

The 2013 Ecuadorian Legislative and Presidential Elections

Jason Eichorst
Rice University
jaeichorst@rice.edu

John Polga-Hecimovich
University of Pittsburgh
jop42@pitt.edu

Submitted to *Electoral Studies*

Approximately 9.5 million Ecuadorians went to the polls on 17 February 2013 for constitutionally-mandated presidential and legislative elections. The incumbent president, Rafael Correa, is completing the first full term since Sixto Durán Ballén (1992-1996), and his time in office surpasses that of Isidro Ayora (1926-1931), making him the longest-serving Ecuadorian president in history. His present mandate terminates on 10 August 2013. As expected, Correa easily won re-election in the first-round, and his party *Alianza Patria Altiva I Soberana* (Alianza PAIS) won a 97-seat majority in the 137-member unicameral legislative assembly.

1 Background

This is Correa's third presidential election, winning in both 2006 and 2009. His first term was cut short for early elections after the adoption of the 2008 Constitution, which allows for immediate one-time re-election (Bowen 2010).¹ The 2009 election was the first since the return to democracy in 1979 that a candidate exceeded the 50 per cent threshold in the first-round, avoiding a second-round runoff.

Correa's overwhelming support in the election can be credited to a number of factors, including: improved infrastructure; increased social spending and a subsequent reduction of poverty and unemployment; and a growing economy. Since taking office in 2006, poverty has dropped 10 percentage points, from 37.6 to 27.3 per cent (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC) 2012b). The unemployment rate has also experienced

¹ There are, however, no restrictions on the total number of terms. Correa's partial term from 2006 to 2009 is not considered to contribute to the total number of consecutive terms he can serve.

similar reductions, dropping from 9.03 per cent in January 2007 to 5.04 per cent in December 2012 (INEC 2012a).

The government has invested extensively in infrastructure and education, as well as cash handouts to poor families through the Human Development Bond (BDH). In this program, which composes more than 1.6 million people, poor families with children up to the age of 16 receive a monthly stipend of 50 USD (“Lasso keeps Correa on his Toes” 2012). Increased social spending reflects substantial expansion of the budget, which has doubled since the start of the Correa administration from 11 billion USD to 26.11 billion USD. This has been financed through increased tax revenue due to a clamp-down on evasion, continued dependence on oil exports and royalties, and more than 7 billion USD in controversial oil-for-cash loans from China to finance the remaining fiscal deficit (“Yasuní and the future of Ecuadorian oil” 2012).

This should not suggest that the Correa administration has proceeded without conflict. A violent confrontation between the president and the national police erupted on 30 September 2010. A bill to eliminate medals and bonuses with promotions for the national police caused nationwide protests by the service. Correa publicly addressed them at their headquarters in Quito, but the speech quickly turned rancorous, as he verbally challenged them to kill him. One officer discharged a tear-gas canister that nearly hit Correa and the president was immediately taken to the police hospital. Tensions escalated after police surrounded the hospital and an elite commando squad was employed to rescue the president. Eight people throughout the country were killed during protests.

The president has also faced significant criticism of restricting freedom of expression. Correa pursued libel charges against three directors and a journalist of the Guayaquil daily *El Universo* in 2011 after the journalist published a controversial opinion column critical of the president. The three directors were fined 40 million USD, and all four were assessed three-years in prison. Correa pursued similar charges against two journalists who wrote a book critical of business negotiations between the president’s brother, Fabricio Correa, and the government. After months of negative international and domestic attention, the president announced in February 2012 that he would drop charges in all cases. Ironically, Correa granted asylum to WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, on 16 August 2012; the administration claimed this was a principled decision to protect freedom of speech.

2 Rules and Substance

2.1 Presidential Elections

The president is elected using a qualified plurality method in a two-round election. A candidate can by-pass the second round if she wins the first-round with more than 50 per cent of the valid vote, or between 40 and 50 per cent of the valid vote with a 10 percentage point margin of victory. The second-round is between the top two candidates, which would have been held on 7 April 2013.

