El Niño causes flooding and destruction in Ecuador, exposing Noboa government's lack of preparedness

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The disasters caused by El Niño have exposed the failure of President Daniel Noboa's government to prepare for a natural phenomenon extensively studied by meteorologists worldwide and anticipated for months. Since a nationwide red alert was declared on August 29, torrential rains have left 14 people dead and 91,222 affected, according to the November 17 report by Ecuador's National Secretariat for Risk Management (SNGR).

Flooding, landslides and severe infrastructure damage have followed. The SNGR recorded 1,597 adverse events across all 24 provinces, affecting 167 municipalities. Of the 91,222 people impacted, 55,758 were classified as affected and 35,464 as disaster victims. Some 24,999 homes sustained damage and 96 were destroyed. The rains damaged 29.8 kilometers of roads, 29 bridges and 42 health care facilities.

The coastal province of Esmeraldas, bordering Colombia, recorded the highest number of people affected, with 25,354, followed by Guayas with 24,515, El Oro with 14,103, Los Ríos with 11,330, Santa Elena with 5,541 and Manabí with 4,758.

The lack of preparedness of Noboa's far-right government has had tragic consequences for Ecuador's population. Its priorities are domestic security, strengthening the Armed Forces, strategic cooperation with Washington, attracting private investment and fiscal discipline. Preventing the consequences of an intense El Niño has not received attention commensurate with the dangers facing the population. Ecuador is one of the leading promoters of the Shield of the Americas, a Washington-sponsored alliance directed toward a future confrontation with China, and it is to this project, not to the protection of workers and peasants, that the government has subordinated the state.

Noboa, a member of one of Ecuador's wealthiest families, is an unconditional ally of the warmongering US President Donald Trump. He has placed Ecuadorian territory at the disposal of US imperialism for military operations, including facilities in Manta. Ecuador's economic dependence on Washington is symbolized by its adoption of the US dollar as its official currency in 2000.

In Guayas, Milagro canton is among the hardest hit by the overflowing Milagro and Venecia rivers and the San Miguel estuary. Several neighborhoods were completely submerged. Alejandro Zanzzi, deputy chief of the Milagro Fire Department, told the daily *Primicias*: "The streets became canals through which only rescue boats could travel." Firefighters rescued approximately 1,000 people.

Some 8,000 people were affected in Milagro alone. Numerous communities are running out of drinking water, food and essential supplies, and the elderly and children are among the hardest hit. With inadequate rescue resources, residents improvise platforms to transport those trapped by the floodwaters.

Transportation infrastructure has suffered extensive damage. In Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, a sinkhole destroyed part of Esmeraldas Avenue on November 16, flooding several homes. According to *La República*, the collapse forced the evacuation of a family and cut traffic in both directions. Damage had been reported since October 18, but nothing was done before subsequent rains worsened the deterioration of the roadway.

The Alóag-Santo Domingo highway, a principal connection between Ecuador's coast and the Andean highlands, has been blocked at kilometer 83 for nearly two weeks following a landslide. Despite workers' efforts to remove debris, no reopening date has been set. The closure of this artery of commerce between Guayaquil and Quito threatens supplies and raises transportation costs for food produced on the coast and imported goods bound for the capital and other highland cities.

The emergency continues to spread. The National Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology (Inamhi) forecast more rain beginning November 17 in Esmeraldas, Guayas, Los Ríos and Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas. On November 18, *El Comercio* reported that Inamhi was warning of increasing rainfall in Quito and possible heavy precipitation across Pichincha province. Heavy rains disrupted transportation across the capital, and a minor was injured in a traffic accident during a thunderstorm.

The worst is still to come. On November 7, Ecuador's ERFEN committee warned that the phenomenon could reach an intensity comparable to the El Niño events of 1982-83 and 1997-98. Noboa himself has said the most difficult period will run from December through the end of February 2027.

A pittance for the victims

The government-promised payment of US$964 to repair damaged homes is insignificant compared with the magnitude of the disaster. It amounts to just two months of Ecuador's legal minimum wage of US$482.

The inadequacy of the payment becomes clearer when set against workers' real incomes. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), approximately 4.5 million workers—52.8 percent of the employed and roughly one-quarter of Ecuador's population—work in the informal sector. Average monthly labor income is only US$471 nationally and US$365 in rural areas, below the legal minimum wage itself. Millions of working-class families confront El Niño with nothing to fall back on.

On November 6, Noboa estimated that economic losses caused by El Niño in 2026 and 2027 would reach between US$2 billion and US$3

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billion. Given the disasters that followed later in November and the months of rain still ahead, this could prove a grotesque understatement.

In the same radio interview, Noboa claimed that more than US$200 million had been spent from a US$650 million fund set aside in the 2026 budget, and he blamed local governments for failing to prepare. Carolina Lozano, Ecuador's national secretary for risk management, had told *Primicias* in late August that the ministries had allocated the US$650 million from existing institutional budgets. She has acknowledged that several local government plans never materialized into preventive works. The exchange of blame between the presidential palace and the municipalities and provinces, all of which had months of warning, only confirms that no level of the state treated the protection of the population as a priority.

This is not the first time El Niño has produced enormous disasters whose consequences fall primarily upon workers, peasants and small merchants. Among the most vulnerable are the unemployed who take to the streets every day to sell candy, fruit and household goods, seeking barely enough to feed their families. Flooding wipes out their precarious means of subsistence.

