

Colombia Decides

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Colombia entered the 2026 electoral cycle amid deep political polarization, institutional tensions, and ongoing negotiations with criminal groups under the government's "Total Peace" policy. Against this backdrop, the March 8 legislative elections and inter-party consultations represented a critical test for the country's democratic institutions and electoral integrity.

On March 8, 40,036,238 citizens in Colombia were eligible to participate in the legislative elections and three inter-party consultations, with approximately 20.4 million voters ultimately casting ballots.

In the weeks leading up to the elections, tensions between the executive branch and Colombia's electoral institutions intensified. President Petro repeatedly questioned the legitimacy of the same electoral system that brought him to power as a city councilor, mayor, member of Congress, and ultimately president.

In January, Petro recruited hundreds of new government contractors worth millions of dollars, launched attacks on the electoral system, and criticized opposition leaders. He assumed roles exercised by electoral authorities, undermining the power of Colombia's electoral institutions.

In addition, he successfully blocked the automatic distribution of voting materials at the poll stations, making them available only upon request and limiting voters' proactive access to information.

Beyond institutional tensions, security conditions and the presence of illegal armed actors continued to shape the electoral environment in several regions of the country. His allies—including criminal groups operating in regions affected by the government's "Total Peace" negotiations—provided logistical support in nearly 300 municipalities, urging voters to support Petro-aligned candidates.

In at least 186 municipalities¹, voters faced coercion and pressure to support Petro-aligned candidates. In some areas, Indigenous Misak and individuals posing as civilians—likely tied to armed groups—actively impeded voting.

Several individuals were detained nationwide for vote-buying but were later released. The first was a Petro political ally; in later cases, authorities confiscated the money but did not disclose the detainees' political affiliations.

Despite these repeated violations, the Inspector General and the Attorney General—both appointed by the president and confirmed by Congress—remained silent, as did international election monitoring missions.

The Office of the Ombudsperson has been the only institution consistently monitoring human rights violations and raising alarms, yet its warnings have largely gone unreported by the international community².

Congress Results

Despite these tensions and irregularities reported in several regions, the elections produced a fragmented but competitive congressional outcome.

In the Senate (103 seats), the Historic Pact (President's party) won 25 seats, Democratic Center 17, Liberal Party 13, Alliance for Colombia 11, Conservative Party 11, Party of the U 9, and others 17.

In the Chamber of Representatives (182 seats), Democratic Center won 32, Liberal Party 31, Historic Pact (president's party) 29, Conservative Party 18, Radical Change 13, Party of the U 11, and others 48.

The president's party owes its electoral success to several factors: political violence against opposition figures, entrenched corruption, and support from Indigenous communities and people in civilians' cloths that blocked voting in certain areas³. Amid coercion from criminal groups linked

¹ In the departments of: *Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Caquetá, Putumayo, Arauca, Norte de Santander, Bolívar, Antioquia, Chocó, Córdoba, Nariño y Cesar.*

² Strategic Impunity www.360geopolitica.org

³ Cauca, Caquetá, Putumayo entre otros.

to the government's "Total Peace" initiative—along with allegedly illegal financing, voter transhumance, and vote-buying—Pacto Histórico secured strong results, particularly in departments where these groups have expanded their territorial influence.

The results confirm the continued fragmentation of Colombia's political system. While the Historic Pact consolidated an important presence in the Senate, no single political force obtained a dominant majority in either chamber, suggesting that coalition-building will remain essential for legislative governance.

Three Inter-Party Consultations. The Great Consultation for Colombia (9 candidates, 5,834,096 votes) was won by Paloma Valencia with 3,220,417 votes; The Solutions (2 candidates, 617,342 votes) by Claudia López with 573,450; and Front for Life (5 candidates, 594,056 votes) by Roy Barreras with 256,205. The winners will move on to the May 31 presidential race, joining at least eight other candidates—seven of them backed by President Petro.

The preliminary assessments by international observation missions reflect an important distinction between the technical administration of the electoral process and the broader political environment in which it took place.

While observers highlighted the solidity and organization of Colombia's electoral infrastructure, they also noted persistent concerns

regarding political violence⁴, pressure from illegal armed groups, and disinformation⁵—factors that may affect public confidence even when electoral procedures function correctly.

Impact on Voter Confidence and Political Dynamics

President Petro's attacks on the electoral system had a significant negative impact on voter confidence, yet paradoxically strengthened his political allies, who mobilized pressure in several regions to secure votes in his favor.

The tension between formally transparent electoral procedures and localized irregularities underscores the complex challenges facing Colombia's democracy.

Conclusion

The March 8 elections demonstrated both the resilience and the vulnerabilities of Colombia's democratic system. On one hand, the electoral infrastructure proved capable of organizing a large and competitive national vote.

On the other, persistent political polarization, institutional tensions, and the continued influence of criminal actors in certain regions highlight structural challenges that remain unresolved.

As Colombia moves toward the presidential election, strengthening institutional trust and ensuring a secure electoral environment will be critical to preserving democratic legitimacy.

Bogotá, Colombia March 13, 2026.

⁴ *Those who dare to speak out about what is happening in the country are met with death threats, legal intimidation, and coordinated smear campaigns orchestrated by the president's networks and his allies. Despite the severity of these attacks, the international community has largely failed to treat the situation with the urgency and seriousness it demands (See Strategic Impunity, www.360geopolitica.org).*

⁵ President Petro has spent millions of American dollars since the start of his administration funding influencers, bot networks, and content farms to spread disinformation—much of it financed through the public media RTVC budget, which has become openly partial in favor of his candidates.