

Rafael Correa wins third presidential term in Ecuador

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Nearly 57 percent of voters cast ballots to reelect Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa to a third term on Sunday. His party, the Country Alliance Movement (Movimiento Alianza País—MAP), will have the majority of seats in the National Assembly, perhaps more than two-thirds, according to some estimates.

Correa ran against an opposition divided into six parties. The next highest vote percentage went to Guillermo Lasso of the Creating Opportunities Party (Partido Creando Oportunidades—PCO). Lasso is a banker and member of the fascistic Opus Dei Catholic organization.

The election was a repudiation of past president Lucio Gutiérrez of the Patriotic Society Party (Partido Sociedad Patriótica—PSP), who received 6.6 percent of the vote. Gutiérrez had led the 2000 coup that overthrew President Jamil Mahuad. In 2005, mass popular protests forced Gutiérrez out of office and led to Correa's first election in 2007.

Lasso's 23 percent, while far behind Correa, was way ahead of the 6.6 percent or less obtained by the other parties. This signals political polarization, with sections of the middle class moving toward the extreme-right program of the banks and financial sector, represented by the Lasso's PCO.

Among the opposing slates was a coalition of 10 left-wing parties, the Plurinational Coordination of Left Parties (Coordinadora Plurinacional de las Izquierdas—CPI), whose main constituent parties are the Ecuadorean Confederation of Indian Nationalities (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador—CONAIE) and the indigenous Party Pachakutik. The coalition also includes pseudo-left organizations and Christian Democratic tendencies. Most of the parties in the CPI coalition had supported Correa in previous elections.

Its candidate, Alberto Acosta—himself a former member of the Correa cabinet—obtained 3.9 percent of the vote, much less than the 6 or 7 percent that was expected. Among other issues, the CPI opposes the handing over of ecologically sensitive areas in southern Ecuador to Canadian and Chinese mining companies. The CPI also opposes a free trade pact with the United States and accuses the Correa government of corruption.

Since the country declared bankruptcy in 2008, its major source of foreign financing has been Chinese direct investments and loans. Correa has broken with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Much of the debt has been used for social spending and improvements in roads and other infrastructure. According to the Madrid daily *El País*, poverty rates have fallen from 36.7 percent to 27.3 percent in five years.

In return, Ecuador exports oil to China. Correa is also opening up the jungles east of the Andes Mountains to open pit mining, which threatens the region's water and ecology and is opposed by the indigenous communities in the region. These have organized protests to block highway construction projects and occupy mining sites. While Correa won in every region in the country, his support was less strong in the south, where the mining is to take place.

National Assembly votes are still being counted, but MAP is expected to win at least 69 seats out of 137, and perhaps as many as 91. If the higher projection holds up, the new government will have the power to amend the constitution of 2008 and move forward with what it calls the Citizens' Revolution.

During his time in power, Correa has steered Ecuador into membership in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alianza Bolivariana para los

Pueblos de Nuestra América—ALBA). ALBA includes Bolivia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, Surinam and the Caribbean Islands of Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Saint Lucia.

ALBA was established in part as a counterweight to US imperialism and includes economic integration and cooperation along populist and nationalist lines.

Correa, like his counterparts in Venezuela and Bolivia, is hobbled by his country's heavy reliance on oil, mineral and banana exports, and by the nation's debt, which makes it hostage to transnational mining and oil companies. His government relies almost totally on export fees to pay for social programs, infrastructure development, and subsidies to various sectors of the population. For all his left rhetoric, Correa depends on the profitability of transnational capital and on the health of mining companies and agribusiness to sustain the Ecuadorean economy. He has been careful not to impinge on the interests of these business sectors.

The excessive reliance on these resource exports also distorts internal prices and makes it difficult for domestic industry to develop, chaining the Andean nation's economy to expensive manufactured imports from China, the US and other countries. A vicious circle has been established. Any slowdown in resource exports has disastrous economic effects.

ALBA member Venezuela, under similar circumstances, was forced to devalue its currency this month by 32 percent. This option is not open to Ecuador, whose currency is the US dollar.



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