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Ecuador elections: state of emergency in the aorta of Latin America

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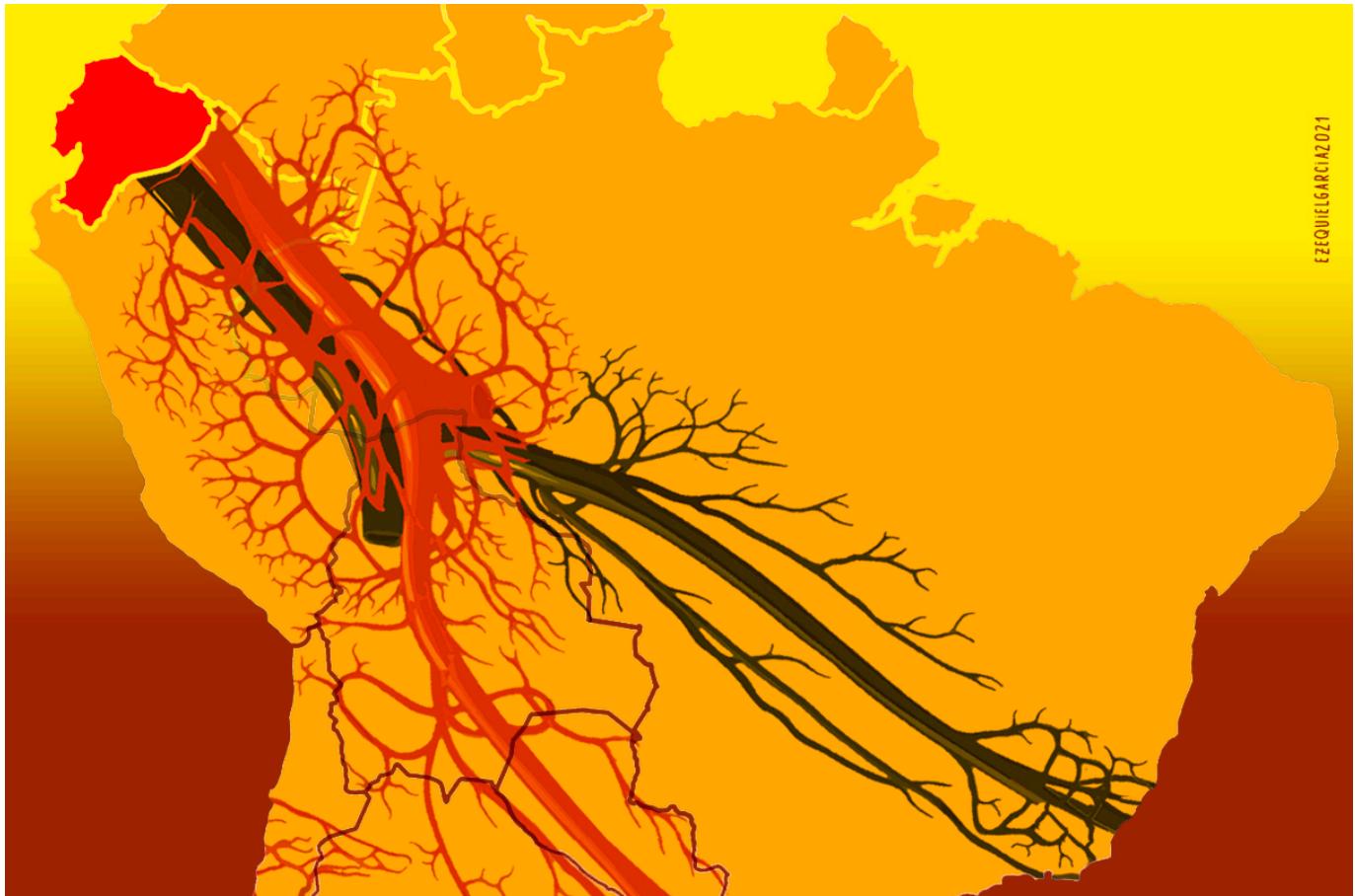


Illustration: Ezequiel Garcia

Sunday will define who will be the new president of Ecuador and polls predict a close runoff. The candidates in dispute are oil and water: on one side the country's biggest banker, representing the elites and the neoliberal creed; on the other a leftist economist, heir to former president Rafael Correa, currently in exile. Will the indigenous movement tip the balance? Is there any guarantee of a fraud-free election? One thing is certain: the outcome will have a major impact on regional geopolitics.

State of emergency in Ecuador: the news was confirmed minutes after I finished interviewing Andres Arauz. The candidate is confident and thoughtful. He is greeted and hugged in the street, pictures are taken with him. Each day of campaigning

means touring one or more provinces and, at the same time, defusing threats. The presidential ballot of April 11 is very close. It is the moment of desperate, dangerous maneuvers, something that, it was known, was going to happen. I bid him farewell. Night falls in Quito and little can be seen, there is no fog but clouds, mountains, volcanoes, the almost three thousand meters of the city.

