President. Otherwise, a second round will be held on 17 June among the two candidates with most votes in the first round. The winning candidate will be President of Colombia from 7 August 2018 for a four-year mandate, and cannot be re-elected.

According to the [latest](#) opinion polls, Iván Duque leads the race for the presidency (between 35 % and 41.5 % of the votes), followed by Gustavo Petro on the left (25 % – 29.5 %), and the gap between these two candidates is estimated to be between around [11 %](#) and 15 %. A victory in the first round therefore seems unlikely. The historical margin of error in Colombian polls is around 14 percentage points, so the outcome remains uncertain. And other candidates, such as Vargas Lleras or Sergio Fajardo still seem to have chances, according to an [average of polls](#) and an estimate based on the 11 March results. In any case, the most likely candidates to go to a second round seem to be Ivan

Duque and either Gustavo Petro or Vargas Lleras. The polls also give an advantage to Duque in the second round, with over 55 % of the votes.

The peace process

Since the signature of the new final peace agreement on 24 November 2016, the peace process in Colombia has not progressed smoothly. Although the disarmament of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and its transformation into a political party, as well as the reduction in violence associated with the conflict, have been a success, aspects such as reintegrating FARC members into civilian life, legal implementation, and rural reform are lagging behind. This is likely to influence the country's presidential elections.

State of play

The progress of implementation of the agreement differs according to the sources. The [new agreement](#) replaces the original version that was rejected by the Colombian people in the October 2016 plebiscite, and was revised to meet opposition demands. Some aspects, such as those related to ending the conflict, implementing mechanisms, and political participation, have seen greater progress, but others, in particular regarding rural reform, illicit drugs, and victims' rights seem to be moving at a slower pace.

The Observatory for the Follow-up of the Agreement's Implementation (OIAP), in its [fifth report](#) of 5 January 2018, stated that an average of only 18.3 % of all elements of the new final peace agreement had been implemented by then. According to this report, a) progress had been made in bringing the conflict to an end, but much remained to be done on building peace; b) implementation must be integral, more forceful, and more intense; c) political participation for victims continues to be denied, and substantial reforms (rural reform, elimination of illicit drugs) lack consolidation; e) a stable and durable peace will not be possible without completing these reforms; f) the 2018 legislative and presidential elections will probably serve as a second plebiscite on the final agreement and its implementation; g) the agreement is not just a matter of domestic policy, but also a state commitment to the international community; h) victims and excluded communities do not yet enjoy the rights derived from building peace; i) Colombian institutions seem unable to adopt the necessary reforms and adapt to peace; j) Colombian society must still find a way to make a national pact towards peace; and k) if the pending issues are not properly addressed, new forms of rural and urban violence might arise.

Nevertheless, President Santos declared in April that 61 % of the goals established had been achieved and that, with the measures adopted, all the goals for 2018 would be met, and corrective mechanisms were being put in place to speed up the process.

And the [Kroc Institute](#), which officially monitors the implementation of the agreement, has recently presented its latest periodic update on the progress, stating that, although progress has continued, 'there are urgent challenges that need to be addressed strategically'. Continued joint efforts would be required to push the peace process forward, with special emphasis on implementing the long-term reintegration programme for former combatants, and on providing security to human rights leaders and other social actors at the local level. In any case, both the Colombian government and FARC leaders have agreed to renew their commitment to implement the agreement, constructively address the implementation challenges and go on working to transform the root causes of the Colombian conflict.

The detention of former FARC leader [Jesús Santrich](#) on [9 April 2018](#) for an alleged conspiracy to send cocaine to the USA, and his subsequent decision to go on hunger strike, could affect the peace process, as it is feared it could contribute to increase the current dissidence movement among the FARC (currently estimated at 1 200 members).

As regards the peace negotiations with the National Liberation Army ([ELN](#)) that started in Ecuador in 2017, the latter country decided to stop acting as guarantor of the talks last April, until the guerrilla

commits to stop its terrorist actions. Nevertheless, a [fifth cycle](#) of peace talks started in Havana (Cuba) on 10 May 2018, and the ELN announced a [ceasefire](#) during the first round of the presidential elections (25-29 May).

The presidential candidates and the peace process

Of the six candidates for the presidency, only [Ivan Duque](#), from the Democratic Centre, has openly opposed the agreements with the FARC, and has promised to make 'structural modifications', in particular regarding the Special Justice for Peace mechanism. [Candidates](#) Gustavo Petro, Sergio Fajardo and Germán Vargas Lleras have vowed to respect and implement the agreements. Regarding negotiations with the ELN (National Liberation Army), Vargas Lleras and Duque do not support them, while Petro supports the initiative, on condition that the ELN chooses dialogue over violence.

