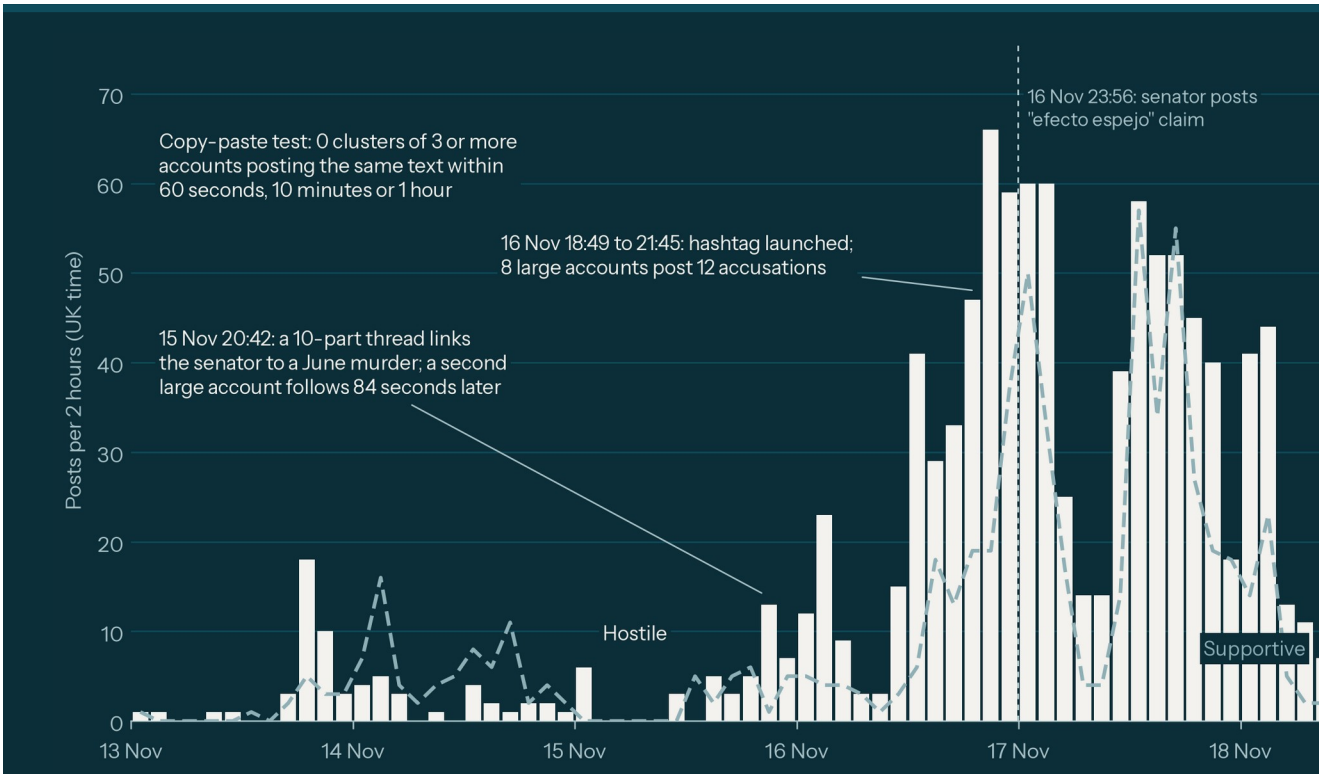
Disinformation Commission rapid assessment

The X attack on senator Duvalier Sánchez, 15 to 18 November 2026

18 Nov 2026



Hostile and supportive X posts about senator Duvalier Sánchez per 2 hours, 13 to 18 November 2026 (UK time). Source: Our collection of 4,473 X posts, labelled and checked by hand on a sample, 18 Nov 2026 [C16].

The attack on senator Duvalier Sánchez was a timed push by partisan accounts, not a bot swarm

Hostile posts rose after accounts tied the senator to a June murder that no authority links him to [C7]. Large accounts posted within seconds of each other and launched a hashtag together [C11, C12]. We found almost no copy-pasted text and no burst of new or fake accounts [C16].

How big was the attack?

953

hostile X posts from 573 accounts, 15 Nov 20:00 to 18 Nov 10:00 UK; 420 accounts posted only once. See Section 2, p.4

[C16]

Was it copy-paste?

