

Trump-backed fascist claims victory in Colombian election, sparking mass protests

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Colombia's presidential runoff Sunday has produced a razor-thin preliminary result. Abelardo de la Espriella, the fascist lawyer endorsed by Donald Trump, leads Iván Cepeda—incumbent President Gustavo Petro's hand-picked successor—by a margin of under one percentage point.

With 100 percent of votes reported, the preliminary count placed de la Espriella at 49.66 percent and Cepeda at 48.70 percent. In the tightest Colombian presidential contest in recent history, turnout reached 63 percent, the highest since the 1998 runoff. Small shifts in the final tally of disputed polling stations—more than 33,000 have been formally contested—could still alter the outcome.

The hours after polls closed provide a prelude to what a de la Espriella administration would look like, if results hold.

Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in the hours following the preliminary count, primarily in Bogotá and Cali. In Cali—Colombia's third-largest city and a center of the 2021 uprising—protesters burned American flags and clashed with riot police, which deployed tear gas.

Emboldened by the Trump administration's public backing, de la Espriella threatened those demonstrating against him with accusations of "terrorism" and appealed to his fascist constituency among the security forces, reservists and veterans.

Petro, meanwhile, called the preliminary winner a fascist and alleged that foreign money had bought him votes, while simultaneously urging his supporters to remain "calm" and proposing a "national agreement" with the far right—a transparent attempt to contain opposition.

Cepeda accepted the preliminary count but declared he would not formally recognize the result until the final tally is complete.

The same dynamic is unfolding across the region—in Bolivia, Argentina, Chile and Ecuador—where pseudo-left forces and union bureaucracies whose treacherous policies facilitated the election of far-right governments are now working to quell mass opposition to them.

Far from expressing overwhelming support for any candidate, the Colombian elections have exposed a social

tinder box. Spoiled and blank ballots—approximately 675,000—far exceeded the roughly 250,000-vote margin separating the two candidates. This means that any candidate elected would ultimately face opposition from the much-cited "popular majority."

In the case of de la Espriella, his nearly 13 million votes primarily express rage against the establishment rather than a genuine endorsement of his program. Throughout his campaign, de la Espriella was marketed as the "outsider," ignoring that he spent his career as the lawyer of choice for establishment politicians tied to fascist paramilitaries and the massacres they perpetrated, and that his running mate José Manuel Restrepo was finance and commerce minister under Iván Duque and a decades-long member of the Conservative Party.

As *El País* summarized based on exit polling: "Significant sectors of the lower and middle classes that had voted for [Petro] have switched sides in this election, disillusioned with his government, while hostility from the elites had been growing. The president leaves four unresolved crises behind: the expansion of armed groups, the economic deficit, the collapse of the health system and corruption scandals."

The result is a verdict on Petro's pseudo-leftist government. Elected in 2022 on the back of enormous social upheaval—including the National Strike of 2021, in which more than 80 people were killed and hundreds forcibly disappeared by state forces—Petro immediately proclaimed his intentions in his first public address: "We are going to develop capitalism in Colombia."

He staffed his cabinet with figures from the bourgeois establishment. His healthcare, pension, and labor reforms—already modest in scope—were either blocked by Congress or quietly abandoned. The anti-riot unit ESMAD, directly implicated in the killings of 2021, was merely renamed. Moreover, his government oversaw a surge in the fortunes of Colombia's six wealthiest oligarchs, from \$28.3 billion when he took office to nearly \$50 billion today.

And the final humiliation came in early 2026, when Petro traveled to the White House and praised Trump as "terrific."

Workers and youth who had poured into the streets in 2021 had every reason to oppose Cepeda—a pillar of the same political establishment who, as his own campaign noted, was “looking for people to put the markets at ease... just like Petro has refused to do.” Cepeda’s platform, initially emphasizing a “living wage for all” and broad peace negotiations, was quietly diluted ahead of the second round: the living wage became “real minimum wage increases linked to productivity and cost of living,” and “total peace” became a more circumscribed “comprehensive peace” with narrower territorial dialogues. He presented himself, consciously, as a shift to the right from Petro.

For the past quarter century, Colombian workers and poor have rejected overwhelmingly the traditional parties of the oligarchy and imperialism only to be served a more right-wing version of the same politics.

The Conservative Party and the Liberal Party alternated power almost continuously from 1848 until 2002, punctuated by episodes of extreme state violence. The former Liberal Álvaro Uribe’s rise in the early 2000s represented the first significant rupture in this arrangement, fusing the far right with paramilitary networks under the banner of US-backed “democratic security.”

Now, with traditional *Uribismo* thoroughly discredited, de la Espriella is performing Uribe’s role: providing a new and more extreme platform for the oligarchy and imperialism to advance their interests through a figure claiming to oppose the corrupt political elite—despite representing its most ruthless faction.

His campaign finished on an aggressively hardline note, with his promises including: launching military operations against armed groups with direct Pentagon participation, expanding prison infrastructure, restarting aerial herbicide spraying of coca crops, lowering taxes, shrinking the state and accelerating oil and gas extraction. He drew congratulations from the international fascist constellation led by Trump.

The international responses to the preliminary count were immediate. De la Espriella confirmed he spoke with Trump, who offered congratulations and support, while US Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued a statement reiterating Washington’s backing. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also issued congratulations on social media.

In its National Security Strategy, the Trump administration set a clear priority of restoring “American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere,” which was concretized in its backing fascistic candidates—Javier Milei’s party in Argentina, José Antonio Kast in Chile, Nasry Asfura in Honduras, Laura Fernández Delgado in Costa Rica—as well as the military seizure of Venezuelan President Nicolás

Maduro and the continued siege of Cuba.

Petro and Cepeda denounced Trump’s repeated and full endorsement of de la Espriella, a US dual citizen, as unconstitutional, and protested the ties between the company managing the fast vote count and forces aligned with the Colombian far right.

Yet in the same breath, Petro writes on X: “I propose that if the majority forces of Colombia agree to a national accord, our position starts from a respect for the social gains already achieved... The United States government must allow this stability agreement and support it.”

This appeal to Washington to sanction a managed transition—addressed to the very government that had just endorsed his fascist opponent—captures the complete political bankruptcy of bourgeois nationalism as a response to the rise of the far right. Those like Petro represent sections of the ruling class and upper middle class much more terrified of a mass upsurge of the working class that escapes their control and threaten capitalist interests than of fascist violence directed from Washington.

Mass opposition to de la Espriella cannot find its expression through Petro’s Historic Pact coalition and his allies in the union bureaucracy and pseudo-left. The construction of a Colombian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—fighting to unite the struggles of Colombian, Latin American and North American workers under the program of world socialist revolution—is the only answer to fascism, war and the escalating social counterrevolution throughout the continent.



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