



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Transparent and peaceful election leads to second round with pending challenges

Quito, 11 February 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. The mission will also observe the second round of the Presidential Election. After the completion of the process, the EU EOM will publish a final report, including full analysis and possible recommendations for electoral reform.

Summary

- The preliminary results of the 9 February elections indicate that the candidates Daniel Noboa, of *Acción Democrática Nacional* (ADN) and Luisa González, of *Revolución Ciudadana* (RC), both with results close to 44 per cent, will contest the second round of the presidential election on 13 April. Both parties will dominate the National Assembly, with two blocs of similar size, neither of them reaching a majority, and will share the seats in the Andean Parliament.
- Election day was calm and peaceful. Political party representatives were present in two thirds of polling stations visited by the EU EOM. EU observers assessed the performance of polling staff as positive during voting. The counting process was assessed as transparent and well-intentioned although it could benefit from additional training. The *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (CNE) had processed and published presidential results of 75 per cent of polling stations within six hours of the closing, ensuring transparency and traceability of the results transmission.
- The CNE organised the elections efficiently and transparently, although trust in the election authorities remained very low. Its public image had deteriorated, partly due to internal disagreements, as well as delays in the renewal of its members. Despite these circumstances, election preparations went smoothly and in accordance with the electoral calendar, including the update of the voter register, which saw only a very small number of administrative complaints. The CNE displayed a high degree of transparency, including in the implementation of election technologies.
- Despite the climate of violence prevailing in some areas of the country, there was limited violence targeting candidates during the campaign. The EU EOM did not observe any significant restriction on campaigning activities as a result of the State of Emergency.
- The constitution provides for public servants running for election to take a leave of absence. President Noboa did not to request such leave and declared himself ‘in temporary absence’ during brief periods when he left the presidency to campaign. He alternated campaign activities with his presence at government events, some of which are prohibited during campaign periods. This became a key controversial issue during the campaign.

-
- Freedom of expression and media freedoms were generally respected, with most media covering the electoral process without significant limitations. EU EOM media monitoring found a pro-incumbent bias in state media. The EU EOM observed instances of online institutional advertising that contributed to a blurred distinction between Daniel Noboa's roles as president and as a candidate.
 - While the election law establishes strict regulations on political advertising in traditional and digital media to guarantee equal treatment for all candidates, social media remain an unregulated space. Although parties must report social media advertising spending to the CNE, the absence of verification mechanisms limits oversight of expenditure throughout the electoral campaign.
 - Disinformation was rife. Towards the end of the campaign, various narratives of fraud proliferated, particularly from the ranks of RC and its presidential candidate, Luisa González. The EU EOM also observed extensive AI-generated and manipulated content on social media, including paid content misusing media logos to mislead voters.
 - Ecuador holds itself to one of the highest legal standards for women's equal political participation in the region and beyond, with obligatory gender parity and alternation in candidate lists, and the introduction of closed lists in 2020, which makes this requirement more effective. The law also requires gender parity in presidential tickets. However, only two of the 16 presidential candidates were women.
 - The Constitution and the election law dedicate numerous provisions to the recognition and protection of the rights of the indigenous peoples of Ecuador, as well as the Afro-Ecuadorian communities and the Montubio people. EU EOM identified several racist messages on social media against the CNE president, Shuar people member Diana Atamaint, and afro-descendant Assembly candidate Paola Cabezas.

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 106 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 9 February, they observed in 480 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 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.

Preliminary Findings

Background

On 9 February, Ecuadorians voted for the two presidential and vice-presidential candidates who made it to the second round from a record 16 tickets, fourteen of which were headed by men. Ecuadorians also decided the composition of the next National Assembly, whose members increased to 151 as a result of the new population census, as well as the country's five representatives in the Andean Parliament. These elections mark a return to ordinary terms of office for president and Assembly after early elections in 2023, following the activation of the *muerte cruzada* constitutional mechanism by President Lasso.

