

Colombian migrants in London and Madrid

The Colombian 2010 Elections from the UK and Spain

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Introduction

This report outlines the findings from a research project that examined the voting patterns among Colombian migrants living in the UK (London) and Spain (Madrid) in relation to the Colombian Congressional and Presidential elections of 2010. This forms the European component of a larger comparative study with colleagues in the US, Colombia and France. The project aimed to identify the motivations behind migrants' participation in home country elections, as well as the barriers to the exercise of the external vote. It also aimed to examine how and why experiences of voting differ across different countries. It was set within the wider context of how governments of the home countries of migrants have increasingly extended political rights to their country people residing abroad, especially in Latin America. While some fear that maintaining strong political ties with countries of origin is detrimental to the political engagement of migrants in destinations, others have highlighted how migrants participate in both countries simultaneously. Although there has been increasing recognition that transnationalism and integration are not mutually exclusive, much of this theorising is in its infancy. Empirically, this project has examined a fairly neglected 'new migrant group' in Europe focusing on Colombian migrants in the UK and Spain (see also McIlwaine et al., 2011). The Colombian case is especially important as the state has pioneered the extension of political rights to expatriates living abroad giving them the right to vote in congressional elections and choose a representative from the diaspora (the first in Latin America).

Background

Many countries nowadays offer the option of external voting to their nationals residing abroad or are in the process of allowing this as part of their efforts to strengthen links with their diasporas and/or to fortify their democracies (Bauböck, 2007; Calderón Chelius, 2003; IDEA/IFE, 2007; Gamlen, 2009). However, this is a very controversial issue that raises many challenges and concerns. On the one hand, external voting operations are complex and costly, and the evidence so far is that rates of participation tend to be low. Despite this, in particular scenarios, votes from abroad can have a disproportionate effect on election results, raising concerns within home communities. On the other hand, the host countries where migrants reside worry about the effects that political loyalties oriented towards the home country can have on participation and integration at the local level (see Portes et al., 2008). At a more theoretical level, there is also a debate about how these transnational political practices are transforming concepts such as, nation-state, citizenship or democracy (Bauböck, 2003; Faist, 2000). Finally, for migrants themselves, what matters is their ability to participate politically in at least one society, if not more, to avoid being disenfranchised (see Parra, 2006). However, there are few empirical studies that explore the real implications of external voting processes for both countries of origin and destination and for migrants themselves.

The Colombian community in London and Madrid

Colombians in London

The Colombian population in the UK is concentrated in London. This reflects wider patterns among Latin Americans as a whole in that 61% of the UK Latin American population resides in

London according to recent analyses of official data (McIlwaine et al., 2011, p15). Although small numbers of Latin Americans have lived in London for many years, Colombians began to arrive in larger numbers in the 1970s under the work permit system to work in hotels, restaurants and as cleaners in public buildings (Cock, 2009). After 1979, this route was effectively closed but Colombians continued to arrive through utilising social networks. During the 1990s, as the armed conflict escalated, Colombians continued to arrive in the UK in search of asylum (Bermúdez, 2010). Migration has continued throughout the 2000s, with large numbers of Colombians arriving with student visas, as well as via Spain with EU passports.

In terms of the actual numbers of Colombians residing in London, although some informal estimates suggest that there are as many as 50,000 (McIlwaine, 2005), more recent analysis of official statistics from the Annual Population Survey shows that there were 24,040 Colombians living in the UK, of which 15,271 were in London. However, this excludes the irregular and second generation populations and so these official statistics are likely to be an under-estimation.¹ Colombians are the second largest Latin American nationality in the UK (after Brazilians), but the most established, particularly in London where there are concentrations in the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Haringey and Newham (McIlwaine, forthcoming; McIlwaine et al., 2011). Although there are Colombians from a wide range of backgrounds living in London, most come from urban working- or middle-class backgrounds from Bogotá and other large cities such as Cali, Medellín, as well as others in the Valle del Cauca and *Eje Cafetero* (coffee growing area). Although recent research suggests that there are roughly equal numbers of women and men migrating (McIlwaine et al. 2001), others indicate that migration flows are feminised (Guarnizo, 2008).

Recent studies have suggested that most migrate to London for economic reasons (35%) or to study and learn English (27%) with only 7% fleeing political turmoil. Also significant is that 32% of Colombians have lived elsewhere before arriving in the UK, and among this group, 50% had resided in Spain. Colombians also tend to be well-educated with studies suggesting that more than two-thirds have tertiary education. However, this educational attainment rarely translates into professional or managerial jobs. Indeed, it has been shown that although 43% of Colombians had held professional, managerial or secretarial jobs before they migrated, only 26% worked in these occupations in London. In turn, more than one-third (36%) worked in elementary occupations such as domestic and office cleaning or catering. Most Colombians are legally resident in London although around one-third have temporary visas (as students or tourists) (McIlwaine and Bermúdez, 2011). Rates of irregularity are generally quite low among Colombians in London partly linked with their relatively established nature as a group although exact numbers are always difficult to ascertain exactly (Linneker and McIlwaine, 2011). Indeed, McIlwaine and Bermúdez (2011) suggest that 7% of Colombians are irregular although some may have false EU passports and many more may be semi-compliant (breaking the terms of their visas) (see also Linneker and McIlwaine, 2011).

¹ For example, in January 2010, there were 27,543 Colombians registered at the consulate in London. However, this figure includes those who may have left the country as people do not de-register.

Colombians in Madrid

Colombian migration to Spain in large numbers is a relatively recent phenomenon, and as such the information and research available on this community is limited. Although Colombians have settled throughout Spain, 42% live in the Madrid and Catalonia regions. Provisional data as of 1st January 2011 from the *Padrón Municipal* (municipal registry) show that out of a total of 271,773 Colombian nationals living in Spain, 65,168 reside in the Autonomous Community of Madrid. Data as of 1st January 2010 (the latest to offer information at the municipal level) show that there were 568,214 foreigners living in the city of Madrid, and of these, 35,776 were Colombian nationals (19,257 of them women).² According to a specific study of Colombians living in the Madrid region (Garay Salamanca 2008),³ the Colombian community settled in this part of Spain arrived in the last 10 years, with more than 70% coming in 2000-2003. The main regions of origin of these migrants in Colombia are the central and western metropolitan areas of the *Eje Cafetero*, followed by Bogotá, and the departments of Antioquia and Cauca.

The majority of these migrants had no previous experience of migration, and came to Spain in search of better socio-economic opportunities, thus choosing to settle in Madrid because of the perceived greater access to jobs there. Women are a majority of migrants: 56% according to the Garay Salamanca (2008) study and 54% based on the *Padrón* data for 2010. Most Colombians (75%) are in the economically-active age bracket (18-54), and an estimated 25%-30% of Colombians are still in an irregular situation. This migration flow is mainly urban, with some 15% having only primary education, 45% secondary, and 30% higher education. A high proportion of Colombians in Madrid were economically active, working mostly in unskilled positions, domestic service, or as shop assistants (70% in the service sector). An estimated 12% had their own business. Transnational connections are strong, especially in terms of contact with family members living in Colombia and the sending of remittances, while a majority (70%) said they were not members of any type of organisation in Spain.

Colombian elections and the vote from abroad

Latin American countries have been at the forefront of the extension of political rights to migrants abroad in recent years (see Calderón Chelius, 2003; Moraes et al., 2009). Within this context, Colombia is one of the pioneer countries, and has one of the most generous policies regarding political rights for nationals abroad (see Serrano Carrasco, 2003; Vono de Vilhena, 2006). Colombia was the first Latin American country to allow its citizens abroad to vote in presidential elections; it did so in 1961, just ahead of Brazil (1965) and Peru (1975), with legislation in the other countries dating from the mid-1990s onwards. Colombian migrants also have the right to dual citizenship, to vote from abroad in elections for the Senate, and to choose their own representative in the lower chamber of congress.⁴ In

² See INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas: www.ine.es)

³ The information that follows is mostly taken from this study, which was based on a survey administered in the Madrid region in 2005 to a representative sample of Colombian households (Garay Saslamanca 2008).

⁴ This chamber allows for the election of five members as part of the *circunscripciones especiales* (special electoral districts): two for indigenous communities, two for Afro-Colombians, and one for Colombians abroad.

addition, the Colombian state has been developing an integrated policy towards its population abroad since the 1990s.

Serrano Carrasco (2003) argues that the political rights that Colombian nationals abroad enjoy have been more the result of attempts from above to strengthen the democratic system by widening and increasing participation in response to different crises, than of demands from below. Law 39 allowing Colombians abroad to vote in presidential elections was part of a group of electoral reforms signed in 1961 in the context of the emergence of the National Front.⁵ The second group of rights, which included the granting of dual citizenship, and provisions for Colombians abroad to vote in, and be voted for, congressional elections, was established by articles 96, 171 and 176 of the 1991 constitution (ibid.). This new constitution, she argues, was once again the result of efforts by the political class to legitimise and strengthen the political system after the violence and corruption of the 1980s. Nevertheless, migrants voted in the 1990 plebiscite for constitutional reform, and the Colombian communities in the US (especially in New York) organised to demand the approval of dual nationality and the creation of the special electoral district for Colombians abroad (ibid; Jones-Correa, 1998).

To date, Colombians abroad have participated in 13 consecutive presidential elections, have voted four times in senatorial elections, and on three occasions they have chosen their representative to the lower chamber. However, the emphasis in some previous studies has been on the limited interest that Colombian migrants have in home country politics in general (for some exceptions, see Bermúdez, 2010, 2011), and on the low participation rates of external voters.⁶ However, these arguments need to be contextualised. First, rates of external electoral participation tend to be low in most cases where it is allowed. For instance, in Spain, where the vote from abroad has been possible since 1978, less than 23% of the potential external electorate participated in the 2000 general elections (Calderón Chelius, 2003, p.582). Second, electoral participation in Colombia in general has been historically low, when compared with other countries in the region, with an average turnout in presidential elections just above 40% during the 1940s-1990s (García and Hoskin, 2003, p.8; see also Zovatto, 2005). Compared with this, turnout from abroad has not been so insignificant. In the 2006 Colombian presidential elections, the total participation rate from abroad was less than 38% (and 45% at the national level); by contrast, official data shows that in the 2002 presidential election turnout was higher for external voters (64.6%) than internal ones (46.5%).⁷ Detailed results from some of the countries from which Colombian migrants voted also show that in the 2006 elections, voter turnout was higher in some of these countries than at the national level.

⁵. The National Front emerged out of the political pacts signed in Spain (Benidorm and Sitges) by the leaders of the two main political parties, some of whom had to go into exile during *La Violencia* and the Rojas regime. Thus, the granting of the vote to Colombians abroad 'was originally designed as a political weapon for elite refugees', to prevent their exclusion if they ever had to go into exile again, although it later benefited a wider cross-section of society as migration grew and diversified (Guarnizo, 2001, p.234).

⁶. Calderón Chelius points out that one of the arguments against granting migrants political rights in their countries of origin has been their perceived lack of "interest, enthusiasm and political commitment" (2003, p.35).

⁷. *Registraduría Nacional* [<http://www.registraduria.gov.co>] (12/03/07).

The 2010 Colombian elections

On March 14 2010, Colombians voted in congressional elections (to renew all 102 members of the Senate and 166 representatives of the lower chamber), with a total of 29,882,147 registered voters (out of a total population of 43,677,372), and some main 19 political parties participating.⁸

In London (which was the only city in the UK where voting took place), 701 people voted for the Senate. MIRA (*Movimiento Independiente de Renovación Absoluta*) won with 131 votes, followed by the *Partido de la U* (who gained 113). The *Partido Verde Colombiano* (Green Party) attained 90 votes, and the *Polo Democrático Alternativo* (Alternative Democratic Pole) won 78. The rest of the votes were distributed among a range of other parties. In the election for the congress member abroad, MIRA won 130 votes, followed by the *Partido Verde Colombiano* with 87 votes, and 68 votes for the *Polo Democrático* and 65 for the *Partido de la U*. Miguel Puerto (from the *Polo Democrático*), the first London-based candidate to stand for a Latin American parliament, won 22 votes.

