

COLOMBIA

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2026

POST - ELECTION REPORT

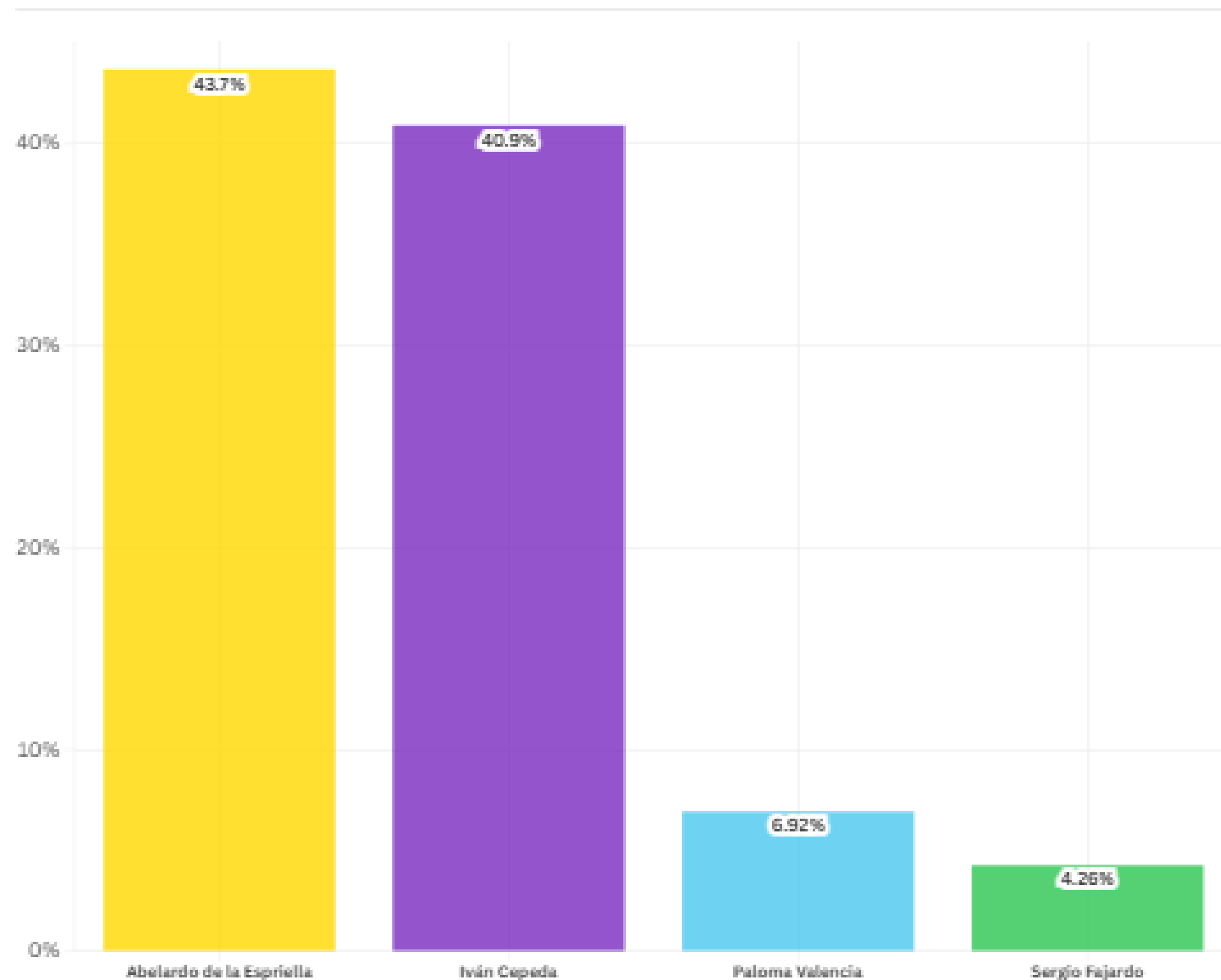


ELECTION AT A GLANCE

This Sunday, right-wing populist candidate Abelardo de la Espriella (Defensores de la Patria) won the first round of Colombia's presidential election with 43.7% of the vote, ahead of government-backed candidate Iván Cepeda (Pacto Histórico), who secured 40.9%, and center-right candidate Paloma Valencia (Centro Democrático), who received 6.9%, with 100% of polling stations counted. As no candidate surpassed the 50% threshold, De la Espriella and Cepeda will advance to the June 21 runoff, setting up a highly polarized second round between two competing political visions. The next president will take office on August 7, while the Congress elected in March will begin its term on July 20.

- **De la Espriella's upset victory.** Contrary to most polling projections, which had placed Cepeda in the lead, the outsider candidate finished first with 43.7% of the vote. He successfully attracted support from moderate right-wing voters, traditional party supporters, and independents, and heads into the runoff with significant political momentum.
- **What's new works.** De la Espriella more effectively capitalized on anti-Petro sentiment, channeled public demands for security, and tapped into the frustration of sectors that feel they have not benefited from the redistributive policies promoted by President Gustavo Petro. At the same time, he built a narrative centered on the promise of a "miracle country," linking economic growth, the restoration of territorial control, and social stability, while projecting an image of strong leadership as a response to uncertainty and growing dissatisfaction with the government.
- **The rise of the radical right.** As in Chile, Brazil, and Argentina, the radical right gained ground at the expense of more moderate alternatives. Drawing on rhetoric and political styles associated with Bukele, Trump, and Milei, De la Espriella captured the spirit of the moment and outperformed Paloma Valencia, the candidate backed by former President Álvaro Uribe. Following the defeat, Uribe took responsibility for the result and quickly called on his supporters to back De la Espriella in the runoff.
- **Voters over parties.** Despite the institutional backing that Valencia received from Colombia's traditional parties —Partido Conservador, Partido Liberal and Partido de la U— voters ultimately gravitated toward De la Espriella.