0.4%

of 723 hostile posts sat in near-duplicate clusters; no cluster had 3 accounts within an hour. See Section 3, p.5

[C16]

Was it timed?

8

large accounts posted 12 accusations in three hours as the hashtag launched on 16 Nov. See Section 3, p.5

[C11, C12, C16]

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Results at a glance

Our assessment

The claim partly holds up. The "efecto espejo" Sánchez describes, one account launches an accusation and others repeat it at the same time, matches what we measured among about a dozen large partisan accounts on 15 and 16 November. The second part of the story, told by senator Angélica Lozano, that the attack ran on "bots y cuentas falsas", does not: the posts were not copy-pasted, and the accounts that amplified them look like the accusers' usual audience. The explanation with fewest inconsistencies is a loosely timed push by partisan influencers, amplified by their real, very active followers. It would flip towards an automated network if deleted posts, platform data or shared login details showed many accounts run by the same people.

Strong indicator	Large accounts moved together: two pairs posted 84 and 55 seconds apart, and 8 accounts posted 12 accusations in three hours once the hashtag appeared [C9, C10, C11, C12, C16]. Our assessment: it is likely (about 55% to 75%) that some of these accounts agreed the timing in advance. We have moderate confidence: close timing in a small, connected community can happen by chance, and we have seen no messages showing a plan.	Section 3
Confirmed	The attack was not copy-paste: 3 of 723 hostile posts (0.4%) fell in near-duplicate clusters, and no cluster had 3 accounts posting within 60 seconds, 10 minutes or an hour [C16]. Our assessment: it is highly likely (about 80% to 90%) that the hostile posts were written by individual users, not pasted or generated by a bot network. We have moderate confidence: our X collection is a sample and deleted posts are missing.	Section 3
Strong indicator	The amplifiers look like the accusers' normal audience: on account age, default avatars, follower counts and posting rate, they match people who retweet the same accounts' ordinary posts [C16]. Our assessment: it is likely (about 55% to 75%) that most amplifiers are long-standing partisan accounts, not accounts created for this attack. We have moderate confidence: retweeter lists are capped and profiles cannot show who runs an account.	Section 4
Insufficient evidence	The "bots y cuentas falsas" description is not borne out: at most 4 amplifying accounts were created on any one day since 2025, and 5.3% have a default avatar [C4, C16]. Our assessment: it is a realistic possibility (about 25% to 50%) that some automated or rented accounts took part without leaving these traces. We have low confidence: our tests catch crude automation, not well-run fake or human-operated accounts.	Section 4

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Observation

The accusation rests on timing, not evidence: Jesús Céspedes filed a complaint naming Sánchez 18 days before he was shot, and no authority has linked Sánchez to the killing [C7, C8]. Our assessment: it is a remote chance (about 5% or less) that prosecutors name Sánchez as a suspect by 31 January 2027. We have low confidence: the investigation is open and its file is not public.

Section 2

Why it matters

Calling a coordinated push by real partisans "bots" is easy to rebut, and the rebuttal then discredits the real problem: a handful of large accounts put a murder insinuation in front of a combined 365,745 followers in three hours [C16]. The line between real and fake amplification will keep coming up in Colombian politics, and getting it wrong helps whoever is accused.

How to read the findings

Each finding opens with its evidence label. Confirmed means a reproducible primary source or measurement. Strong indicator means a pattern across several measures. Observation means a thin or single source. The likelihood term follows the UK Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment yardstick, and the confidence sentence says how much the evidence supports it.

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What happened

On 11 November Sánchez, a Green Alliance (Alianza Verde) senator from Valle del Cauca, published what he called a year-long investigation into a "fábrica de engaños", an alleged troll operation that he tied to Valle governor Dilian Francisca Toro and political strategist Carlos Suárez [C5]. His post drew 335,177 views and 4,027 retweets [C5, C16].

On the evening of 15 November a large anonymous account opened a 10-part thread headed "¿Quién lo asesinó?" [C9]. It linked Sánchez to the June killing of Jesús Céspedes Montoya, a Valle government contractor shot outside his home in Cali on 12 June [C8]. Céspedes had filed a criminal complaint against Verde deputy Esteban Oliveros on 25 May, and a page of that complaint says Sánchez amplified accusations against him [C7]. El Expediente, which published the complaint, says no authority has linked the complaint to the murder or blamed Oliveros or Sánchez, and that it found nothing to support the link circulating on social media [C7].

