



## **PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

### **Transparent and well-organised election day disproves fraud narratives, but reforms remain to be addressed**

**Quito, 15 April 2025**

*This preliminary statement of the EU election observation mission (EU EOM) is delivered before the completion of the entire electoral process. Critical stages remain, including the tabulation of official results and the adjudication of petitions. The EU EOM is now only able to comment on observation undertaken to date. After the completion of the process, the EU EOM will publish a final report, including full analysis and possible recommendations for electoral reform.*

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#### **Summary**

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- On 13 April, Ecuadorians re-elected Daniel Noboa of the *Acción Democrática Nacional* (ADN) party as president, with 55 per cent of the vote, according to provisional results, on a day when 83 per cent of the electorate turned out to vote. The candidate of the *Revolución Ciudadana* (RC) - RETO coalition, Luisa González, received 44 per cent. While RC's main *prefectos* and mayors conceded Noboa's victory, the presidential candidate and her running mate denounced fraud and refused to recognise the results on election night.
- Election day was overall calm and transparent, with a higher presence of political party representatives than in the first round. Opening and voting procedures were largely followed, and EU observers as well as political party representatives could follow the counting without undue restrictions. The CNE results website and application functioned smoothly and within three hours 90 per cent of the results protocols had been published and processed, guaranteeing the transparency and traceability of the results transmission system.
- Prior to election day, EU observers reported a pluralistic run-off campaign in a calm environment. Candidates campaigned unhindered, and the freedoms of assembly and movement were guaranteed despite the State of Emergency, which prevails in parts of the country.
- During the first week of the second-round campaign period, president Noboa switched between his roles of president and candidate on three occasions, after previous notification to the CNE. After March 30, when the *Tribunal Contencioso Electoral* (TCE) sentence suspending vice-president Abad's political rights came into effect, president Noboa notified the CNE of his "temporary absence from presidency". Failure to request a "leave of absence" to the Assembly at the beginning of the campaign, which is mandatory for incumbents, contributed to further blurring the boundaries between the two functions and tilted the playing-field.
- The CNE conducted the elections in a transparent and efficient manner and implemented effective mechanisms to ensure traceability of the election results. Nevertheless, CNE's

*This preliminary statement is available in English and Spanish but only the English version is official.*

independence and neutrality were again questioned by both parties and civil society organisations. One of the main concerns was a controversial resolution adopted by the CNE that banned the use of electronic devices during voting. This measure was widely seen as having been adopted under pressure from the government, who had made allegations about voter intimidation by organised crime after the first round. President Noboa also requested that voters in the provinces most affected by heavy rainfall be exempted from fines if they did not vote, but this measure was not considered by the CNE.

- The CNE carried out the election preparations efficiently and on time. Training of polling staff was limited and focused on members from those polling stations who had made mistakes during the first round. To strengthen the authority of the CNE in polling centres and to facilitate the implementation of new procedures, the CNE reintroduced polling centre coordinators, in charge of liaising with the security forces. The CNE maintained a high degree of transparency, accrediting large numbers of national and international observers as well as political party representatives at all levels of the election administration.
- The TCE's sentence against vice-president Veronica Abad sets a worrying precedent in the treatment of gender-based political violence, an offence initially conceived to protect women's participation in politics, not to limit it. The ruling is widely considered as having imposed disproportionate penalties and unduly restricted freedom of expression in the political debate.
- Media professionals were generally able to cover the elections without obstruction, though many reported self-censorship in areas affected by organised crime. Polarisation of the media intensified during the run-off campaign, with state-owned outlets strongly favouring Daniel Noboa, whilst private media contributed to a pluralistic environment by providing both candidates with substantial coverage. Extensive government-sponsored advertising contributed to an uneven playing field in the media.
- Disinformation campaigns were widespread across all monitored online platforms, frequently amplified through paid advertisements and bot farms. The use of AI-generated content increased throughout the election campaign, often as a format for disinformation and personal attacks against candidates. While parties are required to report online spending to the CNE, the lack of verification mechanisms limits effective oversight of compliance with expenditure rules.