Colombia and the EU

The EU supports the peace process

Since 2000, [EU support](#) for the Colombian peace process has reached [almost €2 billion](#) (including the [€575 million](#) announced by the EU for the post-conflict period, and €910 million allocated bilaterally by Member States between 2010 and 2015). The EU has focused on local production and income generation, citizens' participation and victims' rights. From 2002 to 2012, [EU PEACE laboratories](#) supported 614 projects, benefiting over 300 000 persons and 220 municipalities. Since 2012, bilateral cooperation through budget support (€120 million) has targeted rural development policy, social sustainable development and regional competitiveness. In December 2016, the [EU Trust Fund](#) for Colombia was established, with a total contribution of €95 million from the EU budget and from 19 Member States, to support the implementation of the peace agreement in the early recovery and post-conflict stabilisation phase, and with the main focus on rural development; projects for over 60 % of the Fund have already been approved. In addition to the Trust Fund, the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace ([IcSP](#)) has mobilised an [extra €40 million](#) for critical elements of the peace process, such as achieving an effective transitional justice system. On 6 December 2017, the EU signed four human and gender rights [projects](#) for over €1.7 million. EU cooperation focuses on areas such as victims' rights, reintegration of ex-FARC guerrillas into civilian life, de-mining (over €17.8 million over the last five years), rural development, land restitution, environment, conflict resolution, rapid reaction projects related to peace and the post-conflict period, as well as the establishment of a [Special Investigation Unit](#) in the Prosecutor-General's office to combat crime and protect activists. EU Special Envoy, Eamon Gilmore, considers the EU role in this process a great success, and a [model](#) to follow for EU external policy.

EU support to peace in Colombia

- Total: €2 billion (since 2000)
- EU PEACE laboratories, 614 projects, over 300 000 beneficiaries (2002-2012)
- EU Trust Fund for Colombia, 2016: €95 million (EU and 19 Member States)
- IcSP: €40 million (transitional justice, etc.)

Source: [EuropeAid](#).

The European Parliament

In its [resolution](#) on EU political relations with Latin America of 13 September 2017, the European Parliament reiterated its support for the peace process. The EP stressed 'the importance of involving the whole of Colombian society' and of 'guaranteeing the safety and protection of human rights activists and community leaders'. It urged the EU and its Member States 'to continue their political and financial support', and backed 'the role of the VP/HR's Special Envoy for Colombia' (currently Eamon Gilmore). Parliament had previously expressed its support for the process in a [resolution](#) of 20 January 2016, and sent a [delegation](#) to accompany the peace process and witness the [plebiscite](#)

on the agreement held on 2 October 2016. The European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, [Christos Stylianides](#), on behalf of Vice-President/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), Federica Mogherini, made a [statement](#) in the Parliament's January 2018 [plenary session](#), taking stock of the achievements in the peace process to date, as well as EU support. He particularly stressed the EU efforts to protect victims of violence and human rights defenders. He underlined that the EU will make use of all its instruments for humanitarian aid and its strategies in the fields of gender, human rights and democracy-building; noted the decision to propose the extension of bilateral cooperation with Colombia until 2020; and concluded that there is a vital interest in supporting the peace process in Colombia. This statement was followed by a debate. President Juan Manuel Santos is due to visit the Parliament on 30 May 2018.

EU presence in the elections

The EU is active in the electoral process with an Electoral Expert Mission,² which will carry out an election follow-up from 4 May to the end of June 2018. It also sent an EEM for the March legislative elections.

The [European Parliament](#) is also present through a multi-party delegation of eight MEPs, presided by Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, from the ALDE group. They are expected to meet the Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the High Commissioner for Peace, representatives of the National Electoral Council (the authority that regulates and supervises elections and political parties) and officials of the National Registry of Civil Status (responsible for organising the electoral processes), and shall visit different voting centres. There will be also a meeting of EU ambassadors in Colombia.

MAIN REFERENCES

Calderón J., Gómez, A., [Informe Post Electoral Colombia. Legislativas 2018](#), CELAG, 12 March 2018.

Kroc Institute [Partial Update](#) on Colombia Peace Accords Progress, 14 May 2018.

Observatorio de Seguimiento a la implementación del Acuerdo de Paz (OIAP), [La Paz en Deuda](#), Informe número 5, January 2018.

ENDNOTES

¹ These results are still provisional, as the final results are not yet available.

² An electoral expert mission ([EEM](#)) is not an electoral observation mission. It is generally composed of two to four experts, who meet a series of interested parties in the electoral process. They do not make a traditional observation of the elections, nor do they have media visibility.

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