In Spain, Colombians were able to vote in eight different places: Madrid (at the embassy and at the consulate), Barcelona, Bilbao, Seville, Valencia, Palma de Mallorca and Palma de Gran Canaria. There were nearly 15,000 voters registered in Madrid (specific information on numbers voting at the congressional elections in Madrid is not available).

These congressional elections were followed by a first round of presidential election on May 30 for which there were at least nine main candidates. Since no candidate won an absolute majority (Juan Manuel Santos, of the ruling *Partido de la U* obtained 46.7% of all valid votes, and Antanas Mockus, of the *Partido Verde Colombiano*, 21.5%), a second round of voting was held on June 20 between the two most voted candidates.

Total voter turnout for the first round of the presidential election was 49.3% (out of a total number of registered voters slightly higher than for the congressional elections), and for the second round it was lower, 44.5%.⁹ There were a total of 948 polling tables installed abroad, in more than 50 countries. In the first round of presidential elections, voter turnout abroad was 25.36% (out of total 415,118 potential voters) of which 60.1% voted for Santos and 29.3% for Mockus.

In Spain, voter turnout in this round was 15.7%, with 45% for Mockus and 40.8% for Santos. Noemí Sanín (*Partido Conservador*) was in third place. In the UK, voter turnout was 24.1%), with 51.5% for Mockus and 33.5% for Santos. In third place was Germán Vargas Llosa (*Partido Cambio Radical*).

For the second round of presidential elections, participation declined slightly, and support for Santos increased (see Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, voter turnout from abroad in the 2010 elections was considerably lower

⁸ This information and the following have been taken from <http://www.electionguide.org/> (5/6/2011). Total voter turnout in the last parliamentary elections in Spain in 2008, was 76%; in the UK, in the last elections in 2010 it was 65.5%. See: <http://www.electionguide.org/> (5/6/2011).

than in the previous presidential poll (in 2006), while at the national level it was similar. This was true for all the countries included in the table, which are the main countries of reception of Colombian migrants. As in the previous elections, in 2010 the voter turnout of Colombians residing in Spain and the UK were among the lowest; in Spain, the total votes cast were almost 15 percentage points lower than in 2006 (it went down from 28.74%), and in the UK by 10.5 points (from 29.94% in 2006). A comparison of election results in 2006 and 2010 also show some interesting differences. While in 2006, there was overwhelming majority support for the official candidate (Uribe) in the votes coming from abroad (84%), in 2010 this support was more moderate. The only countries where in 2006 the opposition candidate won a significant proportion of the vote, were in France, Germany and Belgium. These are precisely the countries, in Table 1, where the outsider candidate in 2010 won a majority of the votes, but this time together with most other European countries (except Spain), while Colombian voters in the Americas showed overwhelming support for Santos (with the exception of Canada).

Table 1: Rates of participation in the June 2010 Colombian presidential election from abroad

	Spain	UK	Fran.	Germ.	Belg.	Italy	US	Can.	Ven.	Ecuad.	Total abroad	Total Colombia
Reg voters	55,095	7,101	5,129	2,150	1,004	3,309	154,971	9,414	116,400	15,915	415,118	29.9m
Total votes (%)	13.80	19.39	27.91	22.65	29.38	14.68	29.33	24.03	15.29	26.37	22.61	44.48
Votes for Santos (%)	55.98	47.88	25.00	21.56	32.20	44.81	81.97	48.67	85.27	71.70	74.17	69.06
Votes for Mockus (%)	41.87	50.21	72.61	76.18	64.06	51.65	17.24	48.98	14.12	26.66	24.69	27.53

Source: <http://www.electionguide.org/> (5/6/2011)

Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, República de Colombia (2011)

In the 2010 congressional elections, at least 11 electoral lists were competing to represent Colombians abroad in the lower chamber. In the registration period (19 October-13 November 2009), at least 70,000 new voters registered to vote from abroad.¹⁰ Amid allegations of fraud, and some delays in the announcement of the results, the candidate that won this seat was Jaime Buenahora, representative of the U Party and resident in the US (out of a total of some 20 candidates).

Methodological framework

The methodological framework for research reported here was twofold and based on mixed methods. First, it entailed a series of four questionnaire surveys (later combined into one large sample): one survey was carried out with Colombian migrants before the congressional

¹⁰ The information contained in this paragraph comes from the website of *Conexión Colombia* and *Votebien.com*.

elections of March 2010 (78 in London and 89 in Madrid). Another was conducted on the congressional election day (110 in London and 100 in Madrid). A further survey was administered before the presidential elections of May 2010 (136 in London and 111 in Madrid) and also on election day (105 in London and 100 in Madrid) (the first round only). This provided a total sample of 829 combined across both countries (see Table 2). This is a much larger sample than was initially envisaged (200 in total).

Table 2: Surveys undertaken in Madrid and London with Colombian migrants (March – May 2010)

Types of surveys undertaken	Frequency	Percent
Pre-congressional Madrid	89	10.7
Pre-congressional London	78	9.4
Congressional Madrid	100	12.1
Congressional London	110	13.3
Pre-presidential Madrid	111	13.4
Pre-presidential London	136	16.4
Presidential Madrid	100	12.1
Presidential London	105	12.7
Total	N=829	100.0

The second core element of the framework was to conduct a series of in-depth interviews with Colombian migrants in London and Madrid about their transnational political practices. This included 19 in London (of which 11 were men and 8 were women) and 10 in Madrid (of which 3 were men and 7 were women). This made a total of 29 across both countries. These were undertaken mainly after the presidential elections. Again, more were conducted than were initially planned (20 in total).

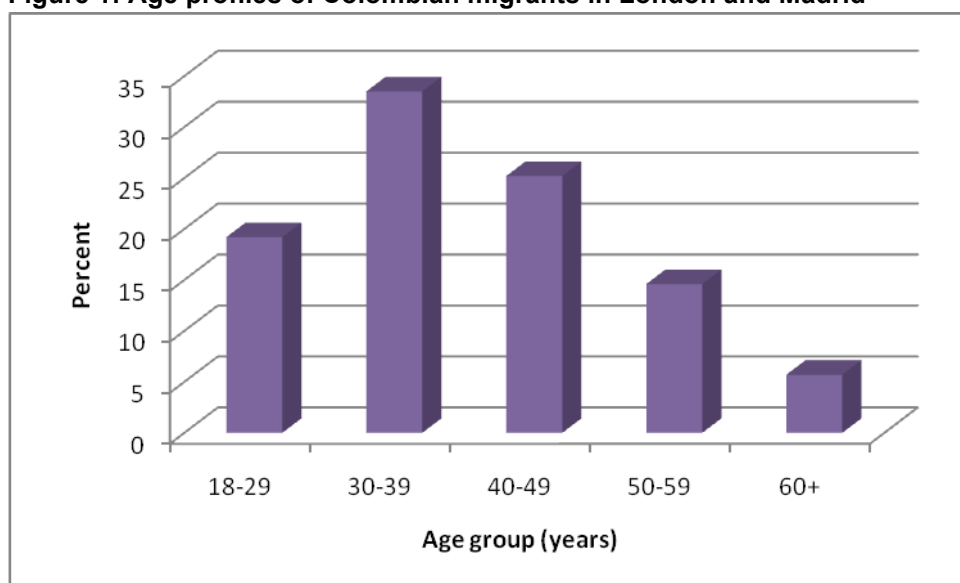
Profile of research participants in London and Madrid

- More Colombian men than women were included in the London and Madrid samples
- More than a half were aged between 30 and 49
- More than a third of working Colombians held elementary jobs with one quarter in professional, managerial and related occupations
- There were many more students and professional, managerial and related workers in London with many more unemployed in Madrid
- In London, 80% earned less than £2,000 per month (less than the UK average), while in Madrid, 97% earned less than €2,000 per month (with 54% earning less than €1,000 per month)
- Colombians were well educated with more than half having some form of higher level education; those in London were better educated than in Madrid
- Colombians in London were more established than in Madrid
- The vast majority were citizens or residents, especially in Madrid
- Levels of civic and active political participation were low while participation in recreational activities was much higher
- Almost half of migrants planned to return to Colombia, especially in London

In terms of the gender breakdown of the survey sample as a whole, 433 men were included together with 383 women.¹¹ In both London and Madrid, more men were surveyed than women (222 men and 203 women in London and 211 men and 180 women in Madrid). In terms of age, more than a quarter were aged between 30 and 39 years (34%), with a quarter aged between 40 and 49 (26%). One-fifth were aged over 50 and 19.5% were aged between 18 and 29 years (see Figure 1). These age profiles were broadly similar for each city, although the London sample had more people aged under 39 (59%) compared with Madrid (48%). In contrast, the largest age group in Madrid overall was those in their forties (31%).

As for economic activities, the employment rate among Colombians was high at 78%. However, the proportion of students was also high at 15%. In relation to occupational status, the largest single category was those working in elementary jobs which made up more than a quarter of all migrants (27.5%), increasing to 35% of those who were working (this category includes cleaners, catering staff, chambermaids, security guards and so on).¹² Professional, managerial and related occupations together constituted only 19% of all occupations (and 25% of those who were working) (see Table 3).

Figure 1: Age profiles of Colombian migrants in London and Madrid



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=814)

There were some differences by city, with many more students in London than in Madrid (22% compared with 3%). There were slightly more people working in elementary jobs in Madrid compared with London although the difference was not that great (30% compared with 25%). In turn, Colombians in Madrid were more likely to work in sales jobs than their

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¹¹ The remaining 13 cases were non-responses.

¹² The occupational classifications used here are the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC 2000) which are maintained by the Occupational Information Unit (OIU) of the Office of National Statistics. They also include additional categories for those who are not in work (studying, unemployed, housework, sick).

counterparts in London (8% compared with 5%) and to work in skilled artisan jobs (7% compared with 4%). However, there were nearly twice as many professional, managerial and related workers in London compared with Madrid (24.5% compared with 14%). There were also more retired Colombians in London (5% compared to 1%) reflecting the fact that they are a more established population group in the UK. Also very marked was that 15% were unemployed in Madrid compared with only 2% in London.

Table 3: Occupational status of Colombian migrants by category

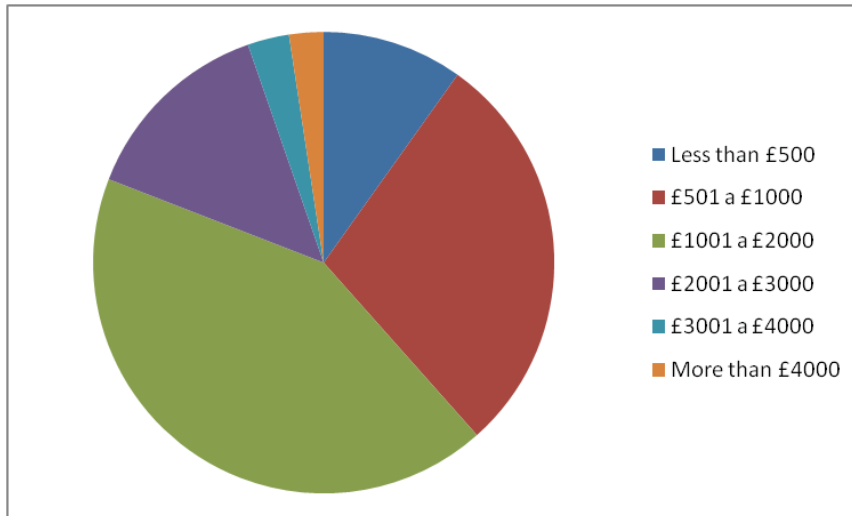
Occupational category	Frequency	Percent
Professional	59	7.6
Managers and senior officials	38	4.9
Associate professional and technical	52	6.7
Administrative and secretarial	50	6.5
Skilled trades	41	5.3
Personal services	12	1.6
Sales and customer service	48	6.2
Process, plant and machine operatives	25	3.2
Elementary	212	27.5
Unemployed	62	8.0
Studying	117	15.2
Housework	31	4.0
Retired	24	2.9
Total	n=771	100.0

Source: Questionnaire survey

Partly reflecting the concentrations in the lower paid sectors of the labour market, personal monthly incomes are generally low. In London, 80% earned less than £2,000 per month (which is less than the average for the UK as a whole),¹³ while 38% earned less than £1000 per week and 10% less than £500 (see Figure 2). In Madrid, 97% earned less than €2,000 per month with 54% earning less than €1,000 and 11% earning less than €500 (see Figure 3).

