



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

A transparent, well-organised run-off, supported by solid democratic institutions, closes a highly polarised process

Bogotá, 23 June 2026

This preliminary statement of the EU election observation mission (EU EOM) is delivered before the completion of the entire electoral process. Critical stages remain, including the tabulation of official results and the adjudication of petitions. The EU EOM is now only in a position to comment on observation undertaken to date. The EU EOM may also make additional statements on election-related matters as and when it considers appropriate. After the completion of the process, the EU EOM will publish a final report, including full analysis and recommendations for electoral reform.

Summary

Preliminary results from the 21 June presidential run-off placed Abelardo de la Espriella of *Defensores de la Patria* on course to win, with 49.7 per cent of the vote, ahead of Iván Cepeda of *Alianza por la Vida*, who obtained 48.70 per cent. Final results will be declared following the official tabulation process (*escrutinio*), which is being closely observed by the EU EOM. Turnout reached 63.6 per cent, the highest recorded in Colombian history.

Election day was peaceful and well organised, with no major incidents reported. Voting, which was assessed positively in all polling stations observed, was described as a calm and smooth. Party representatives, present in three quarters of polling stations observed, carried out their duties without restriction. Vote counting was transparent and very swift, with almost 100 per cent of the preliminary results published within an hour of the closing. The *escrutinio* (official results tabulation), transparent and well organised, was carried out in presence of the candidates' legal teams.

Fundamental freedoms were generally respected during the campaign period and no substantial limitations on candidates' activities were reported overall. The run-off campaign was highly polarised and took place mainly online, with widespread disinformation and an unprecedented use of AI and deepfakes. It was marked by reciprocal unsubstantiated vote-buying allegations, disputes over the appropriation of national symbols by one candidate and criminal complaints that the candidates brought against each other. Security arrangements were reinforced under *Plan Democracia*, including the early activation of a *Puesto de Mando Unificado* (PMU) five days ahead of election day, with no serious disruptions reported.

The *Registraduría* organised the run-off election in a transparent and efficient manner despite logistical and security challenges in certain regions. Electoral officials at both the national and local levels performed their duties professionally, consistently upholding the independence and integrity of the electoral administration. Its regular engagement with stakeholders, providing them with updates on technical and procedural developments, and enhanced public communication helped to counter disinformation and reinforce confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

Preparations for the presidential run-off were conducted efficiently despite significant time constraints and included some enhancements to preliminary results transmission to ensure an even swifter publication as well as adjustments in polling-centre management to reduce overcrowding. The *Registraduría* coordinated with security forces and other authorities to

secure electoral operations as well as electoral personnel, *testigos*, and voters in areas where illegal armed groups operate.

The results management system is both reliable and efficient and complies with the international standards for transparency, integrity and traceability of election results. The *Registraduría* performed technical and stress tests of the results system, which the EU EOM evaluated positively, while the source code of the employed software was put again for a review by auditors of the candidates. An international audit of the electoral process, commissioned by the *Registraduría*, issued a positive assessment of the results management software.

The presidential run-off campaign relied heavily on social media, where political debate became increasingly confrontational and polarised. Disinformation and fraud narratives persisted. De la Espriella conducted an intensive online advertising campaign, while official government accounts continued to promote the administration's record in contravention of national legislation and international standards on use of state resources.

The campaign coverage reflected polarisation and a clear asymmetry between state-run and private media. EU EOM monitoring showed that private media, which account for the largest audience share, allocated similar airtime in their news programmes to De la Espriella and Cepeda, while covering both candidates mostly in a neutral way. State-run media, which have a heightened obligation of neutrality and balance, slightly privileged the coverage of Cepeda, mostly in a neutral way, while De la Espriella was given less time and mainly in a negative tone.

The European Union Election Observation Mission has been present in Colombia since 26 January following an invitation from the Comisión Nacional Electoral and the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil. The Mission is led by Chief Observer Esteban González Pons, Vice-President of the European Parliament. The EU EOM deployed 141 observers from 24 EU Member States, as well as from Norway, Switzerland and Canada across the country to assess the entire electoral process against international obligations and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Colombia. On 31 May, they observed in 592 polling stations in 30 departments. A delegation from the European Parliament, headed by Leire Pajín, MEP, also joined the mission and endorses this Statement.

The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions and adheres to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation signed at the United Nations in October 2005.

Preliminary Findings

BACKGROUND

The 21 June run-off was contested by presidential candidates Abelardo de la Espriella (*Defensores de la Patria*), who secured 49.66 per cent according to preliminary results, and Iván Cepeda (*Alianza por la Vida*), who received 48.70 per cent.¹ In a context of deep polarisation and entrenched regional divides, turnout reached 63.6 per cent, the highest ever recorded.

CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

Fundamental freedoms were generally respected and no substantial limitations on candidates' freedom to campaign were reported. Campaigning nevertheless remained challenging in some remote rural areas under the influence of illegal armed groups, but this did not affect overall

¹ During the tabulation of the first presidential round, the number of disputed polling stations did not exceed 0,7 per cent and were resolved according to the law. The CNE had declared the two run-off candidates on 4 June. Both candidates accepted the first-round official results.

campaign competitiveness. The run-off campaign was marked by heightened polarisation and confrontational rhetoric, with both sides relying heavily on social media outreach.

Political competition became increasingly judicialized, with legal disputes over campaign conduct, criminal complaints that the candidates brought against each other and the political use of national symbols. Cepeda filed complaints with the *Fiscalía* against De la Espriella alleging crimes in association with paramilitary groups. In turn, De la Espriella's campaign filed a criminal complaint before the *Fiscalía* alleging voter coercion by illegal armed groups in municipalities of Cauca, Nariño and Chocó. These cases remain under investigation. Separately, initial restrictions on *Defensores de la Patria*'s use of national symbols and the national football jersey were ultimately lifted.

Reciprocal, unsubstantiated vote-buying allegations added to the tense runoff campaign environment. Cepeda's campaign announced its own investigation into alleged vote-buying by *Defensores de la Patria*'s campaign, while De la Espriella made public allegations of large-scale vote-buying in the Caribbean region, naming political figures close to *Alianza por la Vida*, and called for U.S. scrutiny and possible visa removals. Cepeda's camp rejected this as intimidation and profiling. President Trump's explicit endorsement of De la Espriella, as well as statements by other US officials and politicians prompted numerous accusations of foreign interference from the government, Cepeda's campaign, other political figures and the media.

De la Espriella's campaign relied on social media outreach, while Cepeda's campaign placed greater second-round emphasis on voter mobilisation and digital communication. President Petro remained visible during the campaign and faced opposition criticism, as well as a recrimination by the *Consejo de Estado*, over alleged unlawful participation in partisan political activity.² Disinformation, intimidation and vandalism increased during the campaign period, while allegations of voter coercion by local authorities and illegal armed groups remained present in some areas.

Plan Democracia deployed a quarter of a million military and police personnel for the second round, with an additional 160,000 uniformed personnel on stand-by. Protection measures for the campaigns were reinforced, and EU EOM observers reported no disruptions or incidents at the 49 campaign events observed across 18 departments.

Security forces sustained significant casualties during the electoral process, with 11 soldiers killed and 26 wounded in incidents related to *Plan Democracia* since its deployment. The three main illegal armed groups unilaterally declared an 'electoral truce' for 21 June.³ No breach of these commitments was reported during the election period.

Campaign Finance

Campaign finance transparency shortcomings identified by the EU EOM observers during the first round persisted into the runoff. Across multiple departments, local campaign activities were reported to rely on in-kind donations, private contributions and volunteer networks that were not systematically declared on the *Cuentas Claras* platform, pointing to underreporting and weak traceability of local spending. This remained particularly relevant in the runoff, when both campaigns increased spending on voter transport, *testigo* recruitment, small-scale

² A separate controversy arose when the chair of the congressional Impeachment Committee, a *Pacto Histórico* congresswoman, unilaterally issued an injunction to suspend President Petro from office on grounds of undue involvement in the campaign. The decision was promptly rejected by the Committee itself, the *Procuraduría* suspended her from office for grave procedural irregularities, the Supreme Court opened an investigation for abuse of office, and Petro filed a complaint for alleged extortion.

³ The *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), the FARC dissident faction *Estado Mayor Central* (EMC) and the *Ejército Gaitanista de Colombia* (EGC).

territorial mobilisation and digital outreach. Local campaign coordinators showed limited awareness that in-kind contributions and decentralised logistical support are subject to reporting obligations. Both presidential candidates submitted campaign finance declarations.

Given the importance that online campaigning has acquired, monitoring campaign expenditure in digital products and online advertising has become crucial but the current legal and institutional framework remains largely insufficient to achieve this task, particularly given the cross-border nature of the social media networks.

The Comptroller General's Office (*Contraloría*) raised concerns over possible risks to the proper use of public resources during the electoral period, after identifying direct contracts signed after the 31 January entry into force of the *Ley de Garantías* (Law 996/2005) restriction and in sectors that would not fall under its exceptions.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The *Registraduría* organised the elections in a transparent and effective manner despite some logistical and security constraints affecting certain regions. Electoral officials at both the national and local levels performed their duties professionally, consistently upholding the independence and integrity of the electoral administration. The *Registraduría* regularly engaged with political parties, institutional actors and observer groups and provided them with updates on technical and procedural developments. At the same time, it further strengthened its public communication efforts to counter disinformation aimed to undermine credibility of the process, including accusations alleging irregularities in polling and results-management procedures in the immediate aftermath of the first round.