The irresponsibility of the pro-imperialist government becomes even more apparent when examining previous El Niño disasters.

El Niño in Ecuador and Peru

The disasters in Ecuador and Peru are manifestations of the same climatic phenomenon, which recognizes no national borders. In 1982-83, economic losses reached US$1.051 billion in Ecuador and US$3.283 billion in Peru. In 1997-98, losses reached US$2.882 billion and US$3.5 billion respectively. These are the precedents with which ERFEN now compares the current event.

Despite confronting identical risks, the two countries have no comprehensive coordination to prevent flooding, the destruction of infrastructure and the loss of life. This contradiction exposes the historically obsolete character of the division of the world into nation-states. A natural phenomenon affecting entire populations demands international scientific planning, while governments subordinate the protection of their populations to national interests.

In northern Peru, the current El Niño has caused severe flooding in Tumbes, Zarumilla, Aguas Verdes, Puerto Pizarro and Máncora, destroying homes, businesses, roads and essential services. Rainfall exceeded 100 millimeters in parts of Tumbes and Piura. In Tumbes alone, authorities reported 324 disaster victims, 625 other people affected, two homes destroyed, 110 left uninhabitable and 225 damaged.

Overflowing rivers have cut roads and forced schools to suspend classes. On November 17, the Tumbes River again reached dangerous levels. Peru's meteorological service, Senamhi, warns that rainfall will continue, while the Multisectoral Commission for the National Study of El Niño (ENFEN) expects the phenomenon to persist into 2027.

Noboa's priority: making Ecuador a servant of US imperialism

While El Niño approached, the Noboa government's attention was fixed elsewhere. As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported in March 2026:

> The US-Ecuadorian joint military operation launched March 3, ostensibly against drug cartels, has turned Ecuador into a proving ground for unleashing military violence upon every country in the hemisphere in furtherance of US hegemony.
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> Neither the Pentagon nor the Ecuadorian Ministry of Defense, which has dubbed the onslaught “Operation Total Extermination,” have reported casualty figures.
>
> Subsequent reports, however, have made clear that the Pentagon and Ecuadorian forces are following a scorched-earth policy aimed not at cartels but civilians, akin to that employed by the military dictatorships in Central and South America over the last century.

The alliance with Washington has since deepened into ever closer military, police and intelligence cooperation. In August, Noboa issued a decree allowing US troops to remain on Ecuadorian soil for up to 180 days without visas and granting them immigration immunity. On September 24, less than a month into the El Niño red alert, 50 US Southern Command troops and DEA agents took part alongside Ecuadorian forces in raids in Guayas, Los Ríos and El Oro, providing intelligence, drones and surveillance technology. In the last week of September, two US MQ-9 Reaper drones arrived at the Taura air base near Guayaquil.

Meanwhile, fiscal austerity has starved essential social needs. In 2026, the health and education budgets amounted to 4.05 percent and 5.59 percent of GDP respectively. Yet by October 20, only 36 percent of the health budget and 46 percent of the education budget had been spent, equivalent to 1.46 percent and 2.60 percent of GDP. Resources intended for the working population are simply left unspent.

Recurrent energy crises fall hardest on low-income households. Inadequate investment and planning have produced blackouts that paralyze production, interrupt schooling and ruin small merchants. In 2024, Ecuador endured 89 days of electricity rationing, with blackouts lasting up to 14 hours a day and estimated losses of US$1.7 billion, about 1.5 percent of GDP. In April 2026, blackouts returned to Guayaquil, Daule and Samborondón, lasting up to 15 hours in some areas, while Quito also suffered interruptions. For working-class families, these outages mean spoiled food, lost income and greater difficulty meeting basic needs.

Noboa owes his position in no small measure to Washington's backing. Before the April 13, 2025, presidential runoff, polls anticipated a close contest between Noboa and Luisa González, the candidate associated with former President Rafael Correa. On March 29, just 15 days before the vote, Noboa traveled to Florida to meet Trump at Mar-a-Lago. Afterward, he declared that Trump viewed his policies against “narcoterrorism” favorably.

Contrary to predictions of a statistical tie, Noboa won 55.63 percent of the vote against González's 44.37 percent, a margin of nearly 1.2 million ballots. The following day, Trump congratulated him on his Truth Social platform: “Congratulations to Daniel Noboa, who will be a great leader for the wonderful people of Ecuador.”

Noboa has committed himself to making Ecuador one of Washington's principal military allies within the Shield of the Americas, the coalition Trump launched at his Doral resort in Florida on March 7, 2026, under the pretext of fighting drug trafficking and organized crime. At the founding summit, Trump warned that Washington would not allow “hostile foreign influence” to gain a foothold in the hemisphere, a transparent reference to China's growing presence in Latin America.

Noboa authorized joint military operations and intelligence cooperation even though 61 percent of Ecuadorians voted against permanent foreign military bases in a November 2025 referendum.

Ecuador's population will remain exposed to El Niño in the coming months, when, according to experts, its most devastating effects are

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expected, threatening further loss of life, destruction of homes and widespread hunger. This threat hangs over a population that the Ecuadorian bourgeoisie has subordinated to the interests of US imperialism and its fascist president, Donald Trump.

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