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FEATURED Q&A

Is Correa Still a Driving Force in Ecuador's Politics?



Even if his name is not on the ballot, former Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa could still influence the country's election next year, commentators say below. // File Photo: @MashiRafael via Twitter.

Q Former Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa in August announced his intention to be leftist candidate Andrés Arauz's running mate in the Andean nation's presidential election next year. However, the country's electoral council rejected the candidacy of Correa, whom an Ecuadorean court earlier this year found guilty of corruption charges and now lives in Belgium. Correa, who was president from 2007 to 2017, has repeatedly denied wrongdoing. How much of an impact will Correa have on Ecuador's presidential race? How much popular support does he enjoy in Ecuador? To what extent will current circumstances, including the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic and talks to renegotiate its debt, play a role in the 2021 elections?

A Daniela Chacón Arias, executive director of Fundación TANDEM and former Quito vice mayor and city council member: "Due to several legal impediments (a prior conviction and a re-election ban), it is very unlikely that the electoral council will allow Correa to be Arauz's running mate. Nonetheless, Correa doesn't need to be on the ticket for the election to be about him. Lenín Moreno has justified all of his government's shortcomings with Correa's wrongdoings. And given Moreno's failed handling of the coronavirus pandemic and his unmet promise to combat corruption, there are many voices reminding the electorate that things were better under Correa. The renegotiation of the debt is very important for the country, but it will not play a major role in the elections as voters are more preoccupied with unemployment, poverty and lack of social safety networks. The right-wing candidates

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Jamaica's Ruling Party Re-elected in Landslide Vote

The ruling Jamaica Labour Party overwhelmingly won the Caribbean nation's elections, winning 49 of the 63 seats in parliament.

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ECONOMIC

Mexico Likely to Cut Oil Production Targets: Legislator

Mexico will likely be forced to lower its targets for crude oil production next year, ruling-party legislator Erasmo González told Bloomberg News in an interview. The country missed its production targets this year.

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ECONOMIC

Costa Rica's Chinchilla Drops Bid to Lead IDB

Former Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla withdrew her candidacy to be the next president of the Inter-American Development Bank. The election has been controversial because of the Trump administration's nomination of a U.S. citizen for the role.

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Chinchilla // File Photo: Inter-American Dialogue.

POLITICAL NEWS

Jamaica's Ruling Party Re-elected in Landslide Election

The ruling Jamaica Labour Party, or JLP, overwhelmingly won the Caribbean nation's elections on Thursday, securing 49 of the 63 seats in parliament, 16 more seats than it previously had, BBC News reported. While face masks and temperature checks were mandatory at polling stations to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus, turnout was among the lowest in



Holness // File Photo: Jamaican Government.

the country's history, at 37 percent. By comparison, 48 percent of the electorate participated in the 2016 elections, BBC News reported. Prime Minister Andrew Holness had called for the early vote last month amid the pandemic. Most experts saw it as an attempt to capitalize on people's satisfaction with his response to the virus and his economic agenda, BBC News reported. "There are many Jamaicans who did not participate, there are many Jamaicans, who for fear of the virus, did not come to the polls, but for other reasons, apathy, frustrations, decided not to participate," Holness said following his party's victory. "We are honoured to continue to serve you and we look forward to #RecoveringStronger," he wrote on Twitter. Holness has been Jamaica's prime minister

SUBSCRIBER NOTICE

The Latin America Advisor will not be published on Monday, Sept. 7 in observance of the Labor Day holiday in the United States. We will resume publishing on Tuesday, Sept. 8.

since March 2016. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 24 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Costa Rica's Chinchilla Drops Bid to Lead IDB

Former Costa Rican President Laura Chinchilla on Thursday withdrew her candidacy to be the next leader of the Inter-American Development Bank. In a letter to Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado, which Chinchilla posted on her Twitter page, she said she found fault with the process of selecting the institution's next leader. "To continue forward with our national aspiration would amount to endorsing a process that I do not consider convenient for the IDB or for the hemisphere in the present conditions," Chinchilla wrote. The former Costa Rican president said a factor in her decision was the "abrupt change in the rules that since the creation of the IDB have regulated the process of presenting and selecting candidates." She added that since the bank's creation, a Latin American or Caribbean citizen has always occupied the IDB's presidency. "However, the government of the United States of America decided to alter this norm that was in force for 60 years, without prior consultation processes or institutional agreements and presented its own candidate." The U.S. nomination of Mauricio Claver-Carone, a U.S. citizen, earlier this year to head the IDB has been controversial as he would be the first person from outside Latin America and the Caribbean to lead the institution. The vote is scheduled for Sept. 12, though several countries, including Costa Rica, Argentina, Mexico and Chile, as well as European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, have called for the vote to be delayed, Reuters reported. Claver-Carone has said 17 countries support his candidacy. Argentina has nominated Gustavo Beliz, the country's strategic affairs secretary, for the IDB presidency. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the June 25 issue of the Advisor.]

