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Ecuador

What happened to the left?

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A little more than a month ago, on 13 April 2025, Daniel Noboa Azín, of the *Acción Democrática Nacional* (ADN), party, was re-elected as Ecuador's president. [1]

In contrast, the social democratic right, represented by Luisa Gonzales of the *Revolución Ciudadana* (RC) party - linked to former president Rafael Correa - lost the presidential race for the third time. The *Correismo*/anti-*Correismo* discursive axis re-emerged as an electoral strategy, but this dichotomy does not explain the structural crisis of capitalism nor does it reflect class antagonisms, as some sectors have tried to claim. The electoral logic, turned into an iron cage, captured the masses seduced by immediate promises. More than 1.2 million votes went to Noboa, a figure associated with the interests of transnational capital and U.S. imperialism.

This analysis distances itself from simplistic interpretations that attribute Noboa's triumph to the use of the state, political marketing, his opponent's mistakes, disinformation campaigns or theories of mega fraud. Instead, three key factors are examined:

- The implementation of material and punitive responses to social demands, along with the capitalization of popular discontent, in particular the rejection of *Correismo*.
- The economic and political convergences between the neoliberal right (ADN) and social democracy (RC), which limited programmatic differentiation.
- The crisis of the institutional left, and the absence of a cohesive anti-capitalist project.

1. Data does not kill narrative

There is a myth in certain academic and media circles that objective data determines political success. However, politics is defined by the ability to impose narratives and exercise power, not only by statistics. Noboa, who took office in November 2023, faced an interim term marked by scandals and adverse figures:

- Late 2023: The Ministry of Environment granted the company Vinazin S.A., of which Lavinia Valbonesi - the president's wife - is a majority shareholder, an environmental registration for a private real estate project in Olon, within a Protected Forest and Vegetation Area.
- June 2024: Contracts for school breakfasts for more than US\$150 million were assigned to Corporación de Alimentos y Bebidas (CORPABE S.A.), linked to Isabel Noboa Pontón, the president's aunt.
- February 2025: The Ministry of Energy and Mines awarded the Sacha field (77,000 barrels per day) to the SINOPETROL consortium, linked to Noboa's relatives. Due to electoral pressure, the decision was reversed on 12 March.
- NARPOTEC: A port controlled by the Noboa family in Guayaquil, where 151 packages of cocaine were seized in 2025. A contractor of the company was arrested, but released thanks to a lawyer linked to the government (*Revista Raya*, 2025).
- Energy crisis (2023-2024): Recurrent blackouts caused losses of \$7500 million in the commercial and industrial sector. There is a strong possibility that the phenomenon will be repeated this year (*Cámara de Comercio de Quito*, 2025).
- Violence: Ecuador has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. In the first 50 days of 2025 alone, more than 1,300 murders were recorded, equivalent to an average of one homicide per hour. This trend intensified in the first quarter of the year, when the number almost doubled to 2361 cases, a milestone that has been described as one of the most violent periods in its history. Despite the 85,000 military operations carried out during the year by the

so-called Security Bloc - made up of the Armed Forces and the National Police - the actions have had little or no impact on crime reduction.

- The Case of Los 4 de Las Malvinas: In December 2024, four Afro-descendant children were detained in southern Guayaquil by military personnel during a night patrol. The government kept the case under deliberate manipulation until after the elections, when the testimony of the uniformed personnel involved revealed that the victims had been kidnapped, tortured and subsequently murdered.
- US interference: On 29 March 2025, Daniel Noboa met with Donald Trump and requested the collaboration of Erik Prince, founder of the private military company Blackwater, who came to the country during the first week of April. These actions were framed within a series of controversial policies: recurrent declarations of states of emergency - the last one, issued on 12 April, less than 24 hours before the second round of elections - militarization of civil society and legal impunity for members of the security forces, among other measures.

Added to these factors, the dismissal of the vice-president Veronica Abad, the accusations of vicarious violence by Noboa's ex-wife Gabriela Goldbaum, the increase in fuel prices and the circumvention of campaign licenses did not prevent his victory. Why does the people approve of him despite his being a plutocratic regime? Why were the analyses of the institutional left and social democracy so erratic?

