

COLOMBIA

2026 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS AND PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

PRE-ELECTION REPORT



ELECTION AT A GLANCE

- **Colombia's election year is beginning.** On Sunday, March 8, voters will elect a new Congress, with all seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives up for grabs. That same day, three political coalitions will hold primaries to pick their presidential nominees.
- **A fragmented Congress.** Polling points to a Congress with no clear majorities in either the Senate or the House of Representatives. The Pacto Histórico, the ruling left-wing coalition, leads voting intentions—but by a margin far too small to guarantee control of the Legislative branch. The next president will have to build agreements with other forces to pass legislation.
- **A presidential barometer.** Beyond shaping Congress, legislative results often serve as an early signal to gauge the political forces' electoral strength ahead of the presidential race to succeed Gustavo Petro at the Casa de Nariño.
- **Interparty primaries among the second-tier forces.** That same day, internal contests will be held to define presidential candidacies in three coalitions: Frente por la Vida (center-left), Consulta de las Soluciones (center), and Gran Consulta por Colombia (center-right). Although the best-positioned candidates in voting-intention polls for the May presidential election are not competing in these primaries, the outcomes will be important to watch: the nominees chosen will help shape the electoral landscape and influence how alliances are arranged heading into the presidential campaign.
- **Upcoming elections.** The first round of the presidential election will be held on May 31. At this time, the two candidates with the highest voting intention are the ruling coalition's candidate Iván Cepeda (Pacto Histórico—left) and Abelardo de la Espriella (Salvación Nacional—right). However, neither is expected to reach 50% of the vote, making a runoff on June 21 the most likely scenario at this stage.

WHAT IS BEING ELECTED AND HOW?

The Ground Rules

- **Date:** March 8
- **Type of elections:** Legislative elections and primaries to select presidential candidates
- **Legislative offices:** Full renewal of Congress for the 2026–2030 term
- **Candidates to be chosen in the primaries:** Three nominees, selected through three separate primaries

Upcoming election dates

- **Presidential first round:** May 31. If no candidate gets more than 50% of the vote, a runoff will be held.
- **Presidential runoff:** June 21.

¿Qué y cómo se elige para el Poder Legislativo?

- **The election will renew the entire Congress:** 103 senators and 183 representatives.
- **Two chambers, two systems.** In Colombia, the Senate and the House of Representatives are elected under different rules. The Senate is chosen through a single nationwide constituency, while the House is elected by territorial districts and special constituencies. In addition, the presidential ticket that finishes second in the presidential election is awarded one seat in the Senate and one in the House of Representatives.
- **Open vs. closed lists.** With the exception of Pacto Histórico and Centro Democrático, most parties are running open lists, allowing voters to select individual candidates within each party slate. The candidates who receive the most votes win the seats. Under this system, candidates compete not only against other parties but also against members of their own list, encouraging a more personalized vote.

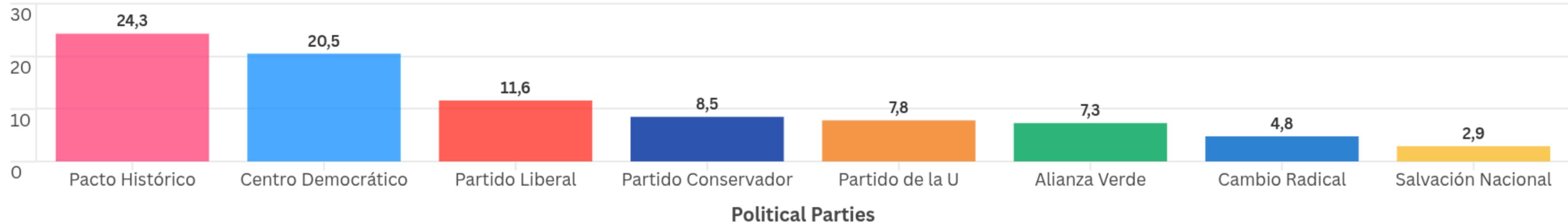
Separate elections

Colombia is an atypical case in Latin America: by constitutional mandate, legislative elections are held before the presidential election. Legislative elections help gauge the strength of political forces, provide an early read on presidential voting intentions, and allow campaigns to recalibrate their strategies.