For the second time the government of Lenin Moreno decrees a state of emergency. The previous one occurred in October 2019, when the indigenous and popular uprising took place to confront the adjustment decided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Quito was then a battlefield, columns arrived from Cotopaxi, Amazon, neighborhoods of the capital, confronted with a response with gunfire, police, military, eleven dead, loss of eyes, and a negotiation at the last minute agreement that the government did not respect.

A lot of crisis and political persecution has happened since then. The country is worse, the pandemic devastated Guayaquil in 2020 with corpses in the houses, streets, morgues, hospitals. Three health ministers have succeeded each other in the last month, and hardly any vaccines have arrived. Moreno, meanwhile, seeks to culminate the conflagration with a wave of privatizations that will reach the main target: the Central Bank of Ecuador (BCE).

The state of exception, under the argument of the pandemic, has two objectives: to privatize behind the scenes and to build an even more unfavorable scenario for Arauz in the elections. It prohibits "the realization of all events of massive affluence and congregation" in the eight provinces where it is in force -they are the principal areas of the country, which means that the campaign in the streets is limited, where Arauz has strength and the valuation of his closeness with the people is great.

The decree is also a threat for election day in the event that some event occurs before which mobilization is necessary. In 2017, for example, Lasso, facing Moreno, was proclaimed winner in advance and falsely by the hegemonic media apparatus.

There was then an institutionality in which confidence could be placed. Correism was a government and a movement with structure, now it is a persecuted force.

Dreams of banishment

Moreno's political time has expired. He fulfilled his objectives: he carried forward the agenda of financial capital, of the US State Department, and persecuted those who brought him to the presidency. He earned his place in history as the one who executed one of the deepest betrayals within a political movement. Now he is looking, like others before him, for a place to spend the rest of his years, most likely outside the country.

The process of dismantling Correism was carried out in stages. The first target was Rafael Correa, who moved to Belgium with his family after leaving the presidential palace of Carondelet. As in Brazil, Bolivia or Argentina, the first target was the leadership of the process, on whom a combination of media, judicial and political attacks were unloaded until the objective was achieved: to prevent his return to Ecuador and his electoral participation.

The persecution continued on the second and third lines, with charges of corruption or the crime of rebellion. The result was jail for Moreno's vice president, Jorge Glas, exile for Correa's former foreign minister, Ricardo Patiño, a permanent threat of sentence for the current prefect of Pichincha, Paola Pabón, who wears an electronic anklet to be located at all times.

Simultaneously, and often invisibly, there was a multiplication of cases for those who were part of government teams during the Correa years. Young people, for example, who had joined the government attracted by the possibilities of a state that was open to all. These actions impacted a large part of a generation that had its first political experience in the Citizen Revolution.

The persecution also reached the Alianza País party, which was left in the hands of Moreno and those who accompanied him in the betrayal were numerous. The strategy was not only to dismantle Correism, but also to prevent its electoral participation. That is why when Arauz achieved the presidential registration in the National Electoral Council (CNE), there was already, in that act, a victory.

The operations were designed by those who knew the process from the inside, which added impact and blocked any reaction. The weaknesses of the citizen revolution did the rest, two of them in particular: the absence of a strong party, and the scarce popular organization (both in the territories and in the world of work). The capacity for pressure in the streets was weak, sporadic, and without the possibility of alliance with the only movement with structure and capacity for mobilization: the indigenous movement.

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The return of the indigenous movement to the center of the political stage occurred in October 2019. The uprising was centrally led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Conaie), the main national organization, which maintained roadblocks and an encampment in Quito for more than a week. The action had great social legitimacy, which was translated into banging pots and pans, provision of food, lodging, medical care for the wounded.

Two leaders had high visibility during those days: Jaime Vargas, president of Conaie, and Leonidas Iza, who emerged as a leader because he was at the head of the main column, with about 50,000 people, coming from Cotopaxi. The former has now seven judicial processes against him, the latter eight, and several regional leaders have precautionary measures. Criminalization also hit those who, within the indigenous

movement, confronted the government.

The uprising meant the definitive rupture with Moreno after an initial stage of agreements, which were manifested, for example, in the appointment of a Conaie leader as Minister of Environment. Those days also revealed the distance between Conaie and the Citizen Revolution, the depth of the rift and the apparent impossibility of a rapprochement between the parties.

The disagreements between Conaie and Correism were over various issues, such as indigenous justice, organization in the territories where the communities are located, the so-called millennium schools, and water management. And there were conflicts regarding mining and oil exploitation, demands that did not receive the necessary answers, according to leaders such as Iza, who is also an authority of the Panzaleo people.