Campaign Environment

Despite a widespread fear that the climate of violence prevailing in some areas of the country eventually would come to the fore during the election campaign, there was limited violence targeting candidates. The EU EOM did not observe any significant restriction on campaigning activities as a result of the prevailing State of Emergency, which imposes, among other measures, a night-time curfew in some areas of the country. However, the deteriorated security situation in parts of the coastal provinces often limited campaign activities.

The constitution provides for public servants running for election to take a leave of absence to minimise the benefits of incumbency. The president and ADN candidate decided not to request it from the Assembly and instead issued four executive orders declaring himself ‘in temporary absence due to force majeure’ during brief periods when he left the presidency to campaign, and added that, during his absences, he would not use state resources or receive a public salary. The first two decrees were both annulled by the *Corte Constitucional* (CC). The CC did not assess whether temporary absence amounts to a leave of absence, although it did state that mere difficulties arising from the holding of an office do not constitute force majeure.

During the last few weeks, President Noboa has alternated campaign activities with his presence at government events, some of which are prohibited during campaign periods, such as participating in the inauguration of public works or handing out houses to citizens in the context of public programmes. This has been compounded by a certain blurring between the government's institutional propaganda and that of his party.

Towards the end of the campaign, various narratives of fraud proliferated, particularly from the ranks of RC and its presidential candidate, Luisa González.

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 and on billboards. It also establishes ceilings for private donations to cover other campaign expenses, notably on social media. It also sets out mechanisms for the transparency of campaign accounts and oversight by the CNE, in cooperation with other public and private institutions. However, 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, limit effective supervision of campaign finances, particularly in relation to private campaign funds and their sources.

Campaign-related complaints

Few complaints during the election campaign were registered with the *Tribunal Contencioso Electoral* (TCE). President Noboa faces three complaints for campaigning without taking a leave of absence and for using public resources for electoral purposes, filed by *Partido Unidad Popular* and *Partido Social Cristiano*. The cases are being studied, and a hearing will be held in the next few months. Although the law provides that election offence complaints should be resolved within 30 days of their admission, in practice, this often takes several months, as these proceedings retain strong safeguards for the right of defence. The CNE filled two complaints against ADN legislative candidates who had allegedly distributed state-owned stoves.

Legal Framework

The Ecuadorian Constitution and legislation are in line with international standards for democratic elections. The country has ratified all relevant international and regional treaties relevant to elections and political participation. The Constitution prevents electoral reform during the year prior to an election. In a context marked by the *muerte cruzada* and 2023 early elections, there have been no electoral reforms since 2020, when the *Código de la Democracia* (Election Law) was extensively amended. As a result, none of the recommendations of the 2021 and 2023 EU electoral expert missions that required legislative amendments have been adopted, although improvements have been made in CNE public outreach.

Election Administration

The CNE organised the elections in an efficient and transparent manner, despite the erosion of its reputation among both the public and opposition parties during recent years. The CNE councillors have been in office since November 2018 as the nominating body, the *Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social* (CPCCS), has been unable to renew the council within the timeframes stipulated in the Constitution. Recent criticisms against the CNE were partly related to alleged inaction in relation to President Noboa not requesting a leave of absence, contributing to accusations of bias. Internal dissent also tarnished the council's image. CNE members were the subject of disinformation about their public statements in social media and, in the case of the CNE president, of attacks and hate speech.

Despite this context, the election preparations went smoothly and in accordance with the electoral calendar. The EU EOM observed that the CNE, including its provincial offices, operated with experienced staff and in a professional manner. Polling staff was selected on time, and the vast majority attended compulsory training. Election materials were printed, assembled and dispatched as scheduled, including to the 39 countries where Ecuadorians living abroad could vote. However, out-of-country voting in Venezuela and Israel was cancelled due to the lack of Ecuadorian consular staff and security considerations, respectively. The election administration at all levels was open to EU observers and provided access to all requested information. In another display of transparency, the CNE accredited over 1,300 national and international election observers. Political party representatives were invited to the different phases of the election preparations, including the technical tests, but EU observers noted low attendance.

