

Colombia

1. **Year Achieved Independence:** 1819 from Spain
2. **Political Institutions:** Colombia is a presidential system with a bicameral legislature. It has a long history of holding elections since 1821, but few of them could be considered free and fair by modern standards. Since 1991, Colombia has held a series of mostly free and fair elections, though political violence remains a major problem. Colombian history, prior to the 1990s, is filled with civil war, electoral fraud, election boycotts, suppression of opposition parties, and collusion among parties. On the last problem, between 1957 and 1991, the two major political parties, Liberals and Conservatives, agreed to share national ministries and keep out other parties. The two parties formed what was called the National Front, and this front colluded to make elections largely irrelevant in the determination of governing power. Universal male suffrage was instituted in 1853, though unevenly and inconsistently implemented thereafter. By the mid-20th Century, there was general adherence to the principles of universal suffrage. In 1957, women gained the right to vote. In 1975 the voting age became 18. Voting is not compulsory.

The 1991 constitution, and then a series of electoral reforms in 2003, set the current electoral system. The lower house (House of Representatives) is elected from MMCs of various sizes. Constituencies are of two types, territorial and special. Special constituencies grant representation to Colombians living abroad, blacks, natives, and other political minorities. Candidates are chosen on closed lists, and parties can list either as blocks or allow voters to choose candidates within the party. For constituencies with more than two seats, the d'Hondt formula is used. For two-seat constituencies, the Hare quota is used. The president is elected by absolute majority, with a runoff between the top two vote-getters if necessary. The senate is elected from a single national constituency (with two seats reserved for minorities).

3. **Lower Chamber Electoral System:**

- 1886-1910: Limited suffrage in practice; representatives elected by plurality rule in SMCs.
- 1910-1932: Limited suffrage in practice; majority rule, with runoff if necessary, with MMCs. Limited multiple vote.
- 1932-1951: MMCs with the following: party that gained majority of the votes got two-thirds of the seats in a constituency. The second place party gained the remaining seats.
- 1951-53: MMCs with the following: party that gained a majority of the votes got a majority of the seats in a constituency. The remaining seats were allocated by the Hare formula.
- 1958-1974: Liberal and Conservative parties would split the seats regardless of vote outcomes.
- 1991- Candidates are chosen on closed lists, and parties can list either as blocks or allow voters to choose candidates within the party. For constituencies with more than two seats, the d'Hondt formula is used (with a legal threshold of 50% of the quotient given by dividing the number of seats by the number of valid votes). For two-seat constituencies, the Hare quota is used (with a legal threshold of 30% of the quotient given by dividing the number of seats by the number of valid votes).

4. **Electoral History:** Elections to the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia were held on the following dates.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Type of Election</i>	<i>Polity Score*</i>	<i>CLEA Data Release</i>
1947	March 16		5	
1949	June 05		-5	
1958	March 16		7	
1960	March 20		7	
1962	March 18		7	
1964	March 15		7	
1966	March 20		7	
1968	March 17		7	
1970	April 19		7	
1974	April 19		8	
1978	February 26		8	
1982	March 14		8	
1986	March 09		8	
1990	March 11		8	
1991	October 27		9	
1994	March 13		9	
1998	March 08		7	√
2002	March 10		7	√
2006	March 12		7	√

Note: The Polity score measures a level of democracy on a 21-scale that ranges from -10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic). It also includes the standardized authority codes for the following cases: -66 (foreign interruption), -77 (interregnum/anarchy), -88 (transition). Data come from the Polity IV project at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>

5. Sources on Electoral History:

Nohlen, Deiter, et. al. 2001. "Elections and Electoral Systems in the Americas." In Dieter Nohlen et. al., eds. *Elections in the Americas: A Data Handbook*. Vol. I. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

6. Sources of Electoral Data:

1988-2006: Data collected by Marcelo Leiras and adjusted by CLEA.