

From Rafael Correa to Guillermo Lasso via Lenin Moreno

Via [Jacobin América Latina](#)

On April 11, 2021, in the second round of the presidential elections, Guillermo Lasso, the candidate of the right, defeated Andres Arauz, the candidate supported by Rafael Correa and part of the left. Lasso was elected thanks to the division of the left, since a large part of the left wing, which had lost all confidence in Rafael Correa, asked for a null vote. The votes of the popular camp, which had a clear majority in the first round of the February 2021 elections, were divided and this allowed a former banker to be elected president. The situation is serious because an opportunity to break with Lenin Moreno's policies has been lost. Lasso, although critical of Lenin Moreno's positions, is going to continue with the neoliberal policy, submission to private interests, especially to the powerful Ecuadorian banks, and to the North American superpower. How is it possible that an important part of the votes of the popular camp did not go to Andres Arauz to prevent the election of Guillermo Lasso? This is explained by the rejection of Rafael Correa's policies, especially since 2011, by a part of the left, especially in the CONAIE, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador and the FUT, Frente Unitario de Trabajadores.

The election of Lasso as president opens a new stage in the implementation of a policy even more favorable to Ecuadorian big capital, to foreign multinationals, to the alliance between right-wing presidents in Latin America and to the continuation and even the strengthening of U.S. domination in the continent. The electoral result of April 11, 2021 is a dark day for the popular camp. To understand how an important

part of the popular camp refused to ask for a vote in favor of Arauz to defeat Lasso, it is necessary to analyze the policies followed by Rafael Correa after being reelected president in 2010.

Reminder of Rafael Correa's policies from 2007 to 2010

Let us begin by recalling Rafael Correa's presidency from 2007 to 2010. Ecuador provided an example of a government that made the sovereign decision to investigate the debt process to identify illegitimate debts and then suspend payment. The suspension of payment of a large part of the commercial debt, followed by its repurchase at lower cost, demonstrates that the government did not limit itself to denunciation speeches. In 2009, the government unilaterally restructured part of its external debt and won a victory against its private creditors, mainly U.S. banks. In 2007, the government of Ecuador at the beginning of Rafael Correa's presidency came into conflict with the World Bank. Between 2007 and 2010, a number of important positive policies were implemented or initiated: a new constitution was democratically approved announcing important changes that were not genuinely or profoundly realized; the US military base at Manta on the Pacific coast was terminated; an attempt was made to create a Bank of the South with Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay; the World Bank tribunal was abandoned.

The change of Rafael Correa in 2011

The year 2011 certainly marks a change in the Ecuadorian government's policy on several fronts, both social and ecological, on trade and debt. Conflicts between the government and a number of important social movements such as CONAIE on the one hand, the Frente Unitario de los Trabajadores (United Workers' Front), the education unions, the women's movement, and the student movement on the other hand, were festering. On the other hand, Correa made progress in the trade negotiations with the EU in which the president

multiplied concessions. In terms of debt, since 2014, Ecuador has begun to gradually increase its use of the international financial markets, without forgetting the debts already contracted with China. In the ecological field, the Correa government abandoned, in 2013, the project of non-exploitation of oil in a very sensitive part of the Amazon.

Abandonment of the Yasuní-ITT Initiative in 2013

The Yasuní-ITT initiative was presented by Rafael Correa in June 2007. It consisted of leaving 20% of the country's oil reserves in the ground (about 850 million barrels of oil), located in a megadiversity region, the Yasuní national park, in the northeastern Amazon. As Mathieu Le Quang explains:

To compensate for the financial losses of not exploiting the field, the Ecuadorian State demanded from the countries of the North an international financial contribution equivalent to half of what it could have earned from exploitation (US\$ 3.6 billion based on the 2007 oil price). This ambitious policy, especially in its objectives to change the energy matrix of the country which, although it exploits and exports its oil, is also an importer of its derivatives and remains dependent for electricity generation.

He continues:

A strong decision of the Ecuadorian government was to have registered the Yasuni-ITT Initiative in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, that is to say, to have emphasized the "non-emission of greenhouse gases" that would be generated by the "non-exploitation of oil.

In August 2013, Rafael Correa, who had been re-elected president of Ecuador for the third time in February with more than 57 % of the votes in the first round, announced the end of the project. He justified his decision by the very real

lack of firmness of the commitments made by the various countries to finance the non-exploitation of Yasuni-ITT oil.

