

IRI Colombia Index

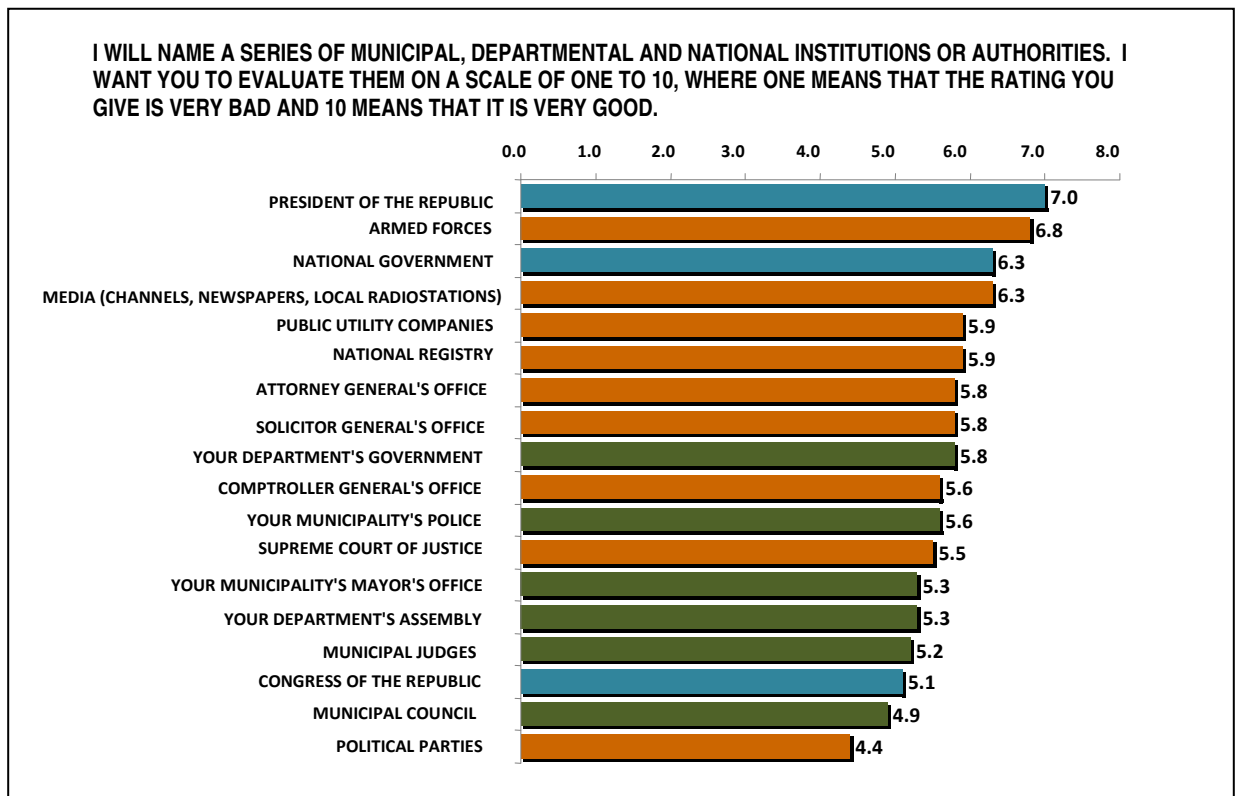
Background

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.

Problems and Solutions of Political Parties

Poll results reveal that although Colombia's political parties are viewed as very important to democracy, they receive the worst rating among the country's public institutions and authorities. Respondents identified a lack of engagement with citizens, lack of transparency, corruption and the lack of ideology as some of the major problems currently faced by political parties.

- First, when asked about how important political parties are to democracy, 63 percent of those polled stated they believed they were very important and important. On the other hand, 33 percent of respondents considered parties to be not important for democracy. The degree of importance increased for the residents of small municipalities.



