

Electoral setback in Colombia opens a new phase of struggle

written by Ted Zuur | July 14, 2026



The razor thin loss of the left in the presidential election in Peru and the left's rejection of the legitimacy of the election of US citizen and ultra-right candidate Abelardo de la Espriella in Colombia have set the stage for a new period of social and class conflict in Latin America.

The political temperature in Colombia continues to rise following the contested official election results that have made extreme-right wing candidate Abelardo de la Espriella the presumptive president elect.

President Gustavo Petro has rejected the electoral results and called for national demonstrations on July 20 th , the day the new congress is to be seated. He wrote on X,

"The president of Colombia does not recognize the legitimacy of the incoming government. Abelardo did not win the elections.

"The national majority is called upon this July 20th to raise the cry of national independence in all public squares."

Since the elections

On June 24, three days after the final round of Colombia's presidential election, Senator Ivan Cepeda, the presidential candidate of the left-wing Pacto Historico and Alianza por la Vida, conceded the presidential race to Abelardo de la Espriella, the right-wing candidate and now the presumptive president elect of Colombia.

Cepeda said, "At this stage of the scrutiny of the ballots and voting, I have decided to accept the results of that process. They indicate that Abelardo de la Espriella is the new president of the Republic. I do it as an act of democratic responsibility... However, acceptance of the electoral result does not mean giving up the truth or remaining silent in the face of events that we consider serious and that marked this presidential campaign."

Then, just six days later, Cepeda demanded that de la Espriella renounce his US citizenship and his ties to US intelligence and police agencies as a condition of assuming the presidency of Colombia. De la Espriella is a citizen of Colombia by birth, a naturalized citizen of the United States who has sworn to renounce all allegiances to all other countries, and also a citizen of Italy.

Cepeda called on the judicial authorities to act to protect Colombian sovereignty and called on the people of the country to engage in peaceful civil disobedience if de la Espriella does not renounce his ties to the USA.

President Gustavo Petro's rejection of the election results and call for demonstrations began with the statement that,

"We have all the information regarding the IP server located in Los Angeles, California, owned by the Bautista brothers, which was integrated into the vote counting operation. Algorithms were used that substantially altered the vote count in favor of Abelardo. The algorithms that rigged the election results were used with the voter registration lists of those who never vote, replacing them with voters who could vote multiple times or with no registered voters at the polling stations.

"The polling stations abroad where Abelardo obtained 177,000 more votes than Cepeda had poll workers from Colombia who were not residents of the US or Spain, which is illegal. These polling stations also included voters brought in for the World Cup who were able to vote seven times using the names of those who never vote.

"The same thing happened in several regions of Antioquia and Medellín, in Norte de Santander, and at polling stations in northern Bogotá.... "The company that supplied the Bautista brothers with flawed algorithms and other support is an Israeli private intelligence firm called BlackCube."

The opaque vote collection and counting software is owned by a private firm known as Thomas Greg and Sons. The company is owned by the Bautista family, Colombians now based in the United States. They have close ties to right-wing establishment politicians in both the United States and Colombia, and some of them have been convicted of financial crimes in the USA.

Separately, Petro announced that the government has uncovered evidence that a prominent Trump supporter in the United States named Dan Newlin had illegally donated \$1.8 million to de la Espriella's campaign. Newlin is a criminal defense attorney who has offices in Florida, Illinois, and in Medellín, Colombia. Trump had nominated him to be US ambassador to Colombia, but the nomination was rejected by the GOP dominated Senate Foreign Relations committee.

De la Espriella's political position is rapidly deteriorating before he can even take office. Now, he says that his first action in office will be to issue a decree to establish an "urban defense force" reminiscent of Convivir, the legal cover used in the past by the Colombian paramilitary militias and death squads.

Although the situation in the country is very fluid and uncertain, tensions are rapidly rising between the left and right in Colombia, and between Latin American countries and the United States.

Who really won the election?

The National Election Council's official vote count gave Abelardo de la Espriella 12,959,542 votes, less than 1% more than the 12,708,712 votes of Senator Ivan Cepeda. The voter turnout of 63.6 % was a record for this country.

The final complete official results were announced even though there had already been more than 57,000 challenges to irregularities such as vote buying and electronic fraud before Petro's own announcement.

