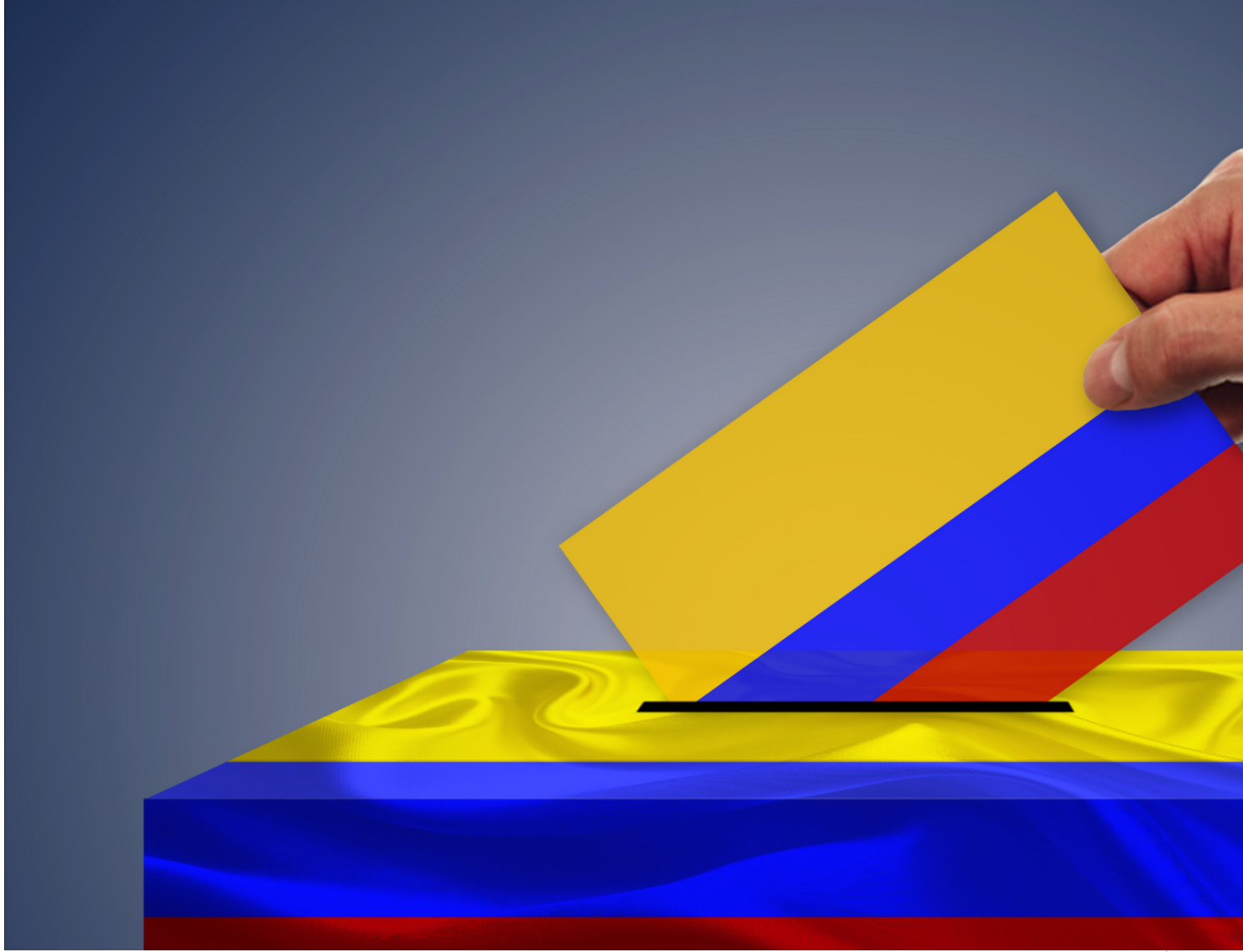


A festering struggle



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By Guillermo Alvarado

There are 12 days left for the second round of presidential elections in Colombia, an event that could bring a dramatic change to the governmental management model after many decades of dominance by conservative, neoliberal and exclusionary political forces.

For the first time in the history of the South American country, a progressive candidate, Gustavo Petro, could accede to the Casa de Nariño, promoted by the coalition Pacto Histórico, where social, leftist, environmentalist and human rights groups coincide.

In the initial round, he did not reach half plus one of the votes, which would have been an ideal triumph, and now Petro will face Rodolfo Hernández, candidate of the undefinable League of Anti-Corruption Rulers.

Although he defines himself an "outsider", Hernández is by no means a political upstart, having been mayor of the important city of Bucaramanga, where his results were not very encouraging in development issues, as well as in the fight against poverty and exclusion.

He is not as independent as he claims, since there are right-wing groups that support him and, after passing to the run-off, he has received with pleasure the support of the traditional parties, including the Democratic Center, of Álvaro Uribe.

He has already declared that he will not participate in any kind of public debate and his campaign is being carried out rather through social networks, with the advantages and limitations that these technologies have.

Regarding the polls of voting intentions, for the moment they do not show a clear tendency and favor indistinctly one or the other candidate.

The most recent one, from the Centro Nacional de Consultoría, gives Petro 44.9 percent of preferences, against 41 percent for Hernández.

Other polls, such as those of Guarumo and EcoAnalítica Medición y Conceptos Económicos put Hernández ahead of Petro, although with a difference of less than the margin of error, which is a technical tie.

As it is known, polls give a sort of snapshot of the state of opinion in a certain sector of the population. They depend a lot on the selection of the sample to determine the result and are subject to variations, among them the way they are conducted and the formulation of the questions.

It should not be forgotten that the campaign is taking place in an environment marked by violence, police repression and attacks against social leaders, which forces many people to abstain from participating.

It will be a dozen intense days, where the right wing only changed its form, but not its methods, and the bet is to mobilize the undecided and make optimism and hope defeat fear.

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