



Why Campaign in Colombia?

A Near Mugging, and a Political Epiphany

By Daniel Raisbeck

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Political campaigns are intense, taxing affairs, and, amid the rigors of the electoral cycle, it is often easy to lose sight of why one is running in the first place. Last week, I was abruptly reminded why I chose to go after a seat in the lower chamber of the Colombian parliament.

It was 4:30 p.m. on a sunny Friday afternoon and, as I made my way to a meeting in northern Bogotá from the colonial city centre, where I work, we came across a traffic jam on Circunvalar Avenue. This swerving road hugs the eastern hills and usually offers the quickest route from south to north. Jaime, a friend who was driving, decided to turn left and descend to Route 7A, the city's oldest and most traditional north-south thoroughfare (its foundations date back to the 16th century).

A few moments later, we found ourselves waiting for a traffic light to give way as we stood still behind a yellow cab on 28th Street, which cuts through a rather menacing and working-class neighborhood. Suddenly inspired, as I thought about the election, I decided to take my mobile phone out of my pocket and write some winged words in a tweet.

I began to type and, all of a sudden, I sensed a grasping hand force itself through my slightly ajar window and go for my telephone, which I instantly put out of reach. In a split second, Jaime had grabbed a firm hold of the burglar's snatching wrist. The fellow, whose face I never saw, suddenly found himself trapped like a wild bear in a cage and, as he attempted to free himself, began to howl obscenities accordingly.

As I noticed the traffic light changing from yellow to green, I urged Jaime to step on the gas, perhaps not realizing the difficulty involved in shifting to first gear while gripping a tugging criminal's forearm. The balance of power then changed abruptly; immediately behind me, a second burglar managed to open the rear door of the car's passenger side. In an instant, Jaime and I were fully exposed.

Aware that, if the second fellow happened to have a knife or any other type of weapon, we were as good as toast, my thoughts shifted from dragging his ensnared colleague at least a few meters

down the road. That would have taught him a sound civics lesson and brought me, ever the pedagogue, great pleasure, but only if we could bid farewell to the place unscathed.

Jaime let the first thief loose and, astoundingly, the second simply shut the rear door and joined his fleeing partner. They escaped among the cars nearby, whose drivers and passengers had passively witnessed the entire ordeal in broad daylight.

As we headed for safety, several thoughts crossed my mind. First, I wondered why Bogotá's current statist mayor — whom the inspector-general [removed from office](#) in December in what *The Economist* described as “an arbitrary administrative lynching of a bad mayor,” — pays more attention to pronouncing demagogic speeches from balconies than to doing his job. That includes the duty to uphold security.

Second, it dawned on me how tremendously precarious the respect for private property has become in this country. Whether it's the infamous “[millionaire's ride](#),” whereby a cab's passenger is held at gunpoint and forced to empty his bank account at numerous ATM machines throughout the city, the destruction of a small shop's façade with grotesque graffiti, or the methodical swindling of cattle in the countryside, “the rule of law” is merely a vacuous phrase here — a platitude with absolutely no bearing on reality. To give but one statistic, [nine out of 10 mobile phone thefts end up with impunity](#).

All of this reminded me of why I decided some months ago to enter into politics. On the one hand, the Colombian state is [unable to perform](#) its most elemental functions, which in my view are upholding the law and protecting the citizen's physical safety as well as his property. On the other hand, the government apparatus is present precisely where it isn't needed, making itself felt with all the weight of a meandering mass of woolly mammoths.

You can always count on Colombian bureaucracy when it comes to placing obstacles before businesses and individuals: it takes at least 15 days merely to register a company and 1,288 days to enforce a contract according to the [World Bank](#); they charge a higher [corporate tax rate](#) than in Sweden, Finland, and Iceland; they spend up to [5.3 percent](#) of our [GDP](#) on the military — an astronomical figure by South American standards — in order to fight the war on drugs, where the chances of winning are [nil](#).

For these reasons and many others, Colombia has consistently ranked close to 100th among the 152 countries measured in the [Economic Freedom of the World](#) Index published by the Cato Institute and the Fraser Institute.

My campaign is merely a small first step toward the goal of turning things around in this country. I have spoken to numerous young people, university students, and dissatisfied citizens who want the state to fulfill its basic duties and to otherwise leave people alone to prosper with their own efforts.

Whether or not they identify themselves as libertarians or classical liberals — a political tendency with very little representation in Colombia since the 19th century, as my colleague [Javier Garay](#) points out — thousands of Colombians want to live in greater freedom, a freedom

based on respect for the law. They want “not just liberty,” as [Margaret Thatcher](#) often said, “but law-based liberty.”

Surely we are a minority at present; paradoxically, many Colombians on both ends of the conventional left-right spectrum clamor for [an even larger state](#). Even so, we are a growing minority in need of representation.

On March 9, we face our first electoral test; the result might be [Thermopylae](#), but then again it might be [Salamis](#). In any event, I’ll keep readers posted.