

COLOMBIA

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS AND PRESIDENTIAL PARTY PRIMARIES 2026

POST-ELECTION REPORT



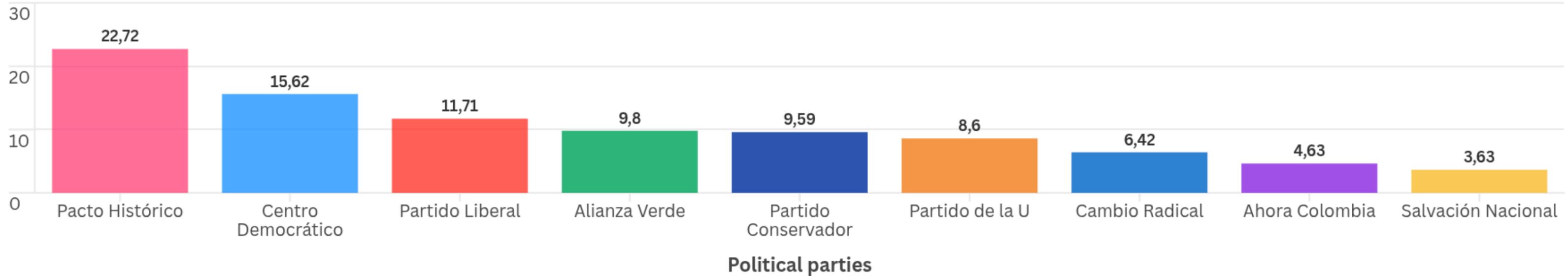
2026 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Legislative elections as a test ahead of the presidential race.** On Sunday, March 8, Colombia held legislative elections to determine the composition of Congress for the 2026–2030 term. Three political blocs also held presidential primaries. The newly elected lawmakers will take office on July 20, 2026.
- **The ruling coalition strengthens its position.** Pacto Histórico, President Gustavo Petro’s coalition, won 23% of the national vote. The result confirms it as the leading political force in Congress and marks an improvement over its 2022 performance.
- **Centro Democrático emerges as the opposition’s main winner.** Centro Democrático won the second-highest number of votes and is set to become the second-largest bloc in the Senate. In the House of Representatives, it will also rank among the strongest opposition forces, alongside the Partido Liberal, which is emerging as the second-largest force there. In addition, the party’s candidate, Paloma Valencia, won the center-right interparty primary (“Gran Consulta por Colombia”), leaving her well positioned for the presidential race.
- **A fragmented Congress shaped by coalition-building.** The results point to a Congress in which no party holds a majority. Although Pacto Histórico increased its seat share in both chambers, it will still need to negotiate with other political forces to move its agenda forward and pass legislation.
- **A three-way presidential race.** Ahead of the May 31 presidential election, the results suggest a three-way contest led by the ruling party’s candidate Iván Cepeda, strengthened by the legislative outcome; Paloma Valencia, the winner of the center-right primary; and Abelardo de la Espriella, the far-right candidate.
- **Polarization or a battle for the center?** In the wake of the election results, Colombia’s main political forces must now define their strategy for the race to the Casa de Nariño. With Paloma Valencia confirmed as the center-right candidate, Pacto Histórico may seek to sharpen polarization by casting itself as the force of “change” against uribismo. At the same time, Centro Democrático faces a strategic choice: double down on anti-Petro sentiment or move toward the center to appeal to moderate voters, who for now lack a strong contender. Another key question is whether outsider Abelardo de la Espriella can sustain his momentum or will ultimately be eclipsed by Valencia, a more traditional figure on the right.



ELECTION RESULTS

Senate vote share by party (national)



