

Colombia's President Takes Aim At Gambling Industry

Gustavo Petro blamed the industry for the failure of his budget bill

His words seen as warning shot to the industry for the coming year

Chief regulator faces fraud allegations over real-estate dealings

Colombia President Gustavo Petro has come out swinging against the gambling industry, blaming unregulated operators for the failure of his 2025 budget bill, which was rejected by Congress.

Petro tweeted on Thursday that as Colombia's national budget for 2025 was underfinanced by some 12 trillion pesos, a presidential decree would have to mark out which investments would need to be postponed "while the necessary financing is obtained, which was not possible due to the dark actions of the owners of illegal games of chance within the economic commissions of the Congress".

Petro is referring to his proposal to apply a value-added tax (VAT) of 19 percent to online gambling. Those articles were removed from the budget bill nearly immediately, as they did not have congressional support. His budget bill was then defeated altogether this month, which he called "a blow to the Colombian people".

Petro's comments on supposed dark actions are [very similar](#) to earlier remarks that he made when his tax reform was nixed, when he blamed "shadowy executives for online gambling".

Juan Camilo Carrasco, a gaming lawyer for Asensi Abogados in Bogotá, said blaming the gambling industry was nothing more than a self-defence mechanism.

"Of course, there are many, many reasons why corporations do not support that bill and the way it is drafted. Those declarations from the government regarding illegal operators behind the scenes is just a way to defend himself about this and the defeat that he is facing with the bill,"

Carrasco told Vixio GamblingCompliance.

Still, he predicted that it means that gambling would be in the line of fire next year for Petro.

“It's super dangerous, because now the online gambling business, it's definitely going to be in his sights,” Carrasco said.

“I think he's going to review the business because he's talking about tax elusion, when you use certain strategies to pay less taxes. And his declarations are very aggressive against online gambling because at the end they said that all the money that flows there [Colombia] should be taxable, and businesses are using certain strategies to pay less taxes.”

Petro has carried out his campaign with the help of his friend Marco Emilio Hincapié, the president of gambling regulatory authority Coljuegos, who has raised eyebrows in Colombia this month over his alleged involvement in real-estate fraud along with members of his family.

On December 6, a criminal notice for fraud was processed by the Colombian prosecutor's office for the sale of unfinished apartments. Hincapié told a local news outlet that he was being targeted to detract from the work he is doing to keep the gambling industry clean.

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