

28 February 2026



**COLOMBIA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2026:
THE LEFT'S LEGACY
VS.
THE 'COLOMBIAN BUKELE'**

ABSTRACT

Colombia will be going through the presidential election this year with the date set for 31st May 2026. An election to be much watched upon. Four years of Cepeda's rule which started with the promise of social reforms is ending with economic burden and insecurity issues in the country. Election results will be decided after 31st May, but the issues that drive us to the results can be watched here now.

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Inside the Cepeda-de la Espriella Showdown

The Candidates

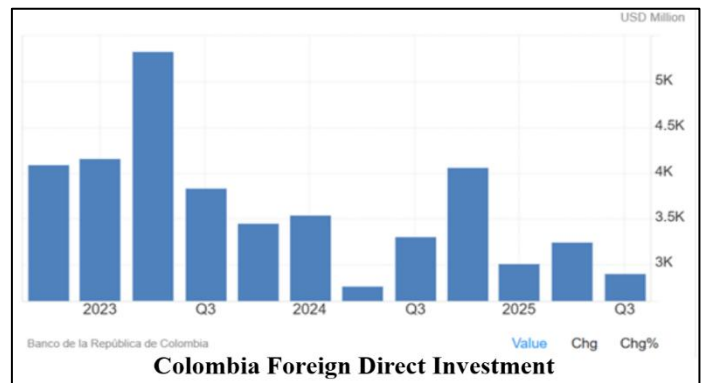
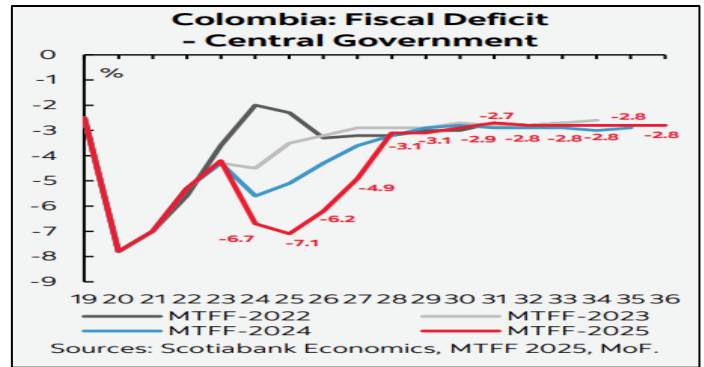
Ivan Cepeda, A candidate positioned as the successor of the incumbent left-wing agenda and current president Gustavo Petro. He represents the legacy of the **Pacto Histórico** and can make forward the promises made for social reform through his professionalism in Human Rights Advocacy and Victims Movement while carrying the burden of Gustavo Petro's current unpopularity.

On the other side of the court is **Abelardo de la Espriella**, often called as **"Colombian Bukele"**, for his **Iron fist on the crimes**. He is a successful criminal lawyer, known for defending highly controversial figures, most notably **Alex Saab and David Murcia Guzmán**. Espriella is also a wealthy businessman who uplifted wristwatch from merely a merchandise in the election campaign to a narrative formation. He goes by the nickname "The Tiger" (El Tigre) to project strength and predatory dominance and thus showcasing his popularity.

Main Domestic Factors in the Election

The first factor comes in the election is **Insecurity**. Daniel Linsker, Partner and Regional Director at Control Risks, says that criminal gangs in the region are growing more sophisticated. Their profitability has been boosted by the increased price of gold and their control of illegal mining operations. In the November 2025, Invamer Poll, it is asked, whether Petro's **"Total Peace"** policy had made them feel safer. 66.2% claim it made them feel more insecure. Almost 65% think that the process is going in the "wrong direction," **and 73% think that the government has lost control of its territory to illegal armed groups**. Only 20% showed confidence in the government's peace and security strategy. According to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Report in February 2026, the **UN confirmed 53 massacres in 2025, leaving 174 victims**, mainly fuelled by cartels and armed groups over illegal economies. The UN registered a significant increase in pre-electoral violence, with 126 attacks or threats against political leaders in 2025, culminating in the appalling assassination of right-wing presidential candidate **Miguel Uribe Turbay** in August 2025.

The second major factor is the **Economic Degradation** in the Petro’s term which further undercuts Cepeda’s and Pacto Histórico Agenda for the election. According to the Ministry of Finance’s own framework the Fiscal deficit has **ballooned past 7 % of GDP breaking the stable aim of 4% to 5%**. Fiscal Deficit coupled with the persistent 5.35% inflation rate recorded by DANE in early 2026 well above the Central Banks Target, and Sluggish Foreign Direct Investment, Petro government had given a way for De La Espriella to pitch the data to the voters and acknowledge them of their shrinking purchasing power.