NEWS BRIEFS

Head of Puerto Rico's Elections Board Resigns After Botched Primary

The head of Puerto Rico's elections commission, Juan Ernesto Dávila, announced Thursday that he was stepping down immediately, NBC News reported. Dávila's resignation came after the U.S. territory's chaotic Aug. 9 primary election, in which dozens of polling places were unable to open because of missing or delayed ballots, and several others turned voters away because they did not have enough ballots. Dávila said he was stepping down due to the well-being of his family, adding that he didn't "want to be a distraction."

U.S. Official Reportedly Tells El Salvador's Bukele That Aid Is at Risk

A senior U.S. official has reportedly told El Salvador's government that aid from the United States is at risk over President Nayib Bukele's clashing with his country's Supreme Court and Congress, the Associated Press reported Thursday. In a May 29 letter to one of Bukele's aides, Thomas Kelly, acting vice president of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an independent U.S. foreign aid agency, warned that recent actions by Bukele have "raised questions about the government's commitment to the MCC's eligibility criteria."

Chile's Government Reaches Deal With Truckers to End Strike

Chile's government and truck drivers who held protests over the past week have reached an agreement to end the strike, France24 reported Thursday. More than 2,000 truckers, who were demanding better security, blocked roads for seven days, leading to supply disruptions. The government agreed to invest approximately \$7 million in policing infrastructure in the southern region of the country.

Mexico Likely to Cut Oil Production Targets: Lawmaker

Mexico will likely be forced to cut its targets for crude oil production next year after missing this year's goal, ruling party legislator Erasmo González told Bloomberg News in an interview published Thursday. González, who heads the lower house's Budget Committee, said the government's initial output target of 2.027 million barrels per day (bpd) for next year is stretched, adding, however, that state oil company Pemex



González // File Photo: @erasmoglz via Twitter.

is still on track to increase its production from current levels. In July, the firm saw its lowest levels of production since October 1979, at 604 million bpd, down 4.2 percent year-over-year, according to data from the National Hydrocarbons Commission. In the first seven months of the year, crude production levels in Mexico averaged 1.692 million bpd, below the 1.83 million bpd the Finance Ministry expected. Pemex was among the companies that saw the sharpest drop in output in July, Publimento reported. Combined with lower selling prices, the below-target production levels have slashed the government's oil revenue to just 56 percent of its target. The government is expected to present next year's budget proposal to Congress on Tuesday. González told Bloomberg News that the plan will be "the most complex of the last nearly 100 years in the modern history of our country" due to the pandemic. González also said the importance of public health has made it very difficult to design the plan, adding that the government is likely to boost spending on health care faster than on Pemex.

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have reached a consensus to back Guillermo Lasso's candidacy, which will polarize the election between the correista and noncorreista options. This could rally the leftist and undecided votes to support Arauz in order to prevent the banker from reaching his lifelong dream. The indigenous movement candidate or a populist outsider can also play an important role in this election if they are able to fill the void for a centrist option. Correa still has strong support, enough to reach the runoff election. If his opponents continue to make the election about him, instead of what the country needs in order to tackle poverty and structural inequalities, this split will end up deciding the winner."

A Hernán Reyes Aguinaga, professor at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and Universidad Central del Ecuador: "The

Ecuadorian election, whose first round will be held in February, has unprecedented characteristics: it is marked by the serious social effects resulting from the terrible government management of the Covid-19 pandemic, by the deep economic crisis that shows historical unemployment rates and the prioritizing of foreign-debt payments over social spending, thus an almost absolute disapproval of the management of current President Lenín Moreno's government. Even worse, the constant corruption scandals have provoked a very strong disaffection toward politics and its institutions, which will affect the candidates' legitimacy. In this unusual environment, whether or not former President Rafael Correa is a candidate for the vice presidency is a weighty factor. For now, it seems almost impossible that his candidacy will be accepted because he is not physically present in Ecuador, a move that was not feasible due to a court ruling against him. However, even with the leader living in Belgium, his electoral pull remains strong. It is estimated that correísmo has the highest percentage of the hard vote, around 20 percent, and the polarization

around him is still the largest nonideological reference. Although there will be a dozen presidential candidacies, it seems likely that for the second round, correista candidate Andrés Arauz will face Guillermo Lasso, now the leader of a large right-wing alliance following the resignation of other leaders of this ideological trend and the support of the powerful Christian Social Party."

