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FEATURED Q&A

Will Ecuador's Correa Seek to Remain in Office?

Q Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa said recently that he will ask members of his alliance's legislative majority to pass a constitutional amendment that would allow for indefinite re-election for all politicians in the country. Correa, whose term expires in 2017, has not said if he would seek another. Is the constitutional amendment likely to be approved? What is behind Correa's decision to push for this change now? Are constitutional term limits a good or bad practice?

A Ramiro Crespo, president of Analytica Securities in Quito: "With Ecuador following the footsteps of Belarus, Venezuela and their ilk, it was only a question of time before President Correa would pursue an end to presidential term limits. The first step was to permit one immediate re-election in 2008 and to reset the clock from the new Constitution that voters approved that year. To believe Correa's claims that he has never wanted to stay in power, as is his claim that he might not seek re-election in 2017 when his term runs out, is disingenuous. Thanks to his gerrymandered control of the Congress, the 100 correista legislators out of 137 and the pliable Constitutional Court will rubber stamp a constitutional amendment without bothering to ask voters if they agree to change to rules they so recently approved at the polls. To do so now, somewhat ironically, comes as Correa realizes that the losses from the Feb. 23 local elections herald what may be an end to his 'revolutionary' regime in three years. Particularly under a 'presidentialist' system and amid weak institutions, term limits importantly bind political power by making it ephemeral and incumbents liable to audits by their successors. For Ecuador's challenged democracy, where the president has shamelessly used the state to boost his personal political agenda, to scrap term limits would be a terminal blow. In a true democracy, nobody is indispensable. Correa's current referen-

Continued on page 3

Former Guatemalan Police Chief Sentenced to Life in Prison

Former Guatemalan police chief Edwin Sperisen has been sentenced to life in prison in connection with extra-judicial killings at a prison near Guatemala City. A Swiss-Guatemalan dual national, he was convicted in Switzerland. See brief on page 2.

File Photo: Guatemalan Government.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Former Guatemalan Police Chief Sentenced to Life in Prison

Edwin Sperisen, a former Guatemalan police chief, has been sentenced in Switzerland to life in prison in connection with the deaths of seven prisoners in 2007, BBC News reported Friday. Sperisen was convicted in Geneva of involvement in extra-judicial killings during a police raid at the El Pavón prison near Guatemala City. The former police chief, a Swiss-Guatemalan dual national, has denied wrongdoing. He fled to Switzerland in 2007.

Mexico Defends Decision to Prosecute U.S. Marine Veteran

Mexico's attorney general's office on Friday defended the decision to prosecute U.S. Marine veteran Andrew Tahmooressi, who drove into Mexico in April while carrying a pistol, shotgun, rifle and ammunition, the Associated Press reported. Prosecutors said that the possession of a weapon is a federal crime in Mexico, and ignorance or misunderstanding is not an excuse for violating the law. Tahmooressi's mother has said her son accidentally crossed the border on his way to dinner.

Michelin Buying Brazil's Sascar for $602 Million

French tire manufacturer **Compagnie Générale des Établissements Michelin** said today that it will purchase Brazilian truck fleet management company **Sascar** for 1.35 billion reais ($602 million) and take on 247 million reais of debt, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. Jean-Dominique Senard, Michelin's chief executive, said the purchase will benefit Michelin through the acquisition of Sascar's expertise in telematics, a mixture of telecom and transportation.

Economic News

São Paulo Subway Workers Extend Strike Ahead of World Cup

Just days before São Paulo is set to host the opening match of the World Cup, striking subway workers in the Brazilian city voted Sunday to extend their strike, which has caused massive traffic jams since last week, the Associated Press reported. The vote to extend the strike came after a labor court fined the subway workers' union for the strike, which stretches into its fifth day today. After the court issued the fine, angered union representatives said the rapid transit workers would try to shut down the subway line that serves the stadium hosting Thursday's opening World Cup match. "The government is declaring a war against its workers," said Alex Fernandes, the union's general secretary, the AP reported. "They sit down to talk to us or there won't be subway service during the World Cup." Authorities have managed to provide limited subway service during the strike, but São Paulo's main subway stations have been closed, the AP reported. If the walkout lasts until Thursday, it could be impossible for many fans to get to the Arena Corinthians stadium for the game. Early today, the striking subway workers called a protest that drew some 300 demonstrators in São Paulo, BBC News reported. Riot police used tear gas to disperse them. The workers are demanding a 12.2 percent salary increase from the local government and want President Dilma Rousseff's government to help them restart salary negotiations. Rousseff has said she will not allow violent demonstrations during the World Cup. About 60 percent of Brazilians oppose the country hosting the World Cup because it diverts public services, according to a Pew Research survey released on June 3, Bloomberg News reported. The survey found that dissatisfaction with "things in Brazil today" reached 72 percent. The survey of 1,003 people was conducted between April 10 and April 30 and had a 3.8 percentage point margin of error.

