

COLOMBIA

Date of Elections: 9 March 1986

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the seats in Parliament on the normal expiry of the members' term of office.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Colombia, the Congress, consists of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

The Senate is composed of two Senators for each of the country's 22 departments and one more for each 200,000 inhabitants or for each fraction of more than 100,000 inhabitants that the department has above the first 200,000.

The House of Representatives is composed of two Representatives for each department and one more for each 100,000 inhabitants or for each fraction of more than 50,000 inhabitants that the department has above the first 100,000.

The March 1982 elections were for 114 Senators and 199 Representatives, all elected for 4 years.

Electoral System

All Colombian citizens at least 18 years of age who are registered as electors in their municipality and have not been deprived of their civil or political rights have the right to vote. Members of the armed forces on active duty and of the police force are debarred from participating in the poll. Voting is not compulsory.

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All electors who are at least 25 years of age and have never been condemned for a non-political offence involving corporal punishment are eligible for the House of Representatives.

To run for the Senate, a candidate must, in addition to the last condition mentioned above, be at least 35 years of age, Colombian by birth and have held certain high offices (President or Vice-President of the Republic, member of Congress, Cabinet Minister, head of a diplomatic mission, Governor of a department, judge of a higher court, Councillor of State, Attorney General of the nation, Comptroller General of the Republic, university professor for at least five years) or have undertaken a liberal profession with a university degree.

Representatives and Senators are elected in each constituency on the basis of a closed-list proportional representation system. A total of 24 constituencies consist of a single department; other less-densely populated regions are grouped together to form four more constituencies.

An alternate is elected alongside each Representative or Senator to replace either of the latter in the event of their resignation or death between general elections.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

Primary contenders in the congressional races of 1986 were, once again, the Liberal and Conservative parties, which had alternated in power for nearly 30 years. An offshoot group of the Liberals, called New Liberalism, also aroused high expectations.

Although there was sporadic violence during the campaign, polling day was generally calm and, as customary in Colombia, marked by a relatively low voter turnout. Final results left the Liberals, led by Mr. Virgilio Barco Vargas, ahead in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, with the Conservatives, headed by outgoing President of the Republic Belisario Betancur Cuartas, in second place. With New Liberalism gaining a disappointing 8% of the popular vote, the outcome appeared to reinforce the bipartism prevalent in the country's politics.

The congressional polling was viewed as a significant barometer of the 25 May 1986 presidential election, which was won in a convincing fashion by Mr. Barco Vargas over his Conservative rival, Mr. Alvarado Gomez Hurtado. Mr Vargas was sworn in on 7 August and named his Cabinet the same day.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the Congress

Voters 30% (approx.)

Political Group	Votes-obtained	%	Number of Seats in the House of Representatives	Number of Seats in the Senate
Liberal Party.	3,200,000	48.2	100	60
Conservative Party.	2,400,000	37	82	45
New Liberalism	400,000	8	7	8
Patriotic Union	20,000	14	10	1