



Immigration and  
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration  
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Canada

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## Country Fact Sheet COLOMBIA April 2007

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### 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

#### Official name

Republic of Colombia.

#### Geography

Colombia is located at the northern point of South America and shares borders with Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil and Venezuela. Colombia has a total of 3,208 km of coastline on the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The total area is 1,038,700 km<sup>2</sup>. The coast has a tropical climate, the interior plateaux are temperate and some Andean areas have snow year-round.

#### Population and density

Population: 43,593,035 (July 2006 estimate).

Density: 39.7 persons per km<sup>2</sup>.

#### Principal cities and populations (2005 estimate)

Bogota (political capital) 8,350,000; Medellin 3,450,000; Cali 2,700,000; Barranquilla 1,925,000; Cartagena 1,075,000.

#### Languages

Spanish (official).

#### Religions

Catholic 90%.

#### Ethnic groups

Mestizo 58%, white 20%, mulatto 14%, black 4%, mixed black-Amerindian 3%, Amerindian 1%. Approximately 75 % of Colombians are of mixed-blood.

#### Demographics

Population growth rate: 1.46% (2006 estimate).

Infant mortality rate: 20.35 deaths/1,000 live births.

Life expectancy at birth: 72.6 (2004).

Fertility rate: 2.54 children born/woman (2006 estimate).

Literacy: 92.8% of people aged 15 and older can read and write (2004).

### **Currency**

Colombian Peso (COP).

COP 1,890.36 = CAD 1.00.<sup>1</sup>

### **National holidays**

2007: 1 January (New Year's Day), 6 January (Epiphany), 19 March (St-Joseph's Day), 5 April (Maundy Thursday), 6 April (Good Friday), 1 May (Labour Day), 17 May (Ascension Day), 7 June (Corpus Christi), 18 June (Sacred Heart of Jesus), 29 June (SS Peter and Paul), 20 July (Independence), 7 August (Battle of Boyaca), 15 August (Assumption), 12 October (Discovery of the Americas), 1 November (All Saints' Day), 11 November (Independence of Cartagena), 8 December (Immaculate Conception), 25 December (Christmas Day).

### **Head of state and government**

Alvaro Uribe Velez (independent) has been president since 7 August 2002. He was re-elected on 28 May 2006. The president is the chief of state and head of government.

### **Form of government**

Colombia has a republican government whose most recent constitution dates to 5 July 1991. The president is supported by a cabinet in the exercise of executive power. A bicameral congress exercises legislative power. The cabinet is composed of ministers from the parties who supported the candidacy of Alvaro Uribe Velez and some independents (see Section 3).

### **Legislative structure**

The Colombian congress is bi-cameral, made up of a Senate (Senado de la Republica) and a Chamber of Representatives (Camara de Representantes). The Chamber of Representatives has 166 members elected for four-year terms. The Senate has 102 members, also elected for four-year terms. Two representatives are appointed to represent indigenous communities and each department has a minimum of two senators and two representatives.

Composition of the Senate after the 12 March 2006 election (next election in March 2010): Social Party of National Unity (20), Colombian Conservative Party (18), Colombian Liberal Party (17), Radical Change (15), Alternative Democratic Pole (11), Citizen Convergence (7), the Wings-Team Colombia Movement (5), Democratic Colombia Party (3), Mira Movement (2), Viva Colombia Movement (2), indigenous groups (2).

Composition of the Chamber of Representatives after the 12 March 2006 election (next election in March 2010): Colombian Liberal Party (36), Colombian Conservative Party

(30), Social Party of National Unity (29), Radical Change (20), Alternative Democratic Pole (9), Citizen Convergence (8), the Wings-Team Colombia Movement (7), Liberal Opening (5), Regional Integration Movement (4), Democratic Colombia Party (2), Huila New and Liberalism (2), National Movement (2), United People's Movement (2), For the Country of Our Dreams (1), Mira Movement (1), National Salvation Movement (1), People's Participation Movement (1), Progressive National Movement (1), Renovation Movement Labor Action (1), Social Action Party (1).

### **Administrative divisions**

Colombia has 32 departments and one capital district (Distrito Capital), Bogota.