Rousseff

File Photo: Brazilian Government.

Political News

Colombian Government, FARC Agree to Truth Commission

Colombia's government and the FARC rebels on Saturday agreed to establish a truth commission to investigate the deaths of thousands of people during the country's five-decade armed conflict, BBC News reported. The agreement by the two sides to hear the demands of victims was the latest development in the peace talks that have been going on since November 2012 and came just eight days before Colombians are to vote in the country's presidential election. In Sunday's runoff, President Juan Manuel Santos is in a dead heat with challenger Óscar Iván Zuluaga. Santos has largely staked his campaign on the success of the talks while Zuluaga has been fiercely critical of them. On Saturday, lead FARC negotiator Iván Márquez said the talks are making progress. "Each day, we feel closer to the mountaintop, to the Mount Everest of rights, which is peace. Without that no other rights are possible," he said, Reuters reported. On Saturday, the government and the FARC both vowed to take responsibility for the victims of the conflict, departing from their usual stance of blaming each other. Just before the first round of the presidential election on May 25, the government and the FARC reached an agreement on battling the

> "Each day, we feel closer to the mountaintop, to the Mount Everest of rights, which is peace."
>
> *— Iván Márquez*

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country's illegal drug trade. Since the talks began, they have also agreed on land use and on the FARc's political status after the end of the war. They still have disarmament and an end to the conflict on their agenda for the talks. Any final peace deal would then be presented to voters for approval.

Company News

Odebrecht Unit Wins Concession for Panama Hydro Plant

A unit of Brazil's **Odebrecht** conglomerate has won a concession from Panama's government to build and operate a 213-megawatt hydroelectric power station in the Central American country, EFE reported Friday. **Odebrecht Energy Luxembourg** was the only participant in the auction and was awarded the concession by state-owned utility **Egesa**. The concession, which the Odebrecht unit won for $1.05 billion, will also have the unit designing the plant. Panama's government had been seeking a "strategic partner" for the Chan II hydroelectric plant. Odebrecht Energy Luxembourg, which was awarded a 50-year concession, will have a 77 percent stake in the project, and Panama's government will hold the remainder. The government could increase its stake in the power station, which will be constructed in the western Bocas del Toro province. It is expected to begin operations in 2019 or 2020, according to Panamanian daily newspaper *La Prensa*. The power station is expected to account for 9 percent of Panama's installed power generating capacity. President Ricardo Martinelli, who leaves office July 1, has sought to adopt power-saving measures since March when the delayed beginning of the rainy season caused water levels to drop at the country's main hydroelectric stations.

Martinelli

File Photo: Panamanian Government.

Featured Q&A

Continued from page 1

dum angst however shows that victory in 2017 is not guaranteed if the vote is as fair as it was in February."

A Patricia de la Torre A., Quito-based sociologist: "Approval of the constitutional amendment is possible because a legislative majority exists in the Alianza País bloc. Since 2007, President Correa has installed radical changes in the country with a social agenda whose indicators are positive. The management of the national crisis in the midst of the recession in Europe and North America is satisfactory. So confirm the UNDP and ECLAC. This has been built in a climate of economic, social and political stability. The profound educational reform and changing the productive matrix are the core projects of the government, with a state model of 'neo keynesiano' style based on the socialism of 'Buen Vivir,' which privileges the human being over capital and governance regulating the private. These results will start to be confirmed from 2017 onward. Therefore, more time is needed so that the changes are irreversible in the state, the administration and the mentality of the citizens. It should be noted that the political and civic culture is changing in parallel. At present, a reconstitution of old conservatism, the right, with the face of new young politicians is observed. This trend would favor private management over public and would cause the process to be cut short in little time. Ecuador is a country that is traditionally reform-minded, and while there are many constitutional amendments, many times these serve as symbolic pacts and roadmaps. Thus to date there are more than 20 constitutional amendments."