WHO IS LEADING IN THE POLLS?

Voting intention



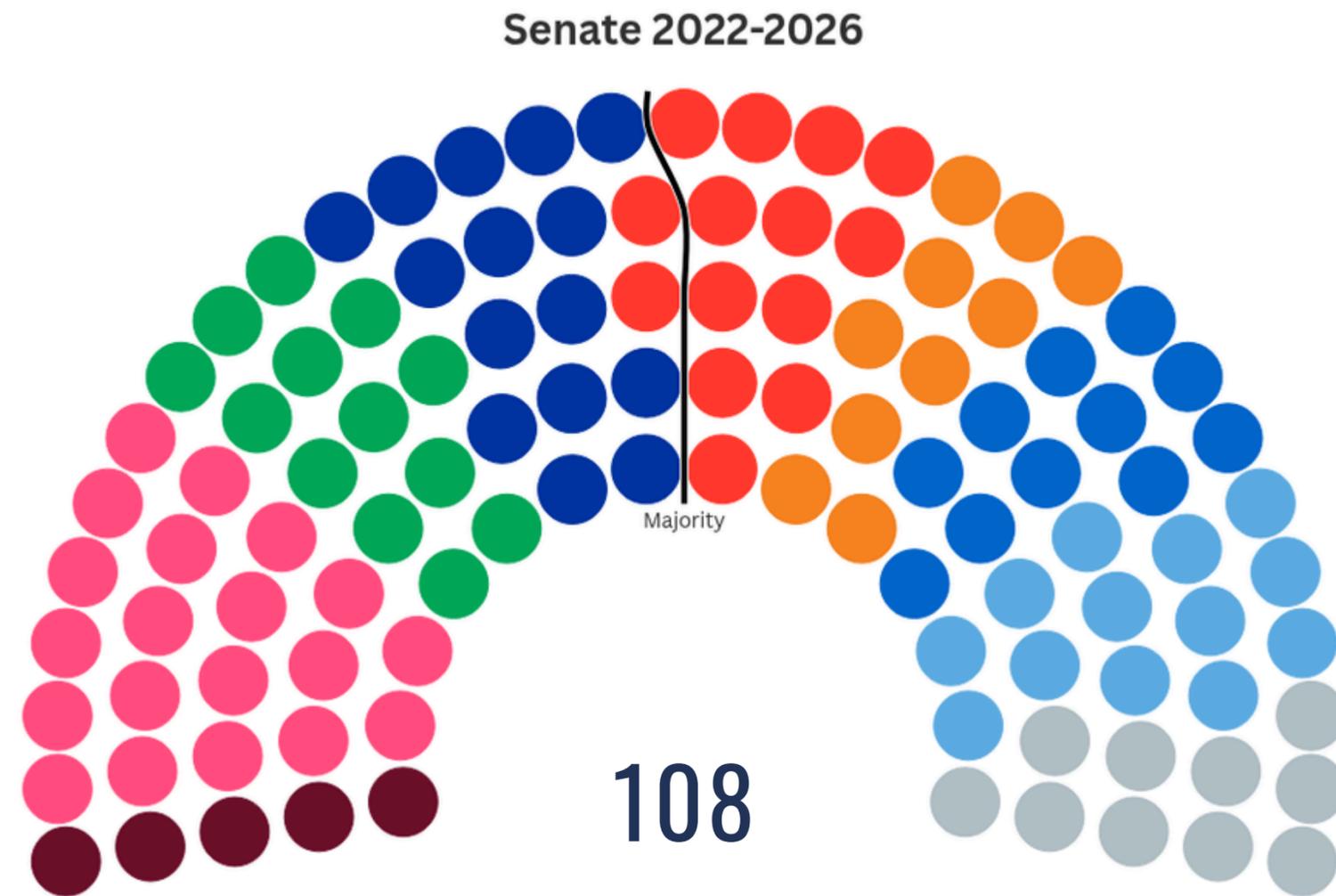
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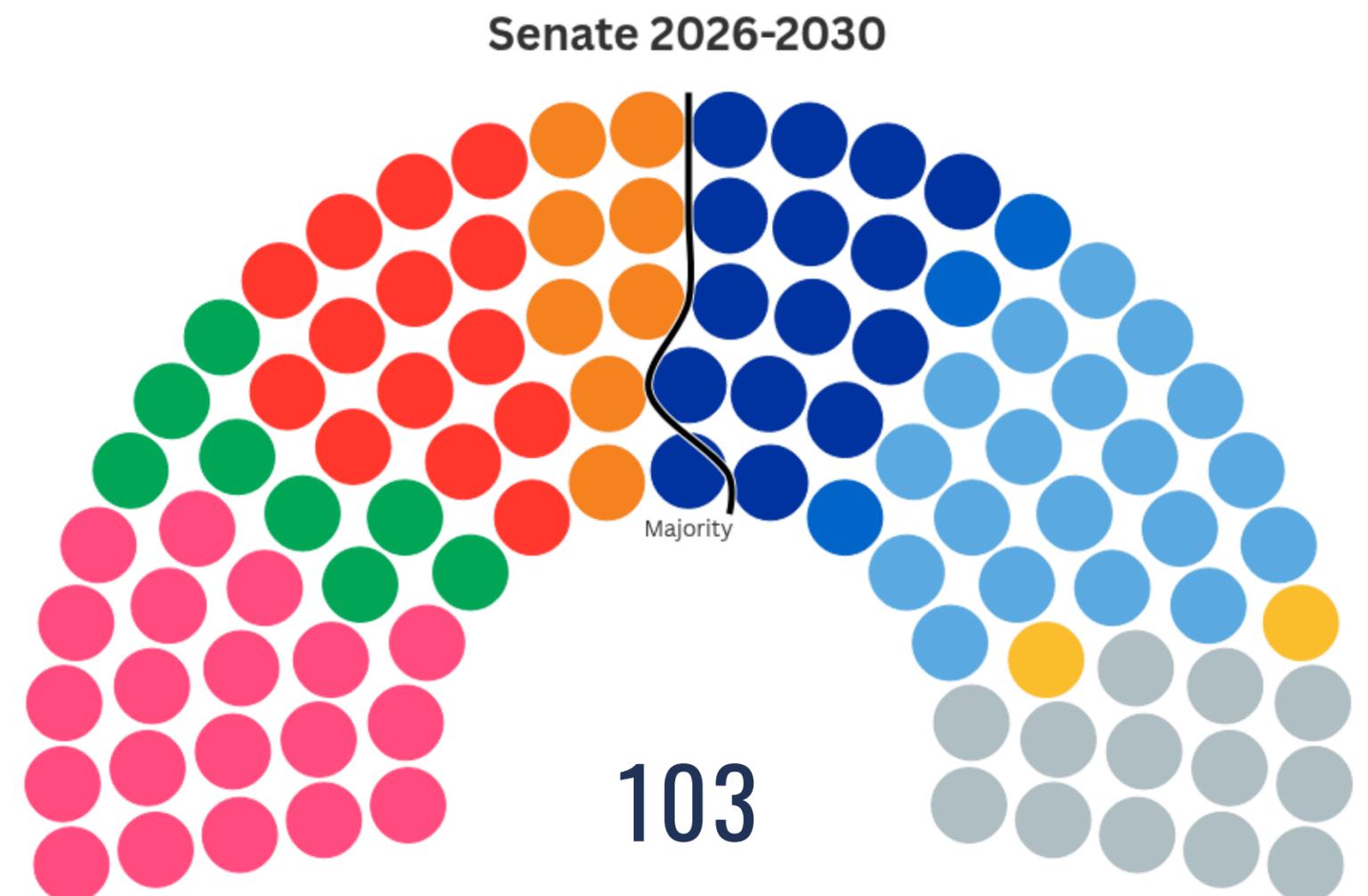
- **A Congress without majorities.** As is the case today, whoever wins the presidential election will have to negotiate to build governing majorities and move their agenda through Congress. Pacto Histórico, the ruling left-wing coalition, leads in voting intention but remains well short of the numbers needed to secure its own majorities. If it retains the presidency, it will face a Congress much like the current one, where most of the remaining legislative representation is concentrated in the center and the right.
- **The dominance of the “seven,” less gender parity, and few new faces.** Candidates from 15 parties are running for the Senate and more than 30 for the House of Representatives, but only seven are expected to continue controlling roughly 89% of Congress. A Congress with lower female representation is also anticipated. And despite more than 3,000 candidates competing for seats, the party lists with the best chances of winning Senate and House seats are still headed by long-serving, well-established politicians.
- **A smaller Congress.** The next Legislative branch will have 10 fewer seats (5 in the Senate and 5 in the House of Representatives). Those seats had previously been automatically assigned to the Partido Comunes (formerly the FARC) under the 2016 Peace Accord. With that change, Pacto Histórico will lose a key ally. In addition, this will be the last election in which voters choose the 16 representatives from the Special Transitional Peace Constituencies (CITREP, in Spanish).