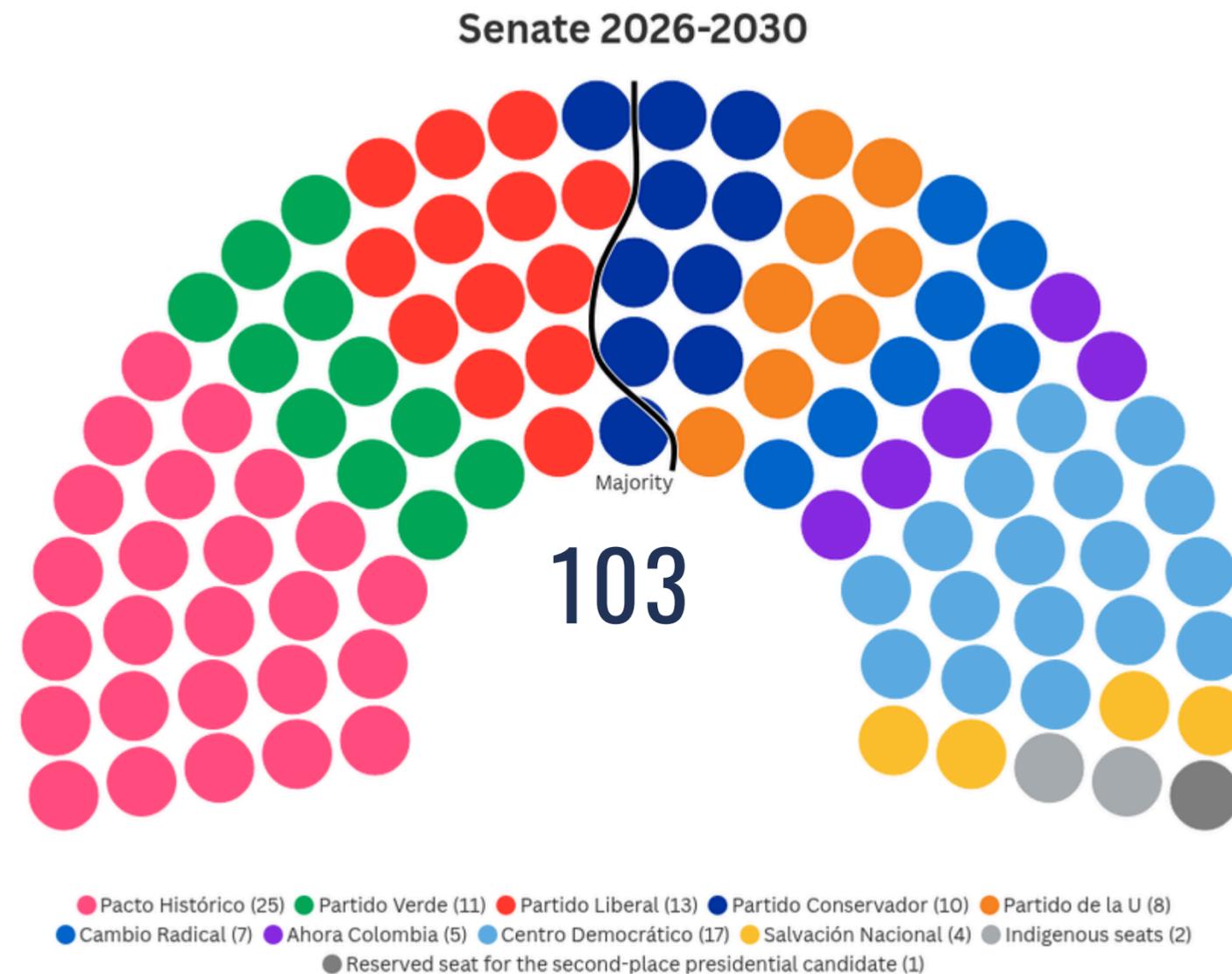
Source: National Civil Registry of Colombia (99.5% of polling stations counted)

Made with Flourish • Create a chart

- **Left consolidates while uribismo rebounds.** Pacto Histórico won 23% of the vote in the Senate, consolidating its position as the country's leading political force and strengthening Iván Cepeda's presidential bid to keep the left in power. Centro Democrático improved on its performance compared with the previous election and emerged as the second-largest force in the Senate, displacing the Partido Conservador.
- **A fragmented Congress with no clear majority.** As in the current legislature, parties will need to negotiate to move legislation forward. The next government will have to build alliances to secure working majorities and advance its priorities. In a fragmented Congress with relatively weak party discipline, legislative deals are likely to depend less on ideological alignment than on political bargaining between the incoming administration and lawmakers.
- **The "big seven" hold their ground, while women's representation declines.** The new Congress taking office on July 20 will remain dominated by seven major parties, which together will control 89% of all seats. At the same time, women's representation will fall: in the Senate, women will hold just 32 of the 102 seats.

