

Colombia 2010: análisis de las elecciones presidenciales y legislativas

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Resumen

Los resultados de las elecciones de Congreso y presidente del 2010 en Colombia muestran la consolidación del multipartidismo en el cual las coaliciones postelectorales se han convertido en una constante desde el colapso del sistema bipartidista a finales de los años noventa. El propósito del artículo es discutir los resultados electorales, con especial atención a la forma en que la propuesta del referendo para reelegir a Álvaro Uribe Vélez impactó la dinámica electoral. Primero, analiza el contexto de las elecciones, posteriormente los resultados electorales y finalmente cómo este nuevo panorama consolida un sistema multipartidista en el nivel nacional después de la reforma del 2003.

Palabras clave

elecciones • sistema de partidos • Álvaro Uribe Vélez • Juan Manuel Santos • Antanas Mockus • Colombia

Colombia 2010: An Analysis of the Legislative and Presidential Elections

Abstract

The 2010 Colombian elections clearly moved the country toward a more multiparty system, characterized by the practice of post-electoral coalitions. These tendencies had been emerging since the collapse of the two-party system in the 1990s. The purpose of this article is to discuss the 2010 electoral results, with particular attention to the manner in which the referendum proposal to re-elect President Alvaro Uribe Vélez impacted the elections. We discuss the context of the elections, the electoral returns for the congressional and presidential elections, and how the results validate the hypothesis of party system transformation after the 2003 Reform.

Keywords

elections • party system • Álvaro Uribe Vélez • Juan Manuel Santos • Antanas Mockus • Colombia

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INTRODUCTION

Until very recently, Colombia was an excellent example of an electoral system that revolved around candidate reputation and formation of post-electoral coalitions (Carey and Shugart 1995; Pachón and Shugart 2010). However, despite the extreme political party fragmentation and especially after the implementation of the 1991 Constitution, newly elected congressmen continued to form traditional party alliances that allowed presidents to form majorities and to govern. Therefore, Colombia's legislative arena held the oldest party system in the region that was based upon an electoral system with arguably the highest degree of intraparty competition in the world.

The political reform legislation passed in 2003 (Hoskin and García 2006) produced significant modifications in the political party system, reducing the degree of fragmentation and promoting pre-electoral coalitions between candidates. These two factors were previously not characteristic of the electoral system. By the 2002 elections, before the political reform, the National Electoral Council extended legal recognition to 78 political parties, 45 of which had representation in the legislature. In 2006 the number of parties competing was significantly reduced to 16, as a result of the reform and the higher electoral threshold.¹ In 2010, only ten parties were represented in the

1 The following parties were recognized by the National Electoral Council in 2006: Partido Liberal, Partido Conservador, Partido Apertura Liberal, Movimiento Alas Equipo Colombia, Partido Convergencia Ciudadana, Partido Colombia Democrática, Movimiento Colombia Viva, Partido Social de Unidad Nacional, Partido Cambio Radical, Partido Opción Centro, Movimiento Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia "Aico", Movimiento Alianza Social Indígena, Movimiento "Mira", Partido Polo Democrático Alternativo, Movimiento Político "Afrounincca", Alianza Social Afrocolombiana "Asa". Resolution from the Consejo Nacional Electoral, No. 1057, July 13 2006. http://www.elabedul.net/Documentos/Temas/Elecciones/Partidos_politicos_2006.pdf

Senate and eleven in the House of Representatives.² This provides evidence to the clear emergence of a nation-encompassing multiparty system.

However, despite the structural transformations in the party system, the logic associated with legislative elections did not apply to presidential elections (nor to gubernatorial or mayor elections), largely because of the possibility for independent candidates to run. As a result, there were few incentives to the coalition formation, at least during the first round of balloting.³ Thus the large number of candidates in the first round of the 2010 Colombian presidential election resulted in some unexpected post-electoral coalitions, a situation that resembled Brazil's presidential elections before the unification of the electoral calendar in 1994. The results suggest that despite the fragmentation seen in presidential elections, the electoral forces that supported President Alvaro Uribe for two presidential terms were able to finally solve the absence of Uribe as a candidate and maximize their results. On the other hand, independent forces played a decisive role in the race, but failed to create an electoral strategy that would amass a significant number of votes in the second round of balloting.