Between 15 November 20:00 and 18 November 10:00 UK time we collected 953 X posts that our labelling marks as hostile to Sánchez, from 573 accounts [C16]. 365 of them tie him to Céspedes' death or ask him about it. Most accounts took part lightly: 420 posted once, and the ten busiest posted 12.4% of the hostile posts [C16]. Only 84 hostile posts were direct replies to Sánchez; his posts in this period show zero replies in our data, which suggests he limited who could reply [C1, C16]. The most-replied-to account in the hostile set was one of the accusers, with 94 replies [C16].

At 23:56 on 16 November Sánchez posted that the attack was an "efecto espejo": "sale un fabricante de engaños, un mercenario del abelardismo y todos replican al tiempo" [C1]. He returned to it on 17 and 18 November, calling it an "ataque sincronizado" by "mercenarios digitales" [C2, C3]. Senator Angélica Lozano backed him on 17 November, describing "ataques masivos y coordinados a través de bots y cuentas falsas" [C4]. El Colombiano reported his claim the same day [C6].

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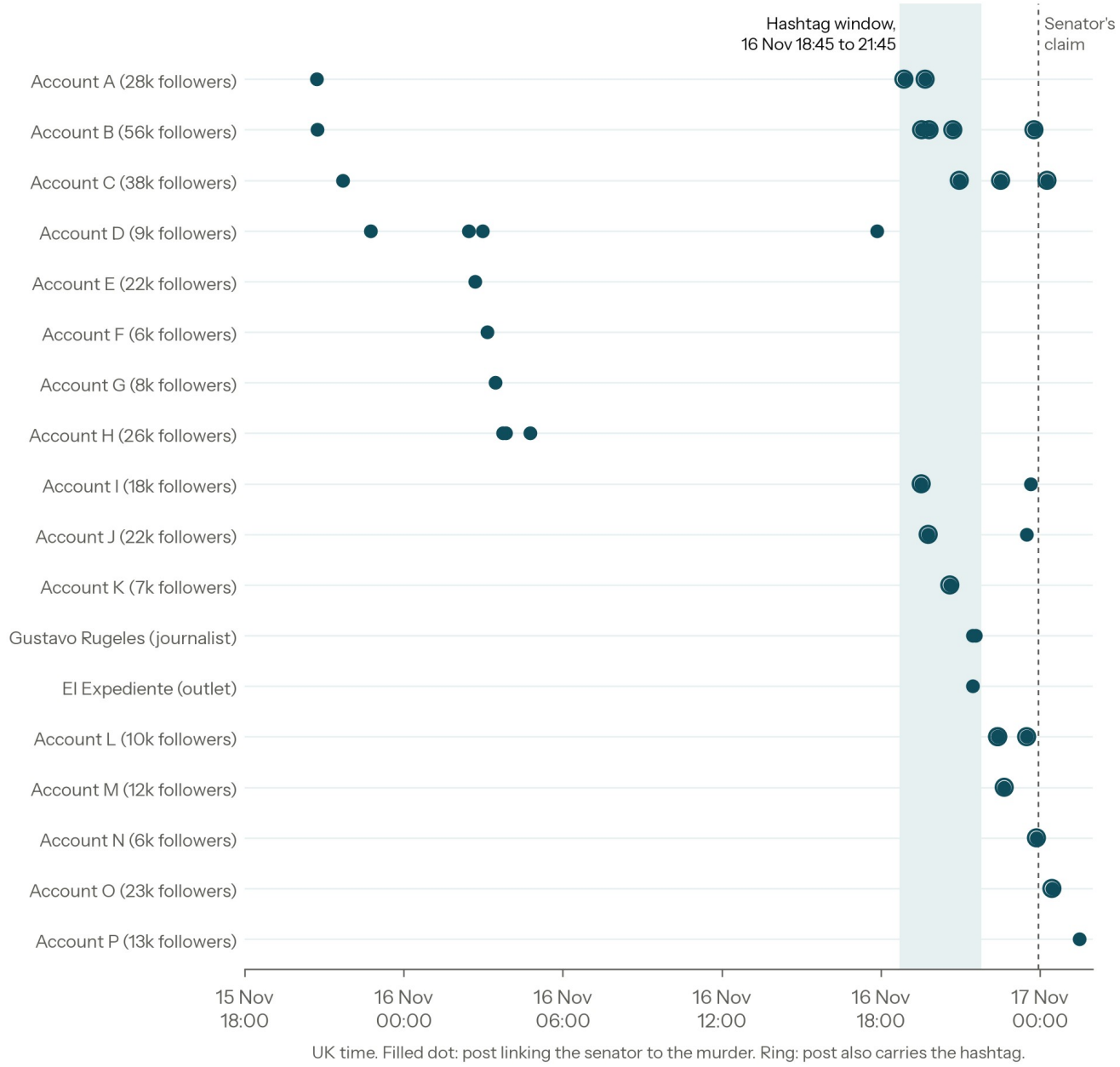
How the attack was organised