Departments: Amazonas, Antioquia, Arauca, Atlantico, Bolivar, Boyaca, Caldas, Caqueta, Casanare, Cauca, Cesar, Choco, Cordoba, Cundinamarca, Guainia, Guaviare, Huila, La Guajira, Magdalena, Meta, Narino, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, Quindio, Risaralda, San Andres y Providencia, Santander, Sucre, Tolima, Valle del Cauca, Vaupes, and Vichada.

### **Judicial system**

Colombia has a Supreme Court of Justice (highest court of criminal law); a Council of State (highest court of administrative law); a Constitutional Court (constitutionality of laws, amendments to constitution and international treaties); and a Superior Judicial Council (jurisdiction conflicts between other courts and administration of the judiciary).

### **Elections**

The president and congress are elected by universal adult suffrage for four-year terms.

All Colombians over 18 years of age can vote, except active armed forces personnel and people who have been deprived of their political rights. The presidential elections of 28 May 2006 produced the following results: Alvaro Uribe Velez 62%, Carlos Gaviria Diaz 22%, Horacio Serpa Uribe 12%, other 4%.

For legislative results, see "Legislative structure" above.

### **Defence**

Every male (except students) of 18 years of age has to report for military service. The service lasts between one and two years.

As of August 2005: Army: 178,000 personnel; Navy: 22,000; Airforce: 7,000; Reserve: 60,700. Paramilitary police forces: approx. 129,000.

The 2004 budget allocated COP 7.4 trillion [CAD 3.9 billion<sup>2</sup>] to defence expenditures.

### **Media**

Dailies published in Bogota: *El Tiempo*, *El Espacio*, *El Nuevo Siglo*, *La Republica*.

Published elsewhere: *El Colombiano* [Medellin], *El Heraldo* [Barranquilla], *El Pais* [Cali], *La Patria* [Cali].

Colprensa is the national news agency.

There are 11 major radio networks, including Radiodifusora Nacional, which is owned by the government (with more than 500 stations). Three national television channels

are controlled by the National Institute for Radio and Television (Instituto Nacional de Radio y Television).

In 2003, Colombia had approximately 12.6 million television sets, 2.3 million computers and between 2.7 million and 4.739 million Internet users.

### **United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and Country Rank<sup>A</sup>**

Value: 0.790/1 (2004).

Rank: 70 out of 177 countries.

### **United Nations Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Country Rank<sup>B</sup>**

Value: 0.787/1.

Rank: 56 out of 177 countries.

### **Population below the national poverty line**

64%.

### **Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)<sup>C</sup>**

Score: 3.9/10.

Rank: 59 out of 163 countries surveyed.

### **Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)<sup>D</sup>**

Police 3.5, legal system/judiciary 3.4, tax revenue 3.5, business/private sector 3.3, medical services 3.1, media 2.9, education system 2.8, utilities 3.3, registry and permit services 2.9, military 3.2, non-governmental organizations 2.9 and religious bodies 2.6.

**[Information compiled from: *The Europa World Year Book 2006 2006*, 1266-1290; *PHW 2007 Oct. 2006*, 256-263; *Political Parties of the World 2006*, 129-133; *TI 7 Dec. 2006*; *ibid. 6 Nov. 2006*; *UN 2006*; *US 8 Feb. 2007*].**

[A] The HDI is a composite measurement of human development in a country, based on life expectancy, levels of literacy and education, and standard of living. Values are: 0.800 and higher (high human development), 0.500-0.799 (medium human development) and 0.500 and under (low development index). Countries are ranked in descending order by their HDI value. [\[back\]](#)

[B] The GDI adjusts the rating of the HDI to reflect inequalities between men and women. [\[back\]](#)

[C] The Transparency International CPI is based on composite survey data from 16 polls and 10 independent institutions. The data reflect the perceptions of resident and non-resident business people and country analysts. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). According to their score, countries are ranked in order from least corrupt (1) to most corrupt (163). [\[back\]](#)

[D] The Transparency International GCB is a public opinion survey used to gauge people's perceptions of corruption within their own state. [\[back\]](#)

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