In order to discuss relevant aspects of the 2010 legislative and presidential elections, the article is divided into four parts. The next section focuses upon the context of the legislative and presidential elections, with a brief discussion of the presidential campaign and President Uribe's key role therein. The subsequent part analyzes the results for the two rounds of presidential voting. The fourth section analyzes the legislative elections, and the conclusion discusses the nationalization of parties, and how these elections corresponded to the re-organization of the party system as a result of the 2003 electoral reform.

1. CONTEXT OF THE 2010 ELECTIONS

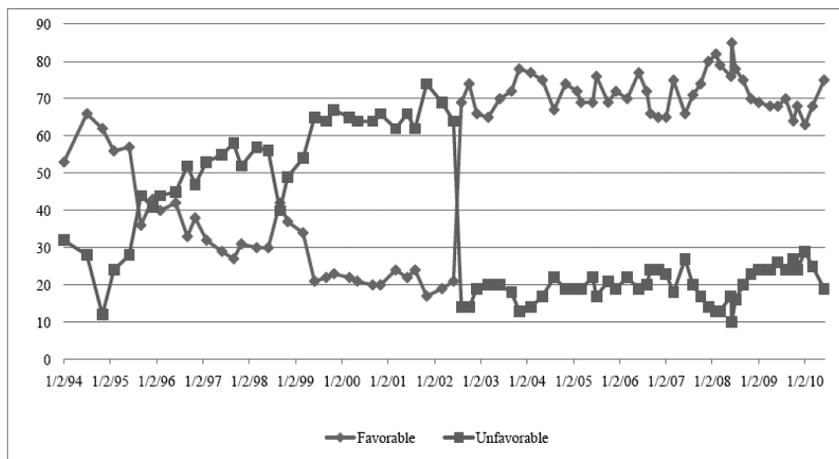
Never before in the history of public opinion polling in Colombia, had a president attained such high levels of popular support as President Uribe (See

2 The parties with current legal recognition are: Partido Liberal, Partido Conservador, Partido Social de Unidad Nacional, Partido Cambio Radical, Partido de Integración Nacional, Partido Verde, Movimiento Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia "Aico", Movimiento Alianza Social Indígena, Movimiento "Mira", Partido Polo Democrático Alternativo, Movimiento Afrovides - La Esperanza de un Pueblo, Movimiento de Inclusión y Oportunidad "Mio". Resolution from the Consejo Nacional Electoral No. 1959, August 26, 2010. http://www.registraduria.gov.co/Informacion/part_movi_poli.htm

3 Additionally, the uncertainty generated by the prolonged wait for the Constitutional Court's decision about the constitutionality of a referendum that would have permitted President Uribe to seek a third term prohibited a rapid definition of the candidate field further inhibited the political elite coordination.

Figure 1). He was the first to be elected in the first round of balloting, with 53.05% of the popular vote, and the first in breaking the monopoly of the Conservative and Liberal parties' hold on that office. Despite having developed a political career closely associated with the Liberal Party, his electoral strategy for the 2002 election was to distance himself from the traditional political machines. Shortly after assuming office, he threatened Congress by calling for a constitutional referendum in 2003 that did not pass (fell short by 1% of the required number of votes) which included most of his policy proposals and other provisions that would have curtailed congressional powers. As a result of his style and early results confronting illegal groups with his security policy – *Seguridad Democrática* - , President Uribe's popularity in the polls mounted. He also consolidated a strong congressional coalition that approved most of his policy initiatives, and later promoted a constitutional reform that enabled him to seek a second term. He was reelected in 2006 with 62.35% of the vote.

Figure 1. Favorability of Presidents Samper, Pastrana and Uribe, 1994-2010



Source: Gallup Colombia Polls, Presidential terms: 1994-1998 Ernesto Samper, 1998-2000: Andrés Pastrana, 2002-2006 Alvaro Uribe. 2006-2010: Alvaro Uribe.

During Uribe's second term the legislative agenda moved slowly and major scandals unfolded as more than 80 congressmen and several government associates were linked to illegal paramilitary groups (Botero 2007; Pachón

2009; Congreso Visible 2009). Politics became increasingly polarized as a result of the President's confrontational style, his persistent clashes with the opposition and the Supreme Court due to the ongoing investigations of members of his government, and his vacillating relationship with President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela.