INCOMING SENATE

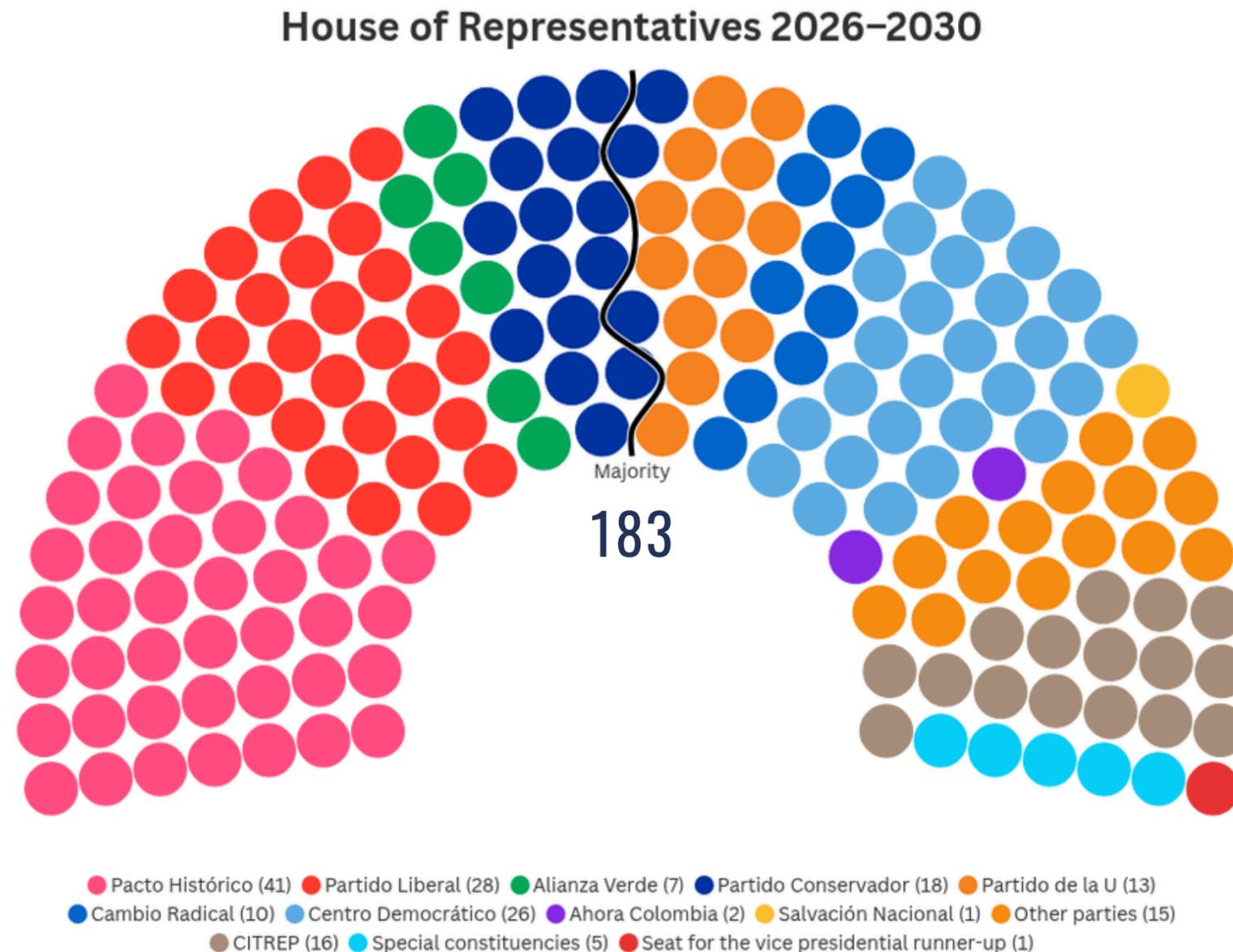
A fragmented Senate with the ruling party as the largest force. Pacto Histórico, the governing coalition, increased its representation from 20 to 25 seats, but remains well short of the 52 needed for a majority. Centro Democrático consolidated its position as the second-largest force with 17 seats and could draw support from ideologically aligned parties such as Cambio Radical and the new Salvación Nacional caucus. Meanwhile, the traditional Partido Liberal and Partido Conservador held steady with 13 and 10 seats, respectively. Their backing will remain critical to passing legislation, as will support from smaller and less cohesive blocs such as Alianza Verde, Partido de la U, and Ahora Colombia.



Source: Author's projections based on preliminary results

INCOMING HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

A plural House led by Pacto Histórico. The ruling party won in Bogotá and Valle del Cauca—two of the country’s most populous districts—allowing it to emerge as the largest bloc with 41 seats, though still far from the 92 required for a majority. The Partido Liberal retained seats thanks to its territorial strength and remains the second-largest force with 28 lawmakers. Meanwhile, Centro Democrático was one of the election’s main winners, increasing its representation from 16 to 26 seats, with victories in Antioquia, Santander, and Meta.