We talk about it near his home, in the community of San Ignacio de Toacaso in the Canton Latacunga. Everything there is green, the rain and the Andes. The land where he was born belonged to a landowner and was recovered in a process of struggle where his parents were involved. Iza comes from an indigenous, leftist background, and explains the map of the movement, composed of a peasant sector - to which he belongs-, traders, transporters, financiers, and the respective influences in the politics of alliances and interests.

The disagreement with Correism is explained by other factors. The citizen revolution did not consider the Conaie an essential alliance, due to a majority political conception that denied an important place to the construction of popular organization. That is why, after the exit of the government, there were no places of withdrawal and rearticulation to confront Moreno's betrayal.

There is another element: the path of the Conaie, particularly a sector permeated by the entry of national and international NGOs, linked to U.S. foreign policy, and their

progressive influence on the leadership. At the same time, there are those who confront this current within the movement. The translation of this debate today is the dispute within the Conaie and its electoral instrument Pachakutik, between leftist sectors -internationally close to Evo Morales- and those who maintain alliances with the right wing and adopt the anti-correista discourse to justify the rapprochement with Lasso. Yaku Pérez, who was designated candidate without respecting the internal mechanisms of the movement, third in the first presidential round, is one of the main figures of this second tendency.

This dispute had a first resolution before the April 11 ballot with the Conaie's call for an "ideological null vote". That agreement was modified in the final days of the campaign when Pérez's vice-presidential candidate called to vote for Lasso, Iza announced that he would never vote for the candidate of the right, and Vargas made an unexpected turn: the public support to Arauz, in an event held in the Amazon. "Andres achieved what I could not," Correa tweeted after the agreement reached. The Conaie later ratified the call for a null vote. How much impact will this agreement have in terms of votes? And what will be its implications in a possible Arauz government? These are some of the questions still without clear answers.

The last days

The polls favor Arauz, with a difference of almost four points and there is more than 30% of the electorate that would vote null or blank. The final days of the campaign occupy a central place within this framework: they may be decisive to obtain the necessary majority, particularly because of the almost one third of voters in dispute. The warning signs of threats are even greater for the Arauz campaign.

This was never a level playing field election. The Ecuadorian institutions were transformed into a device against Correism, such as the Prosecutor's Office for the legal persecution, and the National Electoral Council which hindered Arauz's candidacy from the very first hour. It is a context reminiscent of the Bolivian election

in 2020 where last minute operations could take place during the campaign, the night of the election, the days after, until the inauguration. The difference in Ecuador is that the government was democratically elected.

This set of threats occurs while, at the same time, a dirty campaign with known elements is taking place. One of them is the use of Venezuela as an accusatory method to instill fear in a country where Venezuelan immigrants are numerous. The maneuver went as far as hiring migrants for ten or twenty dollars a day to carry signs at traffic lights such as: "For voting for socialism I am here begging for alms".

The stakes of the election are high. Nationally, a victory for Lasso would be the deepening of neoliberalism under the direction of the banks, now without intermediaries: the government in the hands of those who see the country as their hacienda. In political terms, it would mean the attempt of definitive banishment of the citizen revolution, four more years of selective persecutions, of impossibility for those who are outside to return to Ecuador, with cases brought under the most profound lawfare, perhaps the deepest in the continent.

The international dimension is also central. An example has been the dirty campaign from Argentina via Clarín, with false news about Arauz. And from Colombia, through the magazine Semana and the Attorney General's Office, on a larger scale: the accusation, fabricated without evidence, against the candidate of the citizen revolution allegedly receiving financing from the Colombian National Liberation Army.

This is, in turn, the first election that will take place in South America under the administration of Joe Biden in the United States. His positioning with respect to other agendas, such as Bolivia or Venezuela, has so far maintained more continuity than rupture with respect to Donald Trump's foreign policy. How much of a threat does an Arauz victory represent, and what is needed to prevent it? Perhaps the answer should not be sought so much at the top in the White House, as in those

intermediate zones of the deep state that deploys its agencies in the continent.

Ecuador emerges on the continental map with the possibility of a new progressive government. It would be, should it happen, the fourth victory in three years: the Mexican Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2018, the Argentine Alberto Fernández in 2019, and the Bolivian Luis Arce in 2020. Arauz has placed special emphasis on the need to rebuild the instruments of Latin American integration that were dismantled by right-wing governments in a policy aligned to Washington's strategy. And on the near horizon there are several presidential elections in the continent, in particular, Brazil in 2022, with the new possibility of a Lula da Silva candidacy.

The final days, before the vote, are passing without any electoral climate in the streets, with a great deal of campaigning in social networks, and under state of emergency. Ecuador is facing a defining moment in which Latin America can see itself as in a great mirror.

Source: [Revista Crisis](#), translation Internationalist 360 / [Resumen](#)