Fundamentally, during Rafael Correa's presidency there was no abandonment of the extractivist-export model. This consists of a set of policies aimed at extracting from the subsoil, or from the surface of the soil, as many primary goods as possible (fossil fuels, minerals, timber, etc.) or producing as many agricultural products as possible in order to export them to the world market (in Ecuador's case, bananas, sugar, African palm, flowers, broccoli). Regarding broccoli production in Ecuador, François Houtart wrote:

It is worth mentioning the study done in 2013 on broccoli production in the region of Pujilí, in the province of Cotopaxi. 97% of broccoli production is exported to countries, mostly capable of producing broccoli (USA, EU, Japan), based on comparative advantages low wages, less demanding environmental laws. The production company monopolizes the water, which is (no longer) sufficient for the neighboring communities; it bombards the clouds to prevent the downpours from falling on the broccoli, but on the surrounding area. Chemicals are used, even at less than 200 meters from the rooms as required by law. Contaminated water runs into the rivers. Workers' health is affected (skin, lungs, cancers). Contracts are made by the week, with a foreman who receives 10% of wages, thus avoiding social security. Overtime is often not paid. The company processing broccoli for export works 24 hours in three shifts. It was not unusual for workers to be forced to work two shifts in a row. The union is forbidden. In addition, the two companies, now merged, were both headquartered, one in Panama and the other in the Dutch Antilles.

To this must be added the export of farmed shrimp and tuna (industrially fished).

This model has many harmful effects: destruction of the environment (open-pit mines, deforestation, pollution of watercourses, salinization/poisoning/erosion of soils, reduction of biodiversity, emission of greenhouse gases...), destruction of the natural livelihoods of entire populations (native peoples and others); depletion of non-renewable natural resources; dependence on world markets (commodity or agricultural commodity exchanges) where the prices of export products are determined; maintenance of very low wages to maintain competitiveness; dependence on technologies developed by the most industrialized countries; dependence on inputs (pesticides, herbicides, transgenic seeds or not, chemical fertilizers...) produced by a few large transnational companies (most of them coming from the most developed countries); dependence on the international economic and financial situation.

François Houtart, who closely followed the Ecuadorian process and who supported Rafael Correa's policies, did not fail to express his criticisms, which he had communicated to the government. Shortly before his death in Quito, he wrote about agricultural policy:

These policies are also short-term. They do not take into account natural changes and their long-term effects, food sovereignty, workers' rights, the origin of rural poverty. They emphasize an agro-export model presented as a goal, without indicating the consequences.

And he specified:

As authors, we have asked ourselves in our report, if it was possible to build 21st century socialism with 19th century capitalism (...) Once again in history, it is the countryside and its workers who pay the price of modernization. This was the case of European capitalism in the 19th century, of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and of China after the Communist

Rafael Correa and the social movements: a conflictive relationship

The government of Rafael Correa had great difficulty in taking into account the contributions of a number of leading social organizations. The political line of Correa and the leadership of Alianza País, his political movement, consisted in confronting as often as possible the largest indigenous organization, the CONAIE, the largest teaching union – the National Union of Educators, UNE -, the union of the Petroecuador company (national oil company), and a considerable number of social organizations, especially the trade union organizations grouped in the FUT and the women's movement. It should be remembered that the FUT remained the axis of resistance during the Correa government. All these organizations were regularly attacked by the executive branch, which accused them of mobilizing on a corporatist basis in order to defend their privileges. Moreover, Rafael Correa did not take into account the historical demand, raised mainly by CONAIE, for the integration of the indigenous component in the decision-making process on all major issues affecting the government's lines of action. For its part, CONAIE, which was fighting for the general principles of the Constitution to be transcribed into law, did not hesitate to confront Correa. Several times, the government tried to pass measures, but without first organizing a dialogue with the organizations of the affected social sectors. This line reminds us of the policy of Lula's government in Brazil, when it undertook a neoliberal-oriented reform of the pension system in 2003. Lula carried out a campaign for this reform, attacking the achievements of public service workers, who were presented as privileged.

Among the most serious disputes, which opposed the executive power to the Ecuadorian social organizations, is the draft law

on water, on the one hand, and Rafael Correa's policy of opening up to foreign private investment in the mining and oil industry, on the other. The Ecuadorian economy is mainly based on oil revenues. It should not be forgotten that in 2008, oil represented 22.2 % of GDP, 63.1 % of exports and 46 % of the general state budget. During an extraordinary assembly held on September 8 and 9, 2009, in Quito, CONAIE strongly criticized Correa's policies, which it denounced as neoliberal and capitalist. CONAIE's declaration stated: "(it) demands the State and the government to nationalize natural resources and to start the audit of oil, mining, aquifer, hydraulic, telephone, radio, television and environmental services concessions, foreign debt, tax collection and social security resources", as well as "the suspension of all concessions (extractive, oil, forestry, aquifer, hydroelectric and those related to biodiversity)".