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*The European Union Election Observation Mission has been present in Ecuador since 28 December 2024 following an invitation from the Consejo Nacional Electoral and the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores. The Mission is led by Chief Observer Gabriel Mato, Member of the European Parliament (Spain). The EU EOM deployed 105 observers from 25 EU Member States, Norway and Canada across the country to assess the entire electoral process against international obligations and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Ecuador. On 13 April, they observed in 411 polling stations in 23 provinces. A delegation from the European Parliament, headed by Nacho Sánchez Amor, MEP, also joined the mission and endorses this Statement.*

*The EU EOM wishes to thank the people of Ecuador, the Government, the CNE and the TCE, as well as the political parties and civil society organisations, for their cooperation and assistance over the course of the Mission's observation activities. The EU EOM particularly thanks the European Union Delegation in Ecuador, as well as the EU Member States' diplomatic missions in the country, for their*

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support throughout the process. The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions and adheres to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation endorsed at the United Nations in October 2005.

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## Preliminary Findings

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### Campaign Environment

The campaign for the second round officially started with the mandatory presidential TV debate, conducted in a neutral manner by a journalist appointed by the CNE, though online campaigning never stopped after 9 February. EU observers described a pluralist campaign in a calm environment. Candidates campaigned unhindered, and the freedoms of assembly and movement were guaranteed despite the State of Emergency, which prevails in parts of the country. However, the difficult security situation in areas of the coastal provinces and along the Colombian border sometimes limited campaign activities.

During the first week of the campaign period, president Noboa switched between his roles of president and candidate on three occasions, after notifying the CNE of “campaign activities without using public funds” for brief periods. Failure to request a “leave of absence” from the Assembly, which is mandatory for incumbents, contributed to further blurring the boundaries between the two functions. For example, on 26 March, three days into the campaign period, a USD 500 bonus payment was granted to all members of the armed forces and the police through two presidential decrees. From 30 March, after the TCE sentence suspending vice-president Abad’s political rights came into effect, president Noboa acted exclusively as candidate after notifying the CNE of his “temporary absence from the presidency”.

National and municipal regulations on campaign materials in public spaces were generally respected, although municipal regulations were not homogeneous, and the application of sanctions was frequently inconsistent and sometimes dependent on the mayor’s political leanings. In a number of cases, EU observers reported distribution of staple food and gifts to the most vulnerable communities from some governors, *prefectos* and mayors for the campaign of both candidates. These practices are forbidden by the election law.

### *Campaign Finance*

Ecuadorian regulation of campaign financing aims to foster a level playing-field by providing equal public funding for advertising in media such as press, radio and TV, as well as on billboards. It also establishes ceilings for private donations to cover other campaign expenses, notably on social media. The laws also set out mechanisms for the transparency of campaign accounts and oversight by the CNE, in cooperation with other public and private institutions, among them an obligation for each presidential candidacy to submit their campaign income and expenditure reports biweekly on a dedicated CNE webpage.

As during the first round, insufficient resources within the CNE, as well as loopholes in the legislation, such as the lack of sanctions for non-compliance with some transparency requirements, limited effective supervision of campaign finances, particularly in relation to private campaign funds and their sources. All interlocutors considered the expenditure figures reported by the candidates to be unrealistically low. At the time of writing, neither candidate had submitted the biweekly campaign finance report due by 27 March and 10 April.

### *Campaign-related complaints*

Some 30 complaints have been filed with the TCE for electoral offences during both campaign periods. Most cases have already been dismissed, as complaints were often poorly substantiated. It is worth noting that although the TCE has acknowledged that electoral offences should be given priority, some complaints are at a standstill, such as one for campaigning without leave of absence. The mission considers that such situations should be avoided in order to guarantee legal remedy in due time. EU observers reported that, according to most interlocutors, long delays and lack of confidence in the TCE discouraged the lodging of campaign-related complaints.

### *Complaints on 9 February election results*

Overall, relatively few challenges were made to the preliminary results of 9 February elections. The CNE rejected most of the 17 complaints calling for recounts. The CNE, in a rather restrictive interpretation of the law, considered that provincial party delegates, who filed the complaints, could not challenge the results. Only two complaints, one lodged by each of the contenders, were admitted, leading to recounts. The TCE upheld CNE's resolutions. Both electoral bodies respected the legal deadlines for this exercise.

## **Election Administration**

The CNE conducted the elections in a transparent and efficient manner and implemented effective mechanisms to ensure traceability of the election results. Nevertheless, CNE's independence and neutrality were again questioned by both parties and civil society organisations.

