



# Colombia's 2026 Presidential Election

Updated June 9, 2026

On June 4, 2026, Colombian authorities [certified](#) the results of a May 31 first-round presidential election in which right-wing political outsider Abelardo de la Espriella [exceeded expectations](#), garnering 44% of the vote to finish ahead of left-wing senator Iván Cepeda of the ruling Historic Pact (PH) with 41% (see **Figure 1**). Despite some [violence](#) in the leadup to the contest, election day proved peaceful; international observers [deemed](#) the process orderly and transparent, contradicting President Gustavo Petro's [claims](#) of fraud. After a delay, Cepeda [accepted](#) the results on June 7. A runoff is scheduled for June 21; the winner is to take office on August 7.

Since the late 1990s, Congress generally has [sought to foster](#) closer security and economic ties with Colombia. The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress has reduced foreign assistance to Colombia and placed additional conditions on that assistance, however, due to concerns about the Petro government's security policies, which Cepeda [supports](#). De la Espriella, a criminal defense lawyer, advocates a military-led security policy. President Trump [endorsed](#) de la Espriella, a move that President Petro [rejected](#) as election interference. Congress may examine the candidates' platforms to assess their possible implications for Colombia and U.S.-Colombian relations.

## Domestic Context and Campaign

The legacy of outgoing President Petro, a polarizing figure whose popularity has [risen](#) since November, has influenced the elections. Supporters have praised Petro's focus on reducing inequality through labor reform and historic minimum wage increases despite his government's [corruption scandals](#). The Petro administration's de-emphasis of coca eradication has [coincided](#) with record cocaine production. The government's "[total peace](#)" negotiations involving ceasefires with illegally armed groups may have [bolstered](#) such groups' power and fueled violence.

Colombia's March 8 legislative elections illustrated a left-right division among voters regarding how best to address security and economic issues amid continued fragmentation in the party system. PH captured the most Senate (25 of 103) and House of Representatives (43 of 183) seats, and the conservative Democratic Center (CD) garnered the second-largest number in both chambers (17 and 28, respectively). At least two dozen other parties and alliances won seats. Whomever is elected president will have to form legislative alliances to advance legislation.

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## Candidates and Results

Colombia began its presidential contest with hundreds of candidates, but the field narrowed to five main candidates for the first-round election:



**Iván Cepeda** is a left-wing PH senator, human rights activist, and “total peace” negotiator. Cepeda has [pledged](#) to combat corruption, prioritize peace and armed conflict victims’ rights, enact a progressive tax reform, and bolster rural development. Cepeda [opposed](#) U.S. intervention in Venezuela and is skeptical of militarized drug policies.

Cepeda selected **Aida Quilcué**, a former senator and Indigenous activist, as his running mate.



**Abelardo de la Espriella** is a right-wing criminal defense lawyer who has [represented](#) controversial figures, including paramilitary fighters and Alex Saab, a U.S.-indicted money launderer for former Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro. De la Espriella, a [political outsider](#) who also holds U.S. and Italian citizenship, rejected support from political parties. He has proposed aggressive security policies similar to those of Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele and [supports](#) military strikes on drug trafficking targets in Colombia and aerial fumigation of coca crops. He advocates fiscal austerity, investor-friendly economic policies, and conservative social values.

His running mate, **José Manuel Restrepo**, is an economist and former minister of finance.