WHAT IS AT STAKE? – SENATE

The Senate will renew all 103 seats: 100 senators are elected in a single nationwide constituency, 2 seats are reserved for Indigenous representatives, and 1 seat is awarded to the runner-up in the presidential election. This election eliminates the five seats previously guaranteed to the former Partido Comunes.



● Comunes (5) ● Pacto Histórico (20) ● Partido Verde (13) ● Partido Conservador (15) ● Partido Liberal (14) ● Partido de la U (10)
● Cambio Radical (11) ● Centro Democrático (13) ● Others (10)

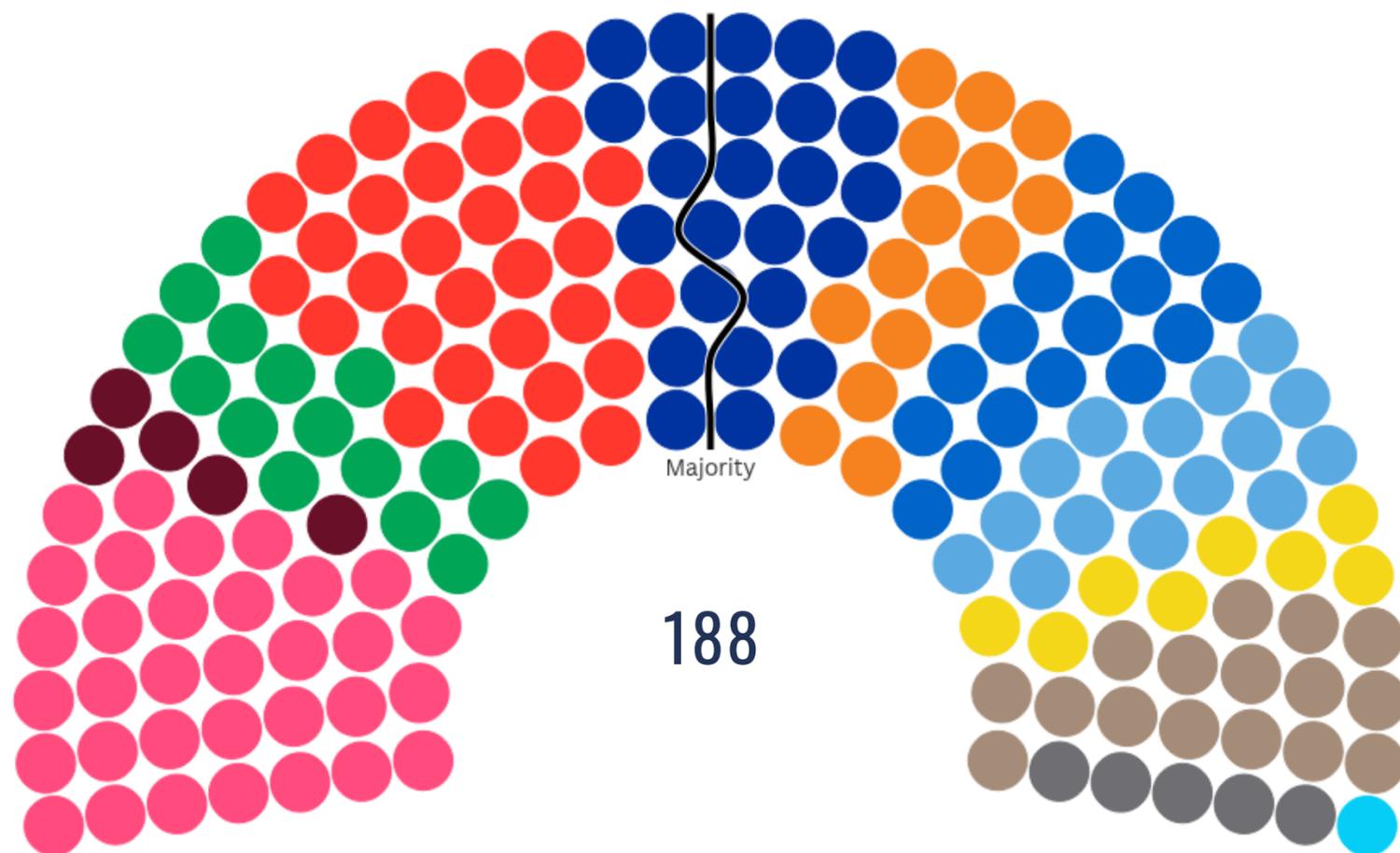


● Pacto Histórico (20) ● Partido Verde (8) ● Partido Liberal (14) ● Partido de la U (8) ● Partido Conservador (15)
● Cambio Radical (3) ● Centro Democrático (19) ● Salvación Nacional (2) ● Others (13)

