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FEATURED Q&A

Who Will Ecuador Choose as its Next President?



Ecuadoreans go to the polls Aug. 20 for snap presidential and legislative elections. The country's presidential palace, the Carondelet Palace, is pictured. // File Photo: Taty2007 via Creative Commons.

Q Ecuadoreans will head to the polls Aug. 20 in a snap election to choose their next president. Of the candidates registered, only three are polling at or above 10 percent, according to a July poll from Comunicaliza: Luisa González, a fiscal leftist and social conservative who enjoyed a long career in the public sector during the presidency of Rafael Correa; Yaku Pérez, an environmental activist whose green agenda could attract younger generations; and Otto Sonnenholzner, a former vice president who is running as a centrist option. Considering the highly polarized state of Ecuadorean society, what will the next leader have to do to bring unity to the country? How likely is the country to join the region's turn to the left, and will the future president remain a close ally of U.S. President Joe Biden, as was the current president, Guillermo Lasso? What are possible security concerns around the election?

A Will Freeman, fellow for Latin America studies at the Council on Foreign Relations: "According to a nationally representative July poll by CEDATOS, a majority of Ecuadoreans don't recognize the names of the presidential candidates on the ballot. Sixty percent are currently undecided on how they will vote. So there is still plenty of time for the race to change at the last minute, as was the case in Guatemala's recent first-round vote and in Peru's 2021 election. That said, I anticipate Luisa González will maintain the lead, given that Correísmo's base is the largest and most disciplined. The runoff, however, will likely be more of an uphill battle for González and Correísmo. A sector of Ecuadorean society remains staunchly anti-Cor-

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICS

Son of Colombian President Arrested on Allegations of Money Laundering

Nicolás Petro, the son of Colombian President Gustavo Petro, was arrested Saturday on accusations that he accepted money from drug dealers in exchange for political favors.

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ECONOMIC

IMF to Provide Argentina \$7.5 Bn From Loan Deal

The International Monetary Fund announced Friday that it reached an agreement with Argentina's government to release \$7.5 billion to the country under an existing loan program.

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POLITICAL

Peru's Boluarte Seeking Expanded Powers to Fight Crime

Peruvian President Dina Boluarte said Friday that she is seeking to expand her powers for 120 days in order to fight crime.

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Boluarte // Photo: Peruvian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Son of Colombian President Arrested in Laundering Case

Nicolás Petro, the son of Colombian President Gustavo Petro, was arrested Saturday in connection with a money laundering case involving money that he allegedly collected from drug dealers during his father's campaign for president, the Associated Press reported. The younger Petro's arrest followed allegations by his ex-wife, Daysuris del Carmen Vásquez, who told local newspaper *Semana* last year that she was present at meetings during which her husband arranged for a donation of more than 600 million pesos (\$150,000) from a politician who had been convicted in the United States of trafficking and who was seeking the support of the Petro campaign to restart his political career, the AP reported. Vásquez, who was also arrested on Saturday, said the president was unaware of his son's activities and that the money collected was kept inside a safe in their home in the city of Barranquilla. Nicolás Petro has denied the allegations, saying they were unfounded. On The Colombian chief prosecutor's office said in a statement that Petro and Vásquez were both taken into custody at about 6 a.m. Saturday on a judge's orders, the AP reported. "As an individual and father, it pains me to see so much self destruction and one of my sons going to jail," the president said in a posting on X, the social media site formerly known as Twitter. "As president of the republic, I've assured the chief prosecutor's office that it will have all of the guarantees so it can proceed according to the law," he added. A politician in Atlántico province, Nicolás Petro said in March that he welcomed the investigation and previously denied accusations that he accepted money from drug dealers in exchange for including them in the Petro government's peace efforts, Reuters reported. The country's procurator said in a statement that it will intervene in Nicolás Petro's and Vásquez's hearings in order to ensure respect for the legal system and the rights of all parties, Reuters reported.