The widespread incidents of various types of fraud and irregularities had already led many supporters of the Pacto Historico to question Cepeda's concession.

Luis Guillermo Perez Casas, a leader of the Pacto Historico, is heading the effort to collect evidence throughout the country at acciondenulidad2026@gmail.com. Casas is a human rights lawyer who served as Secretary General for the Americas of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH). So far, nearly 200,000 Colombians have signed up to help the effort.

A wide variety of irregularities and frauds have been recorded in addition to those related directly to US intervention. They include votes cast by dead people and children, photos of votes used to collect payments from vote buyers, officials of the registrar of voters preventing poll watchers from doing their jobs, and changes made to vote certifications after they had been filed.

If the vote count is not overturned, de la Espriella will take office on August 7. Until then, the current leftwing president, Gustavo Petro, will remain in office although he has already begun the transitional process of handing over the government to de la Espriella.

Under Colombia's constitution, the losing candidate of the final round of voting for president automatically becomes a member of the country's newly elected Senate. Nevertheless, the right is now talking about trying to block Cepeda from taking his seat in the senate if Cepeda does not recognize the official election results. If seated, Cepeda will become the President of the Senate (with powers similar to the Senate majority leader in the USA) since the Pacto Historico has the largest block in the Senate. The members of the newly elected Senate and Chamber of Representatives will be seated on July 20.

A Polarized and Divided Country

This election continued trends apparent in the last election: while the multiparty system lives on in the legislative branch and in departmental and municipal governments, Colombia's multiparty system is collapsing towards a new two-party system in presidential elections and the center is disappearing.

The new binary system is not a repeat of the old system of the Liberal Party and Conservative Party. Those old parties were led by different sections of the ruling class which had evolved from before the country's struggle for independence. Their corrupt but violence plagued rule was transformed with the inauguration of the country's 1991 constitution.

Instead, those two old parties and the various factions and machines of which they had been composed are now coalescing into one new right wing ruling class conglomeration.

They still hate each other as much as ever, but more than they hate each other, they fear the growing power of the working class and the oppressed. That power is coalescing into the new political party called the Pacto Historico.

The Pacto Historico is the current incarnation of a series of electoral coalitions of the left which formed for reasons more closely related to electoral law requirements and a drive to elect leaders of the left than from any serious desire to create a unified party of the working class and the oppressed. Despite its often reactive, haphazard, and improvised history, the Pacto has become a very close approximation to a mass party of the working class and oppressed. Its voter base consists mostly of the urban working class, and the organizations which support it include the country's unions, much of its indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, and large parts of the feminist, LGBTQ+ and environmentalist movements.

A good approximation of the ascendant growth curve of the left in Colombia is found in its presidential election results which you can see in the chart below.

Year	Candidate	Party	First Round		Second Round	
			votes	%	votes	%
2002	Luis Eduardo Garzon	Polo Democratico Independiente	680,000	6.16%		
2006	Carlos Gaviria Polo	Democratico Alternativa	2,613,000	22.03%		
2010	Gustavo Petro	Polo Democratico Alternativa	1,331,000	9.14%		
2014	Clara Lopez	Polo Democratico Alternativa	1,958,518	15.22%		
2018	Gustavo Petro	Colombia Humana	4,855,069	25.09%	8,040,449	41.77%
2022	Gustavo Petro	Colombia Humana/Pacto Historico	8,542,020	40.34%	11,292,758	50.42%
2026	Ivan Cepeda	Pacto Historico/Alianz a por la Vida	9,688,361	40.90%	12,708,712	48.70%

It's worth noting that in 2010 and 2014, the Green Party ran presidential candidates which took votes away from the candidates of the Polo Democratico (In 2010 Antanas Mockus received 3,134,000 votes or 21.51%, and in 2014 Enrique Peñalosa received 1,064,000 votes or 8.27%.) Those were the only elections in which the Greens ran presidential campaigns in this country.

The Cabinet of Los que Siempre (Those who have always)

Much has been made of de la Espriella's slickly packaged campaign, use of social media and artificial intelligence, and clever campaign slogans. Although all of this is true, the keys to his victory lay in the fact that he was an unknown quantity who appeared to be conservative and on the right. Unofficially and behind the scenes, his campaign united the political machinery of the right-wing parties to mobilize the conservative layers of Colombia's middle class.