Eight candidates competed in the election. Correa campaigned on promises to continue his leftist 'Citizen's Revolution' and encourage a referendum vote on his agenda. Former ally and president of the 2008 Constituent Assembly, Alberto Acosta, led a coalition of leftist parties called the *Unidad Plurinacional de las Izquierdas*, while Norman Wray led the left-of-centre *Ruptura 25* composed of former members of PAIS. The remaining five candidates held centrist or right-of-centre positions. Of these, the most competitive candidates included former president and 2000 coup-leader Lucio Gutiérrez of the *Partido Sociedad Patriótica* (PSP), banana magnate and five-time presidential candidate Álvaro Noboa as the head of the populist, neo-liberal *Partido Renovador Institucional de Acción Nacional* (PRIAN), and former president of the Guayaquil Bank, Guillermo Lasso, leading the *Movimiento Creando Oportunidades* (CREO). Major points of contention between the candidates involved long-term economic stability and protection of democratic institutions. All candidates promoted increasing the BDH.

Prior to the start of the campaign Congress took an unprecedented step and approved a 45-day leave-of-absence for Correa to focus exclusively on the election. Vice President Lenin Moreno assumed presidential duties. Every presidential candidate, except Correa and Lasso, had a female running mate.

2.2 Legislative Elections

Legislators are elected from one national district (15 total seats), 24 provincial districts (116 total seats), and three 'external' districts (6 total seats) using a preferential vote system with seats distributed by party. Candidates run on a party list. A voter has as many votes as there are seats. Those votes can be distributed to the entire party-list (*en plancha*), or redistributed across lists to individual candidates (*nominales*), as in panachage. A voter does not have to exhaust all of her votes if she decides to select individual candidates. Total party votes combine *nominal* and *plancha* votes. Seats are distributed using the D'Hondt formula. A party presents a number of candidates equal to district magnitude.

All voters select national assemblypersons and presidential candidates. Conditional on place of residence, a voter also chooses provincial assemblypersons or, if living outside of Ecuador, assembly representatives from one of the three 'external' districts (United States and Canada; Asia and Oceania; Latin America and Africa). Two candidates are elected from each province plus one candidate for every 200,000 inhabitants over 500,000. Following a 2012 reform by the National Electoral Council (CNE), provinces are divided into multiple districts if they elect more than seven legislators. This means that three provinces (Guayas, Manabí, and Pichincha) make up ten different districts.

Also unique to this election, all political parties had to reregister with the CNE. This is in accordance to new laws that have been adopted to minimize the proliferation of small parties and movements. Parties had to acquire signatures from 1.5 per cent of voters, or 157,947 signatures. The CNE ultimately disqualified more parties than it registered (17 of

28). This is a significant drop from the 2009 elections when 42 parties were registered to compete ("Eleven make the cut" 2012).²

3 Results

3.1 Presidential Vote

The presidential electoral results show evidence that Correa commands strong public support. Correa won 57 per cent of the total valid votes. His closest competitor, Guillermo Lasso, won 23 per cent of the vote (see Table 1). Correa's strength is still impressive when calculated including invalid votes (52 per cent total votes). However, there still appear to be gaps in political representation: 9 per cent of casted votes were invalid (blank or voided) and, in a country where compulsory voting is enforced, only 81 per cent of the electorate voted.

Table 1. 2013 Presidential Election Results

Candidate	Party	Votes	% valid
Rafael Correa	Alianza Patria Altiva I Soberana (PAIS)	4,918,482	57.17
Guillermo Lasso	Movimiento Creando Oportunidades (CREO)	1,951,102	22.68
Lucio Gutiérrez	Partido Sociedad Patriótica (PSP)	578,875	6.73
Mauricio Rodas	Movimiento Sociedad Unida Más Acción (SUMA)	335,532	3.9
Álvaro Noboa	Partido Renovador Institucional Acción Nacional (PRIAN)	319,956	3.72
Alberto Acosta	Coord. Plurinacional de las Izquierdas	280,539	3.26
Norman Wray	Movimiento Ruptura 25	112,525	1.31
Nelson Závala	Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano (PRE)	105,592	1.23
Invalid		863,257	
TOTAL		9,465,860	100