Peru's Boluarte Seeking Expanded Powers to Fight Crime

Peruvian President Dina Boluarte on Friday said she would seek to expand her powers and is open to making changes to Congress amid continued protests in the country, Reuters reported. In an Independence Day speech in Lima, Boluarte said she would request legislative powers from Congress for 120 to tackle crime. "[These are] measures Peru needs to face, with more strength and efficiency, delinquency and crime," Boluarte said. She also said she would consider turning Congress into a two-chamber legislature from its current unicameral format. Congress is dominated by right-wing parties and has low popular support, the wire service reported. "The government and Congress have a disapproval rating of 80 percent and 90 percent, respectively, due to the violent repression and the shelving of the proposal for early elections in 2024, which four out of five Peruvians support," Gino Costa, a former member of Peru's Congress told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published July 26. Several rounds of demonstrations have gripped Peru since former President Pedro Castillo's removal from office by Congress last December. The latest wave of unrest started on July 19. More than 60 people have been killed in violent clashes with Peruvian security forces. "I call for a grand national reconciliation between all Peruvians," Boluarte said Friday, Reuters reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

IMF to Provide \$7.5 Bn to Argentina Over Coming Months

The International Monetary Fund announced Friday that it had reached an agreement with Argentina's government to release \$7.5 billion to the country under an existing program to which the two sides agreed last year, the

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. to Take Refugee Referrals From Mexico

The U.S. government announced Friday it will take referrals of Haitian, Cuban, Venezuelan and Nicaraguan citizens in Mexico, and will consider their resettlement as refugees in the United States, the Associated Press reported. Last week, Mexico announced it would set up a service center offering employment and resettlement for immigrants from the four countries who are seeking to enter the United States. The center will be located at its southern border with Guatemala, though the government did not specify when it was due to open.

U.S. Nurse, Child Kidnapped in Haiti

A nurse from the United States and her child were kidnapped last week in Haiti, faith-based aid organization El Roi Haiti said Saturday, Reuters reported. "We can confirm that Alix Dorsainvil, our director's wife, and their child were kidnapped on the morning of Thursday, July 27th from our campus near Port au Prince while serving in our community ministry," the aid organization said in a statement. The U.S. State Department said in a statement that it was aware of reports of the kidnapping and was working with partner agencies in the United States and with Haitian authorities.

Paraguayan President-elect Expects Talks With Brazil Over Itaipu Dam

Paraguayan President-elect Santiago Peña said on Friday after meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva that he expected talks with Brazil over the binational Itaipu hydroelectric dam to start next month, Reuters reported. Both countries expect to reach an agreement over the dam's finances by the end of the year. Under the current rules, which are set to expire this year, each country is entitled to 50 percent of Itaipu's energy.

Associated Press reported. The latest deal was reached after weeks of negotiations between the lender and the South American country's government. It still needs final approval from the IMF's board, which is to meet in the second half of August. Through the agreement reached on Friday, the IMF is seeking "to support Argentina's policy efforts and near-term balance of payments needs, including obligations to the fund," the AP reported. The lender added that it had agreed to relax some of the conditions of its loan program, for reasons including that "Argentina's economic situation has become very challenging due to the larger-than-anticipated impact of the drought, which had a significant impact on exports and fiscal revenues." The agreement combines the fifth and sixth reviews of Argentina's 30-month \$44 billion loan program that it reached last year with the IMF. The sixth review had been scheduled for September, but combining the reviews allows the government to avoid another review before the country's presidential election in October, the AP reported. Economy Minister Sergio Massa is the ruling party's candidate in the election as current President Alberto Fernández is not seeking re-election. Argentina's economy is in its most fragile state in two decades, with its peso having lost a third of its value this year against the dollar and inflation running higher than 115 percent, the Financial Times reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Saudi Arabia Buying Stake in Vale Unit for \$2.6 Billion

Saudi Arabia has agreed to spend \$2.6 billion to buy a 10 percent stake in the base metals unit of Brazilian mining company Vale, Bloomberg News reported Friday. The kingdom is buying the stake through a joint venture between its sovereign wealth fund and state mining firm Ma'aden, the news service reported. The mining industry has been a focus of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to diversify the economy away from oil.

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reísta, even after the shortcomings of the Moreno and Lasso governments. Pérez, Sonnenholzner and others are competing for these voters' support, but once the smoke clears, I expect anti-Correísta voters will begin to unify behind any one of these candidates. There's no guarantee Ecuador will join the region's shift to the left, although it's a possibility. The big challenge for the next president, whoever he or she is, will be bringing Congress and other state institutions together to tackle rising criminal violence. 'Mano dura' theatrics won't cut it. What Ecuador needs is an intelligence-based approach, sustained over multiple governments, that dismantles criminal structures and reverses their capture of officials within the security forces, police, judiciary and ports. That unity has eluded Presidents Moreno and Lasso and could continue to remain elusive if Correísmo versus anti-Correísmo becomes the dominant theme of the next government."

