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# **Elections in Colombia:**

## *2014 Congressional and Andean Parliament Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Latin America and the Caribbean

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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## Frequently Asked Questions

When is Election Day?.....	1
Who are citizens voting for on Election Day? .....	1
Who can vote in the country?.....	1
How many candidates are registered for the March 9 elections?.....	1
How many registered voters are there? .....	2
What is the structure of the government? .....	2
What is the gender balance within the candidate list? .....	2
What is the election management body? What are its powers? .....	2
How many polling places are set up on Election Day? .....	2
What are poll jurors and how are they selected?.....	3
What is preferential and non-preferential voting?.....	3
Where are vote counting and tabulation held?.....	3
When will official results be announced?.....	3
Who can observe during Election Day? .....	4
How many electoral offenses exist and what are they?.....	4
Resources .....	5

*Disclosure:*

*These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Colombian election authorities, to the best of our knowledge as of March 4, 2014. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## **When is Election Day?**

Colombians will cast their ballots on Sunday, March 9, 2014, for both chambers of Congress and the Andean Parliament. Polls will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Citizens abroad can cast their votes from Monday, March 3, to Sunday, March 9, 2014.

## **Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?**

Citizens will be electing all members of Congress, comprised of the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives, and representatives to the Andean Parliament – for 4-year terms.

Of the 102-member Senate, 100 members will be elected from a single national candidate list and the remaining two members are elected from a special list set aside for indigenous communities.

The Chamber of Representatives has 167 members, based on territorial circumscriptions.<sup>1</sup> The capital city of Bogotá has a district circumscription. In addition, there are five special seats, one for indigenous communities, one for Afro-Colombian communities, one for political minorities and two for Colombian citizens abroad.

The Andean Parliament is a regional body that includes members from the following Andean countries: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The central office is located in Bogotá. On March 9, Colombians will elect their five representatives to this body.

## **Who can vote in the country?**

All Colombian citizens who are 18 years of age or older and have registered their national identification document may vote in this election. Likewise, Colombian citizens residing abroad that have obtained or registered their Colombian national identification document can vote in their respective Colombian consulate abroad.

## **How many candidates are registered for the March 9 elections?**

There are a total of 2,324 candidates – 754 women and 1,570 men – running for election to the Congress and the Andean Parliament, of which 773 candidates are running for the Senate, 1,528 candidates are running for the Chamber of Representatives and 23 candidates are running for the Andean Parliament.

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<sup>1</sup> Territorial circumscriptions are specific electoral administrative units, with established territorial boundaries. For each territorial circumscription there are two representatives and an additional representative per each 365,000 inhabitants or fraction over 182,500 in excess of the first 365,000.

## **How many registered voters are there?**

There are 32,795,962 registered voters: 17,043,963 women and 15,751,999 men. The out-of-country voter registry includes 561,247 Colombians, who will be able to vote abroad in 63 countries.

The voter registry does not include citizens who have been sentenced (those awaiting trial can still vote); Colombians who have rejected their Colombian citizenship; active members of the security forces; and deceased citizens.

## **What is the structure of the government?**

Colombia is a unitary, constitutional republic. The government is divided into three branches: the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judicial branch. The President is the head of state, followed by the Vice President and the Council of Ministers. The President is elected by popular vote for a four-year term and is limited to a maximum of two terms. At the provincial level, executive power is exercised by departmental governors, municipal mayors and local administrators of smaller administrative districts.

## **What is the gender balance within the candidate list?**

According to Article 28 of Law 1475 of 2011, all parties, political movements and citizen groups who register lists of candidates to the Senate, the Chamber of Representatives and the Andean Parliament should have lists that include at least 30 percent of women candidates – where five or more seats are up for contest.

## **What is the election management body? What are its powers?**

The National Electoral Council (CNE) is responsible for the general oversight and conduct of elections. The CNE is comprised of seven members; two elected by each of the parties who obtained the most votes in the last congressional election and one is elected by the party that received the third most votes. CNE members are elected by the State Council for a term of four years.

The National Civil Registry is responsible for organizing and supervising the electoral process and updating the voter roll, which allows adequate planning, organizing, implementation and control of the electoral process and mechanisms of citizen participation.

## **How many polling places are set up on Election Day?**

The National Civil Registry will set up 95,055 polling stations in 10,433 voting centers throughout the country. In addition, a special polling center called *Puesto Censo* with 471 polling stations will be set up in Bogotá.

In 63 countries overseas, 1,667 polling stations in 214 voting centers will be set up.

## **What are poll jurors and how are they selected?**

Poll jurors are Colombian citizens between 18 and 60 who represent civil society and help administer the vote. They are electronically and randomly selected by national identification numbers by the National Civil Registry. Jurors can be citizens from public or private companies, educational institutions, political parties or political movements. According to Article 105 of the Electoral Code, serving as a poll juror is compulsory. For these elections there will be a total of 660,000 poll jurors.

## **What is preferential and non-preferential voting?**

Preferential voting is when the political party or movement chooses to enroll an open list so the voter votes for a party or political movement and for any candidate on the list. Only those candidates who receive the most votes within the party are allocated a seat (dependent on the number of seats won by the party or group), regardless of the order of names on the list.

Non-preferential voting is when the political party or movement chooses to enroll a closed list so the voter only votes for a party or political movement. Allocated seats are dependent on the number of seats won by the party and the order of names on the list.

## **Where are vote counting and tabulation held?**

Vote counting and tabulation take place in each polling station by poll jurors.

There are three systems of information dissemination for the election results, which will be conducted simultaneously. The first is the quick count conducted by the poll jurors at the closing of the polls. The poll jurors deliver preliminary results to the media and the general public. The quick count does not have legal value.

The second system is counting by the Scrutinizing Commissions, made up of judges, public notaries and registrars. These commissions must be present at the polls by 3:30 p.m. on Election Day and begin their work as soon as they receive electoral tally sheets at the polling station.

The third information system is the digitization of E-14 forms. These forms are signed by poll jurors and published on the registry website so all candidates, members of campaign teams and citizens can be immediately informed during the counting process and track the results at each polling station.

## **When will official results be announced?**

According to the provisions of the Electoral Code, official results are announced after the Scrutinizing Commissions and the National Electoral Council complete the vote counting process.

## **Who can observe during Election Day?**

Political parties and movements may designate voting witnesses to monitor the electoral process on their behalf. There will also be election observers who represent electoral organizations from other countries or independent national organizations.

## **How many electoral offenses exist and what are they?**

According to Law 559 of 2008 in the Colombian Penal Code, there are 11 electoral offenses, which criminalize behaviors that threaten the free exercise of democratic participation. The 11 offenses are:

- Disturbance of the democratic contest
- Voter constraintment
- Voter fraud
- National identification fraud
- Voter corruption
- Fraudulent voting
- Favoring fraudulent voting
- Delays in the service of documents related with election results
- Alteration of election results
- Concealment
- Retention and unlawful possession of national identification documents
- Denial of registration

## Resources

- Constitution of Colombia ([Spanish](#))
- Electoral Code ([Spanish](#))
- National Electoral Council, CNE ([Spanish](#))
- National Civil Registry ([Spanish](#))
- ABC for Journalists ([Spanish](#))