- **A polarized runoff.** De la Espriella enters the second round as the favorite, although Cepeda could still reverse the outcome if he succeeds in mobilizing abstentionist voters. Two precedents support that possibility: Gustavo Petro's victory over outsider Rodolfo Hernández in 2022 and Juan Manuel Santos's reelection in 2014, both secured in runoff elections. The coming three weeks are therefore expected to be marked by intense polarization and increasingly hostile rhetoric. After the results were announced, the candidates traded accusations: De la Espriella called Cepeda a "criminal" and Petro a "coup plotter," while Cepeda described his opponent's movement as a form of "mafia-style fascism."

ELECTION RESULTS



Source: Preliminary count results from the National Civil Registry. Reporting stations: 100%.

- **A polarization that arrived sooner than expected.** Although polls had projected a three-way race, the first round ended up concentrated in a contest between two extremes: De la Espriella received 43.7% of the vote and Cepeda 40.9%. By contrast, Centro Democrático candidate Paloma Valencia received just 6.92% — well below the nearly 3 million votes she had obtained in the March 8 primary and the 20% some polls had attributed to her. The result suggests that a significant share of Valencia's voters leaned toward De la Espriella, the most openly anti-Petro option, even before the runoff.
- **A deminished center.** The first round's polarized political landscape left no competitive space for the center. Sergio Fajardo received 4.26% of the vote, while former Bogotá mayor Claudia López fell short of 1%. Centro Democrático's strategy of appealing to centrist voters through Daniel Oviedo's vice-presidential candidacy also proved ineffective.
- **Historic turnout.** Voter participation in this election stood at 57.8%, the highest in the country's recent history. Meanwhile, Pacto Histórico achieved a historic result for the Colombian left, securing 9 million votes — surpassing Petro's first-round total of 8.5 million in 2022.

RUNOFF CANDIDATES

Abelardo de la Espriella

Defensores de la Patria



Criminal defense lawyer and political outsider, he burst onto the 2025 presidential race. Known for leading a strategic litigation firm and handling high-impact cases, he entered politics without any prior political career.

