

Petro Threatens Colombia's Elections

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Executive Summary

President Gustavo Petro has intensified partisan mobilization ahead of the 8 March legislative elections. Since taking office in 2022, he has staged at least twelve nationwide rallies, reportedly using public resources to transport and incentivize attendance.

Civil servants are allegedly pressured to participate, while unions and civil society organizations receive support, blurring the line between governance and partisan campaigning. Petro's public claims to "register election juries" and more than 30 messages advising citizens on voting directly usurp powers reserved for electoral authorities, undermining the neutrality of Colombia's electoral process.

Critics warn that these tactics mirror the state-backed political mobilizations seen under Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, raising alarm about the erosion of democratic norms. Allegations of long-standing ties between Petro, Senator Iván Cepeda, and Venezuelan officials, including Delcy Rodríguez, intensify concerns about foreign influence and interference. Meanwhile, the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil and Consejo Nacional Electoral face unprecedented attacks, threatening the integrity and stability of the elections.

Colombia is also experiencing escalating violence, with armed groups and organized crime networks—such as the ELN, FARC dissidents, Second Marquetalia, Gulf Clan, Tren de Aragua, and Cartel de los Soles—exploiting Petro's Total Peace policy to consolidate power and expand illicit activities.

Civilians, social leaders, and human rights defenders are bearing the brunt of this insecurity, and anti-personnel mines are reportedly being deployed in areas where opposition could prevail. Evidence links FARC dissidents to Petro and Cepeda campaign events, suggesting coordinated intimidation and influence on the electoral process.

On the international stage, Colombia is realigning alliances toward Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran, and Russia, including networks tied to Hezbollah and Hamas. This shift away from traditional pro-Western partnerships raises urgent concerns about regional security and counter-narcotics cooperation.

President Petro's conduct represents a convergence of political power, illegal armed influence, and international realignment that threatens Colombia's democratic institutions, the impartiality of elections, and civilian safety.

The 2026 legislative elections face heightened risk, demanding immediate scrutiny and protective measures to safeguard the integrity of the democratic process.

On 19 February 2026, President Gustavo Petro staged yet another rally in support of his administration—one of at least twelve nationwide mobilizations he has promoted since taking office in 2022.

Reports indicate these events rely on extensive coordination and the alleged use of public resources, including transportation and per diem payments to bring groups to the capital. Civil servants are reportedly pressured to prove attendance, while unions and civil society organizations are said to receive support. These practices blur the line between governance and partisan campaigning.

Critics draw stark comparisons to tactics employed under Chávez and Maduro—state-backed mass mobilization and pressure on independent institutions—raising alarms about democratic norms.

Allegations of long-standing ties between Petro, Senator Iván Cepeda, and Venezuelan officials, including Delcy Rodríguez, further fuel concern.

Since 19 February, Petro has intensified attacks on the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil and the Consejo Nacional Electoral, despite the system having overseen his rise from city councilor to president. The controversy comes just weeks before the 8 March legislative elections, when stability and public trust are most critical.

Colombia's elections are organized and supervised under the Constitution to guarantee neutrality, transparency, and respect for the popular will.

Petro's claim on the official Presidency website that "he is registering the election juries" directly contradicts this legal framework, as that function belongs exclusively to electoral authorities.

He has also posted over 30 messages advising citizens on *how to vote*—areas that must remain institutionally neutral, not directed by the executive. Electoral authorities have rejected his

claims, and allegations of “100% electoral fraud” remain unfounded.

At its 20 February press event, the European Union Election Observation Mission, led by Esteban González Pons, referring to Petro’s actions, emphasized that the mission “does not interfere in politics.”

Yet the issue is inherently legal and logistical: a president **usurping** powers reserved for electoral authorities undermines the technical administration of elections—precisely what observation missions are mandated to assess.

Colombia’s Crisis

Colombia is in deep turmoil. Political violence now drives President Petro’s agenda, as he has effectively *ceded* control of vast regions to his Total Peace partners—armed groups and organized crime networks consolidating power, expanding their ranks, exploiting ceasefires, and entrenching illicit economies. The Gulf Clan alone has grown 140% to nearly 9,600 members, with other groups totaling around 27,000.

These criminal actors—including the ELN, FARC dissidents, Second Marquetalia, Gulf Clan, Tren de Aragua, Cartel de los Soles, and other paramilitary formations—finance themselves through narco-trafficking, illegal mining, extortion, and human trafficking, all amid a weakening state presence.

Civilians bear the brunt: communities face renewed cycles of violence—at least 40,000 killed during Petro’s administration, displacement, and insecurity even where negotiations are underway, and more than 453 social leaders and human rights defenders continue to be targeted.

Anti-personnel mines are reportedly being placed in municipalities where Petro and his project could face defeat in upcoming legislative and presidential elections.

President Petro, Senator Iván Cepeda, and the Pacto Histórico have remained silent in the face of this electoral intimidation and the logistical

support provided by these illegal armed groups and organized crime networks.

On 23 February 2026, La Silla Vacía reported that mentions of Iván Cepeda in Raúl Reyes’ computers—a FARC commander—are authentic. Investigations by La Silla Vacía and La Liga Contra el Silencio show that 2008 files from the FARC commander’s devices *reference* Cepeda in discussions about organizing international marches, *a modus operandi later used during 2018-2022*—contradicting claims of post-seizure manipulation.

This becomes politically relevant as Senator Iván Cepeda’s campaign rallies in Tumaco included participation from FARC dissidents—the same groups now accused of killings, kidnappings, human trafficking, and extortion across Colombia.

Critics argue this is evidence that illegal armed groups and organized crime have become intertwined with the campaigns of Petro, Iván Cepeda, and the Pacto Histórico, contributing to intimidation of dissent and opposition. Financial contributions from these groups remain opaque.

International Implications

On the international stage, Colombia has redefined its alliances, engaging with Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran -Hezbollah and Hamas, Russia, and transnational criminal networks—shifting away from its traditional pro-Western alignment and raising serious questions about regional security and counter-narcotics cooperation.

In sum, President Petro’s conduct represents a convergence of political power, armed influence, and international realignment that threatens Colombia’s democratic institutions, the impartiality of elections, and civilian safety.

The 2026 legislative elections face heightened risk, demanding immediate scrutiny and protective measures to safeguard the integrity of the democratic process.

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