3.1 Timing

Two moments stand out. At 20:42:27 UK time on 15 November the 10-part thread went up; 84 seconds later a second large account posted at Sánchez, accusing him of hypocrisy over the Valle investigation [C9, C10]. On 16 November a hashtag, #DuvalierQuePasoConCespedes, appeared at 18:49 from a small account [C13]. In the next three hours, 8 accounts with at least 5,000 followers posted 12 accusations, with a combined following of 365,745 [C16]. Two of them posted 55 seconds apart, at 19:31:16 and 19:32:11 [C11, C12].

Figure 1. Large accounts posted in two tight bursts



Posts linking Sánchez to the murder by accounts with 5,000 or more followers, replies excluded, 15 Nov 18:00 to 17 Nov 02:00 UK. Ordinary accounts are anonymised. Our collection, 18 Nov 2026 [C16].

Close timing is suggestive, not proof. These accounts follow and retweet each other, post dozens of times a day and were already on the story, so some near-simultaneous posts would happen anyway. One account, B, wrote on 16 November that it had been asking Sánchez about Céspedes "desde ayer" [C12]. We count this as loose coordination among influencers, not a scripted operation. Rugeles and El Expediente posted the same headline because it is El Expediente's own story: Gustavo Rugeles is a journalist who shares the outlet's articles [C14, C15].

3.2 Copy-paste test

A bot or paid-troll network usually leaves repeated wording. We tested every hostile post of six words or more for near-duplicates, and compared the result with supportive posts in the same window and all posts before it [C16].

Table 1. Near-duplicate test, X posts about Sánchez, 13 to 18 Nov 2026

Set	Posts tested	In clusters	Share	Clusters of 3+ accounts within 1 hour
Hostile, 15 to 18 Nov	723	3	0.4%	0
Supportive, 15 to 18 Nov	433	0	0%	0
Any stance, 15 to 18 Nov	1,448	11	0.8%	0
All posts before 15 Nov 20:00	245	3	1.2%	1

Our collection, 18 Nov 2026 [C16]. Near-duplicate means word 3-gram overlap of 0.6 or more after removing links and handles; a lower 0.5 threshold gave the same hostile result.

The only wording that repeats at scale is the bare hashtag: 46 hostile posts by 22 accounts consisted of nothing else [C16]. Across all hashtag posts we found 83 from 38 accounts; the five busiest posted 41% of them, and one account alone posted 17 [C16]. That is a small hashtag, pushed by a few committed accounts, not a trending bot campaign.