Source: Author’s estimates based on preliminary results from Colombia’s National Civil Registry

Made with Flourish • Create a parliament chart

PALOMA VALENCIA'S VICTORY AND THE RELAUNCH OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

On Sunday, three political coalitions also held primaries to select the presidential candidates who will compete in the May 31 election. The standout winner was Paloma Valencia, Centro Democrático's candidate, who prevailed in the broad center-right primary ("Gran Consulta por Colombia") and now emerges as a strong contender against Iván Cepeda, the leader of Pacto Histórico, and far-right outsider Abelardo de la Espriella.

MAIN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES



Iván Cepeda (Pacto Histórico - left)

A philosopher, human rights activist, and senator since 2014, Cepeda's political trajectory has been closely tied to the Peace Accords with the FARC. He is a long-standing opponent of former president Álvaro Uribe, whom he has accused of links to paramilitarism. Cepeda proposes to continue the labor, economic, and environmental reform agenda promoted by the Petro administration. He currently leads the polls with 37% of voting intention.



**Paloma Valencia
(Centro Democrático - right)**

A lawyer and senator since 2014, Valencia is one of the founding figures of Centro Democrático. She won the center-right primary with more than 3 million votes, positioning herself as a competitive candidate capable of mobilizing right-wing voters, competing with de la Espriella for that electorate, and potentially attracting centrist voters, who currently lack a strong candidate. Her running mate will be key in shaping the campaign strategy ahead of the presidential election. Among the potential options is Daniel Oviedo, who finished second in the primary and previously served as vice president under Álvaro Uribe.



**Abelardo de la Espriella
(Salvación Nacional - right)**

A lawyer widely known for his involvement in high-profile legal cases, de la Espriella launched his presidential bid in 2025. He presents himself as an outsider, with an agenda centered on security and traditional values, and a political style and rhetoric typical of the new right, in a line similar to Bukele or Milei. Polls place him in second place with around 18% of voting intention. The party backing his candidacy also secured four seats in the Senate.

INITIAL TAKEAWAYS

- **A likely runoff scenario.** The legislative results were encouraging for Pacto Histórico but show the coalition remains far from the 50% threshold needed to win the presidential election outright on May 31. The party's national Senate list received 4.4 million votes, meaning it would need roughly 6 million additional votes to secure a first-round victory. Recent polls place Iván Cepeda at around 37% of voting intention. Similarly, Paloma Valencia received around 3 million votes in the center-right primary, which—even if she retains most of that support—would still fall short of a first-round win.
- **The left consolidates its position.** Another key takeaway from the election is the consolidation of the left as a political force after four years of Gustavo Petro's presidency. With 25 seats in the Senate and the possibility of attracting support from Alianza Verde, the Partido Liberal, and the Partido Conservador, Pacto Histórico could remain the largest bloc if it stays in government—or retain veto power if it moves into the opposition.
- **A right-leaning majority, but divided.** The legislative and primary results show that right-of-center forces together command a larger electoral base. The combined representation of Centro Democrático, Cambio Radical, and Salvación Nacional accounts for roughly a quarter of the Senate's seats, while the candidates in the center-right "Gran Consulta por Colombia" together received more than 5 million votes—about one million more than Pacto Histórico's Senate list. However, the right enters the presidential race divided between the candidacies of Abelardo de la Espriella and Paloma Valencia, who are competing for the anti-Petro vote.
- **Moderate voter turnout.** With 41.2 million Colombians eligible to vote and no compulsory voting, turnout stood at around 40%. This figure is consistent with the historical pattern of legislative elections in Colombia, which typically draw lower participation than presidential races.
- **A weakened center without a clear candidate.** Uribismo's victory in the Gran Consulta over more moderate contenders, together with former Bogotá mayor Claudia López's poor performance in her own primary—where she secured only 574,000 votes—leaves the political center without a strong presidential contender. The question now is whether Paloma Valencia or Iván Cepeda will be able to attract centrist voters.
- **Presidential tickets still taking shape.** The deadline to register vice-presidential candidates is Thursday, March 12. None of the three leading contenders has announced a running mate yet, making the next few days crucial for alliance-building ahead of the May 31 election.

THANKS!



www.directoriolegislativo.org