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- When respondents were asked about the three biggest problems political parties currently face, Colombians answered in order of importance as seen in the chart below:

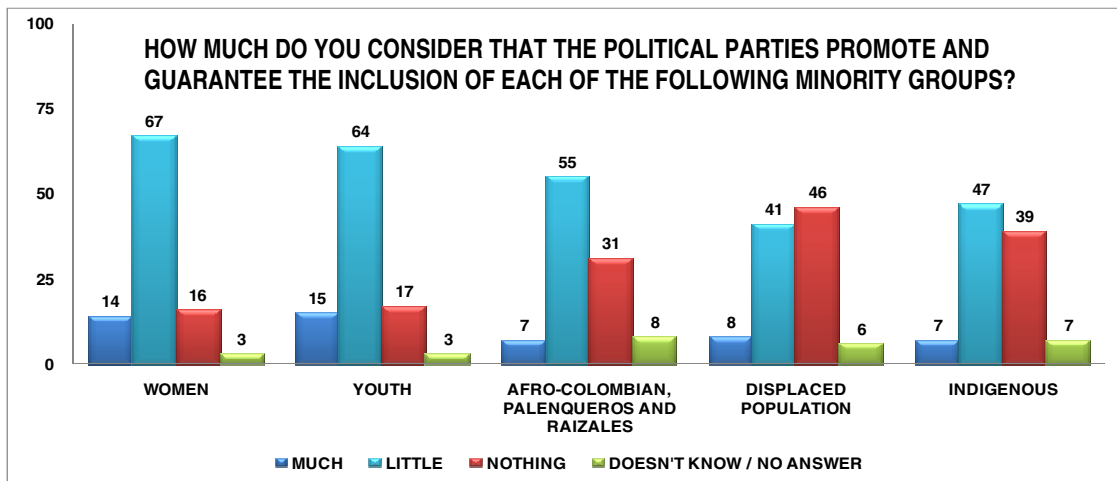
LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE	PROBLEMS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES
First	Lack of interest / They do not pay attention to the priorities of the population
	Lack of communication with the community
Second	They do not generate opportunities for citizen participation
	Lack of transparency / Corruption
	Promote a political system based on patronage
	They do not propose solutions to the country's problems
Third	Lack clear ideology
	They promise and do not fulfill
	They are not inclusive

- Given the three sets of issues raised by Colombians, the survey results suggest that enhancing the credibility of political parties as vehicles for democratic representation, must include the following three solutions: encouraging greater membership, combating corruption and fulfilling their promises.
- Given the low rating of political organizations and most relevant issues at the local level, the survey results suggest that political parties should focus primarily on issues of employment, poverty, corruption and public housing with the aim of improving their public images. Secondly, according to respondents, the parties should focus on issues of mobility, roads and transportation infrastructure, recreational spaces, public safety, economic development and other such public works.

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Minority Groups and Political Parties

One of the major problems identified with Colombia's political parties is the lack of engagement with citizens. As evidenced by the following chart, respondents clearly believe that parties have failed to promote and guarantee the inclusion of women, youth, minorities and internally displaced persons, which combined comprise a very large sector of the population.



- 67 percent of respondents believe that the parties do little to include women in their decisions. Regarding youth, Afro-Colombian groups, palenqueros*, raizales*, (*other Afro-descendent populations) and indigenous people, the figures rise to 64 percent, 55 percent and 47 percent respectively. In addition, 45 percent of Colombians believe that parties do nothing to promote the inclusion of displaced populations. The inclusion of minority groups is a issue that clearly needs attention from political parties.
- Additionally, 66 percent of respondents agreed that there is racial discrimination in political parties.

Corruption

Similar to citizen engagement, Colombians continue to view corruption and a lack of transparency as problems that lower the legitimacy of political parties as vehicles of democratic representation. A clear majority of Colombians view parties as influenced by corruption and believe that specific measures should be taken to improve the institutional transparency of parties.

- Seven percent of Colombians received a gift from politicians in exchange for their vote. Of that, 34 percent received money, 19 percent received food, 17 percent received jobs and another 13 percent received construction materials.

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- Twenty-two percent of Colombians stated that politicians have promised them something in exchange for their vote. Of this 22 percent, 55.9 percent were promised jobs, 15.8 percent were promised housing/lots, and 12.6 percent were promised scholarships for their son or daughter to attend college or the university.
- When those polled were asked about how much they agreed or disagreed with the question Have political parties been influenced by corruption? Colombians responded affirmatively with an average of 7.3 on a scale of one to 10.
- To counter corruption in political parties, 51 percent of respondents believed that sanctions should be leveled on political parties who perpetrate acts of corruption, 45 percent say political parties should be required to declare and publish their finances, and 38.5 percent believe that a culture of rule of law and transparency should be promoted among the country's youth.

Relation between Issues and Political Parties

When asked to associate various positive and negative attributes with political parties, Colombians were able to easily identify a political party or parties that in his/her opinion most associated with each particular attribute. At the same time, Colombians were able to identify parties, with which no specific issues could be associated. The results demonstrate a clear need for a deepening and broadening of platform development among all of Colombia's political parties.