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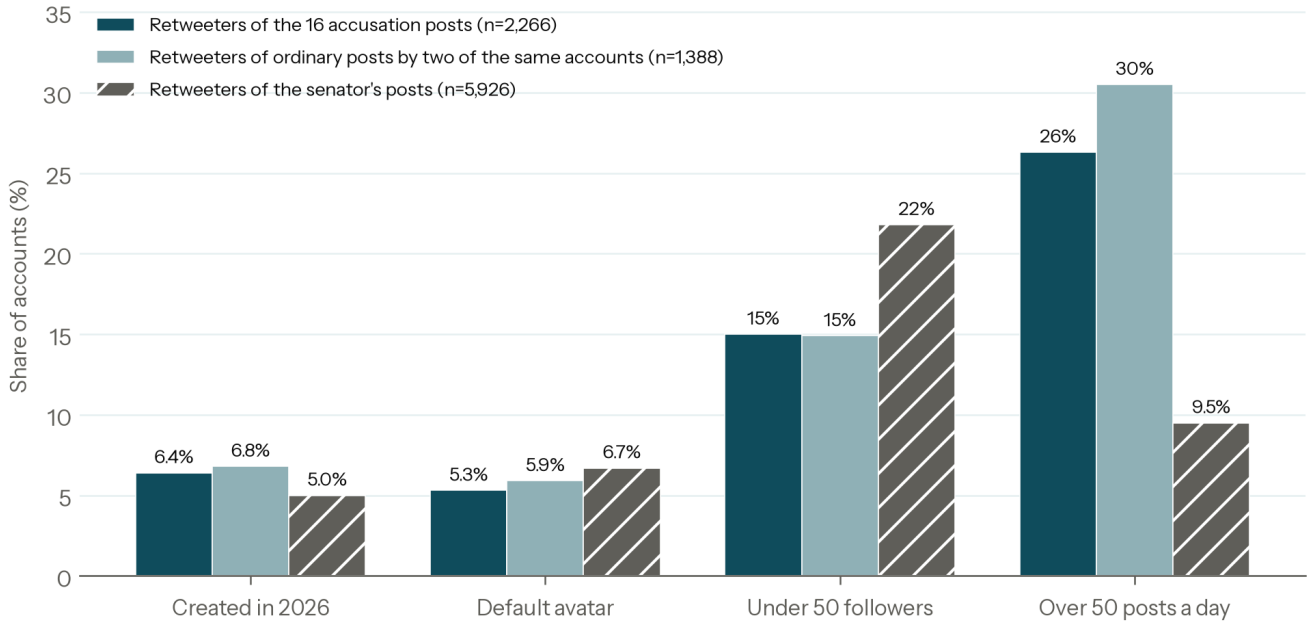
Who the accounts are

We pulled the retweeters of 16 widely shared accusation posts, from 8 accounts, which drew 289,577 views between them [C16]. That gave 2,266 different accounts. 478 retweeted at least three different accusers and 89 retweeted five or more, so the amplifiers form a shared audience [C16].

The question is whether that audience is new. We compared it with two baselines: retweeters of ordinary posts by Accounts A and C on 14 and 16 November, unrelated to Sánchez, and retweeters of Sánchez's own posts [C16].

Figure 2. The amplifiers match the accusers' everyday audience



Profiles of retweeters of 16 accusation posts (2,266), of two ordinary posts by Accounts A and C (1,388) and of 10 posts by the senator (5,926), as returned on 18 Nov 2026. Posting rate is lifetime posts divided by account age. Retweeter lists are capped by the platform. Our collection [C16].

On every measure the accusation amplifiers sit with the accusers' normal audience, not apart from it. Of 734 accounts that retweeted Account A's accusation posts, 239 had also retweeted its ordinary post of 14 November [C16]. The overlap between the different accusers' retweeters (median 0.108 on a 0 to 1 scale) is the same as between two unrelated posts by Accounts A and C (0.111) [C16]. We found no burst of account creation: since January 2025 no more than 4 of the 2,657 hostile posters and amplifiers were created on the same day [C16].

One feature is unusual. About a quarter of the amplifiers average more than 50 posts a day over their lifetime, against about one in ten of Sánchez's retweeters [C16]. But the accusers' everyday audience is just as active (30%), so this describes the ecosystem these accounts live in, not something built for this attack. Very high activity is a reason to look closer at individual accounts, not proof of automation.

Only 7 accounts retweeted both the accusations and Sánchez [C16]. The two sides are separate communities.

05

Does the claim hold up

Table 2. Analysis of competing hypotheses

Hypothesis	Evidence for and against	Verdict
Influencers time their posts and their real followers amplify	Two pairs within 84 and 55 seconds; 8 large accounts in three hours around a new hashtag; amplifiers match the accusers' usual audience	Fewest inconsistencies
Bot or fake-account network	Against: 0.4% near-duplicate text; no creation-date bursts; default avatars and follower counts match baselines	Not supported
Spontaneous outrage after a news story	For: El Expediente published the complaint on 16 Nov. Against: the push started the night before, and the hashtag window bunches large accounts	Partly fits; does not explain the timing

The claim therefore partly holds up. Sánchez's "efecto espejo", one launch and many repeats at once, describes the large accounts well [C1]. "Mercenarios digitales" implies payment, and we have no evidence on money either way [C3]. Lozano's "bots y cuentas falsas" is the part our data does not support [C4].

