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Ecuador: the drama in the streets

In the midst of these differences, the business chambers request that the government "listen to the calls for change", but that the progressive use of force be maintained "in a legitimate way"



Ecuador is experiencing a serious drama. Since June 13 (2022) the national strike called by CONAIE, the largest indigenous organization, began, which raised [10 demands to the government](#).

Leonidas Iza, its president, [was imprisoned](#), although he was able to go free after several hours. The fact aggravated the reactions. And the mobilizations were joined by the trade union centers, students, teachers, small and medium producers, middle strata, intellectuals, artists and many other social sectors, who also led against the government of Guillermo

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Lasso and the neglect in sensitive areas such as public security, social security, education, medicine and health. Every day the protests have grown.



Leonidas Iza, president of Conaie, was arrested by elite groups of the Police and Armed Forces

The government decreed [a state of emergency](#) in several provinces and mobilized the army. The paralysis continued, spread to all regions and thousands of indigenous people advanced towards different cities and especially went to Quito. [The Ecuadorian capital has been occupied by protesters](#) and regular life has been convulsed. In such conditions the escalation between protests and repression grew. Vandalism, destruction, assaults and threats to people and property were also present. The victims increase. There is an evident crisis of the government and a social mobilization spread throughout the country, which has been faced with strong repressions, which alarm [Amnesty International](#) and other human rights entities.

Confrontation does not relent. Opinions become polarized. Racist and classist expressions emerge among those who have convinced themselves that "we must give bullets". There are also demonstrators who cry out for "peace" and in Quito and Guayaquil groups that come out in defense of "their" city and reject Iza and "the Indians" (<https://bit.ly/3HP72ID>). It is a phenomenon of racism similar to that experienced by Bolivia during the crisis of November 2019, which led to the coup d'état that installed Jeanine Áñez in the presidency. In official spheres there is talk of "violent strike", of "terrorists", that the indigenous people want to end "democracy", that the financing comes from "drug trafficking" (<https://bit.ly/3OuKoBk>) and there are even those who maintain that [Correa and "correísmo"](#) are behind. In the streets the battle cry is "[out Lasso, out!](#)"

Ecuador: "Fuera Lasso, Fuera", the cry that resounds in the streets

Various sectors, the most important universities, the church, demand dialogue and appeal to constitutionality. Several European and North American embassies warn about the political climate and [insist on dialogue](#). So did the [OAS](#). But in the international world little or nothing has been disseminated, while the country's large press and particularly television, is selective in information and biased to defend the reasons of the government and to delegitimize the indigenous movement. The informative role at all times, with videos, photos, interviews and reports, has been fulfilled by the alternative media on the Internet and social networks, against which there was the official attempt to silence them, a purpose that managed to stop (). It is a more serious situation than the one experienced by the country in October 2019, when the indigenous movement also led a sustained protest against the government of Lenin Moreno (2017-2021).

The traumatic conjuncture deserves some perspective from the immediate history. First of all, it is worth considering the victory of Guillermo Lasso, who won the ballotage with 52.36% of votes against the candidate of the "correismo" Andrés Arauz, who obtained 47.64% of the vote. In short, from the beginning, it did not have the support of almost half of the electorate. He was sworn in as president of Ecuador on May 24, 2021. And, leaving aside the campaign offers, but not its definitions in economic matters, it gave continuity to the government of Lenin Moreno (2017-2021), who had restored the business-neoliberal path, in addition to advancing in the conservative reinstitutionalization of the State, the privilege to business interests, the persecution of "correismo" and the criminalization and judicialization of social protest. The Lasso government went on to represent the most powerful forces in the country: bankers, economic groups, wealthy strata, well-to-do middle classes, large media, political right and also transnational capital. All converge in maintaining an ideal: neoliberalism as an economic model, but which has been applied in Ecuador under an oligarchic, conservative, backward and exclusionary mantle. State control has been understood as an opportunity to do good business with public resources, goods and services. In addition, there was the Extended Facility (SAF) with the IMF (2019, <https://bit.ly/39TfALV>), inherited from the Moreno government and that so favored its economic slogans: reduce taxes, shrink the State, privatizations, labor flexibility, extractivism, openness. Lasso comes directly from the ranks of that economic elite. It also has the ideological identity of the conservative governments of the region and for the US it is an essential ally, even more so after the triumph of Gustavo Petro in Colombia. All this

constitutes the essence of what is sociologically recognized as a dominant or hegemonic power bloc in Ecuador.