Thirdly, Pacto Histórico was a broad alliance of several left wing and progressive movements. Ahead of the 2026 Election all parties planned to merge them all into a single legal political party which the National Electoral Council completely derailed, citing administrative error, specifically, that Petro's own party, **Colombia Humana**, failed to reach a legal quorum during the vote. Later the Progressive alliance wanted to form a primary in March 2026 as **Frente por la Vida (Broad Front)** which the National Electoral Council again rejected with a judgement split of 5-4 against Cepeda. Making **the left fragmented** and a smooth runway for Espriella to take off.

The US: A Match Point Factor

On September 16, the U.S. government officially removed Colombia's designation as a partner in the fight against drugs for the first time since 1997, as the country is experiencing record levels of cocaine production. Later that month, the State Department cancelled the visa of Colombian President Gustavo Petro following remarks he made at a rally during the UN General Assembly in New York, where he urged U.S. soldiers to defy the orders of President Donald Trump.

According to the **Invamer Polls**, Foreign policy is also shaping voter priorities. **A large majority - 78%, said maintaining strong relations with the United States** is essential for the next administration.

According to the **TIPP Insights Survey**, President **Trump has a 45% approval rating in Colombia (with a disapproval rating of 36%)**, significantly higher than in many surveys conducted in the U.S. and surpassing

the 39% approval of incumbent Gustavo Petro. Only 25% of people view the current U.S.-Colombia relationship positively, yet 73% desire to see it strengthened, and 70% believe that the bilateral relationship is crucial for their presidential voting decision. Colombians are evidently eager for a much closer and more collaborative partnership with the United States. Abelardo de la Espriella is in a prime position to leverage this feeling, *setting himself up as the candidate for a renewed alliance* similar to José Antonio Kast in Chile, Javier Milei in Argentina, and Nasry Asfura in Honduras, who have each taken a comparable approach in their own contexts.

These popular trend shows how U.S. factor came crucial in Colombia Presidential election. With these scenarios, the 3rd February 2026 meeting between Gustavo Petro and the Trump can be seen as a step by the former to ease the field for Cepeda despite been unpopular at home. Petro left the White House with an autographed MAGA hat and a copy of *Trump: The Art of the Deal* with a handwritten note reading “you are great.”

For Abelardo de la Espriella United States is the biggest asset. He has personal connections in the United States with owning a home and firm in Miami to calling himself an open admirer of U.S. President Donald Trump and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. He also *pitched about the U.S. backed military alliance in Colombia through his “Plan Patriota”*.

Sergio Guzmán, director of Colombia Risk Analysis says “The U.S. administration ... is looking at the relationship as something that will transcend Petro and that is far too important to sour,”

Conclusion

Though the recent meeting between Petro and Trump sets a positive tone in the relation but the factors like *growing insecurity, economic degradation and fragmented coalition of the left* tells a story line shifting in favour of De la Espriella. Though the trends in December 2025 favours Cepeda but Espriella popularity and U.S. support coupled with the domestic factors makes the situation 60-40 in favour of Espriella.

What’s in it for India?

For New Delhi, the 2026 Colombian election creates a significant geopolitical challenge regarding energy security and the expansion of "*Techplomacy*." If Iván Cepeda wins, he could become a valuable ally for India's digital public infrastructure and foster solidarity within the Global South, but his stringent *environmental policies could jeopardize the oil and coal imports that underpin bilateral trade*. On the other hand, Abelardo de la Espriella would swiftly revive Colombia's hydrocarbon industry, paving way for a steady

energy supply for India and encouraging corporate investment. Nonetheless, De la Espriella's close ties to Washington are likely to result in Bogotá abandoning any aspirations within BRICS, reducing the partnership to a **strictly transactional relationship**.

February News Review:

Sno.	Date	Sector	News Headline	Source
1	04-02-2026	Politics	Historical Pact issued a strong warning to the CNE, "Iván Cepeda, presidential candidate"	HSB Noticias
2	04-02-2026	Politics	170 municipalities at risk of fraud and violence in 2026 elections: EOM warns - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
3	07-02-2026	Politics	Iván Cepeda does not want to see the CNE even in paint and proposes to end it if he is elected president	Colombia.com
4	07-02-2026	Politics	Government in electoral crisis: CNE revokes key candidacies of the Historic Pact - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
5	11-02-2026	Politics	Abelardo de la Espriella can't wait for the elections and that's why he sells watches for 20 million pesos	Colombia.com
6	11-02-2026	Politics	Gustavo Petro looks for culprits for the floods and is reminded that the robbery at the UNGRD left victims without aid	Colombia.com
7	11-02-2026	Politics	2026 elections: the ballot for the first round of the presidential elections will be quite large due to the record number of candidates	Colombia.com
8	11-02-2026	Politics	Colombia regresses in the Corruption Perceptions Index during the Petro government	Colombia.com
9	14-02-2026	Politics	Minimum wage: government sets negotiation table for next Monday, February 16	Colombia.com
10	14-02-2026	Politics	Constitutional Court returns the seat to Alexander López Maya in a historic ruling	Colombia.com
11	14-02-2026	Politics	Roy Barreras does not believe Abelardo de la Espriella that all his money is the product of hard work and doing business	Colombia.com
12	14-02-2026	Politics	Colombia falls in the Corruption Perceptions Index for the second consecutive year - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
13	18-02-2026	Politics	How does Gaitana AI work? The candidate created with artificial intelligence who wants to reach Congress	Colombia.com
14	18-02-2026	Politics	Armando Benedetti announces start of signature collection for Petro's Constituent Assembly	Colombia.com
15	18-02-2026	Politics	Gustavo Petro assures that he asked Donald Trump to ban drug trafficking in the world	Colombia.com
16	18-02-2026	Politics	Abelardo de la Espriella turned the cake and leads the polls for the presidential elections	Colombia.com
17	18-02-2026	Politics	Alejandro Gaviria does not hesitate to write that the most corrupt government is that of Gustavo Petro	Colombia.com
18	21-02-2026	Politics	Colombia's Petro Signs New Decree Maintaining Minimum Wage Value	Colombia One
19	21-02-2026	Politics	Colombia's Left in Tension: Barreras Gains Union Support as Pact Urges Primaries Boycott	Colombia One
20	21-02-2026	Politics	Abelardo de la Espriella bulletproof: he will debut an armored lectern for his speeches	Colombia.com

21	04-02-2026	Economy	Rains put 260,000 cattle at risk and cause millions of dollars in losses to banana growers	El Colombiano
22	04-02-2026	Economy	Coal industry declares itself in crisis: exports fell 21%, revenues 32% and 150,000 jobs are at risk	El Colombiano
23	04-02-2026	Economy	\$500 reduction in gasoline unleashes criticism: they call it insufficient and electoral	El Colombiano
24	07-02-2026	Economy	Diesel will rise by about \$3,000 and will affect more than 830,000 vehicles	El Colombiano
25	07-02-2026	Economy	Inflation started the year at 5.35%: current was what got the most expensive	El Colombiano
26	07-02-2026	Economy	Colombian coffee starts 2026 under pressure: production falls 34% and the weather takes its toll again	El Colombiano
27	11-02-2026	Economy	Controversial government operations lowered the deficit, but raised the debt by \$310 billion	El Colombiano
28	11-02-2026	Economy	Petro government prepares wealth tax for 15,000 companies in possible new economic emergency	El Colombiano
29	11-02-2026	Economy	Ministry of Finance confirms that economic emergency is coming due to climate crisis: "About \$8 billion would be needed"	El Colombiano
30	11-02-2026	Economy	President in charge of Urrá resigns after Petro's request for criminal investigation into winter tragedy in Córdoba	El Colombiano
31	14-02-2026	Economy	Will Petro be able to justify his 'formula' to increase the minimum wage by 23% before the Council of State?	El Colombiano
32	14-02-2026	Economy	Colombia is the third country that sells the most electric cars in Latin America	El Colombiano
33	14-02-2026	Economy	Colombia cracks before the OECD: it is the fourth country with the highest unemployment	El Colombiano
34	14-02-2026	Economy	Petro announced that he will bring gas from Venezuela "much cheaper", but repairing the pipeline would take up to two years	El Colombiano
35	14-02-2026	Economy	Petro government announces forced investments in banks in the midst of an economic emergency	Colombia.com
36	14-02-2026	Economy	Colombia's Blueberry Boom Is Growing Fast, but Exports Lag The City Paper Bogotá	The City Paper Bogotá
37	18-02-2026	Economy	Six former finance ministers reject Petro's forced investments in a letter: "only Venezuela and Bolivia have used them"	El Colombiano
38	18-02-2026	Economy	The great wage struggle: President Petro redefines the minimum wage and divides Colombia - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
39	18-02-2026	Economy	The bicycle business in Colombia already exceeds US\$200 million a year	El Colombiano
40	18-02-2026	Economy	Colombia will be "halfway to the goal" of renewable energies in the Petro Government: Ser Colombia	El Colombiano
41	18-02-2026	Economy	Colombia surpassed Germany, France and the European Union in annual GDP growth	El Colombiano
42	18-02-2026	Economy	Investment in Colombia plummeted to its lowest level in the last 20 years	El Colombiano