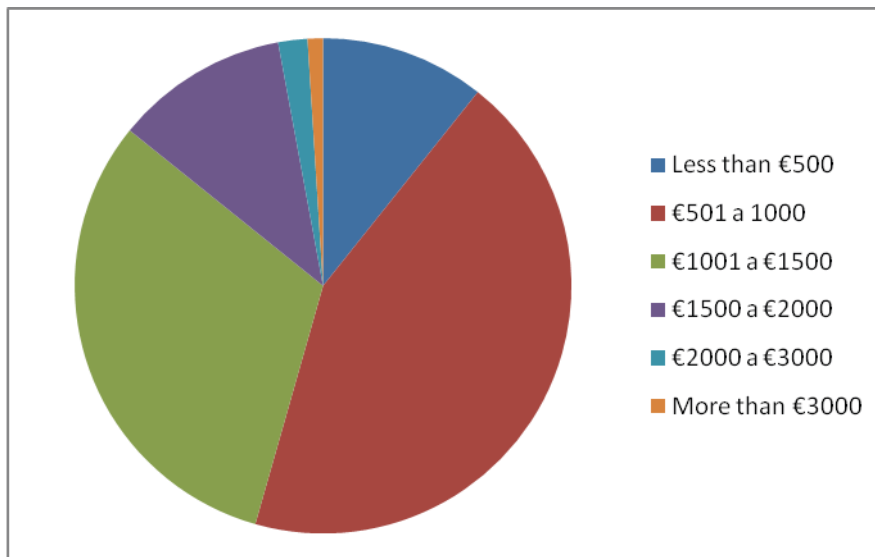
¹³ The average annual earnings for the UK as a whole was £25,800 in 2009 (McIlwaine et al. 2011).

Figure 2: Personal monthly income (£) in London



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=408)

Figure 3: Personal monthly income (€) in Madrid



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=309)

Colombian migrants are very well educated with more than half having some form of higher level education (58.5%), with 19% having a postgraduate qualification. Only 5% had only primary level, with a further 37% having secondary level schooling. Colombians in London tend to be better educated overall with 72% having tertiary level education, of which 25% had postgraduate qualifications. In Madrid, only 44% had university level of which 13% was postgraduate, while 7% had only primary (in London only 2% had primary).

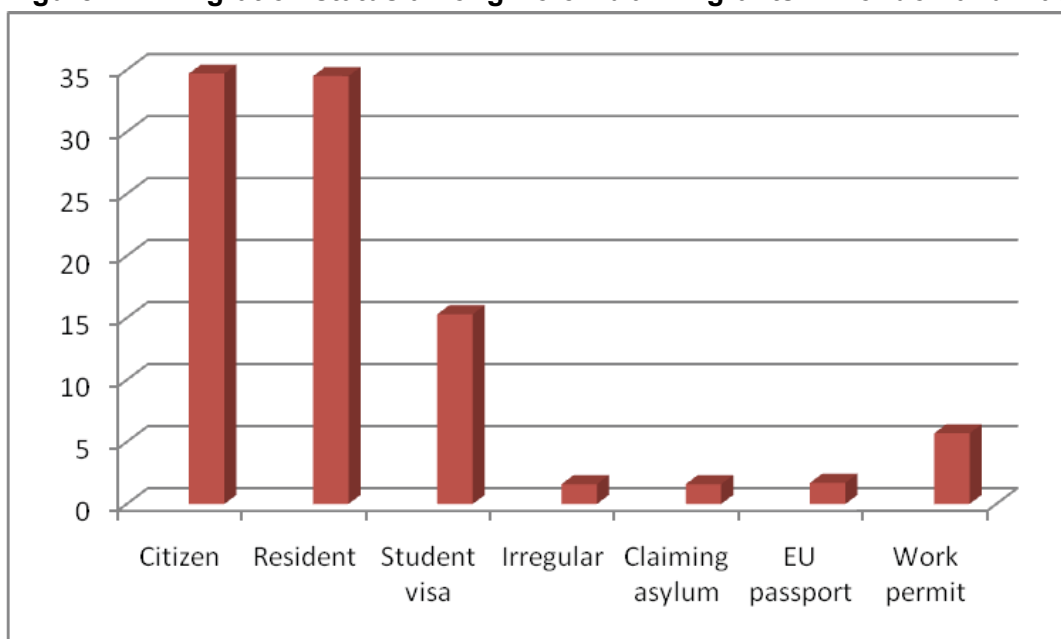
As for marital status, more than a third were single (37%), while 42% were married and another 7% were living together. 11.5% were either divorced or separated and only 2% were widowed. The variations between cities were minor although more people were married in

Madrid than in London (46% and 39%) while more were divorced and separated in London (15% and 8%).

Colombians in London were more established than in Madrid in terms of years of residence. While 28% of the sample as a whole had been living in the city for more than 11 years, in London, 37.5% had been living for more than this duration compared with 17% of those in Madrid. However, there are also many migrants in London who had been living there for less than a year (17%) compared with only 6.5% in Madrid. Indeed, in Madrid almost half of all Colombians had been residing there for between 6 and 10 years (47%) compared with only 23% of those in London.

This is also related to immigration status in that the vast majority were citizens (35%) or residents (35%). The only other sizeable types of status were those living on student visas (15%); only 2% openly stated that they were irregular (see Figure 4). However, Colombians were more likely to be residents or citizens in Madrid (85%) than in London (56%); in the latter, if EU status is included, this rises to 59%. There were many more people with student visas in London (24.5%) than in Madrid (5.5%). In the London case, it is possible that a proportion of those with student visas will also be working as their primary activity. More people admitted to being irregular in London than in Madrid (2% compared with 1%), as well as stating 'other' as their status (6% compared with 2%) which can also be an indication of irregularity.

Figure 4: Immigration status among Colombian migrants in London and Madrid



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=819)

Note: EU passports are only identified among those in London

Travel between Colombia and Europe was not that regular. In the previous 3 years, for example, 37% had never returned home with a further 47% having visited 1 or 2 times. Only 2% had travelled there more than 5 times. Those living in Madrid appeared to travel less than those in London with 39% never having returned compared with 35% in London; while 3% had visited more than 5 times in London, only 1% had done so in Madrid. The vast

majority visited in order to see family or to have a holiday, although 5% also went for business reasons.

Links were maintained between Europe and Colombia through remittance sending with 61% sending money. Colombians in Spain were more likely to send remittances (65%) than those in London (58%).

In terms of religion, the vast majority identified as Catholic (67%), with another 17% evangelical Protestant; 13% had no religion, while 2% stated 'other'. There were few differences between the cities in terms of religious beliefs. 39% attended church services at least once a week, with another 15% attending 1-2 times per month. Again, patterns were similar in both cities.

As for language in London, 52% spoke Spanish at home, while 32% spoke both Spanish and English with 15% speaking only English.

In relation to levels of civic participation, only 14% had been involved in civic or community activities that supported Colombia in the previous 2 years. Slightly more were involved in London (15%) than in Madrid (12.5%). As for political initiatives related with Colombia and organised by Colombians, only 13.5% had participated. More Colombians in Madrid participated (16%) compared with London (11%). Perhaps not surprisingly, many more people took part in recreational activities such as parties, and cultural or sporting events (35%), with more in London (40%) than in Madrid (30%). However, only 13% participated in religious events, with slightly more in Madrid (15%) than London (11%).

Discrimination was not widespread in that 62% reported having never experienced it, with only 7% saying it was common. In addition, 17% had experienced it a few times, with another 14% saying it had occurred rarely. Discrimination appeared to be less frequently experienced in London than in Madrid. For example, in London, 67% said they had never experienced it compared with 56% in Madrid. In turn, 30% had experienced discrimination a few times or frequently compared with 18% in London.

Finally, almost half of migrants planned to return to Colombia (46%), with 30% saying they wanted to settle in the UK or Spain. A further 15% did not know and 9% planned to move to another country. More people living in London planned to return home than in Madrid (49% compared to 41.5%). In turn, more people wanted to settle in Madrid (34%) than in London (25%).

The differences between the profiles in London and Madrid were also noted by some of those interviewed in the qualitative research. For example, Felipe¹⁴ who was in his 30s and was a Green Party campaigner had moved to Madrid in 2004 and then to London in 2008 where he worked as an architect. He noted:

"The profile of the people here ... because they have to speak English to be here, the profile changes. There ... there are many people who arrive without knowing anything, without having an idea about anything ... here the profile, to my eyes, there

¹⁴ All names used here are pseudonyms.

are lots of students, many who come to study English, more than to Spain ... the profiles are very distinct.”

Profiles of voters and non-voters in London and Madrid

- Voters were more likely to have tertiary level and especially postgraduate education, especially in London
- Voters were more likely to be married than non-voters
- Voters were more likely to work in professional and managerial occupations; non-voters were more likely to work in elementary jobs
- In London, non-voters had lower monthly incomes than voters
- Non-voters were slightly more likely to have resided in London or Madrid for longer than voters
- Slightly more citizens than residents voted, while slightly more irregulars and students were non-voters
- Non-voters were slightly more likely not to have travelled to Colombia in the previous 3 years, especially in Madrid
- Non-voters were more likely to send remittances than voters, especially in Madrid
- Voters were more likely to participate in political and civic activities, especially in London; non-voters were more likely to participate in recreational activities especially in London

As a whole, the sample included 426 people who voted in either the congressional or presidential elections. In addition, there were 403 people who were surveyed before each election among whom, 295 (73%) who did *not* plan to vote in either elections or who were undecided (10 people in the latter category). Among the 295 non-voters, there were slightly more in London (152) than in Madrid (143).

Profile of voters

Focusing on those who participated in the elections (426),¹⁵ more men than women were included (54% compared with 49%); this was slightly more marked in Madrid than in London. Generally, the voters were well-educated with 60% having some form of tertiary education of which 25% were postgraduate. This was especially marked in London where more than a third (35%) of the voters had postgraduate qualifications compared with 15% in Madrid.

More than a third of voters (35%) were aged between 30 and 39 years with another 24% aged between 40 and 49 years. These broad patterns were roughly the same for each city, although those in London were generally younger than in Madrid. In addition, 43% of voters were married while 38.5% were single, with slightly more single people among the Madrid sample.

Among the voters, a quarter were elementary workers, with almost another quarter working in professional, managerial or related occupations an almost one-fifth being students (see Table 4). In London, 29% of voters were professional or managerial compared with only 16% in Madrid. In contrast, 28% of voters in Madrid were elementary workers compared with 21%

¹⁵ Although there were also voters among those who were surveyed before each election day, these are excluded from the voter profile.

in London, while only 10% were students in Madrid compared to 26% in London; 17% of voters were unemployed in Madrid compared with only 1% in London.

Table 4: Voting and non-voting among Colombians by occupational status in London and Madrid

Occupational category	Voter	Non-voter
Professional , managerial and related	89	43
	22%	15%
Unemployed	35	26
	9%	9%
Studying	72	40
	18%	14%
Housework	15	12
	4%	4%
Retired	11	6
	3%	2%
Administrative and secretarial	27	15
	7%	5%
Skilled trades	19	20
	5%	7%
Personal services	8	1
	2%	0.3
Sales and customer service	17	26
	4%	9%
Process, plant and machine operatives	9	8
	2%	3%
Elementary	98	82
	24.5%	29%
Total	400	279
	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Questionnaire survey

In London, 38% of voters earned between £1001 and £2000 per month while a further 26% earning between £501 and £1000 (with 64% earning less than £2000). In Madrid, 47% of voters earned between €501 and €1000 with a further 29% earning between €1001 and €2000 (with 76% earning less than €2000).