The CNE's electronic results management system, developed in-house, incorporated best practices in terms of transparency and security. Measures were taken to protect it against most foreseeable risks such as power outages and cyber-attacks, and it enabled full traceability of individual polling station results for stakeholders and the public.

As in previous electoral processes, the CNE implemented a range of measures to make voting more accessible for persons with disabilities, such as voting from home, braille ballot sleeves, and help desks in every polling centre. At the end of 2024, the CNE launched three voter information campaigns, disseminated via traditional media and the CNE's social networks. In the weeks leading up to election day, a series of informational programmes on various aspects of the electoral process were aired during primetime on the most widely viewed channels (*cadena nacional*). Still, at local level, EU observers noted a lack of voter education activities.

Voter Register

The 2008 Constitution establishes voting rights for citizens over the age of 16, including those living abroad, as well as for non-convicted prisoners and foreigners with more than five years of legal residency in the country. The voter register, based on the civil register and updated by the CNE for each election, was generally perceived as inclusive and accurate. During a two-week period in June 2024, political parties and citizens were able to submit complaints to the CNE in relation to the voter register. None was submitted by political parties, and very few were filed by citizens, most of which were accepted by the CNE.

Candidate Registration

Ecuadorian law provides an inclusive framework for candidate registration through political parties, movements or alliances, with no excessive or arbitrary restrictions. The election law requires gender parity in candidate lists, as well as for young citizens to make up at least 25 per cent of all candidates within a list. The CNE verifies compliance with legal requirements, which include the selection of candidates through internal democratic processes. CNE decisions can be appealed before the *Tribunal Contencioso Electoral*. Of the sixteen presidential tickets, only two were headed by a woman.

Of the 543 lists which sought to register for the different elections, 48 were disqualified. Four of these were national assembly lists, including those of *Construye* and *Pachakutik*, which had won parliamentary seats in 2023 and had failed to respect the requirement of internal democracy. However, the most controversial disqualification concerned presidential would-be candidate Jan Topic, who came fourth in the first round of the 2023 presidential election. The CNE approved his candidacy, but its decision was appealed by *Pachakutik* and the *Partido Sociedad Patriótica* to the TCE. The TCE disqualified Topic, considering he was subject to the constitutional prohibition on standing while having a contract with the state for the provision of public services. However, the fact that the conclusive evidence relied on by the TCE was kept confidential and was not communicated to Topic raised doubts about the respect for his right to defence.

Media

Freedoms of expression and of the press were largely respected during the campaign period, with media granted access to most presidential and assembly candidates. However, the mission received credible reports of “information blackout zones” in several regions, where journalists face threats or violence when reporting on the nexus between organised crime and politics. State mechanisms for the protection of journalists remain chronically underfunded, and often effectively rely on civil society organisations to function. Self-censorship, particularly at the local and regional levels, was widely acknowledged by media professionals seeking to avoid reprisals.

The *Fondo de Promoción Electoral* is a state-administered mechanism that serves as the exclusive means for parties and candidates to purchase political advertising in traditional media and digital news websites pre-approved by the CNE, ensuring equitable access for candidates to these communication channels. Each presidential ticket was allocated slightly over \$300,000, covering less than an hour of primetime television advertising on the leading channels for the entire campaign period. Digital news websites relying on Google Ads,

including outlets that had not opted into the fund, reported having no control over the political adverts displayed on their sites.

EU EOM media monitoring¹ found that media coverage and political advertising during the campaign period demonstrated an imbalance in favour of Daniel Noboa, both in quantity and tone. State-owned media played a significant role in this disparity, but private outlets also contributed to it. Government advertisements were closely aligned with Daniel Noboa's campaign messages.

