

4-21-2017

Presidentâ€™s Handpicked Successor Claims Victory in Ecuador as Opposition Candidate Cries Foul

Luis Ãngel Saavedra

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

Recommended Citation

Ãngel Saavedra, Luis. "Presidentâ€™s Handpicked Successor Claims Victory in Ecuador as Opposition Candidate Cries Foul." (2017). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/notisur/14509>

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.

President's Handpicked Successor Claims Victory in Ecuador as Opposition Candidate Cries Foul

by Luis Ángel Saavedra

Category/Department: Ecuador

Published: 2017-04-21

Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa's handpicked successor, Lenín Moreno, was declared the winner of the April 2 presidential elections with 51.15% of the vote. But two weeks later, Moreno has not been able to overcome the uncertainty caused by the way the Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council, CNE) handled the vote count and by the contradicting results presented by three pollsters, who gave the win to Guillermo Lasso, the opposition candidate. Lasso has charged there was election fraud.

Government mobilizes against Lasso

At the end of the first electoral round, Moreno was just shy of the 40% that would allow him to win outright—he had 39.36% and Lasso, 28.09%. For the runoff, the Moreno and Lasso waged an aggressive campaign unlike any seen in Ecuador since its return to democracy in 1979 ([NotiSur, Feb. 4, 2011](#), [Nov. 11, 2016](#), [March 10, 2017](#)).

The government itself launched a defamation campaign against Lasso, connecting him to the 1999 bank holiday that led the country to bankruptcy. Lasso was unable to refute accusations made in the official media because to do so, he would have had to expose the real culprits who were, in great part, linked to the Partido Social Cristiano (Social Christian Party, PSC), a party that had promised to support him in the second round of voting.

Lasso's Banco de Guayaquil benefited from the bank holiday by buying securities issued by the government to settle the creditors of failed banks. But Lasso himself did not participate in the decision made by then-President Jamil Mahuad (1998-2000) to declare the bank holiday, nor was his bank part of the group of banks that went bankrupt for having committed large amounts of capital in unsecured loans tied to the owners of the failed banks ([NotiSur, Oct. 1, 1999](#), and [March 10, 2017](#)).

Physical attacks

During the campaign, Lasso was threatened on several occasions, the worst occurring March 28 at the Atahualpa Olympic Stadium during the game featuring the Ecuadoran national team, when a group of people began throwing rocks at him, his wife, and his children. A government agency allegedly purchased a large number of tickets for seats near the area where Lasso would be seated. Neither the number of seats purchased nor the identity of the government agency have been identified. However, more than 500 people did surround Lasso inside and outside the stadium.

Moreno, with the full support of the government, traveled from one end of the country to the other saying that “the banker,” as he called Lasso, would eliminate subsidies, privatize health and education, take the country to a new bank holiday, and govern for elites only. Moreno refused to substantiate his accusations and did not present himself for debates or interviews programmed in the media or by social guilds. He also refused to participate in a debate organized by his own supporters in the Red de Maestros (Teachers Network), an organization created by the government

to replace the Unión Nacional de Educadores (National Educators Union, UNE) that it dissolved in 2016.

Government propaganda and the aggressions against Lasso kept Moreno ahead in the pre-election polls made public 10 days before the April 2 election, as well as on those delivered to the leaders of the competing parties up until the day before the vote.

Contradictory results

At five o'clock in the afternoon on April 2, when voting closed, television channels not connected to the government announced Lasso's victory based on data from three polling companies, including CEDATOS, which conducted an exit poll and was confident that the opposition candidate had captured 53.02% of the vote. Two more pollsters, Informe Confidencial and Market, presented similar results from their surveys.

The feeling was that the incidents at Atahualpa Stadium had changed voters' minds in the last days before the election. With these results, Lasso proclaimed himself the winner and met with media reporters for interviews as "president elect." Meanwhile, Moreno insisted that his party, Alianza País, had other results, and that it would wait for the release of the results by the CNE. Moreno referred to an exit poll done by Perfiles de Opinión, a firm close to the government, that gave him 52.2% of the vote.

With these contradictory results, Lasso's followers organized several demonstrations at the CNE's provincial offices, shouting slogans about defending the vote and not giving in to fraud. They pointed out that it had been impossible to access the CNE webpage for more than two hours to view the development of the count in real time. CNE President Juan Pablo Pozo, however, said that only the web had been offline and that the counting system functioned flawlessly during that time. But the doubts generated by Lasso's followers were not dispelled. Uncertainty grew when the Corporación Participación Ciudadana (Citizen Participation Corporation) abstained from giving its rapid vote count. The organization performs a vote count in every election, based on a sample of real data entering the CNE. The accuracy of its reports has earned it the Ecuadorans' trust. The group's refusal to provide results, arguing that their data showed a technical tie, gave credence to the idea that electoral fraud had been committed against Lasso.

From then on, a number of CNE reports were published giving Moreno the victory, including a quick vote count report from the mathematics department of the Escuela Politécnica Nacional (National Polytechnic School), contracted by the CNE to develop a statistical model, software, and a report on the results for a rapid count.

Finally, on April 9, Pozo tweeted, "With 100 percent of the votes tallied, Moreno obtained 51.15%; Lasso, 48.85%." With this announcement, the vote count officially ended, and the challenge process began. Lasso called for a total vote recount, backed by supporters who held permanent demonstrations in front of CNE offices throughout the country.

Calls for peace

Demonstrations have proliferated, both in favor of Lasso and of Moreno. Although there have been some aggressive speeches—especially by Lasso's running mate Andrés Páez, who has even asked for the removal of Pozo from the CNE—people are calling for peace without ending the mobilization. Even Correa and Moreno have supported the calls for peace and the requests for a

recount. For his part, Lasso has not only requested that a recount be witnessed by representatives of the political parties and international observers, but also that it be transmitted live so that every person can follow the process.

Lasso's team presented 4,243 ballots as a sample of inconsistencies generated by the count, and have cast the whole process in doubt asking that each vote be counted again, one by one.

The government has been tolerant of the marches, and there have been no mass arrests as has been common in other instances of social protest. But it has turned against CEDATOS, initiating judicial proceedings against its representatives for the crime of "an attack on the public faith," according to a complaint filed by Assemblywoman Rosana Alvarado with the Attorney General's Office. The government has raided CEDATOS offices in Quito and Guayaquil and confiscated the company's computer equipment and documents related to its work. Ángel Polibio Córdova, the CEDATOS president, said the government wants to destroy his company and his family.

Pressure has also been put on the media outlets that announced a Lasso victory. As of now, this pressure has led to the resignation of journalist Rafael Cuesta, vice-president for news at Channel 1.

After what happened at CEDATOS, people in the offices of Participación Ciudadana are concerned. The organization's director, Ruth Hidalgo, wrote on Twitter: "We know they are coming for us." Her concern is based on President Correa's statement that Participación Ciudadana "was an accomplice to the uncertainty and violence."

While the government uses the entire state apparatus to defend itself from accusations of fraud, and while the opposition remains in the streets waiting for a vote recount, neither Moreno nor Lasso have spoken about the fact that the country is facing a difficult economic situation or about what the new president will have to face. For example, Ecuador's risk rating continues to climb. On April 5, it was at 707 points, in other words, with the present electoral results, Ecuador does not generate confidence.

-- End --