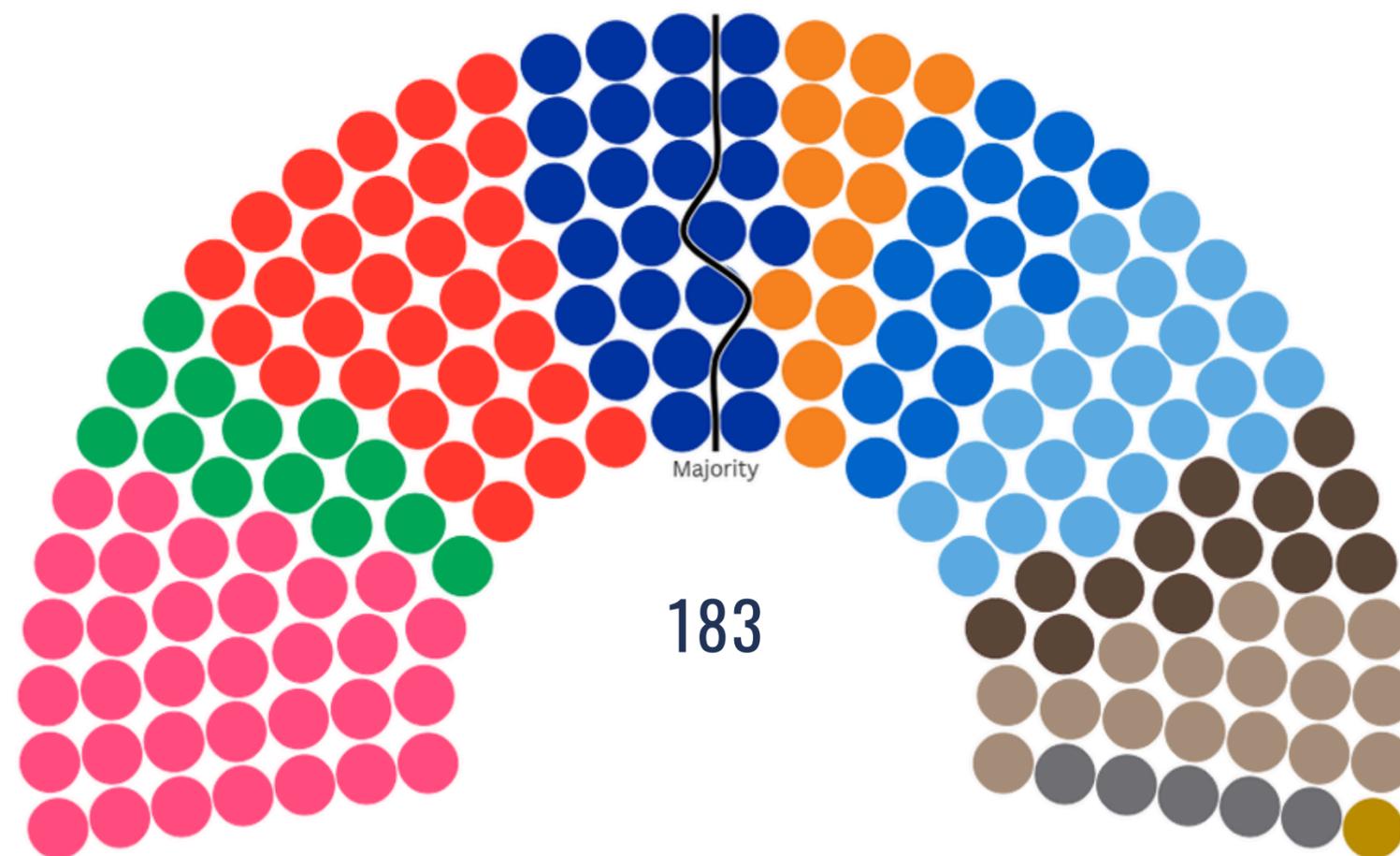
WHAT IS AT STAKE? – HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The House of Representatives will renew all 183 seats. Unlike the Senate, representatives are elected in territorial and special constituencies: 161 seats are allocated across Colombia's 32 departments and Bogotá based on population; 16 are reserved for the peace constituencies; 5 correspond to special constituencies for Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities and Colombians abroad; and 1 is awarded to the vice-presidential candidate who finishes in second place. Based on population, the departments with the most representatives are Bogotá (18), Antioquia (17), and Valle del Cauca (13).