Nonetheless, the government's persistent and rather successful armed clashes with the FARC immunized President Uribe from harsh opposition criticism, generally increasing his popularity in the polls. Numerous military victories occurred during his second term. In a highly controversial bombing raid on a guerrilla stronghold in Ecuador in March, 2007, Raul Reyes, a member of FARC's Secretariat, was killed. Another renowned FARC leader, Iván Ríos, was assassinated by his own men after the Colombian military encircled the group and severed its supply lines.

In a national poll in early June 2008, 66% of Colombians stated that they favored a third term for President Uribe. Further increasing the wave of FARC defeats, in mid-June an 'Operation Jaque' liberated 15 kidnapped persons, Ingrid Betancourt and three North American contractors among them, in a highly successful intelligence operation that did not result in a single death. With these victories over the FARC, the committee promoting the reelection referendum attained its greatest momentum. Toward the end of August, this committee presented the National Electoral Council with five million signatures, of which three million were certified as valid, enabling the beginning of a required legislative process in September. Nonetheless, doubts about possible campaign finance violations for the referendum prevented the Electoral Council from lending its approval of the process. After lengthy debates about the merits of the project and the threats it entailed to the viability of Colombian democracy, Congress finally approved the referendum in March 2009.⁴ President Uribe's silence about whether he would stand for reelection produced changes in the governing coalition: a massive wave of congressmen belonging to the governing coalition supported Uribe's reelection, while parties like *Cambio Radical* declared their opposition to the referendum and left the coalition (Congreso Visible, 2009).

As a result, Radical Change (*Cambio Radical*) candidate Germán Vargas Lleras launched his campaign in June 2009. Sergio Fajardo, former mayor of Medellín, devoted all of 2009 collecting the necessary signatures to run as an independent candidate, and parties in the opposition decided to hold

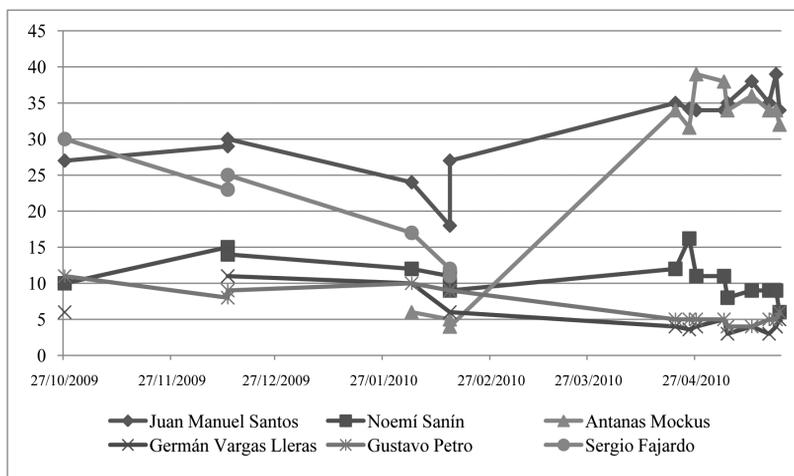
4 "Cronología de un referendo reeleccionista", in Votebien.com, published in February 26, 2010: http://www.terra.com.co/elecciones_2010/votebien/html/vbn537-vida-pasion-y-muerte-de-un-referendo-reeleccionista.htm [Last accessed: April 1st, 2010].

primaries to select their candidates. The Democratic Pole (*Polo Democrático*) and the Liberal Party were the first to nominate candidates in October 2009. Other independent candidates (three former Bogotá mayors Enrique Peñalosa, Luis Eduardo Garzón and Antanas Mockus), decided to join forces under the Green Party's endorsement. Their primary was also set on the date of congressional elections. This strategy provided the candidates with more visibility and better chances for legislative success.

On the governing coalition side, the Conservative Party, which had scheduled its primary (*consulta*) on the same date as the Democratic Pole and the Liberal Party, decided to postpone it to include Noemí Sanín's candidacy in order to compete against Andrés Felipe Arias, President Uribe's former Agriculture Minister. While other parties needed to move fast in order to choose their own candidates or fulfill the necessary legal requirements, Juan Manuel Santo's U Party (*Partido Social de Unidad Nacional*) patiently waited for events to unfold. Even before the March legislative elections and the defeat of the referendum, Juan Manuel Santos' popularity in the polls began to rise, despite the fact that he had not formally declared his candidacy.