2. The conquest of hearts and minds

Daniel Noboa's electoral triumph has generated three predominant interpretations. The first -articulated by analysts such as Durán Barba, García and Ricaurte- revolves around political marketing. According to this vision, Noboa managed to differentiate himself from the archetype of the traditional politician - including *Correísmo* - by capitalizing on the mistakes of his opponent, Luisa Gonzalez. Among these are ambiguous proposals such as the "Ecuadorian-style dollarization", "peace managers", the controversial closeness to Maduro, the reactivation of the Communication Law and the scandals revealed in the chats of Augusto Verduga, former counsellor of the Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control (CPCCS). [\[2\]](#)

A second approach - defended by authors such as Andino and Santiago - blames the state machinery. Here it is argued that the systematic use of public resources, officials and institutional apparatus for proselytizing purposes was decisive. This practice, however, is not new: since the beginning of the 21st century, Ecuadorian governments have normalized the instrumentalization of the state during campaigns, which questions its role as an exclusive factor in this process.

The third reading, advanced by Rafael Correa, points to a mega fraud by means of pens with delible ink being used to alter votes. This thesis, however, runs up against an uncomfortable fact: *Revolución Ciudadana* deployed an army of observers trained in electoral processes, which undermines the narrative of widespread manipulation.

Transversal criticisms reveal the limits of these explanations. Moreover, although the use of the state for electoral purposes is real, its historical recurrence makes it a structural element rather than a single decisive variable. Finally, the fraud theory ignores both Rafael Correa's surveillance capacity and an unquestionable fact: Noboa knew how to connect with the immediacy of the people.

Beyond the competing narratives, the triumph is explained by Noboa's effectiveness in offering symbolic -albeit ephemeral- answers to urgent demands. The states of emergency against violence, the military deployment in the streets or the economic bonds for 500 million dollars during the campaign operated as mirages of solution in a context where structural issues are relegated to electoral urgency.

To illustrate these assertions, let us first take the case of the children murdered in Las Malvinas. The institutional left's narrative focuses on the thesis that "the state disrespected human rights". Although this is true, its limit lies in not offering concrete answers to the structural problem of violence among the populations. There is an asphyxia in the material living conditions of the popular sectors - aggravated by insecurity and drug trafficking - which forces the communities themselves, not the state, to disregard the discourse of human rights in order to seek justice by their own means. The case of Los 4 de Las Malvinas, an extrajudicial execution and state crime, reveals this contradiction: the prevailing narrative of the institutional left and social democracy does not connect with the immediate needs of the population.

Noboa's position, on the other hand, did. By resorting to militarization, states of emergency, ceding sovereignty and prison complexes under the rhetoric of the iron fist, his discourse denied the rule of law in its liberal conception, but resonated in sectors that prioritize survival. The people support these measures based on the logic that this is the way to confront the gangs, valuing the military presence in the streets more than abstract narratives about human rights, especially in areas where violence has de facto erased them.

This does not ignore the fact that violence is expressed, above all, as lack of employment, basic services, decent transportation, medical attention and food. Noboa does not pretend to solve these fundamental problems; however, in the market of votes -the ill-named *democracy* - his image sold better than that of his rivals. Why? Because in the current context of open war against the people and urgent needs, the dimension of rights - human, ethnic, gender - has ceased to operate as a mobilizing element for broad popular sectors. Noboa's effectiveness lay in capitalizing on this vacuum: he offered mirages of immediate order in a scenario where the structural continues to be an unfulfilled promise.

A second evident issue is the demand for work and employment. [3] When asked about the main concerns of citizens, violence, insecurity and unemployment stand out, with significant variations depending on the region. The majority of the population lacks resources to cover immediate needs such as food, health, basic services or debts. The bonds delivered by Noboa - characterised by some as immoral or unethical -, in spite of their momentary and limited character, gave material relief to families in crisis. Although they do not solve structural problems, the difference between eating or not eating in the most vulnerable sectors establishes a base of social support that Noboa knew how to capitalize on. Contrary to public narratives, his victory is explained because the elite he represents managed to hegemonize hearts and minds, based on concrete answers that consolidated his regime.