He campaigned as a political outsider, using the campaigns of Donald Trump in the USA, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, Javier Milei in Argentina, and Rodolfo Hernandez here in Colombia (the candidate of the Colombian right who lost the 2022 presidential election) as his templates. As in those campaigns, de la Espriella is far from being an outsider, but he was a blank slate to the public. His dark past as a front man for the paramilitary AUC, as an attorney for drug dealers, money launderers and corrupt politicians, and as a close collaborator of the DEA and FBI, only began to become public as the campaign neared its end.

His campaign was built on lies. A man who had professed to be an atheist, he embraced religion and appealed especially to the growing evangelical churches of the country. He has placed two of their leaders in his new cabinet.

Knowing that the conservative petty bourgeoisie of the country had turned their backs on the traditional right-wing leadership, he promised he would make no deals with the traditional political parties and form a government of "los que nunca" ("Those who never" which means something like "the have nots" in English.) The slogan was a promise to rid the country of the corrupt right-wing politicians while remaining true to conservative values.

His choice of a vice president should have told his voters that this was a lie.

The new Vice President, Jose Manuel Restrepo, is a Colombian blue blood who is the descendant of three presidents and who was Minister of Finance in the scandal ridden government of Ivan Duque. Restrepo appears to be the de facto leader of the new government. Since the election, de la Espriella has disappeared from public view while Restrepo is constantly in the news and is leading the transition team of the new government.

If the choice of Restrepo did not alert de la Espriella's voter base to his bait and switch game, his cabinet appointments have. His newly minted ministers mostly served in the right-wing governments of Alvaro Uribe and Ivan Duque, and key members are drawn from the elite of two of the most corrupt family dynasties of Colombia's right: the Char family of Barranquilla which now controls the party known as Cambio Radical, and the Pastrana family which dominates the Conservative Party. That party's patriarch is former President Andrés Pastrana who is famous for his 33 entries in the Epstein files.

The Cabinet of Los que Siempre (Those who have always)

Faction	Name	Ministry	Notes
Char Family	Elsa Noguera	Minister of Transportation	Husband is a convicted drug dealer
Char Family	Rodrigo Lara Restrepo	Minister of the Interior	His father was a Minister of Justice who was assassinated at the orders of Pablo Escobar.
Char Family	Mauricio Gómez	Minister of Foreign Commerce	
Pastrana Family	Miguel Gómez Martínez	Minister of Finance	Grandson of Laureano Gomez, the most extreme right wing President in the history of Colombia.
Uribe Machine	Iván Cancino González	Minister of Justice	(Uribe, Gilinski, Odebrecht)
Uribe Machine	Lorena Angarita	Minister of Technology, Information and Communications	internet activist and senatorial candidate with no apparent education or qualifications
Uribe Machine	Paloma Valencia	Mines and Energy	Official Presidential candidate of Alvaro Uribe's Centro Democratico
Evangelicals	Viviane Morales	Minister of Education	Former Procurador
Evangelicals	Jaime Andres Beltran	Minister of Housing	Former Mayor of Bucaramanga removed from office for violating election laws.
National Salvation Party	Retired General Jorge Eduardo Mora López	Minister of Defense	Career military officer closely connected to DEA. Removed by Petro from chain of command after he was investigated, but not convicted, for corruption. Senatorial candidate for the extreme right wing National Salvation Party

Unaffiliated	Fabio Alberto Arjona Hincapié	Minister of the Environment	A supposed environmentalist who supports fracking as well as strip mining of sensitive environments in the Andes
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Plans and Threats

De la Espriella has made many promises and threats which involve aggressively using executive decrees rather than going through the legislative processes beginning with his attempt to use the transition process to witch hunt members of the current government.

Much of what he wants to do requires legislative action under the Colombian constitution, and other goals are flatly unconstitutional. While his campaign claims that all of the parties in the legislative branch except the Pacto Historico and the Alianza Verde have agreed to support the new government, this has not been confirmed by all of the party leaders, and even if they do, it is unlikely that they will be able to control all of their own parties' legislators.

De la Espriella says he wants to diminish the size of the state, transfer powers and revenue from the central government to the notoriously corrupt departmental and municipal governments; encourage private investment, mining and fossil fuel; and launch a major offensive against armed groups and drug-trafficking organizations. All in the first 100 days of his government.