Source: Ecuadorian *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (CNE)

Correa won the plurality vote in 23 of 24 provinces, including a majority in 14 provinces, and a majority in all three external districts. His only second-place finish was to Lucio Gutiérrez in the latter's home province of Napo. Correa's growing strength can be attributed to increased inroads in the western, coastal provinces, and the Amazonian Oriente. Competition between Correa and Lasso was consistent, even if it was not particularly close. The conservative candidate was the runner-up in 20 provinces and in each of the external districts.

² This is also the first election since the post-transition period that internal divisions in *Izquierda Democrática* obstructed its ability to compete.

3.2 Legislative Vote

Alianza PAIS shows similar patterns of dominance in the legislative elections as Correa did in the presidential race. Table 2 presents the party vote share and total number of seats won for each party (this includes seat gains and losses compared to 2009). Since voters are endowed with a quantity of votes equal to the district magnitude, and parties' totals are a mixture of list and preference votes, calculating the party vote share requires some data manipulation to control for the unbalanced distribution of votes from voters. We borrow from the Swiss Federal Statistical Institute's concept of the 'fictional voter' to determine the party vote.³

Table 2. 2013 Legislative Election Results

Political Party	Weighted Party Votes	Vote (%)	Seats (Diff. to 2009)
Alianza PAIS (AP)	3,640,748	48.29	97 (+38)
Movimiento Creando Oportunidades (CREO)	681,072	9.03	12 (N/A)
Partido Social Cristiano (PSC)/ Madera de Guerrero (MG)	587,918	7.80	6 (-5)
Partido Sociedad Patriótica (PSP)	440,785	5.85	6 (-13)
Coordinadora Plurinacional de Izquierdas*	325,239	3.74	6 (-3)
Partido Avanza	419,255	5.56	5 (N/A)
Independents	--	--	3 (N/A)
Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano (PRE)	237,816	3.15	1 (-2)
Sociedad Unidad Más Acción (SUMA)	228,014	3.02	1 (N/A)
Partido Renovador Institucional	287,145	3.81	0 (-7)
Acción Nacional (PRIAN)			
Ruptura	150,429	2.00	0 (N/A)
TOTAL		92	137 (+13)

* Composed of the indigenous *Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik-Nuevo País* (MUPP-NP), the far-left *Movimiento Popular Democrático* (MPD), and the centre-left *Red Ética y Democracia* (RED). All ran separately in 2009

Source: Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE)

The distribution of weighted votes shows PAIS's strong performance in the legislative elections, nearly winning a majority of total weighted votes. Part of its strength came from merely showing up: it was one of just three parties (with PRIAN and the PSP) to compete for seats in all 34 districts. Yet it earned significant support in even the weakest of these

³ Although a party *plancha* (list) vote counts for the party list, it can also be considered as an individual vote for each candidate on the list. To determine party votes, we first aggregate all *nominal* and *plancha* votes distributed to each candidate. The aggregate is then multiplied by the ratio of valid ballots to the number of valid votes. In notational form, this is $Party\ vote = \sum_{c=1}^{m_j} (v_c + v_p) * \frac{i_j}{v_j}$, for party p with c candidates in district j of m magnitude with i voters and v total votes.

districts. PAIS won more than 50 percent of the party vote in the coastal provinces (Santo Domingo, Manabí, Los Rios, three of four Guayas districts, El Oro), the metropolitan Quito area (three of four Pichincha districts), and all three foreign districts. Overall, PAIS won a plurality in 30 districts and a majority in 14 of them. It earned its lowest vote shares in the southern Andes and the Oriente, yet still won 18 per cent of the vote in its worst performing province of Loja. CREO was the most consistent opponent, earning runner-up status in 11 legislative districts.