This practice, moreover, is not new. In previous elections, the party that is now the opposition (*Revolucion Ciudadana*) doubled the value of the Human Development Bonus during campaigns, when it was in government. Its then presidential candidate, Rafael Correa, like Noboa, did not ask for a license to proselytize, an act that was legal at the time, but questioned. The difference lies in the fact that, after the reform to the Code of Democracy promoted by Correa in his opposition role, such actions are now illegal. However, the underlying logic persists: using state resources to gain immediate adhesions.

Faced with this, social democracy and the institutional left could resort to Paulo Freire and diagnose a syndrome of the oppressed: the internalization of the oppressor's logic by the victims, who end up replicating his domination. Or, in its most simplistic version, branding the people as fascists, "florindo", "burro", with phrases such as "no se quejen" (don't complain). But the underlying reflection, in a Gramscian key, is that there is no hegemony - conquest of genuine adhesions - without a minimum material intervention in reality. While Noboa offered, at least symbolically, concrete palliatives, his rivals cloistered themselves in abstract discourses or in ethical denunciations, without proposing tangible alternatives in a context where survival prevails over ideology.

3. Radical right and moderate 'left'

Beyond the theoretical nuances of economic liberalism - such as the neoclassical synthesis- capitalism operates with two defined styles of economic policy: free market and Keynesianism. In Ecuador, these visions clashed a month ago in the elections: Noboa's neoliberal-oligarchic project versus González's Keynesian-social democratic one. This scenario reflects an inter-bourgeois struggle, where two factions of the ruling class -with non-antagonistic interests- dispute the model of accumulation and social management. Both groups, despite opposing rhetoric, share state practices since 2014, as evidenced by the policies of the social-democratic right (RC) and the neoliberal right (ADN).

The coincidences are palpable. In the National Assembly, CR and ADN voted together in favour of the Economic Efficiency and Employment Generation Law (2023) and the constitutional reform bill for foreign military assistance (2025). During the campaign, Gonzalez reinforced his alignment with the economic regime: he met with Monica Heller, a pro-Israeli figure linked to the chambers of commerce, and proposed to repatriate Venezuelan migrants, joining the securitarian discourse of Jean Tópic, a mercenary close to Nayib Bukele.

Social democracy also showed ambiguities that deepened its disconnection. [4] In territories affected by mining, its offer to respect popular consultations - without proposing a moratorium or reversal of concessions - was insufficient. Nor was there any self-criticism for violations of indigenous rights - from intercultural education to extrajudicial executions - committed under their governments. In the discourse of Tixán, where alliances were sealed prior to the second round, empty slogans such as hope or homeland prevailed, avoiding concrete answers to urgent demands.

While the right wing advances with pragmatism - controlling the government, the state and the extended economy-, social democracy and the institutional left fantasize, cloistering themselves in rhetoric. The former, influenced by figures like Milei, Trump or Bukele, radicalizes its defence of private property and its existential war against communism. The latter, on the other hand, call for de-radicalization, without noticing that their moderation consolidates their glass ceiling. The bourgeoisie, thus, hegemonizes both material means (economic power, monopoly of violence, institutional domination) and immaterial means (ideology, mass media, common sense), configuring what is defined as actually-existing- power: the triad of private property (Marx), the state as an apparatus of class domination (Lenin) and hegemony as the conquest of hearts and minds (Gramsci).

After the electoral results, *Correismo* faces a dilemma. Despite its legislative and local government presence, internal desertions and the hatred sown by the elites - who associate CR with communism despite its ideological distance - erode its base. The rejection, functional to the interests of the oligarchy, is nourished by a popular malaise that the institutional left did not know how to channel. In this game, the right wing not only wins elections: it redefines the rules of power.

4. Paradoxes of the left

Two paradoxes summarize the Ecuadorian crossroads. The first: Noboa triumphed by channelling popular discontent, just as Correa in 2006 capitalized on neoliberal weariness. Azín even absorbed the discontent expressed in the strikes of 2019 and 2022. It was he - not the left - who embodied rupture, challenging normative frameworks and connecting with the idleness of the majorities through an action separated from traditional politics.