More than half of voters had lived in London or Madrid for more than 6 years; 35% for between 6 and 10 years and 25% for over 10 years. Voters in London were more likely to have lived there for a shorter time than in Madrid; for example, in London, 20% had lived for less than a year compared with only 5% in Madrid. However, a third of voters in London had lived there for more than a year compared with 16% in Madrid.

Voters were overwhelmingly citizens or residents with a further 10% having EU passports as well as 14% holding student visas. Only 1% reported having no valid documents, 3 of whom voted in London and 2 in Madrid (see Table 5). Although there were more citizens among voters in London (39%) than in Madrid (33%), there were many more residents in Madrid (48%) compared with 19% in London. In addition, 22% of voters in London held student visas compared with only 7% in Madrid.

Table 5: Voting and non-voting by immigration status among Colombians in London and Madrid

	Voter	Non-voter
Citizen	151	85
	36%	31%
Resident	147	103
	35%	37%
Student	60	45
	14%	16%
Irregular	5	8
	1%	3%
Asylum claim	3	4
	0.7%	1%
EU passport	10	4
	2%	1%
Work permit	28	13
	7%	5%
Other	16	16
	4%	6%
Total	420	278
	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Questionnaire survey

One third of voters had not travelled to Colombia in the previous 3 years (35%), with 48% having travelled 1-2 times. In London, 31% of voters had not travelled to Colombia while 38% of those Madrid had not. In turn, 59% of voters sent remittances home, although voters in Madrid were much more likely (66%) compared with only 50% in London.

65% of voters were Catholics with 17% being Evangelical Protestants; in London, 69% of voters were Catholics and 12% were Evangelical Protestants, while in Madrid, there were more Protestants among voters (22%) and fewer Catholics (60%).

16% of voters participated in civic activities, with more doing so in London (19%) than in Madrid (13%). In turn, only 18.5% of voters participated in political activities, with slightly more in Madrid (20%) than in London (17%). Voters were much more likely to participate in recreational activities (32%), especially in London (36%) compared to Madrid (28%).

Profile of non-voters

This profile focuses specifically on the 295 non-voters defined here as those who explicitly stated they would *not* be voting in either congressional or presidential elections. Slightly more women (52%) were included among the non-voters than men.

While non-voters were still well-educated, with 50% having some form of tertiary education, only 10% had postgraduate qualifications. Indeed, the single largest educational category was those with completed secondary level (37%). However, non-voters in London were

more educated with 68% having tertiary level of which 15% was postgraduate compared with 31% of non-voters in Madrid of which 5% were postgraduates.

As with voters, more than a third of non-voters (36%) were aged between 30 and 39 years with another 27% aged between 40 and 49 years with few marked differences by city. In addition, 35% of non-voters were married, with 43% being single, with more single non-voters in Madrid than London (49% and 38%).

Among the non-voters, 29% were elementary workers, while 15% had professional and managerial occupations. A further 14% were studying, with 9% working in sales and customer service. In London, more non-voters were professional and managerial workers than in Madrid (20% compared with 11%) although the proportions working in elementary jobs were roughly the same.

In London, 47% of non-voters earned between £1001 and £2000 per month while a further 29% earning between £501 and £1000 (with 76% earning less than £2000). In Madrid, non-voters 41% earned between €501 and €1000 with a further 35% earning between €1001 and €2000 (with 76% earning less than €2000).

60% of non-voters had lived in London or Madrid for more than 6 years; 34% for between 6 and 10 years and 26% for over 10 years. Fewer non-voters in London had lived there for a shorter time (54.5%) than in Madrid (65%).

Non-voters were also overwhelmingly citizens or residents reflecting the characteristics of the sample as a whole. However, there was a slightly higher proportion of residents among the non-voters (37%) as well as irregulars (3%) and students (16%).

40% of non-voters had not travelled to Colombia in the previous 3 years, with 47% having travelled 1-2 times. In London, fewer people had not travelled to Colombia (38%) compared with Madrid (43%). More than two-thirds of non-voters sent remittances (67%), with more in Madrid sending them (72%) compared with London (63%).

72% of non-voters were Catholics with 17% being Evangelical Protestants; in London, 64% of non-voters were Catholics and 25% were Evangelical Protestants, while in Madrid, 80% of non-voters were Catholics and only 10% were Evangelical Protestants.

Only 11% of non-voters participated in civic activities in both London and Madrid. Only 4% of non-voters participated in political activities with 5% in London and 4% in Madrid. 34% of non-voters participated in recreational activities, especially in London (43%) compared to Madrid (24.5%).

Interest in Colombian politics among Colombian migrants in London and Madrid

- Around half were interested in Colombian politics, especially in Madrid
- Older people were more likely to be very interested while younger people were most likely to have no interest at all
- Educated migrants had greatest interest especially those with postgraduate qualifications
- Professional workers were most interested, while those in skilled trades were the least interested
- Residents and citizens were the most interested while those with irregular status and claiming asylum were the least interested
- Those who had been living in Europe for the shortest length of time were the most interested and those living more than 11 years the least interested
- Voters were much more interested than non-voters
- Less than one-fifth spoke about politics on a daily basis, although quarter spoke about at least once a week
- More than a quarter were following the Colombian electoral campaigns intensively, while just under a quarter were not following them at all
- Those most likely to be following the campaigns intensively were male, voters, living in Madrid, with postgraduate qualifications, and working in professional and managerial jobs
- The internet was most common medium for how people obtained information about the campaigns, especially in London
- Just over a quarter were contacted directly about voting, especially by email

In terms of being interested in Colombian politics, one third of all Colombians (32.5%) said they were very interested with 17% having no interest at all. In London, fewer people had no interest than in Madrid (15% compared with 19%), but also fewer had a lot of interest (28% compared with 37%). When categories are combined, slightly more migrants in Madrid were interested or very interested (50%) compared with London (46%) (see Figure 5).

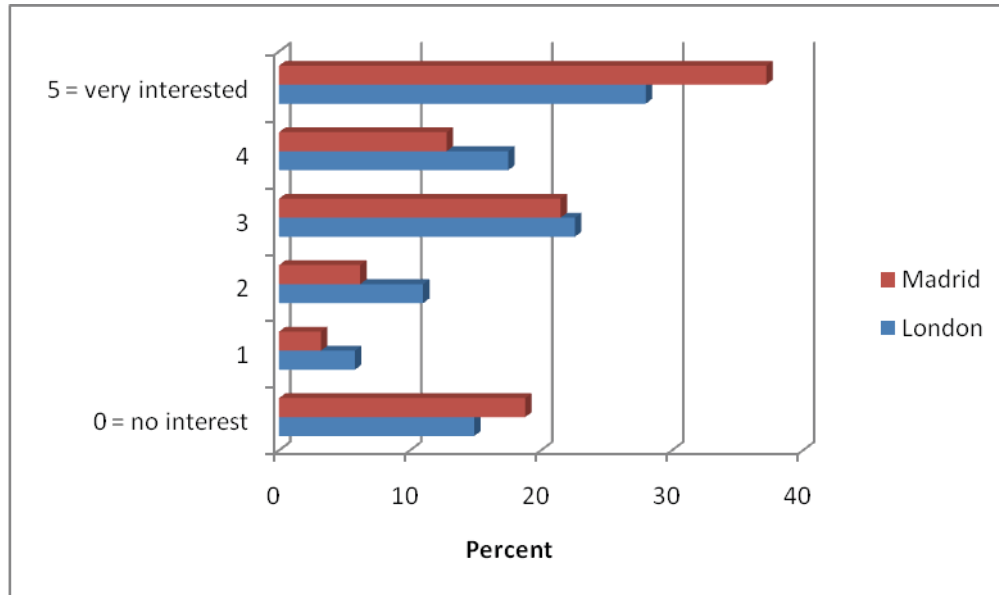
Differences between women and men were not that marked although more men had no interest (18% compared with 16% of women), yet more were very interested (34% compared with 31% of women). However, when combining categories, there was no real difference in that 47% of men were interested or very interested compared with 48% of women.

In addition, older people were more likely to be very interested in Colombian politics (49% of those aged over 60 compared with only 28% of those aged between 18 and 29 years). In turn, younger people were more likely to have no interest at all (19.5% of those aged between 18 and 29 years compared with 8.5% of those aged over 60 years).

Generally, more educated migrants had greater interest in Colombian politics, with those with postgraduate qualifications being the most likely to say they were very interested (46%) and the least likely to say that they had no interest (6.2%). However, those with complete secondary education (and not those with primary level) were the least interested overall (27% had no interest compared with 15% of those with primary schooling).

Magdalena was 33 years old and had a postgraduate education. She worked in Madrid in a professional job as an international cooperation consultant. She discussed how she was interested in both Colombian and Spanish politics: “Generally I keep up to date with what’s happening, politically, both in Colombia and in Spain, although I’m generally more interested in Colombian politics ... Every day I read the papers, and I also listen to a radio station here [in Madrid], one called ‘double U’.”

Figure 5: Interest in Colombian politics among Colombians in London and Madrid



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=827)

Those who were working in personal services reported the highest levels of interest in Colombian politics (75% who were very interested) although the numbers are small. Beyond this, professional and associate professionals were most interested (44% and 42% were very interested). Those working in skilled trades were the most likely to report no interest at all (37%).

In relation to immigration status, those with most interest were those with EU passports in London (71% who were very interested) although this was a small group. Beyond this, residents were the most interested (36%) followed by those who were citizens (31%). Those most likely to have no interest at all were irregular (31%) followed by those claiming asylum (23%). Those who had been living in Europe for the shortest length of time were most likely to be interested in Colombian politics. For example, 40% of those who had been living for under a year were very interested compared with 28% of those had been living abroad for more than 11 years. Those who had lived for between 6 and 10 years were the most likely to report no interest at all (21%) with similar proportions for those who had lived for more than 11 years (20%).

Hernando, who was 39 years old and from Pereira arrived in London in 1996 in search of a better life for himself and his family. He stated how he did not read Colombian newspapers or listen to the news because they were negative and made him feel very pessimistic about the future of Colombia. For that reason, he believed he could not understand fully what was

happening in Colombia: “Well, look, what I say to you is ... I don’t watch the news, as I said, so whatever I say, I could be lying because I don’t know, I don’t have too many connections.”

Not surprisingly, those who voted were much more likely to be very interested in Colombian politics (39%) than non-voters (9%). In turn, 11% of voters reporting having no interest compared with 34% of those did not vote.

Related with this is the frequency with which people discussed Colombian politics. Only 18% spoke about it on a daily basis although this was slightly higher in Madrid (19%) than London (17%). Almost half stated that they spoke rarely (23%) or once a week (23%) although again there was little difference between cities. In London, 38% spoke rarely or never about politics, compared with 36% in Madrid.

Men were slightly more likely to state that they spoke regularly about politics although differences were not marked; 20% of men spoke daily about politics compared with 16% of women. Those with postgraduate qualifications were more likely to speak on a daily basis (26%) while those with primary schooling were the most likely to report never discussing politics (28%). In turn, those who had lived for less than a year in Europe as well as those who had lived for more than 11 years were most likely to speak on a daily basis (20% in each case). Finally, those who voted were more likely to speak on a daily basis (21%) or once a week (27%). Non-voters were most likely to never or only rarely speak about Colombians politics (26% and 32%).

Andres was in his 40s and from Cali and he used to work for the local government and then as a teacher. He moved to London in 1990 living for 10 years without legal papers before attaining his citizenship in 2000. He said he felt “disconnected” from Colombia because he had been away for so long. He was indifferent to Colombian politics and did not understand how Congress was elected. Not surprisingly, he had no intention of voting.