The process of constitutional revision began in January 2010, only five months before the first round of presidential elections, and on February 26th the Constitutional Court declared the referendum unconstitutional because of procedural irregularities and substantial legal contradictions with the Constitution. The 2010 elections were characterized by a high level of uncertainty, mainly due to the referendum proposal and President Uribe's muteness about his intentions. Although the presidential campaign had begun before the Constitutional Court's ruling, it gained momentum in March, which partly explains the large number of candidates.

Figure 2 reveals the tendencies that emerged from the beginning of the surveys in October 2009. A factor that stands out is the positioning of Sergio Fajardo, an independent candidate who was a former mayor of Medellín. He enjoyed a high degree of recognition and popularity in the polls during 2009, but the poor performance of his congressional candidates noticeably undermined his presidential bid. Also scoring high in the polls was Juan Manuel Santos, who still had not launched his campaign awaiting the results of the referendum and Uribe's decision as to whether he would run again, even though Santos expressed an interest in becoming the U Party's candidate, of which he was a founder. The other candidates included Noemí Sanín of the Conservative Party, Gustavo Petro of the Democratic Pole, and German Vargas of Radical Change. They each began to appear in the surveys without noticeably increasing their popularity. Sergio Fajardo remained in the field for the first round, but his popularity declined throughout the campaign.

Figure 2. Presidential Polls: October 2009-May 2010

Source: Various polls from Gallup Colombia, Ipsos Napoleón Franco, Centro Nacional de Consultoría, Datexco Company S.A.

At the beginning of March, candidate rankings in the surveys began to change: the Green Party candidate, Antanas Mockus, began to register a rapid increase in popularity. The March polls showed Santos held between 34 and 36% of the vote intention, Sanín between 17 and 23%, and Mockus around 10%. By the end of April, Mockus registered between 32 and 38%, Santos between 29 and 34%, and Sanín's had diminished to 16%. By the third week of May, just before the first round of balloting, Santos regained a 2% lead over Mockus' 36%. This sudden surge and steady increase in Mockus' popularity was named "*La Ola Verde*"- The Green Wave- by the media, as it ignited large citizen mobilization and support, especially from young voters and students in Bogotá and other cities in the country (Leal 2010, 12).

Despite the large number of debates centered on the continuity or rupture of the Uribe government's legacy, the cleavage between the government and the opposition failed to differentiate clearly between candidates who were *against or in favor* of Uribe. Moreover, the campaign debates failed to increase the popularity of opposition parties. Although the Democratic Pole approached the Liberal Party and its candidate, Rafael Pardo, about forming a coalition, nothing ever came of the negotiations. Moreover, the government coalition and its multiple candidates, especially within the Conservative Party, complicated the translation of Uribe's popularity to his coalition

associates. As revealed in Figure 2, Noemí Sanín, the Conservative candidate, positioned herself in third place in the race, although her popularity declined rapidly, placing her alongside the remaining opposition candidates.

The 'Green Wave' intensified. Its campaign sought to compete within a different dimension of 'new-traditional' politics, with the slogan *No todo vale* -not everything is acceptable. This of course was very appealing to the public, as members and agencies of the national government were being investigated on corruption charges and government intervention in politics. However, it became evident during the televised debates that the Green Party candidate, Mockus, lacked concrete programs and clear stances on major public policy themes. Part of the campaign's dilemma was precisely its velocity. The Green Party lacked the political trajectories of other parties that had been conducting national campaigns for years.