Two things would change this view: deleted posts or suspended accounts that our collection missed, or evidence that several of the large accounts are run by the same people or paid by the same client. Sánchez says he holds chats from the operation he exposed on 11 November [C5]; if those name any of these accounts, the coordination finding would firm up.

Limits

X search returns the posts the platform serves, not every post, so all counts are samples. Retweeter lists are capped, and we cannot see likes, views by account or deleted posts. Stance labels were produced by a language model and checked by hand on a random sample: 32 of 40 hostile labels were clearly right, 4 wrong and 4 unclear, so hostile counts may be overstated by up to a fifth. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook and Threads searches found little: four Instagram reels and one TikTok video repeating the accusation. Telegram and WhatsApp were not searched. None of the accounts named or described was asked for comment.

Recommendations

Ask X whether any of the accounts in the 16 November hashtag window share devices, logins or payment details. Ask Sánchez to publish the chats he says he holds, with personal data removed, so the "fábrica de engaños" claim can be tested. Report the Céspedes insinuation as unsupported unless prosecutors say otherwise.

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Forecasts

- Colombian prosecutors publicly name Duvalier Sánchez as a suspect or charge him over the murder of Jesús Céspedes by 31 January 2027: 5%. Signals: no authority has linked him to the case, and the main outlet reporting the complaint says it found no supporting evidence [C7]. Would change: a prosecutor statement or leaked case file naming him.
- Sánchez files, or publicly announces he has filed, a criminal complaint or other legal action over the online attack or the murder insinuation, reported by national media, by 31 December 2026: 40%. Signals: he says he has "evidencias" and "más por denunciar" [C1, C6]. Would change: a lawyer's statement or filing (up); the story dropping out of the news for two weeks (down).
- A Colombian or regional fact-checking team publishes a check on the claim linking Sánchez to Céspedes' murder by 15 December 2026: 25%. Signals: 16 accusation posts drew about 290,000 views, but we found no check published by 18 November [C16]. Would change: the hashtag returning to large accounts or television coverage (up).
- X suspends or withholds any of the 8 large accounts in the 16 November hashtag window by 31 December 2026: 5%. Signals: our data shows no automation traces that usually trigger enforcement. Would change: a platform statement or a new wave of copy-pasted posts.

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07

Resumen en español

La denuncia se sostiene solo en parte. El "efecto espejo" que describe el senador Duvalier Sánchez, una cuenta lanza un señalamiento y otras lo replican al mismo tiempo, coincide con lo que medimos en una docena de cuentas grandes de derecha el 15 y el 16 de noviembre [C1, C16]. El 15 de noviembre a las 15:42 (hora de Colombia) un hilo de 10 partes vinculó al senador con el asesinato de Jesús Céspedes, y otra cuenta grande lo siguió 84 segundos después [C9, C10]. El 16 de noviembre, tras aparecer la etiqueta #DuvalierQuePasoConCespedes, 8 cuentas con más de 5.000 seguidores publicaron 12 acusaciones en tres horas [C16]. Ninguna autoridad ha vinculado a Sánchez con el crimen [C7].

Lo que no encontramos son bots ni cuentas falsas, como afirmó la senadora Angélica Lozano [C4]. De 723 publicaciones hostiles, solo 3 (0,4%) repetían el mismo texto, y ningún grupo de 3 cuentas publicó lo mismo en una hora [C16]. Las 2.266 cuentas que retuitearon las acusaciones se parecen al público habitual de esas mismas cuentas en antigüedad, fotos de perfil, seguidores y actividad, y no hubo picos de creación de cuentas [C16]. La explicación más sólida es un impulso coordinado de forma laxa por influenciadores partidistas, amplificado por seguidores reales y muy activos.

