Ecuador's Latest Electoral Process Presents the Left with Major Challenges

Luis Ángel Saavedra

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur

Recommended Citation
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/14095

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiSur by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Ecuador's Latest Electoral Process Presents the Left with Major Challenges

by Luis Ángel Saavedra
Category/Department: Ecuador
Published: 2012-10-12

Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa's administration is characterized by being in constant confrontation with various political sectors. The president has the ability to create enemies that allow him to always have a foil and thus guide the media agenda, presenting himself to the general public as the person who fights against the old political skullduggery. Now, in the electoral process leading to the February 2013 elections, this ability allows him to establish himself in people's minds as the only legitimate candidate and the one with popular support.

The Ecuadoran electoral scene began to take shape amid accusations of fraud and falsifying signatures for registering movements and political parties that want to participate in the electoral contest. Government propaganda says that only President Correa seems honest; however, this hides what is really at play since the right is trying on various fronts to retake control of the government and the indigenous movement's participation is aimed at displacing Correa to radicalize the social-transformation process, using as its base the 2008 Constitution. Correa accuses both these tendencies of being corrupt.

Democratic fraud?

The 2008 Constitution requires political parties and movements that want to participate in presidential elections to register with the Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE); to do so, they must submit signatures of citizen support equivalent to 1.5% of eligible voters—157,943.

Fourteen national organizations presented signatures. However, thousands of citizens complained about the fraudulent use of their names and signatures to back a specific political group, forcing the CNE to examine each signature submitted, proving in the process that in some cases the CNE database had been manipulated and in others that signatures of persons appearing as supporters of parties or political movements had been forged.

President Correa accused the political organizations of carrying out a "fraud on democracy." The accusations were aimed principally at indigenous Deputy Lourdes Tibán of the opposition Movimiento Plurinacional Pachakutik.

Tibán said she had received a telephone call from a business offering to obtain the signatures needed to register Pachakutik; however, she denied contracting the service. But other political organizations accepted the offer, including political sectors linked to the governing party.

The number of falsified signatures included those of political leaders who appeared registered not only in organizations other than their own but also in those with diametrically opposing views. The CNE had to set a new deadline for organizations already registered to gather new signatures to meet the required number, since once questionable signatures were eliminated only the governing Alianza País obtained verification.
Pachakutik, which represents indigenous groups, and the leftist Movimiento Popular Democrático (MPD), the base of the Coordinadora Plurinacional de las Izquierdas, which includes various social movements that oppose Correa, denounced the government attempt to eliminate from the electoral scene opposition political tendencies linked with the left and with environmentalism. The government, it said, wants to choose candidates with whom it wants to compete to guarantee the president's re-election. "It wants to eliminate Pachakutik, it wants to eliminate the MPD, because in that way it ensures that only the right can go to the elections," says Tibán.

In the end, 11 political organizations were accredited to participate in the elections; Pachakutik and the MPD were the last to be registered.

A fractured right

A banker, a banana tycoon, and a former military officer will try to bring back the classic neoliberal form of government and again put the right in power. However, they could not agree on forming a unified front with the ability to confront Correa.

For the past several months, Guillermo Lasso, owner of the Banco de Guayaquil, used his banking platform to project an image of himself as a future president. He then formed the CREO movement, which will allow him to run in the elections. Lasso's plan for government is clear. He wants to open the market to international investment, sign free-trade agreements, and create new opportunities for investment and development through private enterprise. Lasso's ability to buy advertising allows him to counteract government publicity portraying Correa's re-election as necessary to ensure the continuity of the administration's social programs.

Álvaro Noboa, the richest person in the country, is running for president for the fifth time (NotiSur, Aug. 14, 1998). His government agenda dovetails with his tax situation, since his company, Bananera Noboa, owes the Servicio de Rentas Internas (SRI) more than US$90 million in unpaid taxes. His candidacy and an eventual win would allow him to successfully overcome the judgments and restrictions against him. However, his Partido Renovador Institucional Acción Nacional (PRIAN) has begun to crumble because of the departure of some of its top people who have questioned the party's leadership and the absence of a political agenda that goes beyond Noboa's needs.

Finally, former Army colonel and President Lucio Gutiérrez (2003-2005), who had to leave office following a popular uprising in 2005 (NotiSur, April 22, 2005), is presenting himself as a populist option. His message calls for recovering private investment, and he accuses Correa of being one of the instigators of the uprising that toppled him. Gutiérrez maintains a military structure in his Partido Sociedad Patriótica (PSP) and does not hide his desire to strengthen diplomatic relations with the US, which, during his brief time in office, he called Ecuador's "best friend."

Taken separately, the three candidates do not seem to have the strength necessary to confront Correa, as they will splinter the Ecuadoran right's vote, but that has not convinced them to set aside personal aspirations and try to consolidate a united rightist bloc with a better chance of competing against the president.

Completing the right's options is the once-powerful Partido Social Cristiano (PSC), also accredited for the 2013 elections. However, given its current weakness, it will not field a presidential candidate but will join the PSP or CREO, according to prominent PSC member Cynthia Viteri.
The left and the indigenous movement join forces

The indigenous movement and various leftist groups have preferred to join forces for the elections, creating the Coordinadora Plurinacional de las Izquierdas, which includes most of the movements that supported the writing of the 2008 Constitution and that question Correa's move to the right.

After carrying out an internal selection process through general elections, the Coordinadora named Alberto Acosta as its presidential candidate. Acosta is co-founder of Alianza País and one of the architects of Correa's victory in 2006. He was president of the Asamblea Constituyente, a position he had to resign when differences between Correa's thinking and that of the indigenous movement became evident (NotiSur, July 4, 2008). Correa accused Acosta of being "too democratic," the reason, he said, that more progress was not made in drafting the 2008 Constitution. Now, the president accuses Acosta of misleading him during the constitutional process by convincing him to incorporate too many rights into the Constitution as well as prohibiting the introduction of transgenic products into the country.

Given Correa's present popularity, it will be almost impossible for the left to win the presidency; however, the challenge for Acosta and the Coordinadora will be to balance the forces in the Asamblea Nacional (AN) by obtaining a larger number of provincial representatives, stopping the government's process of turning farther right and avoiding amendments to the Constitution that would eliminate guarantees that protect human rights and the rights of nature.

-- End --