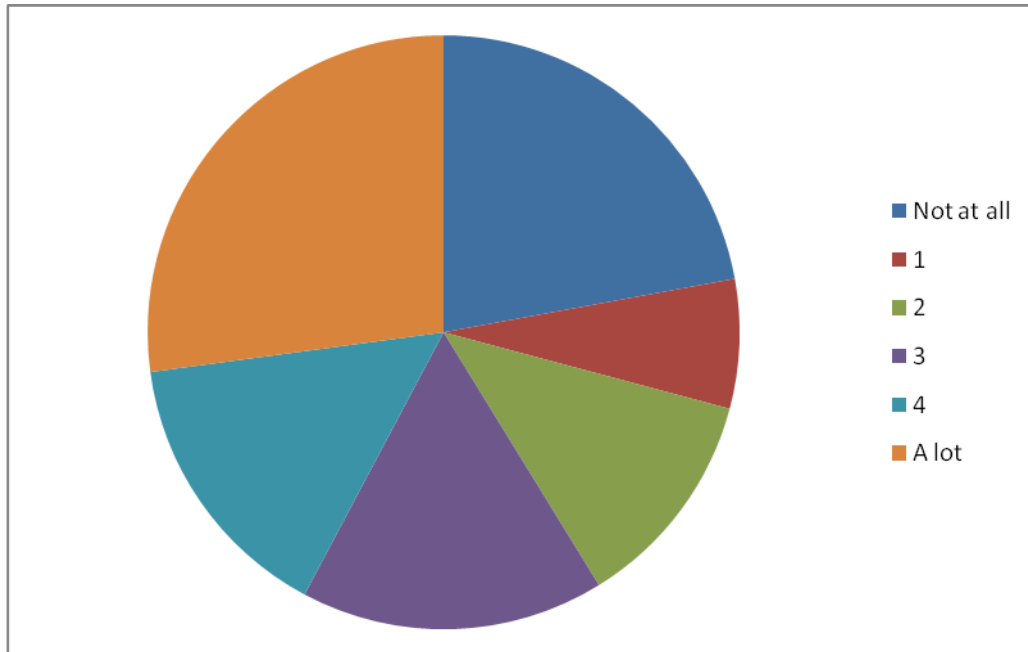
In terms of following the Colombian electoral campaigns, just under a quarter were not following them at all (22%), while just over a quarter were following them a lot (27%) (see Figure 6). Although in Madrid, more people were not following them than in London (24% and 20%), more were following them intensively (31% and 23%). Again, men were more likely to follow a lot (30%) compared with women (23%).

Reflecting the patterns outlined above, those with postgraduate qualifications were by far the most likely to follow the campaigns (37%) along with those working in professional and managerial jobs, especially those in associate professional occupations (36.5%). There was little difference in relation to length of residency, although those who had been living in Europe for 6-10 years were very active (29%). Not surprisingly, voters were more likely to follow the campaigns than non-voters, with 31% of voters following them closely compared with 6.5% of non-voters.

The internet was by far the most common medium for how people obtained information about the campaigns (75% of those who were following the campaigns), followed by the press (30%), and television (27%). More people in London used the internet (83% of those who followed the campaigns) compared with Madrid (64%), while television was much more

popular in Madrid than London (41% compared with 15%), as well as the press (38% in Madrid and 25% in London).

Figure 6: Extent to which Colombian migrants followed the Colombian electoral campaigns in London and Madrid



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=824)

It is also important to remember that many of these channels of information are accessed via the internet or satellite in terms of watching Colombian TV or reading Colombian newspapers. For example, 34 year old Gustavo from Bogotá had been living in London since 2000 and worked as an engineer. He was involved with the Green Party campaign. He commented on his surprise in discovering how connected Colombian in London were:

“The majority of people with whom I speak are very aware because of Colombian television via the internet or by satellite. There are many people, I didn’t realise, but many people watch RCN or *Caracol* [Colombian channels] by satellite. And many read *El Tiempo* (Colombian newspaper), they go to the internet and read the news there, mainly *El Tiempo*”.

The case of the Green Party campaign in London illustrates very clearly the use of the internet and social networking as new and innovative ways of reaching people. Drawing on the qualitative research, Felipe who was in his 30s and a Green Party campaigner described how he got involved with the party. He had been an architect in Bogotá and he continued to practice his profession in London. Because of his work, he had been impressed with the work of Antanas Mockus as mayor of Bogotá and the way he transformed the city. Thus, he contacted a group in Colombia called the *Visionarios* that supported the Green Party. With the backing of the *Visionarios*, he created a Facebook page to meet other people in London who shared his ideals (he had previous experience of using Facebook for political reasons when he joined a page that protested against the FARC following a rally in Spain). Through Facebook, Felipe called a meeting where all those interested gathered to discuss how to effectively support the Green Party. In this meeting the participants pooled resources and

distributed tasks and the campaign for the party started calling themselves the 'London Green Diffusion Party'. For the campaign they used mainly the internet: Facebook, You Tube, My Space and email to reach people and they printed flyers that were distributed in places where Colombians gather in London (the Elephant and Castle and Seven Sisters shopping centres among others). Felipe stressed that this group was a citizens' movement and he wanted to distance himself from traditional ways of doing politics.

Facebook was also used in the Mockus campaign in Madrid. For example, Magdalena found information on the internet about the proposals of the candidates and after following the Spanish campaign of Mockus on Facebook, she found a group of people that were organising his campaign in Spain and she joined them.

Just over a quarter of people (27%) were contacted directly about voting, with almost a third in London (31%) compared with only 22% in Madrid. Slightly more men were contacted (29%) than women (25%). Almost half of people were contacted by email (49%), with a third in person (32%). Only 6% were contacted using more traditional postal methods or by telephone (11%). The use of email was especially high in London (54% of contact) compared with Madrid (41%), possibly linked with the role of the Green Party outlined above. In turn, contact in person was higher in Madrid (38%) than in London (28%). Both telephone and post were used in roughly the same proportions in each city.

It is also important to note that the qualitative research revealed that people were contacted through various media and were influenced by information that they received through different channels. As Jaime who was a 20 year old student from Bogotá who was living in Madrid noted:

"Through various media, official routes as well as alternative ones, through the internet, as well as through my own circle of friends at university; many of them work through organisations in political ways ... I'm very close with them, in the organisation, there are lots of [political] conversations".

However, as noted above, there were also others who knew nothing about the campaigns or voting or that it was possible to vote. For example, Elena, who was 46 and from Pereira and had lived in London since 1996, said that she thought that she was registered with the consulate dating back to when she arrived. However, she did not register to vote because she did not realise she could. She said that she would like to but that she didn't know what was happening:

"It seems to me that many people, very many, are working hard and we aren't involved in other things. Here, you don't realise. If you don't put on the TV or the internet you don't get involved in anything. Time passes and you don't know what's happening in Colombia. Sometimes you get involved because someone calls and says, 'this and that is happening'. My mother keeps me informed: how she likes the president – I don't know if he will be re-elected. I don't even know that".

At the same time, some people actively did not want to get involved. For example, 40 year old Ruth who lived in Madrid did not talk to other Colombians about the 2010 campaign, nor had she been invited to any campaign event or Facebook page. Nobody had told her to vote although she received anonymous mails related to the elections that she deleted:

“No, because it is becoming a topic, the same routine, the same, yes? If we are going to talk about politics, we are always going to say the same things, that such and such candidate is no good, that the country is the same or worse, no jobs, the same story, simply it is not different, it becomes boring, always talking about the same”.

Voting behaviour in Colombia

- Almost three-quarters participated in previous elections in Colombia
- These participants were most likely to be well-educated, older and had lived a short time in London or Madrid
- Almost two-thirds voted to support ideas - usually exercising citizenship and contributing to democracy
- More than half of those who did not vote cited lack of interest in politics as the reason

As to whether people voted in previous elections in Colombia when they lived there, almost three-quarters participated (73%) with no variations according to whether people lived in Madrid or London or according to gender. Those most likely to have voted previously in relation to educational attainment were those with postgraduate qualifications (89%) followed by those with primary education (85%). Older people were more likely to have voted, especially those aged over 60 (83%) compared with much lower rates among those aged between 18 and 29 (60%). Again, not surprisingly, those who had lived for the shortest period of time in London or Madrid were most likely to have voted back home with 83% of those who had lived for a year or less participating in Colombian elections compared with 61% of those who had lived for more than 11 years abroad.

Among the 604 people who voted previously in Colombian elections back home, by far the most commonly cited reason for voting was to support ideas (62%), followed by supporting a political party (16%), and supporting a specific politician (12%). Another 4% said that they wanted to support the democratic system and to exercise their rights as citizens (although for some this was also included in the notion of ‘supporting ideas’).

For example, Felipe (see above) stated: “I was one of those that believed the story that (voting) was the minimum you could do as a citizen”. Similarly, 27 year old Gloria who migrated to Madrid in 2008 and was working in a German bank there had always voted in Colombia:

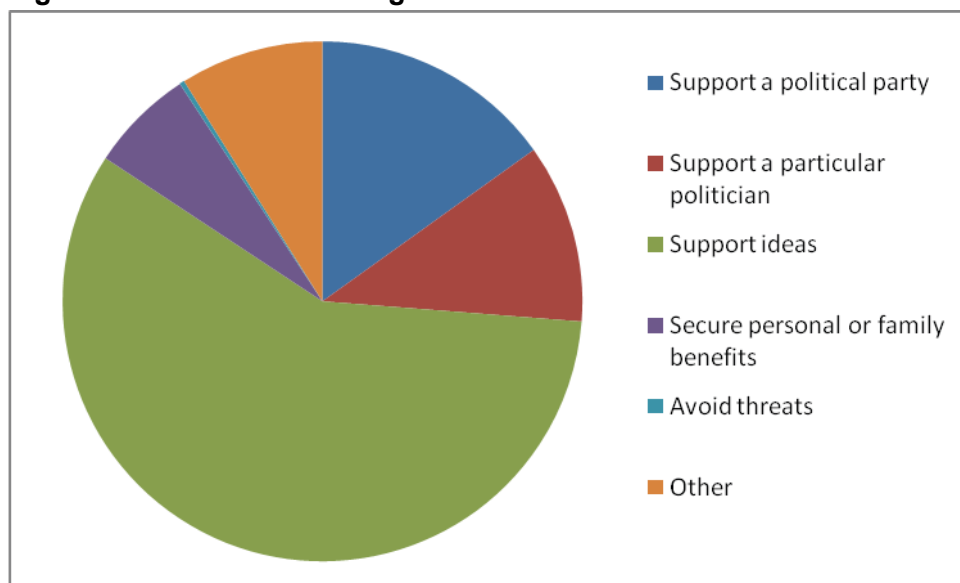
“As I said, I feel, I believe, in change ... and that you can choose. You can’t complain that things don’t change if you don’t use the means available, those provided by the system, to participate ... it is your duty, as a citizen, to inform yourself and vote for the candidate that you think you have more in common with and that it’s going to do things better.”

Only two people reported voting in order to avoid repression in Colombia, although one person reported being paid, and one stated that he was required to vote by his employer (see Figure 7). Elena (see above) reported how she and her husband had campaigned for the Liberal party and had received assistance as a result: “There are many different types of help. For example, a politician, the one my husband supported, helped us with a plot of land and we have a little house. The only one that we have been able to have in so many years.”

For some, the experiences during the worst years of the armed conflict in Colombia meant it was important for them to vote. For example, Sandra was 28 years old and had been living in Madrid since 2008 where she was studying for a PhD. She had been part of the Communist Party in Colombia when she was younger and had also worked as an assistant in a research project on conflict. In addition, Sandra’s mother and father had both been guerrilla fighters; her mother for the M-19 and her father for the ELN. While her father had been killed in combat, her mother was currently a member of the Chamber representing a left wing party, part of the Democratic Pole, and she was involved in campaigning for this party. Sandra noted:

“... and I used to vote ... because it is a way to strengthen the party system, also to demand, in terms of militancy, in terms of compliance ... of having a voice, of being represented in Parliament, I think that is very important ... I have always thought that the vote is the founding principle of democracy, isn’t it? And even more when you have an armed conflict where they steal your vote ... Therefore, I don’t know, I have a lot of mystique in all that concerns voting.”

Figure 7: Reasons for voting in Colombian elections in Colombia



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=604)

Among the 213 who stated why they did *not* vote in previous elections in Colombia, the main reasons cited were lack of interest in politics (57%), followed by not being old enough (31%). This lack of interest was usually related with a mistrust of the Colombian political system especially in terms of corruption. Marisol was 42 years old and migrated to London from Cali in 1988 where she was working as a secretary. In London she worked as a cleaner and owned a small shop selling beauty products. Marisol shared the views of many who had not voted previously in Colombia:

“Because, look, the truth is, look at the politicians, at the politics in Colombia, they say it’s better now, and I think it is. But years ago, everything was robbery. This is what we call a viscous circle in that only the politicians and politics come out of it with any benefits. They don’t care about helping the people”.