43	21-02-2026	Economy	Colombia would concentrate the largest telecommunications market in Latin America and the OECD	El Colombiano
44	21-02-2026	Economy	E-commerce in Colombia reached \$145.4 billion in 2025 and set an all-time record	El Colombiano
45	21-02-2026	Economy	Petro signs transitory decree and maintains the minimum at \$2 million: this is his technical justification	El Colombiano
46	21-02-2026	Economy	Climate change hits Colombia and 75% of the world's largest coffee producers	El Colombiano
47	21-02-2026	Economy	Year of the Horse: Equine industry in Colombia moves \$6 billion a year	El Colombiano
48	04-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Donald Trump assures that Gustavo Petro is great and that he will work with him in the fight against drug trafficking	Colombia.com
49	04-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Between visas and domestic politics: reasons for Benedetti's absence with Petro in the U.S. - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
50	07-02-2026	Foreign Relations	President Gustavo Petro is jumping on one leg for the honors he received during his visit to the United States	Colombia.com
51	11-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Trump put Petro on conditional enrollment - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
52	11-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Joint statement: Second High-Level Dialogue between Sweden and Colombia - Government.se	(Government Offices of Sweden)
53	11-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Echoes of the meeting between Trump and Petro: the fight against drug trafficking will be a priority - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
54	14-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Petro defends his anti-drug initiative after criticism from Diosdado Cabello	Colombia.com
55	14-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Trump to Hold Summit of Allied Latin American Presidents, Excludes Colombia's Petro	Colombia One
56	14-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Colombia Reopens Embassy in Romania After 24 Years	Colombia One
57	18-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Colombia Ranks as Fifth Cheapest Country in LatAm for Foreigners	Colombia One
58	18-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Ecuador escalates tariff war against Colombia in the CAN: presented three claims EL ESPECTADOR	El Espectador
59	21-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Petro government rejects international humanitarian aid for the emergency in Córdoba and ignites the debate	Colombia.com
60	21-02-2026	Foreign Relations	Gas, electricity and politics: this was the meeting between Colombia and Venezuela - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
61	04-02-2026	Defence/Security	Colombia's illegal armed groups have 27,000 members: NGO - Colombia News	Colombia Report
62	04-02-2026	Defence/Security	Military operations in Catatumbo reactivate after the meeting between Gustavo Petro and Donald Trump	Colombia.com
63	07-02-2026	Defence/Security	Colombia's paramilitary successors suspend peace talks - Colombia News	Colombia Report
64	11-02-2026	Defence/Security	ELN accuses Petro of obeying U.S. orders after bombing in Catatumbo	Colombia.com

65	11-02-2026	Defence/Security	U.S., Colombia Team Up Against Submarine Carrying 10 Tons of Cocaine	Colombia.com
66	14-02-2026	Defence/Security	ELN Attacks Military Base on Venezuela's Border with Drones - TalCual	TalCual
67	14-02-2026	Defence/Security	Colombian Presidential Candidate De La Espriella Denounces Threats from ELN Guerrilla	Colombia One
68	18-02-2026	Defence/Security	Colombia Vows to Join European Front Against Organized Crime to Hit Drug Trafficking Global Finances	Colombia One
69	18-02-2026	Defence/Security	Colombia's government and AUC dissident group EGC resume demobilization talks - Colombia News	Colombia News
70	07-02-2026	Society	Government highlights drop in homicides and crime during January, according to the Police - HSB NEWS	HSB Noticias
71	11-02-2026	Society	Journalist's Day: Being a communicator in several places in Colombia means hanging a white one around your neck	Colombia.com
72	11-02-2026	Society	Gustavo Petro 'has no choice' but a new economic emergency in the face of a panorama of 69,000 families hit by floods	Colombia.com
73	14-02-2026	Society	Earthquake in Santander: strong earthquake shook the country this Saturday, know the epicenter and magnitude	Colombia.com
74	14-02-2026	Society	Child recruitment by armed groups in Colombia quadruples in last 5 years AP News	AP News
75	18-02-2026	Society	India, Brazil To Announce Joint Health Projects On Medicines, Digital Health And Research	NDTV
76	18-02-2026	Society	Earthquake shook Antioquia in the early hours of this Wednesday, did you feel it?	El Colombiano
77	21-02-2026	Society	Ministry of Education orders visits to universities in Tolima for alleged electoral use	El Espectador

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