Following allegations by Daniel Noboa about irregularities and voter intimidation by organised crime during the 9 February elections, the CNE adopted on 13 March a resolution on the use of electronic devices inside polling stations. The resolution prohibited voters from using electronic devices such as phones or tablets while voting, to prevent taking pictures of their marked ballot. Polling staff was banned from using electronic devices during the counting, except for one staff member, to add up the votes. The resolution was criticised primarily because the CNE based its decision on confidential reports by the security forces that were not made public. In addition, the sanctions provided in the resolution were disproportionate to the offense. Many interlocutors saw the adoption of this resolution as evidence that the election administration had bent to government's pressure. President Noboa also requested that voters in the provinces most affected by heavy rainfall be exempted from fines for not voting, but this measure was not considered by the CNE.

While the resolution did not address the use of electronic devices by political party representatives and observers, the CNE subsequently clearly stated that there would be no restrictions for these actors. The CNE actively communicated this point, including broadcast of an informative spot, events in all provinces for party representatives and the media, and a series of informational programmes aired during primetime on the most widely viewed channels. Nevertheless, this campaign started late, and its reach was limited. EU observers noted that understanding of the new regulation varied at the local level.

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The CNE carried out the election preparations, including the printing, assembly and dispatch of election material, in line with legal deadlines. Out-of-country voting was organised for Ecuadorian citizens residing in 39 countries on six continents.

Given the heavy rains in recent weeks, which led to flooding in several provinces, the CNE and its provincial offices continuously monitored the condition and accessibility of polling centres and prepared contingency plans. Twenty-four polling centres in 10 provinces had to be replaced, most of them sufficiently ahead of election day to inform the voters. In several provinces, some of the election material had to be distributed by air or water instead of by land.

Polling staff training was limited as the budget foreseen to rehire trainers for the second round was reduced. CNE provincial offices focused on members from those polling stations that had produced results protocols with mistakes during the first round and contacted them to offer further training. The training material was updated and adapted to the presidential run-off and online training was available on a voluntary basis, also for members of the security forces.

Following an internal evaluation of the 9 February election day, the CNE decided to strengthen its presence and authority at polling centres by reintroducing the figure of polling centre coordinators, a position which had been abolished in 2024 due to budgetary restrictions. Polling centre coordinators were trained to take on the important task of liaising with security forces in polling centres, and, together with polling station coordinators, to explain to polling staff how to implement the ban of electronic devices during voting.

The EU EOM continued to have good access to the election administration at national and provincial level and received all the requested information. Maintaining a high degree of transparency, the CNE accredited around 1,700 national and international election observers as well as 95,000 representatives of both political contestants at all levels of the election administration. CNE provincial offices held information sessions on the procedures to accredit party representatives and, at the request of the contestants, increased the numbers of representatives who could be accredited.

During the technical tests ahead of election day, the CNE's electronic results management system performed well, ensuring high standards of transparency. The technology involved was adequately protected against most foreseeable risks, even in areas struck by floods. Both the shortage of technical staff and some ICT glitches revealed during the technical tests were successfully overcome by election day.

## Media

Media professionals across the country were generally able to cover the elections without interference, though many acknowledged practising self-censorship, particularly in areas affected by organised crime. Media polarisation intensified during the campaign for the second round of the presidential election, with a considerable reduction in neutral coverage of the candidates across outlets monitored by the mission.<sup>1</sup> Continuing the pattern noted in the first round, Daniel Noboa received the largest share of media attention, much of it positive,

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<sup>1</sup> Since 23 of March 2025, the EU EOM has monitored: **state-owned media** – *TC Televisión*, *Radio Pública FM*, and *El Telégrafo* (digital); and **private or publicly owned media** – *Telem Amazonas* and *Ecuavisa* (TV), *Radio Pichincha* and *Radio Democracia*, *El Universo* and *Expreso* (newspapers), and *Primicias* and *El Comercio* (digital). **Time slots:** TV (07:00 - 08:00, 18:00 - 23:00); radio (06:00 - 09:00, 17:00 - 20:00).

benefiting from the advantages of incumbency, including coverage of his official duties as president in parallel to his campaign activities.

State-owned media consistently provided extensive positive coverage of Daniel Noboa and his government: he received double the coverage of Luisa González, with no negative mentions and substantial promotion of his official activities and achievements. In contrast, most of the state outlets covered González with a negative tone.

Private media played a key role in fostering a pluralistic environment, offering both candidates substantial coverage. TV channels provided relatively balanced airtime, but Luisa González was framed more negatively than Daniel Noboa. In the print press and digital media, Noboa dominated both in space and positive tone, while coverage of González was limited and often negative. In most of the monitored private media outlets, coverage of the government remained largely positive.