- When making an association between issues and various Colombian political parties, the respondents believe that the political organizations with a greater differentiation from others are the Liberal Party, the U Party, the Polo Democratico and Movimiento MIRA. Colombians recognize a separate and differentiated work of these parties from others in the country.
- On the other hand, Colombians do not easily recognize clear identities of the Conservative Party, Convergencia Ciudadana, Colombia Democrática, Independent Social Alliance, Green Party and Radical Change.
- Respondents associated the Liberal Party with the following attributes: represents people like you, fights against poverty, keeps promises and worries about economic growth and employment.
- Respondents associate the U Party with the following attributes: enforces the law, has concern about security and promotes justice and peace.

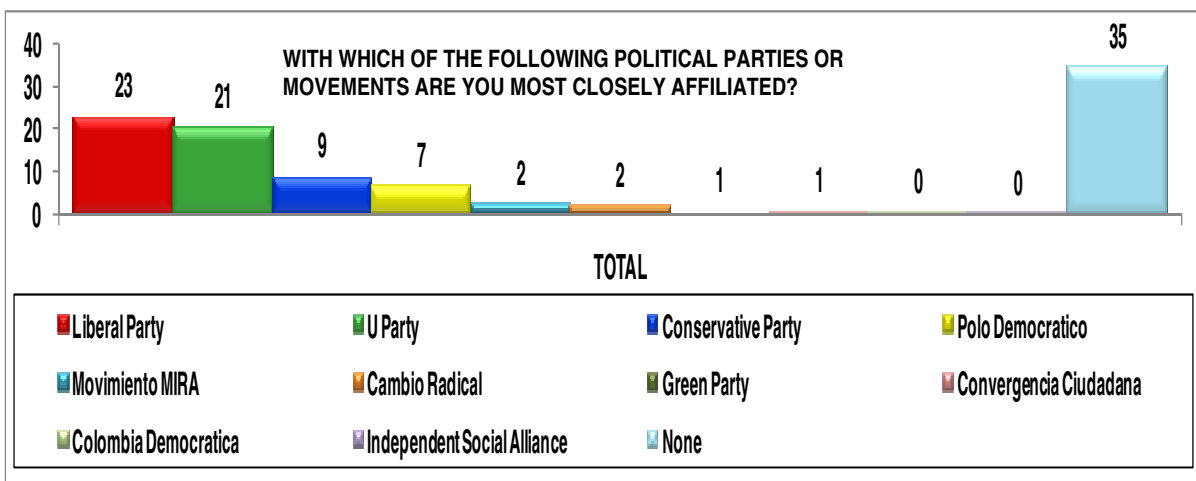
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- According to respondents, they associate the Alternative Democratic Pole party with the attribute of promoting human rights. Regarding the Movimiento MIRA, Colombians believe the party is most associated with the attribute of favoring the inclusion of minority groups.
- According to respondents, they relate the Conservative Party, Convergencia Ciudadana, Colombia Radical with the following attributes: links with illegal armed groups and corruption.
- To some degree, respondents relate the Green Party and the Independent Social Alliance with links to illegal armed groups and corruption. However, the levels of differentiation of these parties are low, when compared with others. Respondents listed no other attributes for these parties.

Political Participation

Despite the fact that Colombians are able to associate attributes/issues to specific parties and despite the fact that a majority of them believe parties to be important to Colombian democracy, a large percentage of Colombians choose to not associate with any political party, choosing instead to vote by an overwhelming margin in favor of candidates regardless of political affiliation.



- The political map of Colombians shows that 35 percent do not belong to any political party, 23.1 percent sympathize with the Liberal Party, 20.5 percent comprise the U Party, nine percent sympathize with the Conservative Party, 6.5 percent consider themselves part of the Polo Democratico and the remainder associate themselves with other political parties.
- When asked about reasons for not voting in 2006, 31.2 percent of respondents did not vote for reasons of apathy (not interested in politics, do not believe in politicians).

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- When asked about reasons for voting in 2010, 32.6 percent of respondents agreed that the most important motivation to vote in the 2010 elections is that they want a change.
- When asked about the party affiliation of candidates, 73 percent of respondents believe that people vote for candidates regardless of political party.
- Sixty percent of respondents believe that internal primaries are important to strengthening political parties.

Other

- Seventy-three percent of respondents consider corruption as the most important political issue currently on the national agenda; however, 63 percent believe it is the economic crisis, and 48.4 percent believe the most important problem is that of human rights.

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