



POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN COLOMBIA

May 27/ June 17, 2018

*Misión de Observación
Electoral MOE*

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN COLOMBIA

- Colombia has a presidential system in which citizens elect their President and Vice President directly in a single constituency.
- Candidates are chosen through the endorsement of one or more political parties or independent citizen movements.
- The President and Vice president are chosen by an absolute majority of the votes cast.
 - If none of the presidential candidates obtain more than 51% of the votes in the first round of elections, then a second round is called between the two frontrunners.
 - The candidates that come at the second place during the elections - whether in the first or second round - will be granted the right to have presence in the House of Representatives and the Senate.
 - A distinct characteristic of the Colombian electoral system is that if the absolute majority of the votes cast in the first round of presidential elections are blank, then new elections has to be called and new candidates have to presented. However, this is not the case for the second round of elections where the blank vote only has a symbolic significance.
 - Colombian law does not allow Presidential re-election. Presidents are chosen for a period of 4 years after which they cannot be re-elected again (neither in consecutive or non-consecutive elections).



THE 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN COLOMBIA

The presidential campaign started the 27th of February with the first round of the election being held the 27th of May and the second round the 17th of June, 2018.

Given that these were the first presidential elections after the signing of the Peace Agreement and that they took place in an environment of heightened political polarization, the public debate became increasingly heated and intense. For instance, before the first round of the presidential election was held, the candidates engaged in a total of 37 programmatic, regional and sectoral debates. This also resulted in a very plural and intense exchange of ideas in the context of a disputed election where there were a high number of candidates and the results of the contest were not certain from the start. Unfortunately, between the first and second round of the presidential elections, no debates were held between the two frontrunners which resulted in the quality of the information available and contrasted regarding the elections for the citizenry being diminished during that period.¹

Another distinct characteristic of the presidential electoral process of 2018 in Colombia compared to others in recent history, was the presence of effectively very different, opposing and competing views in contest between the candidatures. Whereas in the past the options in contention reflected diverse opinions on a set of issues while still maintaining basic consensus on strategic matters, in this presidential race the competing candidates in fact presented substantial differences in their presented worldviews. For instance, this has been the first time in Colombian history that a self-proclaimed left-wing candidate participated in a second round of a Presidential election since the proclamation of the 1991 Constitution and (arguably) in the history of the country. However, similar to what happened during the congressional election campaign, the heightened polarization led to an increase on the intolerance expressed on social media which also translated to real-life acts of violence and the spread of fake news which undermined the quality of the presidential electoral process.²

However, the overall balance of the congressional and presidential campaign and election was positive given that there were no violent acts that directly affected the integrity of the electoral process which was not the case for the past elections in the history of Colombia. Nonetheless, although MOE agrees that these have been the most peaceful elections recorded in the country, it notes with concern that there has been a reactivation of political violence against social and communal leaders – particularly after the second round of the presidential election. Uncertainties regarding the future of the implementation of the Peace Agreement and the accommodation of territorial power as a result of the demobilization of the FARC and the changing dynamics of the presence of armed groups has led to an upsurge of violence in the regions of Colombia. For instance, lethal aggressions against political, social and communal leaders increased significantly since January of this year having reached its peak during the month of June, 2018 with 19 assassinations having been recorded in that period. Moreover, other 10 non-lethal violent acts against congressional and presidential candidates were also recorded during this first half of the year.

¹ More information available at: <https://moe.org.co/la-ausencia-de-debates-ha-traducido-en-una-perdida-del-derecho-ciudadano-a-tener-informacion-comparada-y-contrastada-moe/>

² More information available at: <https://moe.org.co/mas-de-44-millones-de-conversaciones-sobre-proceso-electoral-se-generaron-en-redes/>



Thus, although the violence directly related to the armed conflict with the Colombian Government and the FARC decreased, new types and dynamics emerged. Also during this trimester, some issues of contention that used to be minor in the public conversation regarding the elections became prominent during this second trimester of

2018. In this sense, the relative decrease of security concerns resulted in the focus to be put on the discussion about electoral crimes and irregularities related to fraud and corruption which became more salient. For example, the controversy generated by the errors and/or manipulation of vote count forms (E-14) and the differences between the pre-count and the definitive outcome sparked public debate and awareness about issues related to the electoral process that had not been as extensively and intensely addressed before by the authorities, the media and the citizenry. Also, the parliamentary review and approval of the initiative to carry out an 'Anti-Corruption Consultation' to implement decisive measures to strengthen the efforts to fight crimes against public administration during this quarter also boosted and fed into the public discussion of the issue throughout the presidential electoral process.³

In addition, compared to past elections, citizen engagement and participation increased during the presidential elections held on the quarter covered by this report. For example, these were the elections with the second highest voter turnout since the proclamation of the 1991 Constitution. A total of 53,38% and 53.04% of the electorate participated in the first and second round of the presidential election of 2018 which are characteristically high percentages for Colombian historical standards.⁴

In the first round of the presidential election, the 5 main Presidential and Vice-presidential candidacies received the following number and percentage of votes: (1) Iván Duque and Marta Lucía Ramírez (Centro Democrático) – 39,1% of the votes [7.569.693 votes]; (2) Gustavo Petro and Ángela María Robledo (Colombia Humana) – 25,1% of the votes [4.851.254 votes]; (3) Sergio Fajardo and Claudia López (Coalición Colombia) – 23,7% of the votes [4.589.696 votes]; (4) Germán Vargas Lleras and Juan Carlos Pinzón (Cambio Radical) – 7,3% of the votes [1.407.840 votes]; (5) Humberto de la Calle and Clara López (Partido Liberal) – 2,06% of the votes [399.180 votes]. The two frontrunners participated in the second round of the presidential election where the candidates of the Centro Democrático party won with 10.373.080 votes [51,0% of the votes] and the candidature of Colombia Humana was left in the second place with 8.034.189 votes [41,08% of the votes]. President-elect Iván Duque and Vice-President elect Marta Lucía Ramírez will inaugurate their period of government next August 7th, 2018.

For more information on the results go to:

<https://moe.org.co/publicacion/presentacion-moe-resultados-electorales-de-las-elecciones-2018/>

³ The 'Anti-Corruption Consultation' was approved by the Senate on the 5th of July. More information available at:

<http://www.portafolio.co/economia/aprobada-en-el-senado-la-consulta-anticorrupcion-517769>

⁴ More information available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/moecolombia/photos/a.895576700501948.1073741827.895576620501956/1866482466744695/?type=3&theater>