Disregarding the Latin American and particularly Ecuadorian experiences of the final decades of the twentieth century, as well as the studies that have followed them, such as those of ECLAC, it was evident and inevitable that the neoliberal business model, continued and reinforced by Guillermo Lasso in his first year of government, would deepen the social duality, in which the elite of the power bloc is the privileged one, while the rest of society, and particularly the poorest – among whom the indigenous people are still in the lead – find no possibility of advancement and well-being. Living and working conditions in Ecuador deteriorated dramatically since 2017, accompanied by the ruin of basic public services in education, health and social security, which came to function in an acceptable way during the government of Rafael Correa (2007-2017). Moreno did not even attend the vaccination in the midst of the Covid pandemic of 2020 that, instead, was assumed and successfully assumed by the Lasso government. But in a single year, an unprecedented public insecurity was added by the increase in unstoppable crime. The precarious social picture is accompanied by widespread frustrations and hopelessness.

Under the umbrella of the agreement with the IMF, Lasso continued with the neoliberal ideals of the elites who support him. There predominates the inability to understand social demands, as well as the indigenous world, whose culture and history is ignored. The consequences of the social polarization created by plutocratic rule are seen today in the impressive popular reaction. In the official strategy, the government wants to appear as a promoter of dialogue and peace, while CONAIE maintains that it has dialogued on different occasions without achieving anything (<https://bit.ly/3ynqNxP> // <https://bit.ly/3OprDzE>). And that difference has led to the positions of strength, to the point that on Friday 24 the president, on television, attacked the "violence", the "infiltrated criminals", the "groups of vandals"; also against Iza; and argued that they want to "destabilize democracy", anticipating that the police and armed forces will make the "progressive use of force"; asking, in addition, that indigenous people and peasants "return to their communities" (<https://bit.ly/3uovAN9>). Almost immediately, the siege began to the spaces where the population that arrived in Quito is housed and the offensive of repression was launched, which has been serious and is going to be worse (<https://bit.ly/3A1TqBT>). The images circulating on social media are scandalous and painful.



It has another space that also confronts the institutional parties, within their own dynamics, interests and calculations. In civil society, constitutional solutions were proposed: resignation of the president, legal dismissal, application of the "cross death" (the Executive and also the Legislative leave and new elections are called) or revocation of the mandate for the corresponding legal reasons. The UNES party ("correismo") promoted the constitutional dismissal of the president and managed to get the National Assembly to begin dealing with the issue on Saturday 25 (<https://bit.ly/3nnsyo4>), although it seems certain that there is not the necessary majority of votes. Of course, against this proposal and, ultimately, in support of Lasso, the forces of the right have aligned: PSC, ID, BAN, a sector of Pachakutik and several independents (<https://bit.ly/3yjGeqv> // <https://bit.ly/3QQWcjm>). The government insists on an attempted coup d'état and to alleviate the image before what would be discussed in the Assembly, it lifted the State of Emergency (<https://bit.ly/3OJ9MTS>). In this game of political actors it is not clear what will happen.

Above this sphere of political life, social conflict continues to stand between the government and CONAIE/popular sectors that, despite the brutal daily repression, persist in the 10-point agenda. It should be clear that the axes of this agenda question the governmental economic model and imply a change of course. In the midst of these differences, the business chambers request that the government "listen to the calls for change", but that the progressive use of force be maintained "in a legitimate way"

(<https://bit.ly/3niNqgk> // <https://bit.ly/3u3433t>). The way out of the situation that Ecuador continues to live is, at this moment, unpredictable.

Juan J. Paz-y-Miño Cepeda for La Pluma, Ecuador June 26, 2022

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