The *Fondo de Promoción Electoral* for the presidential run-off was widely regarded as insufficient to afford adequate prime-time advertising on the most viewed television channels. Meanwhile, government advertisements, which had already featured prominently in the first round, increased significantly ahead of the run-off, and media were obliged to air them during the period of electoral silence. Although the government roughly complied with the legal criteria for exceptions on content for campaign-period advertising, it consistently used these to transition into broader promotional messaging, blurring the line between official communication and electoral campaigning. The CNE had authorised these adverts during the first round, however for the run-off the authorisation was issued by the Secretariat of Communication of the Presidency, and even government adverts without an authorisation message were observed. Government promotion accounted for 65 per cent of all political advertising monitored in broadcast media, indicating a misuse of state resources.

## **Social media**

Disinformation campaigns were widespread across all monitored online platforms, frequently amplified through paid advertisements and bot farms.

While Meta provides a public repository to track spending for paid political ads, other platforms offer limited transparency, restricting accountability. Google ads were widely used in the campaign but, unlike in other countries, the company does not publish a report on political advertising in Ecuador. Therefore, despite contacting Google, the EU EOM was unable to verify either the identity of the advertisers or the amount spent. Many of these ads contributed to the spread of misleading information, despite Google's policy on misinformation.

The EU EOM observed instances of online institutional advertising that contributed to a blurred distinction between Daniel Noboa's role as president and as a candidate throughout the electoral campaign.

The use of AI-generated content increased throughout the election campaign, often employed to distribute disinformation and personal attacks against candidates. EU EOM preliminary findings show that of 103 AI-generated items analysed, AI was used to manipulate video in 55 cases, images in 37, generate text in seven, and clone voices or alter audio in four. The EU EOM commends national fact-checking initiatives for their efforts in raising awareness about the growing number of AI-generated publications impersonating media to mislead voters.

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## Women's Political Participation

Forty five percent of the members of the new Assembly will be women, as well as three of the five Ecuadorian members of the Andean Parliament.

The TCE's sentence, suspending the political rights of vice-president Veronica Abad for two years, set a worrying precedent in the treatment of gender-based political violence, an electoral offence introduced in the election law by the 2020 reform. The TCE ruling imposed disproportionate penalties and unduly restricted freedom of expression in the political debate. The sentence is widely considered as opening the door to the political instrumentalisation of an offence initially conceived to protect the participation of women in politics, not to limit it.

## Election day

Election day was overall calm and orderly, with isolated incidents reported by the CNE and the National Police.<sup>2</sup> The presence of political party representatives was higher than in the first round; ADN was represented in 74 per cent of polling stations visited throughout the day, and RC-RETO in 73 per cent.

Opening procedures were largely adhered to. In ten per cent of polling stations visited throughout the day, the layout did not sufficiently protect the secrecy of the vote. In eight per cent of polling stations, political party representatives were restricted in their work by either the military forces or CNE coordinators, usually requiring them to observe from outside the polling station. Voting procedures were largely respected, except the one that required polling staff to inform voters about the ban of electronic devices. In 8 out of 411 polling stations observed, military forces did not allow political representatives or EU observers to use their phones (in Cotopaxi, El Oro and Pichincha). While the EU EOM did not observe directly any case of voters trying to take a picture of their ballot, the CNE informed that throughout the day, 70 voters had been issued a notification because of a presumed electoral offence.

All polling stations observed at the end of the day closed on time. Closing and counting procedures were mostly followed, although in almost half of the observed polling stations the vote of each ballot was not read out aloud. Overall, EU observers as well as political party representatives could follow the process without undue restrictions, and the EU evaluated closing and counting as positive in 36 out of the 40 observed polling stations.

The CNE results website and mobile app functioned smoothly and published the first results half an hour after the closing of the polls. Within three hours, 90 per cent of the results protocols had been transmitted, published online and processed in the provincial tabulation centres, enabling political contestants to track the results protocol of each polling station and ensuring the transparency of the results transmission system.

On the evening of the election, staff in the provincial results processing centres started to check those results protocols that had arithmetical inconsistencies or lacked signatures (about 4.7 per cent of all protocols) and undertook recounts where necessary. Political party representatives were present in two thirds of the tabulation centres. The EU was able to observe the process without restrictions and noted that procedures were followed. No recounts had been requested

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Police, 64 persons were arrested, including because of impersonation, use of false documents and forgery of signatures.

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by political contestants during the election night. The EU EOM will continue to observe tabulation and recount processes as well as any potential legal challenges.

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An electronic version of this Preliminary Statement is available on the Mission website:

<http://www.moeue-ecuador2025.eu>

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