House of Representatives 2022-2026



House of Representatives 2026-2030



- Pacto Histórico (33) ● Comunes (5) ● Alianza Verde (15) ● Partido Liberal (32) ● Partido Conservador (25)
- Partido de la U (15) ● Cambio Radical (17) ● Centro Democrático (16) ● Other parties (8) ● CITREP (16)
- Special constituencies (5) ● Special caucus for the runner-up presidential candidate (1)

- Pacto Histórico (33) ● Alianza Verde (13) ● Partido Liberal (30) ● Partido Conservador (24) ● Partido de la U (12)
- Cambio Radical (16) ● Centro Democrático (23) ● Other parties (8) ● CITREP (16) ● Special constituencies (5)
- Special caucus for the runner-up presidential candidate (1)

Source: Own elaboration based on public opinion polls.

WHAT IS EXPECTED FOR THE 2026–2030 LEGISLATIVE TERM?

- **Fragmentation and low legislative effectiveness.** Current projections suggest another highly fragmented Congress. Without a clear majority, the next president will need to bargain with other parties to pass legislation and advance the government’s agenda. Alliance breakdowns and gridlock were among the Petro administration’s main institutional obstacles. Over the past year, the executive branch secured passage of only 2 of the 15 bills it introduced: the budget and the labor reform.
- **The ruling coalition aims to retain its position as the largest caucus.** Pacto Histórico, President Gustavo Petro’s coalition, is seeking to keep its 20 seats in the Senate. Its closed, gender-parity Senate slate is led by Carolina Corcho, former health minister. The coalition has a comparable objective in the House of Representatives, but the outlook there is more uncertain.
- **Uribismo seeks to regain ground.** Centro Democrático, the party of former president Álvaro Uribe, is projected to reach 19 seats, consolidating itself as the second-largest force. Its list—also closed—is headed by Representative Andrés Forero, with former president Uribe listed last to help boost the ticket’s vote totals. In the House of Representatives, the party is also looking to expand its presence.
- **Traditional parties will remain key players.** The Partido Liberal and Conservador would maintain similar levels of representation in both chambers. Both were pivotal to passing legislation early in the Petro administration and could, going forward, be among the forces that help secure governability for the next president.
- **The Partido Verde, Cambio Radical, and Partido de la U are losing ground.** The Partido Verde enters the election split into three factions: one aligned with Petro, one in opposition, and one independent—reducing its chances of holding onto its caucuses in either chamber. Cambio Radical is in a similar position and could lose 7 of its 11 Senate seats. Partido de la U could also slip from 10 to 8 seats. The latter two appear better positioned to hold their current strength in the House of Representatives.
- **A “Milei” phenomenon in Colombia? The Salvación Nacional question mark.** The right-wing party led by Abelardo de la Espriella, often associated with Argentine President Javier Milei’s ideas, will try to capitalize on his popularity. Still, legislative-election projections currently place it at around 3% voting intention.