> "Since 2007, President Correa has installed radical changes in the country with a social agenda whose indicators are positive."
>
> — *Patricia de la Torre A.*

A Julio F. Carrión, associate professor of political science and international relations and director of the Center for Global and Area Studies at the University of Delaware: "Given the propensity of the Ecuadorean regime to use plebiscites to let people decide on major issues (and even minor ones, such as banning bullfighting and casinos) it is telling that it is choosing the constitutional amendment route instead. The opposition's electoral gains in the most recent municipal elections have signaled to Correa that he can no longer rely on easily winning the popular vote. Instead, he must rely on his majority in the legislature and his control of the judiciary. It is very significant that Guillermo Lasso, leader of the opposition Creo, demanded that a popular referendum be called to decide on the issue. This evidences the opposition's belief that Correa would have a hard time winning such plebiscite. Correa is in a weakened position as a result of the electoral setback, and he needs to regain the upper hand. Correa must signal to key elite actors (i.e., the military, judges, political allies, members of his own party and media executives) that he is—and more importantly—will continue to be in control of the regime

> "Correa is in a weakened position as a result of the electoral setback, and he needs to regain the upper hand."
>
> — *Julio F. Carrión*

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Featured Q&A

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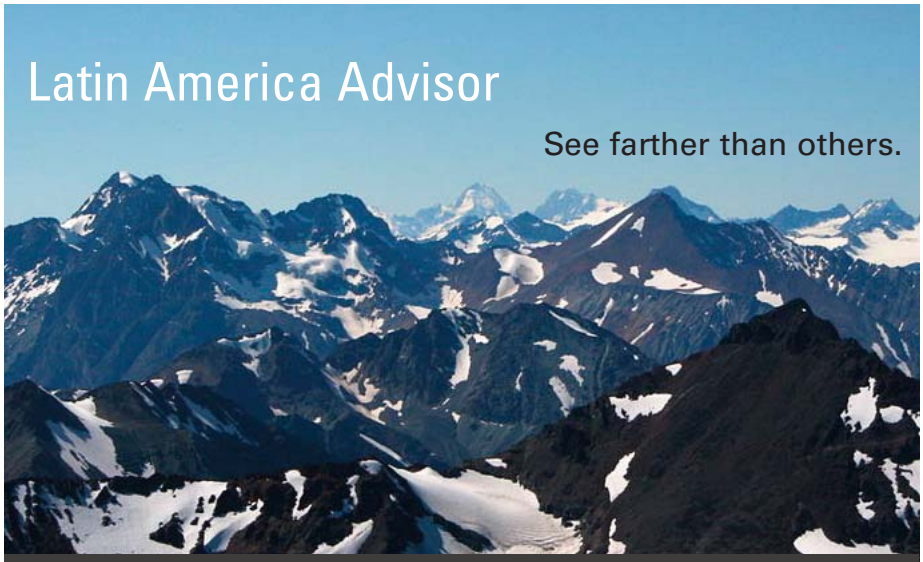
for the foreseeable future. This will address the internal crisis that Alianza País is undergoing as a result of the municipal elections and it will also lessen any potential internal divisions within the party. The steamroller of the 'Citizens' Revolution' has lost momentum, and the constitutional amendment is an effort to regain the initiative. Populist regimes like the ones in Venezuela and Ecuador need to be constantly on the offensive, displaying overwhelming power. Otherwise, the opposition gains strength and thus can make a plausible case for a different, more democratic future."

Felipe Burbano de Lara, professor and researcher at FLACSO Ecuador and columnist at *Diario Hoy*: "The Alianza País movement made a risky move that shows its own weakness as an organization: betting on the continued leadership of Rafael Correa as a condition of its political project. The proposal to reform the Constitution to permit indefinite re-election of popularly elected officials makes a big confession: behind Correa's leadership there is very little organization and other leaders who can sustain the so-called citizens' revolution. The alarms sounded on Feb. 23 when Alianza País lost local elections in 21 of the 23 provincial capitals, including large cities where it had enormous popular traction. The president himself made a lapidary diagnosis of his movement: Alianza País—he said—is a fiction. From that moment, the specter of re-election began to circle, until on May 24, in his address to the nation, Correa announced that the constitutional reform will be proposed. To justify the manipulation of the rules of the political game, the revolution has spread a new cliché: we must avoid—they say in chorus— the danger of a conservative restoration that puts the advances of seven years of revolution in danger. Indefinite re-election is a confession of the caudillo nature of the citizens' revolution: the source of the process' legitimacy revolves around Correa's charismatic leadership and permanent state activism. Alianza País' trajectory has this hallmark. And in seven years, far from diminishing, it has been deepening."

The Advisor *welcomes reactions to the Q&A above. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org with comments.*



The **Latin America Advisor**'s daily **Q&A** section helps readers plan ahead. What do you need to know? E-mail to freetrial@thedialogue.org for access.

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