

Naked progressivism in Ecuadorian elections

Via [IHU On-line](#)

On February 7, the first round of the presidential elections was held in Ecuador. Among the candidates who presented themselves, three were competitive. The young economist Andrés Arauz, 37, represents Correism, Ecuador's version of Latin American progressivism. Guillermo Lasso is an old-time banker and politician, who represents exactly that. What was new was the candidacy of Yaku Pérez by the Pachakutik movement, an organization where much of the indigenous struggles in the country converge.

Within hours, most of the polls were counted. With almost 1/3 of the votes, Arauz moved on to the second round, despite not receiving a massive vote like the Bolivian MAS last year. In the race for second place, Yaku had a slight lead over Lasso: with 99.26% of the polls counted, he had 20.09% of the vote and Lasso had 19.5%.

The final percent of the vote, however, was almost a week late in being counted. Announced in the early hours of Saturday to Sunday, the result favored Lasso, by 19.74% against 19.39%.

What is at stake in this election? Why the delay? How to understand its result?

International progressivism has interpreted this election as a dispute between left (Correism) and right (Lasso). In this key, Pachakutik's candidacy has been commonly identified as a "Trojan horse" of the right [1].

This reading has two underlying problems, which are interconnected.

First, it turns a blind eye on the anti-democratic and anti-popular aspects of Rafael Correa's administrations (2007-17). A government that turned the Good Life into a marketing prop, while it accelerated the exploitation of the territories. As a result, socio-environmental conflicts intensified, and the government response combined defamation and repression. At the same time, it modernized the state apparatus, disciplined for partisan purposes: in Ecuador as in Bolivia (and Venezuela), the independence of institutions was compromised [2].

Benefited by the commodities boom, Correa did at best, "things better, with the same model of accumulation," in his own words. And at worst, he advanced a centralized and personalistic power project: a "citizen revolution," without citizens.

This picture illuminates Correa's break with his successor and former party colleague, Lenin Moreno. It is certain that Moreno approached the traditional oligarchy to differentiate himself from Correa. It is certain that, in the face of the oil crisis, he tightened the structural adjustment, which had enough of the streets in October 2019. It is certain that Moreno concluded his mandate with very low approval ratings. However, the judicial disputes between Moreno and Correism should not be seen through the lens of left versus right, but as different factions vying for state power.

And the most important side effect of this fractious dispute, was to open space for a newness on the left: an alternative to progressivism and oligarchic politics. There lies the singularity of what is happening in Ecuador, which the ideology of the "Trojan horse" hides: the new election does not have the smell of fascism, as in Brazil, nor the mold of the old, as in Bolivia.

It is possible to criticize aspects of Yaku Pérez's candidacy, as Pachakutik, Leonidas Iza and Jaime Vargas have done from within. But it is necessary to understand it, in form and

content.

It was a campaign based on militancy and not on money: whoever visits Yaku Pérez's instagram will discover a candidate who traveled the country staying at supporters' homes. In fact, his companion reports that when he wanted to help him with his instagram at the beginning of the campaign, Yaku didn't even have credit on his cell phone.

As a content, it is a candidacy that defends nature, territories, and water. In a word, it opposes Latin American developmentalism.

This candidacy was close to making it to the second round, where it would benefit from the popular rejection of Correism (as anyone who is around in Ecuador can attest) and would be favored. In this context, the Pachakutik movement denounces electoral fraud. Its reading is that the delay in counting the votes is due to political calculations: the government of Correism believes that Lasso will be easy prey, and has negotiated the outcome of the first round with this sector.

Those who consider this hypothesis absurd should remember that Correa has always considered "leftism," "ecologism" and "indigenism" as the worst enemies of his project – in his own words. And that bankers and primary exporters have profited greatly under his governments. You should also note that requests for a recount of the Pachakutik movement's votes through legal channels, were denied.

The real question facing the left is not to defame the Pachakutik candidacy. But it is to understand why in Ecuador a trajectory is repeated, in which progressivism in power is degraded and corrupted, drifting into a personalist and authoritarian politics that the left always criticizes, when the state is not theirs.

I do not idealize the Pachakutik movement or Yaku Perez. But for anyone who cares about what is happening on the planet, in

ecology as in politics, it is clear that they are part of the solution. The problem lies with those who smear them, not those who support them.

Notes:

[1] Learn who Yaku Pérez is: possible candidate in the second round in Ecuador who supported coup against Dilma and others in Latin America. Available [here](#).

[2] By way of example, let us recall the maneuvers of Morales to approve his fourth consecutive candidacy, and of Maduro to impeach three deputies in the 2015 elections, depriving the opposition of an absolute majority.