He also plans to resume aerial coca eradication using bioherbicides, build 10 Bukele style mega-prisons, revoke decrees against the use of the armed forces against civilian populations, subsidize the private health care system with an additional 10 trillion Colombian pesos, and launch a witch hunt against Gustavo Petro, officials who have served in his government, and the Pacto Historico.

More than these publicly advertised measures, de la Espriella has proposed to roll back the pension and land reforms of the Petro government, and despite his public pronouncements to the contrary, is expected to try to roll back the major gains in the minimum salary made under Petro's government and improvements made to public education.

Where did the votes come from?

Regardless of whether de la Espriella's election is legitimate and regardless of how many votes were falsely attributed to de la Espriella, Colombia is clearly divided into four major political sectors: the approximately 16,000,000 people who were eligible to vote but did not, the almost 10,000,000 politically active working class and oppressed voters of the Pacto Historico in the first round of voting, the 12,000,000 politically active middle-class and upper middle-class voters who voted for the right in the first round of the elections, and about 2,000,000 politically active swing voters.

A close look at the statistics and maps reveals that the Pacto Historico's votes came from the poor and working-class neighborhoods of the big cities and from the Afro-Colombian and Indigenous regions of the country. In contrast, the votes of the right come from the middle class and upper middle-class neighborhoods of the big cities, and from the small cities and towns in the Andean region of the country which are still dominated by the old political machines. These same areas also account for much of the politically inactive population. Swing voters can be found everywhere but are mostly concentrated in the middle-class neighborhoods of the big cities.

This election revealed two big changes in the electorate. First, a large number of people who had never voted turned out at the polls, and most of these new voters supported the Pacto Historico. Second, the middle classes shifted to the right. The Pacto Historico's winning margins decreased in

some cities including Bogotá and in middle-class and upper middle-class precincts throughout the country.

This shift can be attributed to several factors. First, despite falling crime rates, the mainstream media has spent four years amplifying every crime committed in every city of the country and blaming Petro's government for them. Second, Petro's program of Paz Total (Total Peace) has failed to bring about the disarmament and demobilization of the armed groups that control the illegal drug trade and some isolated rural areas of the country. Third, the conflict between Petro's government and the private health care industry has resulted in delays and denials of health care among patients who pay for premium health care services, and this has angered much of the middle classes.

Fourth, the large increase in the minimum salary has caused the monthly administration fees in condominium complexes to go up and has increased the pay for the millions of women who work as maids and house cleaners. This has infuriated these voters even when they would be embarrassed to say so.

From 1970 to 2026 This election echoes the tumultuous election theft of 1970 but is very different in many, many respects. From 1958 to 1974, the two traditional parties of the Colombian ruling class, the Conservatives and Liberals, ruled the country in a more or less friendly power sharing agreement. Each party agreed to let the other party rule and take the lion's share of the spoils of office for four years, and to then take over for their own turn at stealing from the public trough.

This agreement was called the National Front. In 1970, it was the Conservative Party's turn to win the presidential election, so the Liberal Party did not run a presidential candidate. Unfortunately for the two parties, the former military dictator, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, who had been turned out of power by the National Front agreement, decided to run against the Conservative Party candidate, Misael Pastrana.

Pinilla was winning the election when the government stopped reporting results, then declared a state of emergency, and then declared that Pastrana had won the election. For days after the election, there was fighting in the streets, and schools and business were closed.

Three years later, a new guerrilla movement, the April 19 Movement (Movimiento del 19 de abril, M-19), was formed in reaction to the election theft. Its most important aim was to fight for the simple democratic right of one person one vote. As a youth, Gustavo Petro joined M-19, and not much later, Ivan Cepeda joined the legal political party that it became after it demobilized in 1990. Both the Pacto Histórico and the Alianza Verde are in important ways descended from M-19.

This time around, the right-wing will have a much more difficult time stealing the election. For one thing, Gustavo Petro is still president and commander in chief of the Colombian military, police and intelligence agencies. Even though the right wing maintains a powerful network within the military, police and government bureaucracy, it is far from having the control it exercised in 1970.

On the other hand, the Colombian left now has a mass party which did not exist in 1970, and most of the left has come in from the cold from its terrible detour into guerrillerismo.