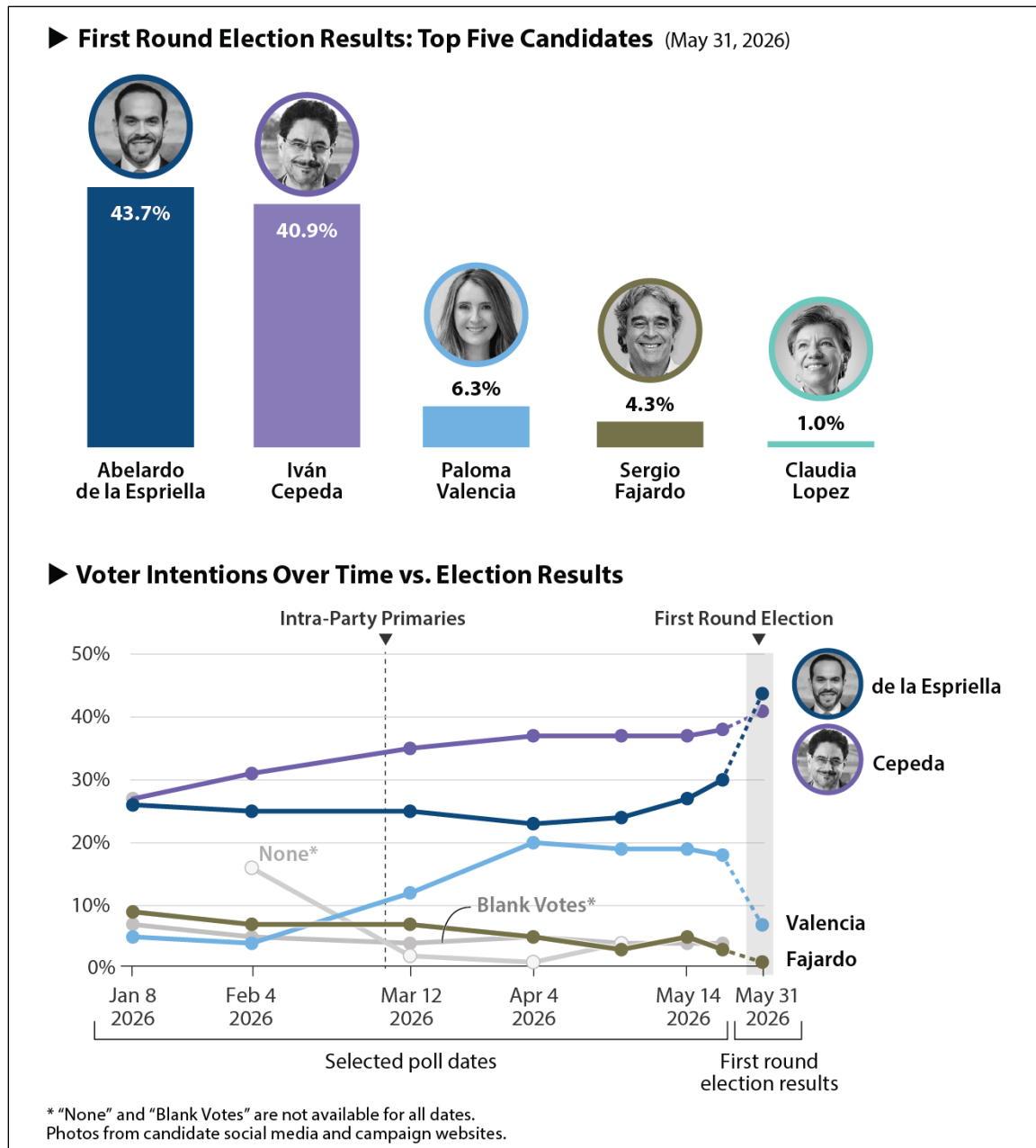
**Paloma Valencia**, a conservative CD senator, is a lawyer who was backed by former President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) and proposed policies similar to those of de la Espriella.

Disputes between Valencia and her running mate **Juan Carlos Oviedo**, a moderate economist, arguably [hurt](#) her candidacy.

Other contenders included **Sergio Fajardo**, a former mayor of Medellín, and **Claudia Lopez**, a former mayor of Bogotá, both of whom are centrists.

Cepeda led in the polls from January until the first-round election but [remained short](#) of an absolute majority. De la Espriella used [social media](#), large rallies, and support from evangelical churches to gradually pull voters away from Valencia. Fajardo and Lopez have refrained from backing either candidate in the runoff; Valencia, who finished third with 6.3% of the vote, supports de la Espriella. Seeking support from centrist voters, Cepeda appears to be [distancing](#) himself from a proposal to convene a constituent assembly to revise the constitution, which is in the PH’s [government plan](#). Analysts [predict](#) a tight race amid extreme [polarization](#).

**Figure I. Results of Colombia’s First-Round Presidential Election**



**Source:** CRS, using results from Colombia’s [National Electoral Commission](#) and a weighted average of polls as published by Colombia’s [La Silla Vacía](#).

### Implications for U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress

[U.S.-Colombian relations](#) have been strained under the second Trump Administration amid the Administration’s differences with President Petro. Drug policy changes, U.S. foreign assistance cuts and tariffs, and Colombia’s decision to sign a cooperation plan with the People’s Republic of China (PRC, or China) on China’s Belt and Road Initiative have contributed to tensions. In September 2025, President Trump [determined](#) that Colombia had failed to meet its counternarcotics commitments, the State Department [revoked](#) Petro’s visa, and the Department of the Treasury [sanctioned](#) Petro under

counternarcotics authorities. Those sanctions remain in place despite a reportedly [cordial](#) February 2026 White House meeting.

Colombia's next president may seek a positive relationship with the U.S. government, as the United States remains Colombia's top economic partner and a source of security and humanitarian support. Cepeda is regarded as [less polarizing](#) than Petro and supports human rights programming and initiatives for Afro-Colombians and Indigenous peoples, such as those [funded](#) in the FY2026 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 119-75). Cepeda's support of Petro's security policies and wariness of U.S. intervention in Venezuela could strain relations. De la Espriella has vowed to join President Trump's [Americas Counter Cartel Coalition](#) and [Shield of the Americas](#) regional security initiatives. He has endorsed El Salvador's approach to security, which includes the use of emergency powers and large-scale prisons (such Salvadoran policies have [spurred](#) some human rights concerns in Congress). In terms of economic policies, Cepeda [supports](#) targeted welfare programs, agrarian and land reform, and a transition to [renewable energies](#). De la Espriella reportedly [favors](#) reducing investment restrictions, limiting regulations, and promoting hydrocarbons development.

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