Manuel, who was 53 and from Medellín had been living in Madrid since 2001. Although he had previously worked in construction, he was unemployed and described himself as apolitical along with all his family. Although he voted once in Colombia, he stated that:

“I’ve been waiting for a change in Colombia for 40 years, since Gaitán [a former president], but it never comes. In Colombia, everything is run by 4 or 5 families, politics, the economy ... It’s difficult to have a new candidate. The struggle against the guerrilla has also been difficult”.

However, Manuel said it was important to vote when abroad to try and change things: “From Spain, yes I’ve voted to do my share from here. You have to vote, even if you’re not interested” (see also below).

Marcos who was in his 40s and originally from Villavicencio had been living in London since 2000 after fleeing persecution linked with his investigations into human rights abuses as a lawyer, assisted by Amnesty International. In Colombia he had never voted despite his work. He stated: “Historically, they come and buy votes as well as use the paramilitaries when people who don’t vote for money vote because they have a in their head. This showed me that the electoral route was not a real route in our country. That’s why I didn’t vote” (see also below).

Nature and reasons for voting in Colombian elections from abroad in London and Madrid

- Only 44% had voted in previous Colombian elections from abroad
- Prior to the congressional elections, 33% in Madrid and 21% in London planned to vote; 31% in Madrid and 38% in London planned to vote in the presidential elections
- Several became very interested in politics only after migration
- Voting from abroad was seen as a responsibility
- Voting from abroad helped to address social inequalities and change Colombia from afar
- Voting from abroad helped to raise awareness of the importance of remittances for the Colombian economy
- Voting from abroad was especially important for those who planned to return

As to whether people had voted in Colombian elections from abroad before in either the UK or Spain, 44% had done so, with little difference between London and Madrid. Men were more likely to have voted previously (38%) than women (29%). Those who had been living longest in London or Madrid were most likely to have voted (48% of those who had lived for more than 11 years in the destination country). There were few variations according to education level, although those with postgraduate qualifications were the most likely to have voted (36%).

In relation to voting intentions before the congressional elections in March 2010, 33% of those interviewed in Madrid and 21% in London planned to vote in these, and 31% of those in Madrid and 38% in London planned to vote in the presidential elections. Prior to voting in the presidential elections in May 2010, plans to vote were slightly less than those indicated before the congressional elections with 29.5% stating their intentions in London and 27.5% in Madrid. However, as pointed out in the case of Manuel above, it is also important to

examine some of the general reasons behind why Colombian migrants felt it was important to vote, much of which was elicited from the qualitative research.

For many Colombians, migration awakened an interest in politics after migration to London or Madrid – sometimes renewed and sometimes completely new. For example, Angelina, who was 31 and from Armenia had been living in London since 1997. In Colombia, she did not participate in politics because she knew people that supported the Patriotic Union (*Union Patriótica*) who had been killed for being involved:

“From a small girl I had witnessed bad things. For example ... I knew people from the Patriotic Union who were killed because they once allowed a meeting to be held in their house, only for this. For this reason, I didn’t vote. Also, because of the economic difficulties. A new president arrives and says ‘this will help this, this will help that’ and before long the situation is worse, more death, more war.”

However, in 2003-4, she began to become involved with MIRA and she had been campaigning with them. She joined with them because of:

“the ideals they have ... the thoughts, the desire to help people. Because independently of any group I liked to help people who needed it. For example, before, I helped with translation for people who couldn’t speak English and needed to visit a doctor, with the elderly. When I met the people from MIRA who wanted to do the same, I thought I would join them. Then I began to see all the good work they had been doing in Colombia. They are always trying to do better there and something better here”.

For many, their interest in Colombian politics had increased since migrating to Spain or the UK. Some felt that they had different insights into Colombia from abroad and they had a duty to participate from abroad. For example, 49 year old Rosario who has been living in Madrid since 1997 pointed out:

“Yes, I am interested in my Colombian politics because, even though we are far away, we can’t forget our characteristics, our co-nationals, and it is my country that gave me life and youth and everything”.

Similarly, 33 year old Magdalena from Madrid believed that Colombians who lived outside the country had a responsibility to vote, especially in the 2010 elections because the results were very close.

In several cases from London, migrants’ political awakening and their participation in formal politics was due to a realisation that social inequalities were very marked in Colombia. For Felipe who was the Green Party campaigner (see above) migrating to London highlighted just how difficult conditions in Colombia were compared with the UK which he viewed as more egalitarian: “... It caused me a big shock, the inequality of my conditions ... it opened my eyes ...”. In a similar way, 32 year old Emilio who was also a Green party campaigner in London who had been living there since 2005 reported that he now viewed social inequality in Colombia as a “a time bomb” when compared to what happens in the UK. This has motivated his political participation: “... it awakens filaments that were sleeping and one thinks, I have to do something. I am not in Colombia but I have to do something about it ... I have to participate somehow”.

Marcos (see above) who had not previously voted in Colombia was standing as a candidate for the Democratic Pole in the 2010 elections in London. Marcos had decided that the electoral process was important especially from abroad because he realised that migrants were neglected by the Colombian government although the remittances they send constitute one of the most important resources for the Colombian state:

“The main issue is that Colombian immigrants are treated like third class citizens in this country and they have been completely abandoned by our country. This is despite the fact that the country lives off what the Colombian immigrants produce. It’s a great contradiction that made me say: something has to be done in this country. Because as you know the remittances from the immigrants to our country are the main economic income. We are talking about 5,000 million dollars per year in remittances produced by immigrants. The contradictory thing is that the majority of this money produces more migration. I mean that this money goes into maintaining the armed conflict.

Another motivation for participating in Colombian politics was the desire to see the country improved especially for those who planned to return. For example, 25 year old Ignacio who was born in London and therefore ‘second generation’ said he was interested in Colombian politics and voting because he wanted to go back as most of his family lived there.

However, there were also others who voted because they felt they had to. For example, 51 year old Liliana who fled political violence to Spain in 1997 because of her political activity with the Patriotic Union noted:

“I don’t believe in the country any more. I vote because I have to, because change is needed. But there is a lack of culture, politics, interest. There has been a big cultural change with the drug trafficking, people now want things quickly, they are individualists, and you can see this”.

Obstacles to voting in Colombian elections from abroad

- Lack of interest was the main reason for not voting in previous elections from abroad
- The bureaucratic nature of voter registration of dissuaded many people from voting
The short voting registration time period was viewed as extremely restrictive
- Lack of information emerged as an issue, especially in relation to that provided by consulates

The main reason cited for not voting in previous Colombian elections was lack of interest cited by a quarter a people (26%), as well a range of issues designated as ‘other’ including not being in the country or not being old enough. Also significant was that people did not register (20.5%), did not have enough information (10%) or enough time (10%).

While the issue of lack of interest is outlined above, the difficulties in registering emerged as important from the qualitative research. In order to be able to vote in the elections in 2010, Colombians at home and abroad required a new *cédula* (or national identification card) provided by the National Civil Registry. While it was possible to obtain these from the Colombian consulates in London or Madrid, not everyone renewed their *cédulas* in order to be able to vote. In our survey, focusing on those who were interviewed prior to the

congressional and presidential elections, 74% had obtained a new *cédula*. Possession was higher in Madrid (81%) than in London (68%). However, obtaining the new *cédula* did not necessarily mean that people would vote. For example, among those who explicitly stated that they did not intend to vote, 49% had a new *cédula*. This was especially marked in Madrid where 64% of those with a *cédula* stated they would not vote compared with 38% in London.

For example, Ruth was 40 years old from Pereira and had been living in Madrid since 2005 where she worked as a receptionist. She said that she was only slightly interested in politics mainly because she felt it was important to know what was going on. However, she had never voted from abroad because: “I never had any interest in registering my *cédula* at the consulate, and when I decided I wanted to do it, it was too late ... I have the *cédula* but I am not registered to vote. Echoing some of the points made above, Ruth had little faith in Colombian elections: “because they promise things and they don’t comply, because we always are in the same situation or worse ...”. For those who were ambivalent about voting, it was clear that the bureaucracy of registering for the new *cédula* dissuaded them.

Patricia who was 38 years old and from Huila and had been living in Madrid since 2009 believed that the consulate did not do enough to encourage Colombians to vote. Although she herself had managed to register, she felt that the consulate should have allowed more time:

“giving only 2 weeks to register your *cédula*, it’s far too short a time. It needs to be at least a month because there are people who find it difficult, who are working ... they didn’t publicise it very well. Many people were left without their vote because of this. Why? I ask. I don’t know. Is it because it’s in the interest of the government? I think so”.

Lack of information emerged as an important obstacle. From the qualitative research, it emerged that this referred to two issues; first, many people were not aware that they were able to vote or that there were elections to vote for a representative abroad; and second, they were not aware of how to obtain information about candidates and issues and so therefore voted blindly.

In terms of the procedural process of voting, the consulates of both countries were blamed for not providing enough assistance as identified by Patricia (see above). Gustavo who was 34 and had been living in London since 2000 and who was involved in the Green Party campaign, lamented the fact that although 7,000 Colombians had registered their *cédulas* in order to vote, at the congressional elections, only 700 actually voted. However, he also pointed out that voting was not made easy:

“The majority of the people with whom we speak, and we have spoken with many Colombians as part of the Green Party campaign, and wherever we go the people say to us ‘I want to vote, I want to vote for Mockus’ ... and they say ‘my *cédula* is not registered and I tried to register but I couldn’t. How do I register my *cédula* because I want to vote?’ They only opened registration for 15 days in November of last year [2009]. They sent an email to a distribution list in which, obviously, not everyone was on, in fact, few were on it. Therefore, nobody realised that the consulate had opened registration for the elections. When people began to realise and went there to register

and said 'I want to vote' it was closed. This has been a terrible problem because people that we meet want to vote and they cannot vote".

Gustavo went on to say that by law, the registration should be open until 15 days before the elections, yet they were closed all year (in 2010 before the elections). This was blamed on the consulates as well as the government in Colombia.

There were several complaints about the voting being concentrated in the large cities which made it difficult for those elsewhere to vote. For example, 52 year old Enrique who worked as a dentist and had been living in Madrid since 1988 noted: "The information is very limited, and because of the dispersion of the people, because no entities that can bind to all Colombians, people are uninformed. They lose the threads of Colombian politics, people feel uprooted, and that's bad". Similarly, 28 year old Sandra stated: "It's not easy although it depends. If you live in Madrid, it's easy, if you don't live in Madrid, it's difficult. If you live in Navarra and you have to go to Bilbao, non-one will go to vote".

This was also an issue in London where voting stations were only located in the capital. For example, Emilio from the Green Party discussed the difficulties of having voting tables in one place as well as the pressures of time and money linked with long working hours:

"Here in London, with the costs so high, you can only have one voting table. But remember that the people here work, the people work lots of extra hours and extra hours on top of that. People work Monday to Monday. First, they have to take a day off, sacrifice their work, second, they have to pay transport that is expensive, not just in London, but if someone lives in Oxford or Cambridge they have to come here and that costs £40 or £50 plus not working that day ... therefore the effort and cost is huge".

The consulates were again blamed for this lack of information as 28 year old Sandra pointed out: "If you don't look for information, it is not offered. The consulate does no type of promotion campaign for voting, there is nothing, nothing to encourage Colombians to go and vote, nor to register their *cédula*, or their vote, nothing".

The concerns over the lack of information about the candidates and the policies concerned many in London and Madrid. 33 year old Magdalena stated:

"I am worried that people go to vote without any information ... A complete lack of information, that is not only a problem here, for us that live in Spain, in Colombia happened the same thing ... so I think that many people were voting blindly and for me, that is not a conscious political participation".