POST-ELECTION SCENARIOS

Based on Sunday's results, two scenarios could emerge ahead of the upcoming presidential election:

- **A strong Pacto Histórico showing, boosting Cepeda.** If the ruling coalition succeeds in expanding its vote share—especially in the most populous districts such as Bogotá and Valle del Cauca—Iván Cepeda's presidential bid would be strengthened. The government could then begin to see a first-round victory as within reach. To support that momentum, the administration might accelerate economic measures such as a minimum-wage increase and push more ambitious initiatives, including a constitutional reform. This scenario would also usher in a new Congress in which the government could revive bills currently stalled, such as a new tax reform and a reform of the health-care system.
 - **A Unified Opposition and Electoral Polarization.** A strong government showing could also pose risks for Pacto Histórico. The prospect of an incumbent win could galvanize today's fragmented anti-Petro opposition and drive it to rally behind a single candidate—such as Abelardo de la Espriella, who currently ranks second in voting-intention polls. Cambio Radical and former president Álvaro Uribe have already signaled their support.
- **An opposition victory, and a fragmented center-right.** A different scenario would open if Centro Democrático emerges as the leading force in Congress and posts a decisive win in the interparty primaries. In that case, Paloma Valencia's presidential candidacy would gain momentum, splitting the right's vote in the first round. Under this scenario, the left could reach the runoff thanks to the dispersion of center and right-wing candidates, but it would face a tougher path to winning the second round.

Across any of these outcomes—and others beyond current projections—everything points to rising polarization along a left-right divide increasingly reframed as **pro-Petro vs. anti-Petro**.

KEY CANDIDATES

Medical doctor. She served as Minister of Health from 2022 to April 2023. She championed health-system reform—one of the Petro administration’s flagship bills, currently stalled in Congress.

Priority issues:

- **Health-system reform** to guarantee universal, equitable, direct access to care by eliminating the financial intermediation role of the Health Promotion Entities (HPE).
- **Front-of-package food labeling.** During her tenure at the Ministry of Health, she implemented warning-label regulations for ultra-processed products.
- **“Healthy” taxes.** Under her leadership, taxes on sugary drinks and ultra-processed foods were implemented to discourage consumption.
- **Comprehensive sex education and reproductive rights.** She regulated access to voluntary termination of pregnancy (IVE, by its Spanish acronym) and promoted sexual and reproductive health policies, especially for women in vulnerable areas.

**Carolina
Corcho**

Pacto Histórico
(PH)



Economist. He has served as a member of the House of Representatives for Bogotá since 2022 and is a founding member of Centro Democrático. In the last election, he received the highest number of votes within his party.

Priority issues:

- **Fiscal responsibility.** As a representative, he co-sponsored a bill—approved in committee—to strengthen oversight mechanisms for public spending.
- **Opposition to health reform.** He proposes strengthening the HPE-based system.
- **Abortion ban.** He supports banning access to voluntary termination of pregnancy from conception.
- **Fracking and environmental permits.** He authored an initiative to promote fracking for unconventional resource development and to establish a more flexible legal framework for environmental permitting.

**Andrés
Forero**

Centro Democrático
(CD)



KEY CANDIDATES

Communications professional. President of the Senate in 2019 and 2025. In both 2018 and 2022, he was the most voted candidate for the Partido Liberal.

**Lidio
García
Turbay**
Partido Liberal (PL)



- **Opponent of the Petro administration.** In addition to voting against most government-backed bills, as Senate president he pushed to convene an oversight hearing to question cabinet ministers over the economic emergency declared in December 2025.
- **A dealmaker profile.** García is better known for assembling vote coalitions than for advancing signature legislative proposals. During Juan Manuel Santos's administration (2010–2018), he was part of the governing coalition that brought together the Partido Liberal, the Partido de la U, and Cambio Radical.

International relations graduate. He served as a senator from 2018 to 2022 and is seeking to return to Congress. He represents the Partido Conservador's reformist wing.