Despite their efforts to build very concrete proposals, other candidates were behind in the polls and were not able to gain momentum. Although the Liberal Party candidate, Rafael Pardo, was one of the most qualified candidates, he failed to captivate a large audience. The Liberal Party's reputation as one of the traditional parties in crisis, coupled with the candidate's lack of charisma and low media exposure in the recent past, also contributed to his poor showing. Gustavo Petro, the Democratic Pole's candidate, skillfully managed to position himself on key issues of the national agenda, and became at some point the third most popular candidate on the Atlantic coast while maintaining his national popularity. This changed as the race continued and the Conservatives aligned themselves behind a single candidate.⁵

Voters considered Juan Manuel Santos of the U Party as the natural successor to President Uribe. Santos was an outstanding Minister of Defense during the latter part of Uribe's government, and oversaw what were considered highly successful operations against the FARC. He had never been elected to popular office, and his political trajectory was limited to the executive branch, which gave him an edge over other candidates lacking such experience. Moreover, Colombians were very familiar with the name Santos; a family recognized as part of the national elite as a result of its ownership of the most important Colombian daily newspaper, *El Tiempo*. Thus the campaign revolved around two candidates: a technocrat belonging to a privileged Colombian family, who had inherited the political capital of one of Colombia's most popular and controversial presidents, and a coalition of independent politicians of the Green Party, whose popularity stemmed from their administrative successes at the local level and an electoral tradition of political independence from traditional parties.

5 "Gran Encuesta de los Medios", March, 2010.

As shown in Figure 2, national opinion surveys suggested a tight race between Mockus and Santos. Consequently, each strategically selected a running mate to optimize his chances. Juan Manuel Santos named a former governor of Valle del Cauca Department, Angelino Garzón, who was a politician formed in the labor movement and the political left; his nomination signaled ideological moderation. Antanas Mockus selected Sergio Fajardo as his vice-presidential candidate. Because of his distance from the traditional political establishment, Fajardo's place on the ticket aimed at mobilizing independent voters.

2. THE FIRST AND SECOND ROUNDS OF PRESIDENTIAL VOTING

The first round of voting for the presidency was held on May 30, two and a half months after the congressional elections (March 14th, 2010). The election unfolded in an atmosphere of relative tranquility with respect to public security. Despite poll predictions of a tight race, the final vote margin between the two candidates was a whopping 25% advantage for Santos. Another surprise was Vargas Lleras' third place finish with approximately 10% of the vote. Table 1 shows the results. Santos regained momentum as Mockus' candidacy floundered.⁶

For the second round of voting, Gustavo Petro and Rafael Pardo explored the possibility of forming an alliance with the Greens, but Antanas Mockus blocked these efforts, believing that any negotiated coalitions would not be optimal for his campaign. Mockus had declared on multiple occasions his reluctance to forge a relationship with opposition candidates. He entered the second phase of the campaign without the formal support of other parties or candidates.

Santos's strategy was completely different. After a calculated change in the campaign on the eve of the first round in which he resumed his association with the U Party and President Uribe (his early campaign had downplayed these relations in favor of Santos's own image), Santos decided to seek additional allies, resulting in what later became the National Unity Government (Gobierno de Unidad Nacional). The Conservative Party was the first to adhere

6 Why were the poll predictions so erroneous? Two plausible explanations emerged in the media after the first round of balloting: (1) Most polls underrepresent rural voters, who tend to be more supportive of traditional parties and President Uribe; and (2) During the week previous to the elections, no polling was permitted, which signified that the latest poll projections failed to account for the campaign dynamics during this crucial period. For further details, see: <http://www.analitica.com/va/inter-nacionales/opinion/3521742.asp>, <http://historico.elpais.com.co/historico/jun012010/NAL/2encuestas.html>

to Santos' campaign. After Noemí Sanín's first round defeat, the Party sought to maintain its place in Uribe's coalition, thereby hoping to assume key positions in the new government. Germán Vargas Lleras of Radical Change and Rafael Pardo of the Liberal Party joined the coalition in mid June. These two alliances were especially important because both parties were more ideologically and programmatically structured than the U Party.

Table 1. Results of the First Round of Presidential Voting, May 30, 2010

Candidate	Partido	Votes	%
Juan Manuel Santos	P de la U	6,758,539	46.6
Antanas Mockus Šivickas	Green	3,120,716	21.5
Germán Vargas Lleras	Cambio Radical	1,471,377	10.1
Gustavo Petro Urrego	Polo Democrático	1,329,512	9.2
Noemí Sanín Posada	Conservative	892,323	6.1
Rafael Pardo Rueda	Liberal	636,624	4.4
Others		81,705	0.5
Blank and invalid votes		249,211	1.7
Total		14,515,151	100%

Source: Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

The formidable expectations generated by Mockus' candidacy evaporated quickly between the two electoral rounds, in part as consequence of his shaky debate performances and his unwillingness to invite other political forces into his campaign to counteract the strength of the Uribe coalition. The challenge confronting Mockus from the beginning may well have been insurmountable because he was challenging the formidable clout of Colombia's entire *clase política*.

