

Colombia Program Summary

The International Republican Institute (IRI) has worked in Colombia to strengthen political parties and democratic processes since January 2006. IRI's current program has four principal components: fostering issue-based and representative political parties; building the capacities of key constituent groups, such as Afro-Colombians, to influence politics and governance; strengthening the national congress's ability to more effectively represent constituents, and; promoting good governance at municipal and district levels.

Political Party Strengthening

In Colombia, a history of personality politics and a perceived lack of public accountability have contributed to widespread disenchantment with the political party system. To address these negative perceptions, IRI is helping political parties differentiate themselves along substantive lines, develop strong policy agendas, and dedicate themselves to responding to national problems. IRI accomplishes this through direct trainings for party members, as well as through support of party think tanks which draft issue-based policy proposals for legislators, candidates and party officials.

Strengthening the National Congress

IRI's work with Colombia's national congress promotes an emphasis on constituent services. With IRI support, Colombian senators and deputies are strengthening their capacity to develop legislative reforms that deliver and respond to citizens' needs. IRI's assistance also focuses on training top congressional staff in the areas of research, organization, and constituent relations. Since 2007, IRI has helped national legislators study the potential of open, recorded voting in congress, an issue which is drawing greater interest and support as the demand for accountability and anti-corruption measures in Colombia builds.

Strengthening Constituent Groups

Afro-Colombians comprise perhaps as much one-quarter of the country's 45 million people, yet they remain among the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in society. Afro-Colombians are largely poor, lack access to education and health care, and are underrepresented in the nation's socio-economic, cultural and political life.

To help Afro-Colombians gain a stronger voice in their government, IRI supports the Afro-Colombian Caucus in the National Congress. The caucus enables the legislators to present a unified voice for Afro-Colombian interests on the national stage to better represent this important constituency. Through technical trainings, town hall meetings, national-level programs, international exchanges and the support of the Afro-Colombian Caucus [website](#), IRI helps the caucus strengthen its organizational and strategic capacity, build consensus within its bloc, and connect with its constituents. Finally, IRI provides research and best-practices investigations which have allowed the caucus to advance important legislative initiatives concerning racial discrimination, quota laws, educational opportunity and budgetary assistance.

Democratic Governance

IRI has a multifaceted good governance program that spans several regions of the country. Working primarily at the municipal level, IRI advances the concepts of administrative organization, problem-solving policy development, governmental transparency, efficient service delivery and building closer connections with constituents. In addition, IRI promotes greater civic interest and involvement in municipal and state issues.