

Ecuador voted for another way

A surprising result. This is a real verdict on the as-yet unfinished counting of the presidential election in Ecuador. Last Sunday, Ecuador went to the polls. In a general election process, in the midst of the pandemic, there was the first round of presidential elections, the composition of the new chamber of deputies, and an important referendum on the privatization of water in Cuenca.

As we finish this short article, the counting of votes is drawing to a close – there are still 5,000 minutes to be recounted, with some problems – pointing to a second round in which Andrés Arauz would run against either Yaku Pérez or Guillermo Lasso, with Pérez holding a slight advantage of a few thousand votes.

The elections had a good turnout, despite the pandemic, with 13 million Ecuadorians eligible to vote, in a context of growing polarization, political, economic and health crisis in the country. The current president, Lenín Moreno, did not participate in the elections and leaves office with one of the lowest approval levels in history, which reached only 8%. In total, 16 candidates ran for the presidency of the Andean country.

The echoes of the October 2019 rebellion

The great triumph of Sunday's election was the fact that it was conditioned by the agenda of the social and popular movements, which seek to represent in the political sphere the demands of the great October 2019 rebellion. In that huge gesture of rebellion, the popular victory expressed a rejection to the adjustment plans of the International Monetary Fund and the neoliberal policies of Moreno, who betrayed the program for which he was elected, breaking with Correa and his party.

The problems continue in the country. To this day, there is a great wave of popular dissatisfaction and the arrival of the coronavirus in the country has only made the crisis worse. Ecuador is one of the Latin American countries most affected by the pandemic, as seen in the health emergency in Guayaquil with bodies being exposed in a public square. Lenín Moreno also gained international notoriety by handing over activist Julian Assange for extradition, after years of being a refugee in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Andrés Arauz, representing Rafael Correa, outlawed by judicial persecution, was the big winner in the first round. With 32.11% of the vote, he was far from the promise of winning in the first round, but far outperformed the other contenders, electing the largest congressional seats, with 49 deputies, as well as good results in the provinces.

The close race for second place is the other big news in the election. The bourgeoisie, especially the coastal sectors, where the country's large business conglomerates are concentrated, have put all their bets on Guillermo Lasso's campaign. The former banker is and one of the richest people in Ecuador, representative of the neoliberal oligarchy. Lasso is a kind of Ecuadorian John Doria [Brazilian businessman and governor of the São Paulo state] and is in his third attempt to become president. With some of the biased polls, the bourgeoisie was already preparing for a "natural" runoff against Correism. Until the exit poll, this was the most likely scenario.

However, the irruption of the novelty Yaku Pérez turned the tide. With a little less than 20% for each of these two candidates, the bourgeoisie has a real risk, also thanks to the dispersion in many candidacies, of being left out of the second round, which shows the capital defeat that is being confirmed for the neoliberals. As already said, so far, Yaku Pérez is with a small lead to go to the second round, to be confirmed at the end of the counting and recount processes in

the coming days.

Pérez is the candidate of Pachakutik, who has expressed the October 2019 mobilization politically with a line focused on indigenous communities, for a plurinational representation that Ecuador does not yet have. The country has a deficit in the recognition of indigenous ethnicities in society and the state. Yaku raised this flag. In addition, there was the plebiscite called "In Defense of Water" in Cuenca – the third largest city in the country and Pérez's city – against the privatization of water for mining purposes. This plebiscite was also reflected in the voting for the presidential elections.

Yaku Pérez's ecosocialist program gained importance in alliance with urban sectors, critical of Correism, that got involved in the October 2019 mobilizations, such as the youth, women's and popular neighborhood movements. Economist Alberto Acosta, a former critic of Correism, also supported Yaku, as did part of the country's radical and independent left. Although there are problems, such as the internal struggles within CONAIE and the Pachacutik, in which Pérez sided with the more moderate sectors in the face of more combative sectors of the movement.

Two additional notes can also be pointed out. First, the deep division of the bourgeoisie has given grounds for other phenomena. The center candidate Xavier Herbas, from the Democratic Left Party – more moderate and critical of both Correa and Moreno – reached more than 15%, especially in the large urban centers and in the national capital. With diffuse and democratic aspirations, although blunt in his criticism of neoliberalism, Herbas used the social networks to capture an ambiguous feeling of the accommodated middle classes, who could not see themselves either in the return of Correism or in Lasso's reactionary and pro-rich stance. Moreover, the fact of the victory of more than 80% in the plebiscite in defense of water in Cuenca, against privatization and predatory mining

activity, opens a fundamental path to follow in the debate about what kind of development model is needed to face the crisis.

An interesting political opportunity

As we have already noted, this brief article is intended to mark the real political storm occurring in Ecuador, with the “news” that is expressed in the polls. With the result consolidated and a second round of voting made official, we will write a longer article to prospect the challenges that are opening up.

For now, however, we register an enormous defeat for the oligarchies, their press, and their research institutes. The Ecuadorian election indicates a path about the relation of forces between the classes in the continent, adding to the recent electoral process in Bolivia, the expectations about the constituent in Chile and the election in Peru. The Andean scenario is an encouragement for all of South America. The popular struggle wins and imperialism loses. It also indicates a space for the Left to confront the contradictions of “progressivism”, without neglecting the need for unity to defeat neoliberal plans and authoritarian attempts.

From Ecuador, a land known for volcanic eruptions and political eruptions – there have been several during the 21st century – new and interesting winds are blowing. It is necessary to follow with attention and otherness the political opportunity that is developing.