After September 30, 2009, CONAIE took action, organizing rallies and road blockades against the water bill. President Correa reacted by opposing the mobilizations against the government and, in principle, any negotiation, and then raised suspicions about the indigenous movement, claiming that the right wing, and in particular former president Lucio Gutiérrez, had been activated within it. Finally, CONAIE obtained a public negotiation at the highest level: 130 indigenous delegates were received at government headquarters by President Correa and several ministers and obtained that the government back down on several points, especially with the establishment of a permanent dialogue between CONAIE and the Executive, and with amendments to the draft laws on water and on extractive industries.

Another social conflict also erupted when teachers mobilized against the government, under the aegis of the UNE, the main union of the profession (in which the MPD party – Movimiento Popular Democrático, the electoral arm of the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Ecuador – exerts an important

influence). On that issue, too, the conflict finally ended in a dialogue. In November and December 2009, a third social front developed with the protest movement in the universities, against a reform project aimed mainly at reducing university autonomy, which is considered in Latin America as an irreversible social advance and a guarantee of independence from political powers.

Globally, Rafael Correa's government quickly showed its serious limits when it came to defining a policy that took into account the point of view of social movements, without confrontation.

In 2010 and 2014, there were important social mobilizations against Correa's government policy. The demands raised by the organizations that, around CONAIE, called for the struggle in June 2014, explain much about the orientation of the government: resistance to mining and oil extraction, to the criminalization of social protest, a new labor code, another energy and water policy, rejection of the reform of the Constitution that would allow indefinite reelection, rejection of the signing of a Free Trade Agreement with the European Union, rights of indigenous communities and, in particular, the rejection of the closure of community schools. Regarding the Correa government's willingness to close community schools, François Houtart wrote in 2017:

The plan to close 18,000 community schools (named "of poverty") in favor of "millennium schools" (at the beginning of 2017: 71 built, 52 under construction. And by the end of 2017, 200 in operation) accentuates the problems. No doubt these millennial establishments are well equipped, with competent teachers, but within a philosophy in rupture with traditional life and with an openness to a modernity today questioned by its social and environmental consequences. Nor do they respond easily to the constitutional principle of bilingual education. In addition, the transportation system in several cases has not been able to meet the needs and

forces students to walk for hours on paths in poor condition, also causing a high rate of absenteeism.

In December 2014, Rafael Correa wanted to expel CONAIE from its premises, which led numerous Ecuadorian and foreign organizations to demand that the government renounce that decision. Here, too, the government backed down. At the end of 2017, the Correa government wanted to withdraw the legal status of a leftist environmental organization called Acción Ecológica. Likewise, it took a wave of national and international protests for the authorities to finally renounce this attack on freedom.

Conclusion on Rafael Correa's presidency

From the beginning of his first term, Rafael Correa composed his government taking care that left-wing ministers and ministers more or less directly linked to different sectors of the traditional Ecuadorian capitalist class coexisted, and this led to perpetual arbitrations. Over time, Correa made more and more concessions to big capital, whether national or international.

Despite a rhetoric in favor of changing the productive model and "socialism of the 21st century", in ten years of presidency Correa did not initiate any profound modification of the country's economic structure, property relations and relations between social classes. Alberto Acosta, former Minister of Energy in 2007, former president of the Constituent Assembly in 2008 and opponent of Rafael Correa since 2010, wrote with his colleague John Cajas Guijarro that:

The lack of a structural transformation causes Ecuador to remain a capitalist economy tied to the export of raw materials and, therefore, tied to a long-standing cyclical behavior linked to the accumulation demands of transnational capital. Such long-standing cyclical behavior is originated by the contradictions inherent to capitalism but, in turn, is

highly influenced by the dependence on the massive export of almost unprocessed primary products (extractivism). That is to say, capitalist exploitation -both of the labor force and of Nature- as a function of international demands, keeps Ecuador "chained" to a back-and-forth of economic animations and crises that originate both internally and externally.

Lenín Moreno or the return of neoliberal policies and submission to Washington's interests

In 2017, at the end of Rafael Correa's presidential term, and at the time he was succeeded as president by Lenín Moreno (a candidate supported by Correa), the debt exceeded the level reached ten years earlier. Moreno quickly called the IMF again. This provoked strong popular protests in September-October 2019, which forced the government to capitulate to the popular organizations and abandon the decree that provoked the revolt.