A **Marc Becker, professor of Latin American history at Truman State University:** "Once again, it appears that the presidential race centers on second place to see who will face off against front runner González in the second round. González is both the strongest but also one of the least known candidates, and much of her support is because of Correa's backing. As she becomes better known, her support could either rise or decline, but it appears unlikely that she will win outright on Aug. 20. Even with concerns about rising crime rates and security under Lasso's conservative administration, right-wing candidates such as Jan Topić who have been cast as the 'Ecuadorean Bukele' have not gained traction. A more likely scenario is that social movements that have long been at odds with Correa will once again be the deal breaker in the race. Pérez, who has broken with Pachakutik, is polling significantly behind what he did in the last election. This would seem to indicate that it was not just the attractiveness of his environmental

agenda but also the institutional support of a political movement that provided him with a strong showing. A question is what will those allied around Leonidas Iza, the leader of Indigenous movement CONAIE, do: both in this first round as well as in a potential second round. Historically and even in the last presidential election, conservatives with their unpopular agenda can never win on the strength of their own program, but only when the liberal/left is divided and that might very well happen again."

A **Diego Andrés Almeida, managing partner at Almeida Guzmán Asociados:** "Although it is important for candidates to communicate their platforms and intentions, this election will most likely be decided not on the merits of a candidate, but rather in opposition to the acts and mistakes of the previous government. Candidates must nonetheless tackle the issues of security, drug trafficking and public spending to incentivize the economy. In the last year, Ecuador has seen more murders and kidnappings than in any other period in the previous decade. The political pendulum seems to be moving at a fast pace. The midterm elections showed that candidates from the left secured large support and acquired power throughout the country. Due to security issues and uprisings from Indigenous groups, it is evident that voters are not leaning toward electing someone from the right. It is important to note that neither Yaku Pérez nor Otto Sonnenholzner represent the conservative side of the political spectrum. Sonnenholzner seems to be closest to U.S. interests. And Pérez is unpredictable, but his stance will most likely be favorable to the United States, except when it comes to mining and oil exploitation. González is certainly the candidate with the least sympathy toward the United States. Security concerns for the election include cyber-attacks directed to the electoral system, as well as physical attacks against

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candidates, such as the murder of the mayor of Manta on July 23.”

A **Hernán Reyes Aguinaga, professor of communications at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Ecuador:** “The upcoming presidential and legislative elections in Ecuador do not leave a large margin of hope. Several factors have a lot influence over the possibility that the rotation of state could bring positive changes: the waves of violence that the population has withstood during the last two and a half years, including more than a dozen prison riots

“**The upcoming presidential and legislative elections in Ecuador do not leave a large margin of hope.**”

– **Hernán Reyes Aguinaga**

with barbaric massacres that have left more than 500 people dead. They have shown that the drug cartels, not the state, are in control of those facilities and other territory. President Guillermo Lasso has been unable to address not only this crisis, but he has also been unable to get country out of the economic stagnation that has affected many people and has provoked migration. Citizens lack trust in the political class. Also, political organizations are weak, and civil society is fragmented, polarized and frightened. In these difficult circumstances, one of these eight candidates must be conscious of the gravity of the devastation in our country, especially considering that they represent all sides of the political spectrum: the traditional right or those in disguise; the outsider candidates who are supported by parties who have no direction and the centrist

environmentalists and progressives. Even if they win, they will not have the opportunity, in about a year and a half, to make practically a single change. Ecuador, which wanders without direction and in a tailspin with the current government, projects itself as hopeless onto whomever will come to substitute the current situation.”

A **Gabriel Santelices Fierro, legal director at Dentons Paz Horowitz:** “The upcoming presidential election is again characterized by the large number of registered candidates (especially from center-right and right-wing parties), which causes an exaggerated division of the vote among them. It is for this reason that candidate Luisa González of Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana, the greatest beneficiary of the large number of registered candidates, leads the polls despite having just 26.8 percent of voters’ support. The next president must bring a solution for the high crime rates caused by organized crime. This issue is a major concern for all of Ecuadorean society, despite the enormous division among voters. Currently, with two of the first three presidential candidates (González and Yaku Pérez) being leftists, it is highly probable that Ecuador will join the regional trend in South America. In this scenario, the Ecuadorean government’s relationship with the United States will probably deteriorate, as occurred during the government of Rafael Correa. There are concerns regarding the security of citizens and authorities during political campaigns and elections. In addition, the electoral institutions (CNE and TCE) are exposed in case the election results do not favor the interests of criminal organizations, such as the recent assassination of the mayor of the city of Manta, Agustín Intriago.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

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