The second round was held a month later, and the results showed a difference of 41.6% between the candidates. Although the participation rate was less than the first round—1,900,000 fewer votes—the outcome revealed the importance of votes deposited by the Conservative, Radical Change and Liberal Party stalwarts, supporting the Program of National Unity formed at the beginning of the second round. Although Mockus' final tally increased by some 400,000 votes over the first round, his go it alone strategy failed miserably. Juan Manuel Santos registered a tremendous electoral victory that subsequently enabled him to construct a legislative coalition that subsequently facilitated passage of his programs in Congress.

Table 2. Results of the Second Round of Presidential Voting, June 20, 2010

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Antanas Mockus Šivickas	Verde	3,588,819	27.5
Juan Manuel Santos	De la U	9,004,221	69.1
Blank and invalid votes		744,618	3,4
Total		13,337,658	100%

Source: Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

3. RESULTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

Because legislative elections are held before the presidential races and because of the personalist nature of the candidacies, different rules apply for congressional contests. Even though political parties play a more important role in campaigns after the 2003 electoral reforms, the outcome of those races depends primarily upon the efforts and financing of individual candidates, not their partisan affiliations. The 2010 congressional elections were impacted by the uncertainty surrounding the presidential campaign, which provided an advantage for the majority coalition in Congress. In both the Senate and Chamber of Representatives the winners were primarily members of the Uribe coalition, which substantially increased its congressional representation.

The Liberal Party, in the opposition during President Uribe's two terms in office, managed to retain a significant number of seats (17 in the Senate and 35 in the Chamber of Representatives), making it the biggest winner among former opposition parties. The other major opposition parties, Radical Change and Democratic Pole, lost seats in both houses of Congress (See Tables 3 and 4).

'New' parties (those formed by the fusion of small movements that were represented in Congress but were disenfranchised because of their ties to paramilitary groups), like the Party of National Integration (PIN), surprised pundits with their unexpectedly large vote. However, Tables 3 and 4 show that parties such as *Convergencia Ciudadana*, *Alas Equipo Colombia*, *Colombia Democrática*, o *Colombia Viva* held 17 Senate seats and 17 House seats in 2006, yet the umbrella-like PIN obtained fewer seats than its regionally based predecessors, nine in the Senate and twelve in the House. Some elected PIN congressmen are allegedly associated with paramilitary scandals and other forms of corruption, but despite these accusations their electoral performance was noteworthy.

Table 3. Comparison of Electoral Returns for the Senate - 2002 - 2010

Political Party	Seats 2002	Seats 2006	Seats 2010 (% votes)
Partido de la U	Na	20	28 (25.1%)
Partido Conservador Colombiano	13	18	23 (20.3%)
Partido Liberal Colombiano	29	17	17 (15.5%)
Cambio Radical	2	15	8 (7.7%)
Polo Democrático Alternativo	Na	11	8 (7.7%)
Partido de Integración (Convergencia Ciudadana)	Na	7	8 (8.3%)
Alas Equipo Colombia	4	5	Na
Colombia Democrática	0	3	Na
Mira	0	2	2 (2.9%)
Colombia Viva	0	2	Na
Movimiento Nacional	6	Na	Na
Movimiento de Integración Popular	4	Na	Na
Vía Alterna	2	Na	Na
Colombia Siempre	2	Na	Na
Movimiento Popular Unido	2	Na	Na
Partido Verde	Na	Na	5 (4.5%)
Others	36	0	0

Source: Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil

*Results for the special districts are excluded.

Among the non-traditional parties, the Green Party represents the most successful case. Three former Bogotá mayors decided to unite their forces and compete in congressional races. Their reputation, together with the fact that the party primary to choose its presidential candidate was held the same day, attracted enough attention to elect four first-time senators and three first-time representatives, as well as a regional leader who was reelected to the senate.