His right-wing proposal combines a tough-on-crime approach with a reduction in the size of the state, openly inspired by the models of Nayib Bukele and Javier Milei.

Among his policy proposals are:

- Promote a shock plan to reduce the size of the state and modernize the Dirección de Impuestos y Aduanas Nacionales (DIAN - National Directorate of Taxes and Customs) with artificial intelligence to reduce tax evasion.
- Create soft loans to facilitate access to university education, along with credit support for young rural entrepreneurs.
- Promote the use of blockchain in public procurement processes to guarantee transparency by 2030.
- Build a “major” audiovisual and music industry based on copyright, with the goal of turning the country into an intellectual property exporting powerhouse.
- Facilitate fiscal support for new cultural enterprises and strengthen a funding line with COP 125 billion annually in seed capital for creative projects.
- Generate employment by promoting job creation in the digital economy and the technology sector.

RUNOFF CANDIDATES

Iván Cepeda
Pacto Histórico



Professor of philosophy, human rights advocate, and senator since 2014. Facilitator of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC, as well as the talks with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN).

Founder of Pacto Histórico, he won his candidacy in an internal party election with the backing of 2 million votes.

Among his policy proposals are:

- Create and adapt a financial system that allows excluded communities to access monetary resources through the creation of a “Banco del Pueblo.”
- Create the “Unidad Nacional de Investigación de la Macrocorrupción,” tasked with identifying money laundering structures and their criminal patterns at the national level.
- Strengthen the production of music, art, and the expression of the spirituality of Afro-descendant communities.
- Review Free Trade Agreements (especially with the United States) to protect domestic production, with a specific focus on safeguarding food sovereignty.
- Introduce a Republican Austerity bill as a mechanism to reduce the fiscal deficit (by eliminating “high bureaucracy” privileges) and strengthen social spending.
- Promote labor reforms through preferential tax treatment for companies that hire young people, while maintaining the concept of a “salario vital” (living wage) through scheduled increases.

WHAT COULD HAPPEN AND WHAT WILL DETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF THE RUNOFF?

On June 21, Abelardo de la Espriella and Iván Cepeda will face each other in a runoff. While no updated polling is yet available for the second round, De la Espriella's unexpected victory tips the scales:

- **Momentum effect.** De la Espriella enters the runoff with political momentum after outperforming Cepeda, who had been the frontrunner. The ruling party's candidate appears to have peaked with his electoral base, though a mobilization of abstaining voters could work in his favor.
- **A united right.** Paloma Valencia and Álvaro Uribe have already announced their support for De la Espriella, rallying the entire right-wing space behind his candidacy.
- **The center wildcard.** Sergio Fajardo has yet to declare his position. Meanwhile, Daniel Oviedo, Valencia's running mate, announced he would do so in the coming days, though he questioned De la Espriella's "sexist and homophobic" candidacy.
- **The specter of fraud.** Petro has refused to recognize the preliminary results published by the National Civil Registry. Despite the agency's emphasis on the transparency of the process, the president stated he would wait for the tally conducted by electoral commissions certified by the judiciary. Cepeda echoed that position. For his part, De la Espriella called on the country's security forces and the military to act in defense of the Constitution should the election results go unrecognized. The doubts sown by the president, and the leading candidate's response, are heightening tensions in an already polarized environment.
- **The Petro factor.** The election came down to continuity versus change. Despite his popularity and moderate economic growth, the government failed to adequately address public demands on security, corruption, and healthcare. Against that backdrop, the president will play a central role in the runoff.
- **The traditional parties' game.** The Partido Conservador, the Partido Liberal, and the Partido de la U had aligned with Valencia, but their voter bases appear to have leaned toward De la Espriella. Party leaderships will likely now follow their voters' lead. Should that support materialize, De la Espriella would be better positioned not only for the runoff, but also to negotiate with a fragmented Congress — where backing from Centro Democrático and the traditional parties could give him the majorities needed to govern.

THANK YOU!



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