Notwithstanding the short time available to organise the presidential run-off, preparations were conducted in a timely and efficient manner, successfully implementing the operational and logistical arrangements across the country and abroad. Ahead of the second round, the *Registraduría* optimised the results transmission protocol and strengthened communication channels to ensure an even swifter publication of preliminary results, as well as measures to reduce overcrowding at polling centres. In cooperation with the *Registraduría*, the security forces, and relevant oversight bodies, the Ministries of Interior and Defence established a *Puesto de Mando Unificado Nacional* further in advance to guarantee the delivery of electoral materials and ensure the security of electoral personnel, *testigos*, and voters at polling centres, with a particular focus on certain municipalities where illegal armed groups are present.

Polling staff and temporary electoral personnel from the first round remained for the run-off, allowing the administration to build on their previous experience and facilitate the smooth implementation of electoral procedures. To address minor shortcomings from the first-round process, refresher training was provided to temporary personnel, as well as to representatives of the security forces and oversight bodies. Furthermore, some municipal offices of the *Registraduría* took the initiative to extend tailored training sessions also to polling staff, particularly in areas with low attendance in earlier training activities, focusing on the completion of electoral documents.

For the run-off, new accreditation of political parties' *testigos* and observers was required. Although involving additional administrative effort, this mechanism helped address issues related to the incorrect allocation of some *testigos* to polling stations reported by political parties following the legislative and first-round election days. However, both campaigns reported delays in the issuance of credentials for some of their representatives. To enhance transparency, the CNE allowed each contestant to deploy two *testigos* per polling station.

The voter register generally enjoys public trust in terms of its inclusiveness and accuracy. For the presidential run-off, the first-round register was used without any updates. However, in accordance with the law, the first-time registration of citizens is suspended four months prior to election day. This considerably long period left a significant number of citizens turning 18 or entering civil register in the interim effectively disenfranchised, at odds with international standards. For this reason, 320,000 citizens remained unregistered for the run-off.

Results processing and election technologies

As observed in the legislative and the first round of the presidential elections, the results management system proved to be both reliable and efficient. It complies with the international standards for transparency, integrity and traceability of election results. It relies on the fast publication of unofficial preliminary results (*preconteo*), as well as of the scanned polling station protocols within a few hours after the close of polls. The official results tabulation (*escrutinio*) is based on manual processing of the original results protocols by judges and notaries during which lawyers representing the two candidacies can file complaints and request ballot recounts.

The *Registraduría* performed technical and stress tests of the individual components of the results system which the EU EOM observed and evaluated positively. The source code of the employed software was put again for a review by auditors of the candidates for two days in the election week. The international audit of the electoral process, awarded by the *Registraduría* to the *Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos / Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Electoral* (IIDH/CAPEL), issued a positive assessment of the results management software.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Candidates turned heavily to social media during the presidential run-off campaign. The online debate became more acrimonious and insults were frequent, exacerbating polarisation. Both Abelardo de la Espriella and Iván Cepeda relied on influencers to convey their messages and strengthen their public image.

Disinformation increased and fraud narratives persisted online. During the legislative elections and the first round of the presidential election, Petro cast doubt on the electoral system, while in the run-off De la Espriella repeatedly denounced a vote-buying plot and published a list of politicians allegedly involved.

The government continued to post political messages through official social media profiles, contravening national legislation and international standards on use of state resources. The number of messages praising the government's record rose from 36 per cent to 47 per cent of all posts published on official accounts. These messages often included generic hashtags such as #Condignidadcumplimos (We honour our promises with dignity) and #100logrosdePetro (100 Petro's achievements), as well as more specific ones, such as #PetrolecumplióalCampo (Petro delivered on his promises to the farming community) and #PetrolecumplióalCauca (Petro delivered on his promises to Cauca Department).⁴

The EU EOM Monitoring Unit detected less hate speech during the presidential run-off. It was focused on the *Pacto Histórico* vice-presidential candidate and member of the Nasa people of Cauca, Aida Quilcué, who received sexist and racist comments against her.⁵

⁴ Sample of 1,706 posts from 1 to 14 June: Ministry of Agriculture, 39.13 per cent of all posts included political messages; Culture, 15.56 per cent; Education, 68.47 per cent; Environment, 39.26 per cent; Health, 57.24 per cent; Transport, 24.05 per cent; Presidency, 61.97 per cent; ICT, 31.85 per cent.

⁵ Sample of 15,825 replies, from 1 to 14 June. At least, 2.99 per cent of these replies included racist comments and 2.31 per cent sexist comments.