It should also be remembered that the government of Rafael Correa had offered Julian Assange asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London since June 2012. Correa resisted pressure from Britain and Washington to hand him over. Lenin Moreno, who succeeded Rafael Correa in 2017, fell into ignominy by handing Assange over to British Justice in April 2019 and stripping him of the Ecuadorian nationality that Correa's government had granted him in 2017.

In 2019, Lenin Moreno recognized Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela as Guaidó called for an armed intervention by the United States to overthrow the government of President-elect Nicolas Maduro.

In 2020 Lenín Moreno made a new humiliating agreement for Ecuador with the IMF and in 2021 he intends to pass a law to make the Central Bank completely independent from the government and therefore even more servile to private banking interests.

His popularity was reduced to nothing: in the last polls, Lenin Moreno had an approval rating of only 4.8%. The results of the candidates supported by Moreno in the parliamentary elections and in the first round of the presidential elections of February 2021 did not exceed 3%.

Guillermo Lasso's program and the new stage

The arrival of Rafael Correa to the presidency of Ecuador in 2007 was thanks to social mobilizations that took place from 1990 to 2005. Without these mobilizations, Correa's proposals would not have had the support they received and he would not have been elected president. Unfortunately, after a good start, Correa came into conflict with an important part of the social movements and opted for a modernization of extractivist-export capitalism. Later, his successor Lenín Moreno broke with Rafael Correa, and returned to the brutal policy of neoliberalism. This hard-line neoliberal policy will be developed by Guillermo Lasso. He has clearly announced that he wants to lower corporate taxes, that he wants to attract foreign investment, that he wants to give even more freedom to bankers, that he wants to consolidate the policy of trade liberalization by joining the Pacific Alliance. It is likely that Guillermo Lasso will try to integrate leaders linked to Pachakutik and CONAIE in one way or another in his government or administration. If this succeeds, CONAIE and Pachakutik will emerge even more divided than on the eve of the second round of elections. It is fundamental for the future of the popular camp to radically and actively oppose the government to be formed by Lasso.

Once again, it will be the social mobilizations that will be able to put an end to these policies and put back on the agenda the measures of anti-capitalist structural change indispensable for emancipation. CONAIE and a series of trade union organizations, feminist associations, leftist political organizations, and environmentalist collectives elaborated in October 2019 an excellent alternative proposal to capitalist,

patriarchal and neoliberal policies, and it should form the basis of a broad government program, called the People's Parliament Program. The question of the rejection of the policies of the IMF, the World Bank and illegitimate debts will return to the center of the social and political battles. In a document made public in July 2020 by more than 180 Ecuadorian popular organizations, we find the following demand: "suspension of the payment of the foreign debt and realization of an audit of the foreign debt accumulated from 2014 to this day, as well as a citizen control over the use of the contracted debts."

Final reflections on the vote of April 11, 2021

Let's analyze the data offered by yesterday's election day.

With 98.84% counted:

Arauz: 47.59%, corresponding to: 4,100,283 votes.

Lasso: 52.4% corresponding to 4,533,275 votes.

Null votes: 16.33% corresponding to 1,715,279 votes.

Total voters: 10,501,517 voters.

Absenteeism: 2,193,896 persons.

The null vote reached in the first round 9.5%, grew by 6.83%.

In terms of votes:

Null vote February 2021: 1,013,395 votes.

Null vote April 2021: 1,715,279 votes.

Difference: +701,884 votes.

In general terms, a large part of this difference in the null vote can be attributed to the campaign of Pachakutik, CONAIE, social movements and leftist organizations. This means that

less than half of their voters opted for the null vote. It should be remembered that Yaku Perez obtained 19.39% in the first round, which is equivalent to 1,798,057 votes. If we assume that the majority of this vote corresponds to the Pachakutik vote, it means that 39% of their vote opted for the null vote. In the case that, as is most likely, there are other sectors that voted null, it would not be risky to point out that the null vote that corresponds to Pachakutik should be around 30% of its vote. That is, one out of every three Pachakutik voters opted for the null vote, which can be considered their hard vote.

Unfortunately, the remaining 70% went mostly to Lasso, probably in rejection of Correism, because of the long history of aggressions to the popular movement, but it still means a vote to the right. It also shows the fragility of the vote for a new alternative to escape the polarization between Correism and the traditional right.

This also shows that if CONAIE, Pachakutik and the other leftist organizations that called for the null vote had called to vote against Lasso or had called to vote for Arauz, it was very possible to defeat Lasso and pressure Arauz to take into account the demands expressed both in the CONAIE text of October 2019 as well as in the proposal of the peoples' parliament of July 2020. Excellent documents that are located to the left of the content of the Yaku Perez electoral campaign in the first round, as well as the program of Andres Arauz.