This lack of information was also partly linked with Colombians not feeling part of the 'Colombian community' in London or Madrid. For instance, 30 year old Isabel who did not vote in the 2010 elections felt that she was not integrated in the Colombian community and so she did not keep track of the campaign (see above). Furthermore, she did not receive much information from friends back in Colombia apart from a few remarks on Facebook. She said:

"If I had had a bit more of ... encouragement from the environment, if I had had more information maybe I would have been more interested on voting, but at the same time, the despair of not knowing for whom to vote and then? ... I go and vote and I

give my opinion but nothing is going to change and that is the sad mentality of many, including me”.

In one extreme case, 25 year old Ignacio who lived in London confessed that he did not read Colombian newspapers and he voted according to his and his friends’ perceptions of the candidates. He did not remember who he voted for in the last (2010) presidential election: “I don’t remember ... what happened is that I went in without knowing, deciding between two or three. I don’t remember exactly for whom I voted”.

However, not everyone felt that there was not enough information provided. 53 year old Manuel who was living in Madrid reported:

“Yes, there is information in the consulate. You have to register with your *cédula*. They help. Yes, it’s easy to get information about the candidates, parties ... There are leaflets, advice and in the consulates there are political meetings about the different candidates. I have been on various occasions on the way to do other things”.

In London, although Emilio was critical of the pressures on voting from the perspective of Colombians themselves he felt that the consulate had done a very good job in organising the elections:

“Their management was great ... They sorted out all the tables: the business tables, the health tables, the entrepreneurs tables, the Feria en su Casa (housing fair), there was also a newsletter sent round regularly. It appeared excellent to me. Because of this newsletter I went and registered my *cédula* in order to vote”.

However, Emilio also recognised, along with others, that those who were irregular would be extremely unlikely to register at the consulate (see also below).

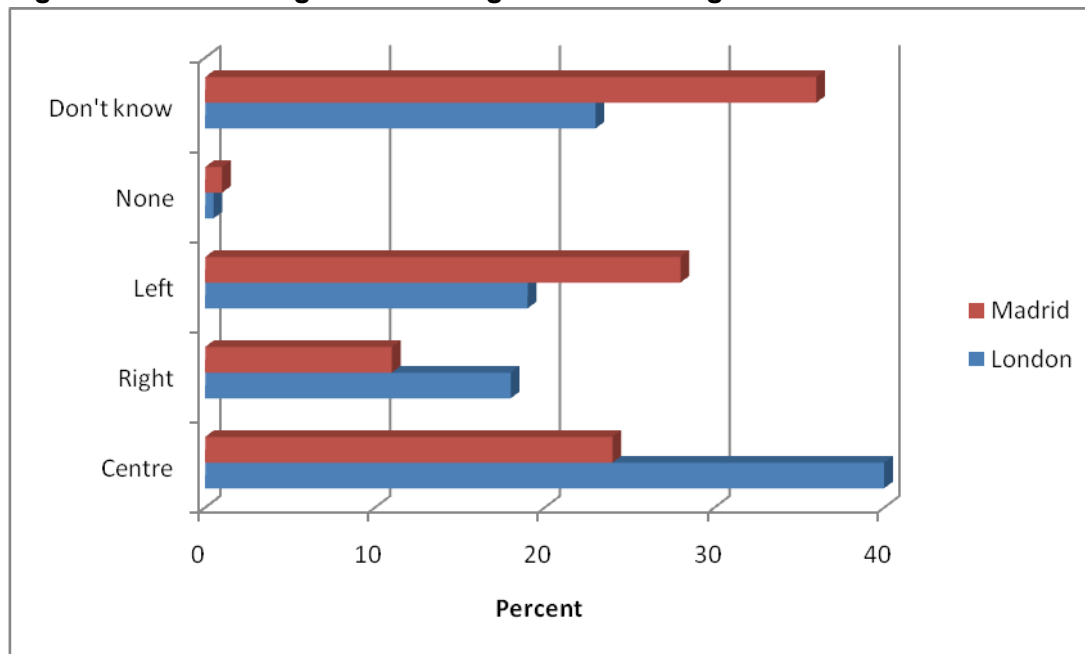
Voting preferences among Colombian migrants in London and Madrid

- One-third stated were politically aligned with the Centre with another quarter identifying with the Left. A further 14% were aligned with the Right and 29% did not know
- In London, more were aligned with the Centre and the Right, while those in Madrid were more aligned with the Left.
- Almost half stated a preference for Mockus, while a quarter preferred Santos
- In London Mockus was the most popular candidate whereas in Madrid, Santos was favoured
- Men were much more likely to vote for Santos than women
- Party identification was much weaker than identification with individual politicians
- In London, more identified no party and with the Green Party while in Madrid more identified with MIRA
- There was greater mobilisation of votes on voting days among the Greens and MIRA than among the older traditional parties
- Almost three-quarters approved of Uribe’s term as President

In terms of people’s broad political affiliations, one-third stated they were centrist (32%), with another quarter identifying with the Left (24%). A further 14% were aligned with the Right, and 29% did not know. Some interesting differences emerged between cities in that Colombians in London were more likely to be centrist (40%) and right-wing (18%) compared with those in Madrid (24% and 11% respectively). In contrast, those in Madrid were more

likely to be left-wing (28%) than in London (19%). However, those in Madrid were more likely to state that they didn't know (36%) compared with those in London (23%) (see Figure 8). Those most likely to vote on elections days were those aligned with the Centre (56%), with those on the Left and Right equally likely to vote (both 53%).

Figure 8: Political alignment among Colombian migrants in London and Madrid



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=794)

However, many found the issue of political alignment difficult to pinpoint. For example, 30 year old Isabel from Bogotá who was pursuing postgraduate study in London to further her career as a psychologist voted regularly in Colombia. Although she defined herself “...more to the left, to the community side, to social aspects, to working with people, to everything that has to do with the people ... those who need the most”, she said that she did not believe in politics.

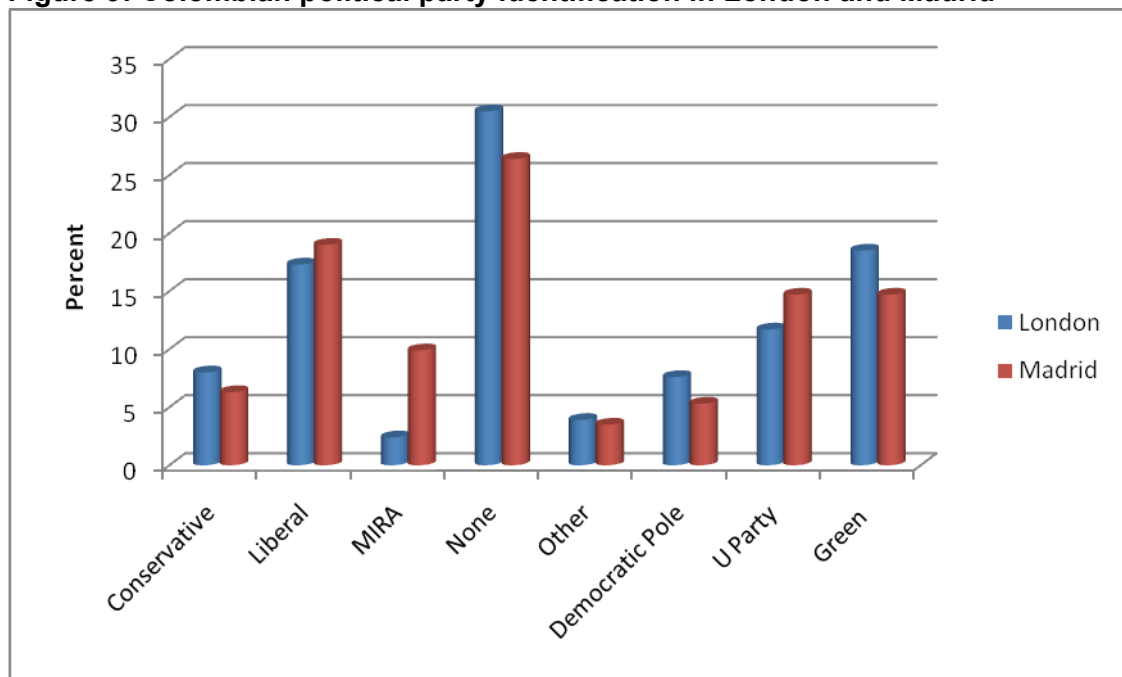
Among those who identified a candidate that they planned to vote for (155), 46% stated Antanas Mockus while a further 25% stated a preference for Juan Santos (although 8% also identified Uribe although he was not running; Santos was the candidate for the *Partido de la U* - Uribe's former party). Men and women planned to vote in roughly equal numbers for Mockus although men were much more likely to vote for Santos. In London, Mockus was the most popular candidate, identified by 63% of people, followed by Santos (18.5%). In contrast, in Madrid, Santos was the favoured candidate (32%), followed by Mockus (28%) and then Noemí Sanin (18%).

Reflecting these broad preferences, among the people who expressed an opinion on various Colombian politicians, Mockus was the most likely to receive favourable statements (57% liking him or liking him very much out of a total of 580). Among those who expressed an opinion about Santos, 34% liked him or liked him very much (out of a total of 560). Somewhat contradictorily, these patterns varied according to city in that in Madrid, Mockus

received more positive feedback than in London (68% and 62%) while Santos was approved of by 43% compared to 28.5% in London.

Related with this, people had much stronger opinions about individual politicians rather than parties. For example, when people were asked which political party they most identified with, more than a quarter (28%) stated none, while 18% identified with the Liberal Party, 16.5% with the Green Party, 13% with the U Party, 7% with the Conservatives and 6% with the Democratic Pole. In London, slightly more identified no party (30.5%) than in Madrid (26%), whereas more identified with the Liberal Party in Madrid (19%) than in London (17%). In turn, the Green Party was more popular among those in London (18.5%) than in Madrid (16%), whereas MIRA was more likely to be mentioned by those in Madrid (10%) than in London (2.4%) (see Figure 9). However, while this refers to voters and non-voters, those who voted were more likely to identify with MIRA (43 out of 49 who identified with them) and the Democratic Pole (38 out of 52). This indicates greater mobilisation of voting power among the former two parties which are new on the Colombian political scene, compared with the older, traditional parties. This said, although those who supported the Green Party and the U Party were slightly more likely to vote, there was little difference.

Figure 9: Colombian political party identification in London and Madrid



Source: Questionnaire survey (n=804)

The preference for politicians rather than parties was reflected in the views of 33 year old Magdalena who was living in Madrid since 2003:

“I think that our political system is very complex. It is not structured around political parties with a clear ideological current. Our system corresponds more to the American rather than the British system – the politician is not linked with the government, and you vote on one hand for congress and on the other for political parties and on the other for the executive ... parties appear and disappear every day, transforming from one day to the next, for example, today they are conservative,

tomorrow they are liberal and the next day they are party of Uribe and the U. I think we lack a lot of political maturity because of this”.

The case of Isabel from London discussed above also illustrates the preference for ideas rather than political parties. She stated that she did not believe in any party: “No political party but in ideas and statements of intent from a person who says ‘well, I’m going to do this’ and me, ‘I’m in agreement’ and so I support them. But a political party, no”.

Among those who expressed an opinion about the former President Uribe (704), 73% approved of how he acted in his term of office, with 26% disapproving and the rest saying that they neither approved nor disapproved. In London, 61.5% approved of Uribe and in Madrid, 67% approved.

Although there were many who disapproved of Uribe in the qualitative research, the words of 27 year old Gloria who had lived in Madrid since 2008 was indicative of those who supported his term in office as well as his successor, Santos:

“Well, there have been many changes ... because we had two very strong parties, that were the liberals and the conservatives ... then new parties appeared that have given a new air to politics and new hope to the people ... Well, from there Uribe came and with him many changes have been achieved and many good things for the country and well, now with Santos ... I voted for him, because I believe that he is a person who also has the perception to continue with the changes that the other had started, of bringing more investment, more growth for the country...”.

In direct contrast, 20 year old Jaime who had also lived in Madrid since 2008 stated:

“I think that Uribe represents the interests of the oligarchy, the North American oligarchy and through them, the armed conflict is viewed as a problem, only as a conflict, they do not see its social and economic roots, where it comes from ... they treat it in a military way, and they criminalise anyone who proposes and opposite view, they criminalise them and they persecute them”.