A Carlos de la Torre, director of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida: "When Rafael Correa got

to power in 2007, Ecuador had lived a major crisis of political representation. With high oil prices, his administration reduced poverty, increased the size of the middle class and wasted money on pharaonic projects. In 10 years, Correa or his allies won 11 elections or plebiscites, and all debates and conflicts centered around his persona. He was so powerful that after changing his own constitution to allow for his permanent re-election, he decided to not participate in order to not govern under an economic crisis. He put his vice presidents, Lenín Moreno and Jorge Glas, in office. Moreno dissociated from his mentor, put businesspeople in charge of the economy and allowed the prosecutor and comptroller to investigate cases of corruption. Glas is in jail, and if Correa sets foot in Ecuador, he would end up as his cellmate for attempting to kidnap an opposition politician and for corruption. Correa unsuccessfully tried to be candidate for the vice presidency but, according to the law, needed to register in person. Yet the Correa dynasty will continue to play a major role in politics. His sister Pierina Correa is candidate for the legislature under Rafael's party, and his older brother Fabricio is running for president as an anti-Communist, Catholic business entrepreneur. Fabricio is the right-wing outsider who wants to become an Ecuadorian Bolsonaro, gathering under his leadership all of those opposed to abortion, LGBTQ rights and a strong interventionist state. His

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platform is against corruption, even though he had millionaire contracts with the state under his brother's presidency."

A **Grace Jaramillo, postdoctoral fellow at The University of British Columbia:** "Ecuador's elections will again be polarized between the supporters of former President Rafael Correa and the rest of the political spectrum. There are many reasons for this. For one, incumbent President Lenín Moreno belonged to the same political party as President Correa, and the falling out of that personal relationship became the best claim for Correa's followers to accuse the current government of treason and the remaining political parties in Congress of co-governing with his former vice president and political ally. The second reason is that the Moreno administration handled the economy badly, refusing to perform necessary reforms until 2019. The pandemic only aggravated an already difficult situation created by an unmanageable streak of fiscal expenditure and external loans to Chinese financial institutions and international banks during the Correa administration. Even with a successful renegotiation with external creditors and the IMF, the dire economic situation for the majority of Ecuadoreans could still play favorably for Correa's party in next year's elections. Memories of the bonanza years under his administration are evidenced by the fact that he maintains significant popular support among Ecuadorean citizens. Different opinion polls have put that support between 20 percent and 36 percent of the electorate. Notwithstanding, Correa himself could not register as part of the ticket. There are several criminal lawsuits against him, one of which was already upheld by two courts of appeals. Moreover, the two largest center-rights parties—Creo and the Social Christian Party—signed an alliance this week to run together for all elective offices up and down the ticket. This strategic move will make harder for Correa's movement to win a defining majority at the National Assembly

and a steep challenge in case they make it to the runoff election."

A **Fernando Carrión, professor and researcher in the Department of Political Studies at FLACSO in Ecuador:** "The first round of next year's elections in Ecuador will be atypical: there are 282 legally recognized political operators, which has produced a very strong fragmentation, with 19 presidential candidates and, paradoxically, polarization between correísmo and anti-correísmo. In addition, there is a discredit of politics being expressed as citizens' indecision, in the absence of political parties' legitimacy and amid a crisis of representation. Corruption has a lot to do with this. Rafael Correa cannot run for president because the Constitution bans re-election, but he is seeking the vice presidency—following the Argentine example. However, for him, there are three setbacks: 1.) the only function of the vice president is to substitute for the president, 2.) the registration of his candidacy must be in person, but he lives in Belgium because of a preventive detention order against him in Ecuador and 3.) the impediment arising from an additional bribery trial that is in its final phase. The question remains: is his candidacy an electoral strategy of victimization? Correísmo is the largest national political force, but it does not reach 20 percent support due to the dispersion of the vote. However, its support will be enough to be the benchmark of the electoral campaign. It has proposed Andrés Arauz, a 35-year-old politician, as its presidential candidate in an effort to capture younger voters. He is also the main opponent of current President Moreno. To that will be added the issues of Covid-19, the economic crisis (the economic model) and the social crisis, including unemployment, poverty and violence."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gene.kuleta@thedialogue.org.

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