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02

Methodology

Reviewed 18 November 2026, Europe/London. Scope. X posts mentioning Sánchez, the hashtag or Céspedes from 13 to 18 November 2026, with replies, quotes and retweeters of 27 posts: 16 accusation posts, 10 posts by Sánchez and one by Lozano. We collected 4,473 unique X posts with commercial social-data and search tools, searching in two to six hour slices so busy periods were not cut short, and searched Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook and Threads with the same terms. Times are UK time, which equals UTC in November; Colombia is five hours behind. Labelling. 2,275 posts from 13 to 18 November were labelled hostile, supportive or neutral by a language model, with flags for links to the Céspedes murder and insults. An analyst read a random sample of 60 labels; the error rates are in Limits. Posts the analyst found misread are excluded from Figure 2. Coordination. Near-duplicate text: word 3-gram overlap of 0.6 or more (and 0.5 as a check) after removing links and handles, posts of six words or more, at least 3 accounts per cluster, tested in windows of 60 seconds, 10 minutes and 1 hour. Chance baseline: supportive posts in the same window and all posts before 15 November 20:00. Timing: posts by accounts with 5,000 or more followers that link Sánchez to the murder, replies excluded. We separate coordinated behaviour from who directed it. Accounts. For posters and retweeters we compared account creation date, default avatar, followers, following-to-follower ratio and lifetime posts per day with two baselines: retweeters of ordinary posts by two of the accusing accounts, and retweeters of Sánchez's posts. Creation-date bursts were checked by calendar day since January 2025. Naming. Public officials, the outlet El Expediente and the journalist Gustavo Rugeles are named. Other accounts are anonymised as Account A, B and so on, and their posts are linked without handles.

03

Evidence register

Each code in square brackets in the text links to its row here. Each row gives the full source and its address.

C1 X, Duvalier Sánchez, "efecto espejo" post, 16 Nov 2026. x.com/DuvalierSanchez/status/2122478946033750352

C2 X, Duvalier Sánchez, "ataque sincronizado" post, 18 Nov 2026. x.com/DuvalierSanchez/status/2122851822301741216

C3 X, Duvalier Sánchez, "mercenarios digitales" post, 17 Nov 2026. x.com/DuvalierSanchez/status/2122734693007430095

C4 X, Angélica Lozano, solidarity post, 17 Nov 2026. x.com/smilelalis/status/2122746062167212393

C5 X, Duvalier Sánchez, "fábrica de engaños" post, 11 Nov 2026. x.com/DuvalierSanchez/status/2120350835460722920

C6 El Colombiano, Duvalier Sánchez denuncia campaña de desprestigio digital, 17 Nov 2026. elcolombiano.com/colombia/duvalier-sanchez-denuncia-campana-digital-corte-con...

C7 El Expediente, Jesús Céspedes denunció penalmente al diputado Esteban Oliveros 18 días antes de ser asesinado, Nov 2026. elexpediente.co/jesus-cespedes-denuncio-penalmente-al-diputado-esteban-oliver...

C8 El Tiempo, sicarios asesinan a un contratista de la Gobernación del Valle, 12 Jun 2026. eltiempo.com/colombia/cali/sicarios-en-moto-y-en-carro-asesinan-a-un-contrati...

C9 X, Account A, opening post of the 10-part thread, 15 Nov 2026 (handle withheld). x.com/i/web/status/2122067729150853250

C10 X, Account B, post 84 seconds later, 15 Nov 2026 (handle withheld). x.com/i/web/status/2122068080176050543

C11 X, Account I, hashtag post, 16 Nov 2026 19:31 UK (handle withheld). x.com/i/web/status/2122412205388046798

C12 X, Account B, post 55 seconds later, 16 Nov 2026 19:32 UK (handle withheld). x.com/i/web/status/2122412434803552739

C13 X, earliest hashtag post in our collection, 16 Nov 2026 18:49 UK (private individual, handle withheld). x.com/i/web/status/2122401632537428038

C14 X, El Expediente, post on the Céspedes complaint, 16 Nov 2026. x.com/ElExpedienteCol/status/2122441605650997330

C15 X, Gustavo Rugeles, post sharing the same article, 16 Nov 2026. x.com/GustavoRugeles/status/2122443103869272357

C16 DisCom.ai, evidence dataset for this report (posts, timing, near-duplicate test, account profiles), 18 Nov 2026. disinformationcommission.com/investigation/colombia-duvalier-efecto-espejo