

# Colombian President Petro accused of “coup” by Trump-backed president-elect

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Colombian President-elect Abelardo de la Espriella—the fascistic lawyer backed openly and repeatedly by Donald Trump—has accused outgoing President Gustavo Petro of orchestrating a “coup d’état” after Petro refused to recognize the runoff result against his chosen successor, Iván Cepeda.

De la Espriella suspended the presidential transition process and issued a direct public appeal to the armed forces: “I ask as president-elect that you comply with your oath to protect the Constitution and democracy, and do not obey any order Petro may be giving to the contrary.” Members of the incoming government team have gone further, calling for Petro’s arrest and trial on coup and corruption charges.

The *World Socialist Web Site* does not support the policies of Petro and Cepeda. But the fraud allegations cannot simply be dismissed. The final preliminary result—de la Espriella at 49.66 percent and Cepeda at 48.70 percent—gave a margin of under 250,000 votes, which itself was considerably less than the 676,000 spoiled, blank, or unmarked ballots cast. This was a measure of the massive rejection of both candidates.

More than 33,000 polling stations have been formally contested, and Petro has alleged manipulation of digital vote-counting systems and pointed to ties between the company administering the rapid count and far-right political networks.

The outgoing president has claimed he has “verified proof” of fraud that he intends to bring to the relevant authorities, but as of this writing, no public evidence has been presented to substantiate these claims. He stated: “The difference that the real preliminary count gives us—0.3 percent in favor of Abelardo—has always been overcome in the formal scrutiny. There are fascist groups waiting for a confrontation today. Let’s not give them what they want—to start violence and kill.”

Cepeda, for his part, told Caracol Radio on Thursday that his team had not yet found “a pattern that could lead us to establish fraud” and said he recognized the formal scrutiny process, though he continued to call the preliminary count “unofficial and non-binding.” He set three conditions for recognizing de la Espriella’s legitimacy: that the president-elect renounce his US citizenship and clarify his ties to American intelligence agencies; that judicial sovereignty be respected; and that all legal persecution and extradition proceedings against Petro be abandoned. He announced he would take his Senate seat and serve as opposition.

These demands point to serious issues that the working class has an interest in seeing fully and transparently resolved. Trump’s triple endorsement of de la Espriella was a naked act of imperialist interference in Colombian electoral politics. The question of whether the instruments of US intelligence and political finance played a role in shaping the outcome—against the background of a National Security Strategy explicitly demanding “American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere”—is not conspiracy theory.

Since the 1960s, the US government built up the Colombian armed forces, which was followed by Plan Colombia under the Clinton administration, which approved \$1.3 billion in US military aid to turn it into one of the largest militaries in the region. US imperialism maintains a strategic interest in securing control over the Colombian state.

That history also includes a massive mercenary contingent of Colombian veterans recruited for the NATO war in Ukraine against Russia, creating a pool of trained soldiers with direct ties to imperialism.

These are the forces within and around the armed forces that represent de la Espriella’s core social base, which he is now whipping into a frenzy. He has

announced “urban search blocks” against crime staffed by military reservists and veterans, the reinstatement of the ESMAD anti-riot unit under a new structure, and the construction of 10 privately administered mega-prisons. Cepeda has warned: “Colombia is beginning to take on the configuration of a paramilitary government.”

This characterization is grounded in the president-elect’s own career. De la Espriella’s legal practice built its reputation defending politicians tied to the fascist paramilitary organizations that have been the enforcement arm of Colombia’s oligarchy for decades. This is a lawyer whose career has been developed in service of organized state terror.

De la Espriella’s denunciation of demonstrators as “terrorists” and his pledge to be “a tiger against the coup plotters” are a confirmation of this trajectory. Vindictive prosecutions of the outgoing government will serve as the political wedge for a sweeping program of social cuts, deregulation, and the criminalization of all working-class opposition.

The precedent is already set in Bolivia, where the seven-week general strike against right-wing President Rodrigo Paz’s austerity, privatizations and land theft was denounced by La Paz and the Trump administration as a coup attempt, resulting in a state of exception and military deployment against protesters. Whatever the legal merits of Petro’s fraud claims, that is the use to which de la Espriella will put them.

A source close to Petro told *El País* that the incoming administration plans to exaggerate administrative mistakes of the outgoing government to “discredit everything social—agrarian reform, education, etc.”

Petro has also pointed to a video circulating on social media showing individuals in a vehicle bearing Nazi flags patrolling in Valledupar. “No police stopped them, when Nazi symbols are banned around the world,” he said—demonstrating, above all, that he retains zero control over the security forces.

The most revealing feature of the current crisis is not the fraud allegations themselves, but what Petro and Cepeda are doing—and not doing—about them.

Petro openly warns of fascism and calls de la Espriella’s victory illegitimate. Yet in the same declarations, he calls on demonstrators to remain “calm,” proposes a “national agreement” with the incoming administration, and addresses himself directly

to Washington: “The United States government must allow this stability agreement and support it.”

This is not a contradiction. As bourgeois nationalists, Petro and the Historic Pact party have an overriding interest in preventing the working class from drawing revolutionary conclusions from the social and political crisis that their own four years of capitalist governance aggravated.

Petro seeks to negotiate his own political survival: demonstrate to Washington and the incoming fascistic government that the Historic Pact can be trusted to police the radicalization of workers and youth and to channel opposition into bourgeois politics, preventing the mass anger already erupting in the streets of Bogotá and Cali from developing into an independent working-class movement.

Cepeda’s three conditions for recognizing de la Espriella are the terms of a negotiated surrender, not a challenge to fascism. He is offering the incoming government a stable opposition in the Senate in exchange for protection from the most extreme forms of political persecution. The pseudo-left formations and trade union bureaucracies backing the Historic Pact will manage the same operation from below.

Workers and youth in Colombia cannot entrust their future to these forces. The fraud allegations demand transparent and independent investigation, entirely free of the political calculations of the Historic Pact and of Washington. The threat of fascist paramilitarism, backed by US imperialism with its decades-long record of building Colombia’s repressive military apparatus, demands a response rooted in the political independence of the working class—not appeals to the imperialist power directing the operation.



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