Interestingly, the comparatively poor showing of PAIS in the more indigenous south-central Andes was not met by gains in the largely indigenous Pachakutik (MUPP-NP), which fielded candidates in only three districts. Recent electoral failures have encouraged Pachakutik to form an electoral alliance with other leftist parties to remain viable in the legislative election. By contrast, the PSP maintained its strong showing in the northern Oriente, the home of party leader and ex-president Lucio Gutiérrez. The party competed in all 34 districts, but performed best in the more *mestizo* and indigenous Andes and Oriente than on the coast.

According to article 99 of the 2009 Electoral Law, electoral lists must promote gender parity and alternate the sequence of candidates by gender ("Ley Orgánica Electoral, Código de la Democracia" 2009). This has introduced greater representational equality in the National Assembly than at any other point in Ecuadorian history. The number of women represented in the legislature has increased from 4 in 1996 (5 per cent of the chamber) to 16 in 1998 (13 per cent), 23 in 2002 (23 per cent), 26 in 2006 (29 per cent), 40 in 2009 (32 per cent) and finally to 53 in 2013 (39 per cent).

4 Effects

The 2013 election marks a turning point in the development of Ecuador's party system and the consolidation of President Correa's power, in part due to the inability of a fragmented opposition to present an appealing, coherent alternative to Correa's Citizen's Revolution.

It appears that PAIS has managed to overcome the debilitating regional divide that has traditionally plagued Ecuadorian parties. This is due in part to the strength of the party's national policy that appeals to its broad base, as well as Correa's permanence in office. To begin with, social welfare programs like the BDH and investments in higher education impact citizens across the country, while the unprecedented rule and reach of the president has allowed his party brand to grow in places, like the Oriente, that did not originally support his party. Further, PAIS has co-opted other movements on the Left, like the MPD, MUPP-NP, and the PS-FA, forcing them into electoral pacts or simply poaching their support in their traditional bastions of power.⁴

⁴ See the authors' post on The Monkey Cage (<http://themonkeycage.org/2013/03/14/party-nationalization-after-the-2013-ecuadorian-legislative-and-presidential-election/>) for an in-depth examination of the consolidation of PAIS's power and the evolution of party nationalization in Ecuador.

With a fresh mandate and a legislative supermajority, the president will be able to further (re)shape state institutions and concentrate power in the executive. Ecuador does not have the types of institutional arrangements that protect the minority from strong, unified control of government. Constitutional amendments proposed by the executive can be adopted with 2/3 support of the legislature (2008 Constitution, Article 441) and partial amendments require majority support (2008 Constitution, Article 442). Just days after the election, Correa announced he would like to pursue a second series of reforms to the 2008 constitution (Zeas 2013). Many in the opposition charge that the president intends to pursue constitutional changes to permit unlimited re-election, as in Venezuela and Nicaragua, although Correa has publicly denied this.

Furthermore, there is no political force on the horizon that appears capable of restricting presidential power and offering a credible alternative. As in Venezuela in its first decade under ex-President Hugo Chávez, the fragmented and weakened opposition has not been able to unite around a common proposal, ideology or electoral strategy. Until this happens, President Correa will be able to mold the Ecuadorian state as he sees fit, and Alianza PAIS will continue to dominate electoral politics.

References

Bowen, James D., 2010. Ecuador's 2009 presidential and legislative elections. *Electoral Studies* 29 (1), 171–195.

“Eleven make the cut”. 2012. *Latin American Weekly Report (LAWR)*, WR-12(41): 4-5.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC). 2012a (December). *Indicadores Laborales: 10 años y más*. Quito.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC). 2012b (December). *Indicadores Pobreza*. Quito.

“Lasso keeps Correa on his toes”. 2012. *Latin American Weekly Report (LAWR)*, WR-12(43): 1.

Ley Orgánica Electoral, Código de la Democracia. 2009. *Asamblea Nacional de la República de Ecuador*, Quito: Registro Oficial.

“Yasuní and the future of Ecuadorean oil”. 2013. *Latin American Weekly Report (LAWR)* WR-13(4): 31.

Zeas, Santiago. 2013. “Segunda reforma a la constitución”. *El Comercio*, 21 February 2013.