Interest in British and Spanish politics among Colombian migrants in London and Madrid

- Interest in the politics of the host country was quite high (around 40%), but higher in Madrid
- Voters, long-term residents and citizens were more interested in British/Spanish politics
- Colombians in Madrid were more likely to talk about Spanish politics than those in London about British politics
- Colombians in London who were politically engaged with British politics were more likely to vote in Colombian elections
- Colombians in London were more likely to engage with politics in their homeland than those in Madrid
- Colombians in Madrid were more likely to be interested in both Colombian and Spanish politics
- Levels of voting were high among Colombians in London in both local and general elections

he understood politics in London better than in Colombia. Somewhat ironically, he had not voted because he did not have a registered address.

The overall lower levels of interest among Colombians of British politics compared with Spanish politics is also related with language difficulties. Elena (see above) had been living in London since 1996 and had residency (Indefinite Leave to Remain) had never voted in British elections (this is only possible with citizenship). However, Elena was not sure whether she could or not and she thought that voting was compulsory in the UK because someone from the council had visited her and told her this. However, Elena admitted to knowing very little about British politics because of difficulties with the language.

In terms of actual patterns of voting, Colombians in London had very high levels of voting in local British elections (66% of those who were eligible), compared with only 38% in Madrid. In turn, Colombians in London also had higher levels of participation in general elections than in Madrid (59% and 48%).

Felipe, for example, spoke about how he liked British politics:

“Yes, I love it. I voted in the local elections as I’m allowed to [he is a Spanish passport holder]. I loved it. I read all the newspapers I can. I’m not linked with any political movement but I think that it’s marvellous to see politics here. It’s very close. There is little evidence of shady things occurring behind closed doors. It’s out there. I think the MP scandal was marvellous”.

In terms of political alignments with British and Spanish parties, in London, almost one third identified with the Labour Party, with 19% favouring the Liberal Democrats, and 9% the Conservative party. However, 34% reported ‘other’ and 2% ‘don’t know’ (it is likely that many of the ‘others’ were also ‘don’t know’ given that all the main parties were identified). In Madrid, the vast majority supported the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE – Spanish Socialist Workers Party) (69%), with only 16.5% identifying with the *Partido Popular* (PP – Popular Party [conservative]). 11% said they supported no-one and 4% identified ‘others’ including the *Izquierda Unida* (IU – United Left).

Rosario claimed that she was both fascinated by Spanish politics and annoyed by it at the same time. She liked Zapatero (of the PSOE) although she thought he did not look after poor people. She obtained information through the radio and TV. She was able to vote and she always did. She discussed politics with her sons although they support the PP instead of the PSOE.

Colombians tended to talk more about Spanish politics in Madrid than about British politics in London although the differences were not that marked. For example, in Madrid, almost a quarter spoke about it once a week (23%), around one-fifth spoke about it daily, with another fifth never mentioning it. In London, one-fifth spoke about it once a week, 28% spoke rarely, and 22% never spoke about it; only 13.5% spoke daily.

Political engagement in the destination country also meant that Colombians in London were more likely to vote in Colombian elections as well. For example, in London, 75% of those who spoke on a daily basis about British politics voted. However, this was not the case in Madrid where only 38% of those who spoke about Spanish politics on a daily basis voted in Colombian elections.

Colombians in London were more likely to engage with politics in their homeland (46%) than in Madrid (31%). In turn, migrants in Madrid were more likely to be interested in both Colombian and Spanish politics (40%) compared with 29% among those in London. This highlights how Colombians in Madrid are more engaged with Spanish politics than those in London are with British politics. For instance, 17% preferred Spanish politics to Colombian in Madrid, while only 11% preferred British politics.

Magdalena, for example, claimed to be more interested in Colombian politics than in Spanish politics: “I believe that, also, it is a sentiment that not being present, you want to have a link with the country, see what is happening, so, I have been more active in terms of Colombian politics compared to Spanish”.

Citizenship and voting behaviour in London and Madrid

- Voters in Colombian elections were more likely to be British and Spanish citizens than non-voters
- Colombians who were British citizens in London were more likely to exercise their voting rights in local elections than those with such rights in Spain
- More than half of those who were not citizens said they would vote if given the opportunity, especially in Madrid
- Very small proportions of irregular migrants voted in Colombian elections from abroad
- Citizenship was linked with belonging rather than nationality

People were also asked specifically about whether or not they were a citizen of the UK or Spain (in addition to the question discussed above about specific immigration status). When this is related to voting patterns, between 30% and 40% of citizens voted in the 2010 elections. For instance, in Madrid, 34% of those who voted on election days were citizens compared with 29% of non-voters. In London, 40% of those who voted were citizens compared with 30% of non-voters.

In relation to local elections in both countries, 54% of those with British or Spanish citizenship voted compared with 46% who did not. Those with citizenship in London were much more likely to vote in British local elections (66%) compared to the Spanish ones in Madrid (38%).

When those migrants who were not citizens were asked whether they would vote if they were given the right to do so, more than half said that they would definitely use their vote (54%), with another 19% saying it was very likely. Only 12% stated that they would not vote, and 6% that it was unlikely. Migrants in Madrid were more likely to state that they would definitely vote if they were given the opportunity (62%) compared with London (43%). Male migrants were slightly more likely to be sure they would vote (56%) compared with women (51%).

Perhaps more important than citizenship in relation to general voting patterns though is that irregular migrants are highly unlikely to register to vote at the Colombian consulates recalling that only 1% of those who voted were irregular (see Table 5). This preoccupation emerged in the qualitative research as stated by Emilio from London in relation to voting:

“[It depends] if you are a legal Colombian who is not illegal, then you are registered at the consulate. But illegal people say: ‘one day the consulate will pass the information to the Home Office and I will be busted’. Therefore, they are not registered. Those of us who are registered are a minority and that is why”.

In the qualitative research, some Colombians in London were asked about what that citizenship and democracy meant to them. The views of 39 year old Hernando who had a Spanish passport although he had lived in London since 1996 where he worked in sales illustrate commonly held views:

“it’s the power to express oneself that is important ...of course in my country I don’t know up to what point it’s possible to express oneself freely, because if you say something bad ... it can be dangerous. Therefore, democracy in a country like ours ... it affects freedom of expression. Here, you can go and protest, even alone in Trafalgar Square and the only thing they will say is ‘come on, good, keep calm’. They let you protest because here the vote is free and you know that nothing bad will happen, but in Colombia, something bad might happen ... so much so that it’s possible to lose your life for speaking out ... so what democracy is there?”

The participants’ perceptions of citizenship illustrated that it is only partly associated with nationality. Although two people thought it was about belonging to a city, most identified citizenship as participating and belonging to a society or a community. Hernando who had both Spanish and Colombian nationality stated: “it’s doing one’s bit for the growth of society”. For 30 year old Cristina from Medellín who has lived in London since 2006 and who was a dependent on her partner’s Highly Skilled Migrant Programme visa identified it as: “It is to be part of acquiring the rights but also the take on the responsibilities of a country”.

However, holding citizenship of a country other than the one of birth did not automatically confer belonging. Gerardo did not feel like a citizen of Colombia because he had lost his Colombian traditions yet he did not yet feel like a citizen of the UK despite having a British passport. Yet, Hernando felt more British because in he had been given many opportunities in the UK even though he actually held a Spanish passport. Similarly, for Wilfred, his Spanish passport was only important to use for work and travel:

“It is a necessity because it lets you travel and work but I don’t feel proud to have it ... I would never say I am Spanish as others do and forget where they come from; that is mediocrity. Denying your nationhood is like denying your mother”.

Similarly, for 32 year old Ana Maria from Bogotá who had been living in London since 2003 and worked as a tour operator, her British citizenship was important but her Colombian citizenship defined her identity – somewhat contradictorily:

“Citizenship is where you belong, the community that you belong to, that’s what I think, if you are a citizen of a place that’s your community ... I think I’m 100% Colombian ... I don’t feel British ... I would need more years, I don’t know, or if I don’t return ... maybe I would say ‘now yes, I’m British’ ... no, I don’t feel it in my hear yet, not because I don’t like it here ... but it’s like my mother, you understand?”

Conclusions

This report has outlined the findings from a research project examining the nature of transnational voting among Colombian migrants in London and Madrid in the 2010 Colombian elections. In including both voters and non-voters, the research has explored the main characteristics of these two groups as well as the reasons why people vote and why they do not. In turn, it has examined the processes of voting and the various political alignments of Colombians living in London and Madrid.

There were some variations between London and Madrid in terms of the general characteristics of the samples. The Colombian population in London was more established than in Madrid despite the overall numbers being smaller. Those in London tended to have higher levels of education, especially postgraduate level, and there were more students and professional, managerial and related workers, but with many more unemployed in Madrid. Linked with this, average month earnings were also lower in Madrid. However, Colombians in Madrid tended to be more settled, with more planning to return home in London.

In relation to political behaviour, generally speaking, those who voted were more educated, especially at postgraduate level, and to be working in professional and managerial occupations. This contrasted with non-voters who were more likely to have completed secondary education and work in elementary jobs. Voters had usually resided for less time abroad than non-voters and were more likely to be citizens than residents of the destination country. Voters were also more likely to participate in political and civic activities, while non-voters were more likely to participate in recreational activities. They were also less likely to send remittances home than non-voters.

Around half of all the Colombians sampled were interested, especially older, educated people who were professional workers. Residents and citizens were also the most interested while those with irregular status and claiming asylum were the least. Those who had been living in Europe for the shortest length of time were the most interested, as were those who voted in Colombian elections from abroad. Three-quarters of Colombians followed the electoral campaigns in some form, and especially male, voters, those living in Madrid, with postgraduate qualifications, and working in professional and managerial jobs. The internet was the main medium for obtaining information about the campaigns, especially in London.

Colombians tended to participate in elections in order to exercise their citizenship and to support democracy. However, although three-quarters had participated in previous elections while they were resident in Colombia, only 44% had voted in previous Colombian elections from abroad. However, some Colombians became very interested in politics only after migration. As for the reasons for voting, it was generally perceived as a responsibility and as a way of trying to address social inequalities in Colombia from afar, especially among those who planned to return.

The main obstacles to voting from abroad were lack of interest, as well as the bureaucratic nature of voter registration coupled with the short time frame allowed for registration. In turn, lack of information was an issue, especially in terms of that provided by the Colombian consulates.

As for political allegiances, one-third of Colombians were politically aligned with the Centre with another quarter identifying with the Left and 14% with the Right. Colombians in London were more aligned with the Centre and the Right while those in Madrid were more aligned with the Left. Although Mockus was the preferred candidate overall and in London, in Madrid, Santos was favoured. In addition, men were much more likely to vote for Santos than women with no gender differences in preferences for Mockus. Political party identification was much weaker than identification with individual politicians although identification with the Green Party was much stronger in London than Madrid, while in Madrid more identified with MIRA.

Around 40% of Colombian surveyed were interested in the politics of the host country with higher rates in Madrid than in London. Voters, long-term residents and citizens were more interested in British/Spanish politics. Colombians in Madrid were more likely to align themselves with the Spanish Left compared with only one-third in London. Colombians in London were more likely to engage with politics in their homeland than in Madrid and those in Madrid were more likely to be interested in both Colombian and Spanish politics, partly linked with language difficulties in the UK case.

In relation to citizenship, voters in Colombian elections were more likely to be British and Spanish citizens than non-voters, especially in London. More than half of those who were not citizens said they would vote if given the opportunity, especially in Madrid. Perhaps not surprisingly, very few irregular migrants voted in Colombian elections from abroad, mainly linked with fear of being discovered if they registered at the consulate. Finally, among Colombians in London, meanings of citizenship were linked with belonging rather than nationality.

On a final note, it is also worth highlighting that even though rates of participation in the external vote among Colombians are relatively low, they are an extremely important process for the country as a whole as well as for individual Colombians. It is significant that many Colombians mentioned that their interest in politics was awakened after migrating, especially linked with the realisation of the difficulties and inequalities faced by Colombians back home. The external vote gave them a channel through which they could try and change their country for the better.

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