Iván Cepeda modestly increased his advertising expenditure on Meta platforms, whereas De la Espriella concentrated his efforts on YouTube and TikTok, conducting an even more intensive advertising campaign on those platforms. Unlike Meta, which provides detailed transparency reporting on political advertising expenditure, YouTube/Google and TikTok remain comparatively opaque. Despite these limitations, the qualitative analysis undertaken by the EU EOM Monitoring Unit detected a significantly greater volume of advertising by the *Firmes por la Patria* candidate, particularly on YouTube.

TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Freedoms of expression and of the media were generally respected during the run-off campaign. However, the killing in Cúcuta of Cristián Herrera, a senior journalist, was a reminder of the threats faced by investigative journalists in parts of the country. The *Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa* (FLIP) revealed that the number of election-related attacks and abuses against journalists, 72 cases this year, a 60 per cent increase compared to 2022 presidential election campaign, most of them involving civil servants, politicians, security forces or illegal armed groups.

The campaign in the media was dominated by stepped-up polarisation. Media coverage reflected increased verbal attacks between the candidates, amid persistent use of discrediting language and disinformation attempts by the two camps. While there is no legal obligation for candidates to participate in debates, Iván Cepeda expressed interest in participating in a debate on television. However, the debate did not happen, as the two campaigns failed to reach an agreement on the terms and participants.

President Petro continued to promote his government's achievements in the media, despite the restrictions imposed by the law. Furthermore, the *Consejo de Estado* banned Gustavo Petro from using the State-run media in favour or against a political movement. In an unprecedented move since the start of the presidential campaign, the *Comisión de Regulación de Comunicaciones* (CRC) rejected President Petro's request to broadcast, on all State and private television channels at peak hour on 12 June, a presidential message on reduction of poverty during his mandate. The CRC ruled that the legal criteria of urgency and exceptional circumstances were not met.

Private radio and television media monitored by the mission between 1 and 20 June allocated similar time in their news programmes to De la Espriella and Cepeda, and covered both candidates mostly in a neutral way.⁶ State-run media, which have a heightened obligation of neutrality and balance, slightly privileged the coverage of Cepeda, mostly in a neutral way, while De la Espriella was given less time and mainly in a negative tone. As in the first-round, State-run media favoured the President and his government in its coverage, whereas private media allocated much less time to them, often in a negative light.

Paid electoral advertising on private media, relatively low compared to the first round, increased in the last week with Cepeda leading in volume. As requested by law, free airtime slots were offered to both candidates on the main state-run and private television channels.

Unlike during the first-round campaign, most private radio stations and television channels with national audience shared with the CNE weekly reports on airtime allocation to candidates, as requested by law to foster pluralism and impartiality. Although some reports showed unbalanced coverage, no decision was made by the CNE to enforce equitable access.

⁶ From 1 to 20 June, the EU EOM monitored quantitatively four private media with national audience (Blu Radio, Caracol Radio, Caracol TV and RCN TV) and two state-run media with national audience (*Señal Colombia* television channel and *Radio Nacional de Colombia*).

ELECTION DAY

Election day was orderly and well organised, with no major incidents reported. Polling stations opened on time. Voting, which was assessed positively in all polling stations observed, was described as a calm, smooth and well organised by EU EOM observers. Polling staff, largely familiar with the procedures, ensured transparency. Party representatives were present in 76 per cent of polling stations observed and carried out their duties without restriction. Although secrecy of vote was generally preserved, in some polling stations observers reported some shortcomings due to the placement of polling booths, overcrowding, or limited space. EU EOM observers noted voters taking pictures of their ballot in some four per cent of the polling stations and received various reports on such cases, indicating possible pressure on voters and attempts to unduly influence their choice. Positively, these situations were prevented by polling personnel or the police.

Vote counts observed by the EU EOM were assessed as transparent and efficient and were generally conducted in line with prescribed procedures. Soon after polling stations closed, the *Registraduría* began releasing preliminary results, with approximately 97 per cent of results reported one hour after the polling stations closed.

The *escrutinio* (official tabulation), observed in over two hundred *comisiones escrutadoras* (aggregation commissions), was transparent and well-organised. Judges and notaries guaranteed an independent review and processing of polling station results while both candidates' legal teams were present in the vast majority of the commissions observed. Results from abroad were tallied based on scans, as provided by law. The *Registraduría* swiftly published copies of nearly all protocols providing for an easy verification of the results. On election night, the results of almost all polling stations were tallied, confirming the preliminary results.

This preliminary statement is available in English and Spanish but only the English version is official.

An electronic version of this Preliminary Statement is available on the Mission website (www.moeUEcolombia2026.eu).

For further information, please contact:

Michela Sechi, Press Officer, tel. (+57) 310 247 3677, michela.sechi@moeuecolombia2026.eu

European Union Election Observation Mission
Grand Hyatt Bogotá, Cl. 24ª #57-60, Bogotá. Colombia.