**David
Barguil**
Partido Conservador
(PC)



- **Promotes financial-services legislation.** As a legislator, he authored several bills regulating financial products that were enacted into law, including: the law allowing consumers to prepay credit obligations (Law 1555 of 2012), the law requiring transparent pricing for financial services (Law 1748 of 2014), and the law establishing a package of free services for credit card accounts (Law 2009 of 2019).

Lawyer with a specialization in administrative law. Senator since 2010

**Carlos
Motoa**
Cambio Radical (CR)
y Alma



- **Opposition spokesperson on health reform.** He promoted a counterproposal to the government's bill aimed at preserving key features of the current system and protecting employment in the sector.
- **Advocate of legislative oversight.** He led the push for a Senate oversight session to question Petro administration officials over the economic emergency declared in December 2025.

KEY CANDIDATES

Juan Felipe Lemos
Partido de la U



Lawyer specialized in government contracting. Senator since 2018.

- **Lead negotiator on the labor reform.** He served as the Senate's lead sponsor (rapporteur) for the Petro administration's Labor reform. Over the course of the debate, he helped broker compromises that facilitated the bill's passage.
- **Advocate of universal income.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, he was one of 50 lawmakers who urged the Executive branch to implement a basic income program.

Luis Garzón
Alianza por Colombia
(Verde, en Marcha and ASI)



Labor leader. Former mayor of Bogotá (2004–2008) and former Minister of Labor under Juan Manuel Santos.

- **Consensus candidate of a heterogeneous alliance.** Garzón leads a centrist coalition with three competing internal factions: one aligned with the Petro administration, including Labor Minister Antonio Sanguino; a second openly critical wing, represented by Katherine Miranda and Jota Pe Hernández; and a third bloc offering conditional support, associated with former mayor Claudia López and led by Angélica Lozano, which backs the social agenda but distances itself from more radical proposals such as a constituent-assembly reform.

Enrique Gómez Martínez
Salvación Nacional



Politician. Leader of the Salvador Nacional Movement and a presidential candidate in 2022.

- **Leader of the “partido del Tigre”.** The party is running as the congressional slate aligned with presidential candidate Abelardo de la Espriella, who currently ranks second in voting-intention polls. Its open list includes military figures, traditional politicians, influencers, and religious leaders. Public security, national defense, and Christian values are at the core of the party's platform. It also opposes peace processes and advocates for reduced public spending.

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS

On March 8, parties and coalitions that choose to do so may hold internal elections to select their presidential candidates. Participation is optional, but these primaries often serve as a barometer of political strength across the broader landscape—including for forces that do not take part. The groups holding primaries are:

Frente por la Vida (center-left)

This primary brings together parties allied with Pacto Histórico (the ruling coalition) and is led by Roy Barreras and Daniel Quintero. The winner will face Iván Cepeda, the outgoing administration’s candidate, in the May 31 presidential election. President Petro’s party has urged voters not to participate in the primary.

Front-runner:
Roy Barreras (La
Fuerza de la Paz)



Consulta de las Soluciones (center)

Led by former Bogotá mayor Claudia López, the coalition aims to capture centrist voters—particularly in Bogotá—under the slogan that this primary should be “neither Petro’s nor Uribe’s.”

Front-runner:
Claudia López
(Independent)



Gran Consulta por Colombia (center-right)

It brings together nine center-right candidates, ranging from Centro Democrático’s nominee to “outsider” figures such as journalist Vicky Dávila and technocrats like former finance minister Mauricio Cárdenas.

Front-runner:
Paloma
Valencia
(Centro
Democrático)



The key primary to watch is the Gran Consulta por Colombia. If Centro Democrático clears five million votes, Paloma Valencia could enter May with added momentum over other center-right candidates. In a late turnout push, she said she would tap Álvaro Uribe as her running mate.

Who Will Run for President Without Competing in the Primaries?

Three of the leading contenders in the May presidential election will not take part in party primaries. They are:

Iván Cepeda (Pacto
Histórico - left)



Sergio Fajardo
(Dignidad y
Compromiso -
center)



Abelardo de la
Espriella (Salvación
Nacional - right)



THANK YOU!



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