**Table 4. Comparison of Electoral Returns for the
Cámara de Representantes, 2002 - 2010**

Political Party	Seats 2002	Seats 2006	Seats 2010*
Partido de la U	Na	29	48 (25,9%)
Partido Conservador Colombiano	21	30	36 (21,4%)
Partido Liberal Colombiano	54	36	36 (19,3%)
Cambio Radical	7	20	16 (7,7%)
Polo Democrático Alternativo	Na	9	5 (5,9%)
Partido de Integración (Convergencia Ciudadana)	2	8	11 (7,4%)
Alas (Equipo Colombia)	4	7	1 (1,9%)
Colombia Democrática	Na	2	Na
Mira	Na	1	1(3,0%)
Por el País que Soñamos	Na	2	Na
Movimiento Nacional	Na	2	Na
Apertura Liberal	5	5	2 (1,2%)
Partido de Accion Social	Na	1	Na
Convergencia Popular Cívica	4	Na	Na
Colombia Siempre	3	Na	Na
Movimiento de Integración Regional	3	4	1 (0,01%)
Fuerza Progresista	2	Na	Na
Frente Social Y Político	2	Na	Na
Movimiento Popular Unido	2	2	0
Movimiento Voluntad Popular	2	Na	Na
Movimiento Progresismo Democrático	2	Na	Na
Movimiento de Participación Popular	2	1	Na
Movimiento de Salvación Nacional	2	1	Na
Movimiento de Renovación Laboral	2	Na	Na
Movimiento Comunal y Comunitario	2	Na	Na
Movimiento Nacional Progresista	Na	1	Na
Nuevo Liberalismo	2	Na	Na
Huila Nuevo Liberalismo	0	1	Na
Moral	Na	1	Na
Partido Verde (Opcion Centro)	Na	1	3 (3,0%)
Afrounca	Na	1	Na
Alianza Social Afrocolombiana	Na	1	Na
Alianza Social Indígena	0	0	1 (1,9%)
Unidad Liberal	Na	Na	2(1,8%)
Others		43	0
Total	166	166	162

Fuente: Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil.

*Results for the special districts are excluded.

Finally, Sergio Fajardo's legislative campaign was a major disaster. With a decrease in the number of political parties and the subsequent transformation of the Colombian electoral arena, Fajardo's electoral strategy was unrealistic. Since he did not want any party attachments, he registered as an "independent", collecting more than 700,000 signatures. To promote his candidates for the legislature, he decided to make an alliance and introduce joint lists with the Indigenous Social Alliance (ASI).⁷ Nonetheless, despite his efforts to make it public, voters were not able to make the connection between Fajardo and the ASI, resulting in a very poor performance. Fajardo's lists were not even able to achieve the legal threshold (*umbral*) for representation.

In sum, the 2010 congressional elections resulted in an increase in the number of parties that lost their legal standing, thereby reflecting the impact of the 2003 Political Reform Act, which was designed to strengthen political parties and promote a better coordination between politicians. A few regional movements survived in the lower house, reflecting the decentralized character of Colombian politics, but these groups are becoming less significant in terms of their representation in Congress (Escobar-Lemmon and Moreno 2008).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After a long history of bipartisan consociationalism (Hartlyn, 1988), drafters of the 1991 Constitution decided to reduce drastically the requirements for participating in the political system, producing what became the most fragmented party system in the Americas; in 2002, the National Electoral Council recognized 72 parties of which 45 had representation in Congress.⁸ This complicated the task for voters to identify parties and their programs at the national level. Furthermore, the possibility for parties to present multiple lists further complicated the situation. For example, in the Department of Atlántico, the Liberal Party presented 19 of the 49 lists for seven seats in which 26 parties or movements participated in the election. In Putumayo,

7 "Fajardo completó firmas para lanzar su candidatura presidencial", in *Vanguardia Liberal*, published in October 27, 2009. <http://www.vanguardia.com/historico/43833-fajardo-completo-firmas-para-lanzar-su-candidatura-presidencial> [Last accessed: April 1st, 2011].

8 The 1991 Constitution permitted the formation of political parties and movements with the presentation of only 50,000 valid signatures. In addition, it created the possibility for citizens to belong to more than one political party. Those factors, plus a Hare electoral system with the highest residuals and the possibility for parties to present an unlimited number of lists, generated a highly fragmented party system.

which has two seats in the lower house of Congress, only the Liberal and Conservative Parties presented lists, the first with three and the latter with one.

