



Written by [Paul Dragu](#) on June 9, 2025

Colombian Presidential Candidate Shot in Apparent Political Hit

Miguel Uribe Turbay, a right-wing Colombian presidential candidate, is fighting for his life after getting shot in the head on Saturday.

The suspect is a 15-year-old boy. He allegedly shot the candidate three times, twice in the head and once in the knee, while the 39-year-old was talking to supporters in a park just west of Bogotá. The suspect shouted, “I did it for money for my family,” as police arrested him, according to [reports](#) citing video from the scene.

Colombian criminal organizations have often used minors to carry out murders. Police [said](#) the suspect used a 9 mm pistol bought legally in Arizona in 2020. There’s no publicly available information regarding who ordered the attack. However, Elizabeth Dickinson, senior Colombia analyst at the International Crisis Group, [told](#) NPR that whoever did it



AP Images

Memorial for Miguel Uribe Turbay at the site of the shooting

almost certainly hired hitmen. Whoever ordered this assassination... very clearly had the intention of throwing gas onto a fire, trying to be incendiary in an electoral context that is already deeply polarized.

After being shot, Uribe was rushed to the hospital, where he underwent surgery. According to [reports](#), the senator had a “neurosurgical and peripheral vascular procedure.” By Monday, his prognosis remained dire. His wife said he’ll need “a miracle” to survive, the BBC [reported](#).

History of Political Violence

Latin America’s Colombia is no stranger to political violence, especially during the period when cartels — both the Cali and Pablo Escobar’s Medellín — waged war against those who threatened their operations. Dickinson sees Saturday’s attack as an indicator that Colombia is heading back to those dark days. “Essentially what we have tonight is a return to a very dark era of politics in Colombia when violence was used as a political tool at the highest level of elections,” she said.

What happened Saturday is part of an emerging new pattern of violence. The BBC [reported](#):

[Current Colombian President Gustavo] Petro had been elected on a promise to bring “total peace” to the country. He made early progress in talks with gangs and rebel groups, but his



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interior minister recently acknowledged that the strategy was “not going well”. Dozens of soldiers and police officers were killed over a two-week span in April, in attacks the Colombian government blamed on armed groups. Earlier in the year, more than 32,000 people fled their homes in the northern Catatumbo region, where [two] rival rebel groups engaged in bloody fighting despite a peace treaty.

Miguel Uribe Turbay

Uribe comes from a well-known Colombian political family. His grandfather was former president [Julio César Turbay Ayala](#), who led the country from 1978 to 1982. His mother was journalist Diana Turbay, who was “kidnapped by Pablo Escobar’s Medellín cartel and killed during a botched rescue operation in 1991,” *The Guardian* [pointed out](#).

The senator is the presidential candidate for the opposition Democratic Centre party, and has frequently [criticized](#) Petro’s policies. He said the current president’s health reforms would harm lower-income Colombians, and compared his pension reforms to a Ponzi scheme. He also claimed his labor reforms would immediately wipe out half a million jobs.

But his views on domestic security and coca eradication have likely earned him his most ardent enemies.

Colombia Still Producing Cocaine

Escobar may be gone, but Colombia is still one of the largest cocaine producers, despite numerous promises and efforts by the government to change that. The country hit a record low of 48,000 hectares used for coca production in 2012, but by 2019 that number had skyrocketed to 154,000. And as of 2018, 90 percent of the cocaine confiscated in the U.S. came from Colombia. A 2021 [report from the International Crisis Group](#) said that coca crops had recently set record yields.

In 2016, the Colombian government struck an agreement with the guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). International Crisis Group [explains](#):

That accord promised to institute a nationwide crop substitution program enabling roughly 200,000 coca-growing families to pursue other legal businesses. It sought to sever links between the insurgency and drug trafficking, while establishing state authority in pockets of the country where criminal rule and poverty had long allowed cocaine production to thrive.

But those promises came to naught:

Few of those promises have been met. Coca cultivation began rising to historical highs during peace negotiations, driven in part by the expectation that any eventual accord would benefit coca farmers who pledged to substitute their crops. This trend worsened as the government struggled to meet the promises made to farmers. Bogotá has not been able to transform the economic fundamentals that make coca — fast-growing and destined for a loyal international market — such a reliable crop. New armed groups have swooped in to control the supply chain the FARC left behind. An array of hustlers, guerrillas and criminals vie for control over the purchase and refining of coca, as well as trafficking routes out of the country.



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Uribe [supports](#) destroying the drug industry by eradicating coca fields with the use of glyphosate, and replacing coca production with legal crops. He has [proposed](#) militarizing the regions around the cities to protect civilians from cartels.

Uribe has been especially critical of the current government's fight against drug trafficking. He posted on his X account on March 14, 2024:

Zero hectares of coca eradicated in January. What kind of world do they live in? And they come out and tell us, in a very nice government newspaper, that they're already winning the battle against drug trafficking. Man, don't be shameless. We have a clear problem here, and it's drug trafficking.

Cero hectáreas de coca erradicadas en enero. En qué mundo viven y salen y nos dicen a, en un periódico muy lindo del gobierno, que es que la batalla contra el narcotráfico ya la están ganando. Hombre, no sean sinvergüenzas, , aquí tenemos un problema evidente y es narcotráfico. pic.twitter.com/pA4Ko4GhvE

— Miguel Uribe (@MiguelUribeT) [March 14, 2024](#)

Petro was a member of the Marxist M-19 guerrilla group, and Uribe has pointed that out, referring to the group as a criminal outfit. Petro became president in 2022, and promised to clamp down on narcos. But he hasn't succeeded, and Uribe has been one of this toughest critics. He has accused Petro of rewarding drug traffickers and preventing law enforcement from going after the cartels.

Is Petro Involved?

There are some who suspect that Petro may have had something to do Uribe's shooting. And even those who don't allege (not publicly anyway) that he outright hired a hitman blame his rhetoric for what happened Saturday. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio blamed, at least in part, Colombia's government for what happened. He posted on his X account the day of the attack:

The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the attempted assassination of Senator Miguel Uribe. This is a direct threat to democracy and the result of the violent leftist rhetoric coming from the highest levels of the Colombian government. Having seen firsthand Colombia's progress over the past few decades to consolidate security and democracy, it can't afford to go back to [the] dark days of political violence. President Petro needs to dial back the inflammatory rhetoric and protect Colombian officials. We stand in prayer with Miguel's family, loved ones, and his supporters. Those responsible for this attack must face justice.

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— Secretary Marco Rubio (@SecRubio) [June 8, 2025](#)



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Former President Juan Manuel Santos has also asked Petro to dial back his rhetoric. “History teaches us that verbal violence leads to physical violence. That is why it is necessary to temper the language, starting with the president himself, who is most obliged to set an example,” Santos [said](#) Monday.

The conservative front-runner in the upcoming presidential election, Vicky Dávila, said in an X post that Petro was “the only one responsible.”

In an exchange on X just days before the shooting, Petro responded to Uribe’s criticism of his plan to issue a decree for a public referendum on labor reform. Referring to former President Julio César Turbay Ayala, Petro said, “The grandson of a president who ordered the torture of 10,000 Colombians talking about institutional rupture?” Petro has also frequently called his political opponents Nazis and slaveholders.

Nevertheless, the president has “categorically” condemned the attack as an “act of violence not only against his person, but also against democracy.” He noted, “What matters most today is that all Colombians focus with the energy of our hearts, with our will to live... on ensuring that Dr Miguel Uribe stays alive.”



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