The second one is sharper: while social democracy and the institutional left demand respect for the Constitution and the rule of law, the oligarchic right systematically violates them. This contradicts the critical tradition of the historical left, which postulated the radical transformation of the order. The right stretches the limits of what is permitted, while its rivals reinforce a status quo they claim to fight against.

The last few years show a clear pattern: the most significant gains of the anti-capitalist left and popular camp - such as the uprisings of October 2019 and June 2022, led by CONAIE - emerged outside institutional channels. Here another tension emerges: the right to resistance clashes with state sovereignty, a legal dilemma that reflects a material conflict. Movements such as Black Lives Matter (USA), the *gilets jaunes* (France), or the pan-African experience of Ibrahim Traoré in Burkina Faso and other Sahelian countries confirm that popular legitimacy is often won on the margins of bourgeois legality. However, the institutional left, trapped in its conservatism - more papist than the Pope - defends the social contract that suffocates it, while the right blurs normative boundaries to garner popular support and do business. This cynicism is replicated in alliances such as that of *Pachakutik* with Noboa's government on 7 May 2025, shamefully continuing a policy of class conciliation. Characters like Ricardo Vanegas, Guadalupe Llori or Salvador Quishpe - who in 2021 supported the government of Guillermo Lasso - are not exceptions: they are symptoms of a party system where class interests and mirages of social mobility prevail. To speak of betrayal is naive; the problem is structural. The so-called organic discipline vanishes in the face of pragmatic calculations in spaces of power such as the Assembly.

Finally, the anti-capitalist left has not renewed its strategies after the October and June uprisings either. Its atomization and lack of material and intellectual resources prevent it from building a power project with its own identity. This vacuum paved the way for the Noboa clan to capitalize on the discontent.

The challenge is clear: fascism is not a coming monster, but a threat lurking in the corridors of neoliberal and social democratic parties, in elitist NGOs, in several influential journalists, in the repressive officialdom and in a radicalized right-wing intelligentsia. Noboa will strike economically at the popular sectors, but the fascist coup is brewing in the bowels of the actually-existing-regime. Overcoming this theoretical and practical blindness demands that the anti-capitalist left reinvent itself, transcending its historical milestones.

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[1] He is the son of the Ecuadorian businessman Álvaro Noboa Pontón, who has been listed by various financial sources, such as Forbes, as one of the richest men in Latin America. His fortune, estimated in billions of dollars, is derived from a diversified business conglomerate that includes sectors such as agriculture (Banana Export Company), commerce, industry and real estate, with a presence in more than 50 countries.

[2] Noboist propaganda warned about a supposed electronic convertibility of the dollar, expressed in the slogan *Luisa te desdolariza*, positing the idea that dollarization was at risk under the González government. Another proposal was articulation of citizens with the National Police to promote peace in territories affected by narco-criminal violence, which the government argued could lead to the creation of militias, similar to those documented in Venezuela or Nicaragua. It was also argued by Noboists that the reactivation of the Communication Law would encourage censorship and arbitrary regulation, while the *Liga Azul* case linked *Correista* activists, including Verduga, to control of appointments in the Judiciary Council and the Superintendence of Banks, as well as influencing the CPPCS.

[3] In Ecuador, the Economically Active Population (EAP) is almost 9 million people, of which less than 3 million are adequately employed (basic salary of \$470 in 2025). More than 5 million are in inadequate or precarious employment conditions: incomes below the basic wage, working less than 40 hours per week or underemployment, even when they wish to work more hours or increase their income. This implies that two thirds of the

EAP survives in less than full employment situations, including unpaid work. As of December 2024, 6 million people subsisted on less than \$91.43 per month, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC). These figures reflect impoverished conditions for the majority of the working class.

[4] *Correismo* does not represent a radical left, but a social democracy: a current within bourgeois thought that, taking up Keynesian models, seeks to prolong cycles of capitalist stability through countercyclical measures. The objective of these policies is to sustain capital accumulation through state stimulus to consumption, positioning the state as an economic dynamiser. Keynes, it should be stressed, never aligned himself with the revolutionary left; in fact, he developed his theory explicitly to contain the revolutionary advance in Europe after the crises of the first half of the twentieth century.