After several failed attempts to reform the Colombian electoral system, classified as the most candidate-based in the world (Shugart and Carey 1995), a constitutional reform in 2003 (Legislative Act No. 1 of 2003) changed the rules that promoted excessive levels of party fragmentation (Pachón and Shugart, 2010). The reform introduced a minimum threshold of 2% of the votes (*umbral*) at the national level; parties were restricted to presenting a single open or closed list (as list openness remained optional); and the introduction of the D'Hondt system generated incentives to the formation of electoral coalitions, thereby effectively reducing the number of parties participating in elections.

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the number of parties with seats in the legislature became significantly lower in 2006, and continued to shrink in the 2010 elections. After the reform, a change in the pattern emerged. As shown by Pachón and Shugart (2010), as the size of the district in the 2002 election increased, the effective number of parties (ENP) followed suit. In Bogotá, for example, the ENP vote measure was greater than 20 despite the fact that the number of seats was 18. This relationship changed in the 2006 elections, and in 2010 there is hardly any variation in the ENP measured in votes or seats according to district size. Additionally, in 2006 and 2010 the number of parties increased in small districts, because most introduced lists in all districts to have a better chance of passing the threshold, irrespective of the district's size. Consequently, there is evidence that parties competing in elections are more "nationalized", although there are still a number of regional parties winning seats – especially in the Chamber of Representatives due to a lower representation threshold.

While elections constitute the bedrock of representative democracy, they are often unpredictable and volatile, especially in countries that are undergoing rapid transformations in their political party systems. Colombia fits this mold as a consequence of the decomposition of a hegemonic bipartisan party system in the 1990s and the eight-year presidency of Álvaro Uribe Vélez, which tended to undermine some of Colombia's democratic institutions as a consequence of his micro-managing style and a significant emphasis of his own coalition and his irreplaceable role therein. President Uribe dominated Colombian politics during his two terms of office, and the impact of his legacy upon the country's democratic institutions remains unclear.

The 2010 presidential elections were characterized by short campaigns, largely because Congress approved a bill calling for a referendum enabling President Uribe to seek a third consecutive term, and the Constitutional

Court's late decision regarding the bill's constitutionality generated uncertainty and significantly affected candidate and party strategies. This abbreviated time period, coupled with President Uribe's pronounced popularity, dictated the logic of the presidential campaign. Juan Manuel Santos inherited Uribe's political capital, and mounted a highly professional campaign that resulted in an overwhelming victory over an extensive field of first round candidates and over Antanas Mockus in the second round. Despite the 'Green Wave' that propelled Mockus ahead of Santos in the polls at one point, Mockus' ill-structured campaign produced a dismal result that was probably doomed from the start because he was running against the bulk of Colombia's political class.

The congressional elections were characterized by campaigns in which candidates were primarily responsible for their own elections (most party lists were open, thereby enabling voters to cast their ballots for specific individuals). The U Party, for example, has a very loose ideological and programmatic structure, and is mainly composed of regional political leaders who have their own organizations and votes. Of the 16 lists competing in the Senate, only one was closed. From the 282 lists for the House of Representatives, 68 were closed but most of these were in two-member districts (Registraduría Nacional 2010). The Uribe coalition won an overwhelming number of seats in Congress, providing the future president with an absolute majority in both houses of Congress. However, President Santos subsequently expanded the Uribe coalition to include the Liberal and Radical Change parties and excluded the National Integration Party (PIN) from the coalition because of their alleged ties to paramilitary groups.

The electoral returns in 2006 and 2010 testify to the impact of the 2003 Electoral Reform Law in reducing the number of political parties at the national level,⁹ but uncertainty remains as to whether current parties and the party system will become institutionalized in the medium or long term as the role of individual candidates is still significant and party-switching continues to be a common practice across all party elites.

9 While the 2003 Electoral Reform Law produced a reduction in the number of political parties at the national level, this apparently was not the case in the 2007 departmental and municipal elections where the number of parties remained the same or even increased in number. See Forero, Mario. 2010. El impacto de la reforma electoral del año 2003 en el sistema de partidos a nivel municipal. Unpublished manuscript.

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