Social media

Online platforms were an essential campaign tool for most candidates. With youth representing the largest voting segment, TikTok emerged as the dominant campaign platform, followed by Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and X, widely used to target specific groups. WhatsApp was widely used to mobilise voters and share toxic narratives through networks of groups.

Based on the results of the social media monitoring carried out by the EU EOM, ADN and RC presidential candidates' much larger follower base granted them broader organic reach, although the real driver behind viral content online was paid promotion. In this regard, Luisa González and Daniel Noboa stood out as the two candidates who invested the most, significantly amplifying their visibility across all platforms. While the election law establishes strict regulations on political advertising in traditional and digital media to guarantee equal treatment for all candidates, social media remains an unregulated space, allowing for disparities in visibility and reach, and contributing to an uneven playing field. 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 EU EOM observed extensive dissemination of paid campaign contents on Meta platforms, Google, X and TikTok. While parties are required to report their campaign spending for advertising on social media to the CNE, the lack of reliable mechanisms to verify that the amounts declared correspond to those actually spent limits the CNE's ability to verify compliance with expenditure ceilings.

After the debate, Andrea González gained visibility and social media engagement, and rose in the polls to the third position, although still far from the two leading contenders. The sudden shutdown of her main campaign platform, Instagram, limited her reach. Meta did not respond promptly to her request for clarification.

Alongside promotion of genuine campaign programmes, social media were widely used to spread disinformation, including through YouTube accounts created for the campaign, as well as organic and paid posts falsifying media logos. This strategy undermined users' ability to discern reliable sources of political information.

Multiple tactics were used to discredit candidates, including AI-generated smear campaign ads boosted to reach a larger audience through a segmentation strategy. Trolls and bots spread hate speech and sexist slurs against female candidates.

¹ Since 05 January 2025, the mission has monitored *Teleamazonas*, *Ecuavisa*, and *TC Televisión* (07:00–08:00, 18:00–23:00); *Radio Sucre*, *Radio Democracia*, and *Radio Pública FM* (06:00–09:00, 17:00–20:00); newspapers *El Universo* and *Expreso*; and digital media *Primicias*, *El Telégrafo*, and *El Comercio*.

Women's participation

Ecuador holds itself to one of the highest legal standards for women's equality in political participation in the region and beyond, with obligatory gender parity and alternation in the lists, and the introduction of closed lists in 2020 made this requirement more effective. In fact, 44 per cent of the outgoing assembly members were women. The law also requires gender parity in presidential tickets. Only two of the 16 presidential candidates were women.

Since 2020, gender-based political violence is a serious electoral crime, and the TCE has often imposed maximum penalties, such as dismissal or loss of political rights of elected officials in the most serious cases.

LGBTI political participation

The principle of non-discrimination is enshrined in the Constitution and the law. The civil recognition of gender identity in the Organic Law of Identity and Civil Data Management has allowed transgender people to have their gender identity reflected in the civil registry, and thereafter in their identity card and the voter register. After a LGTBI rights organisation denounced a statement by a presidential candidate as homophobic, the TCE urged the CNE to ensure that the electoral campaign was conducted in a non-discriminatory manner.

Political participation of national minorities

Ecuador has ratified the most important international and regional treaties on non-discrimination and the protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities. The Constitution and the election law dedicate numerous provisions to the recognition and protection of the rights of the different indigenous peoples of Ecuador, as well as the Afro-Ecuadorian communities and the Montubio people. The election law enables the CNE to introduce, through regulations, affirmative action measures to favour their political inclusion. However, no such regulations have been adopted to date. Training for polling staff in native languages was observed in provinces with a substantial indigenous population, and the CNE published video tutorials in Shuar Chicham and Kichwa languages. EU EOM social media monitoring identified several racist messages against the CNE's president, Shuar people member Diana Atamaint, and afro-descendant assembly candidate Paola Cabezas.

Election day

Election day was calm and peaceful. Throughout the day, political party representatives were present in 69 per cent of polling stations visited by the EU EOM; in 40 per cent of polling stations, the two main presidential candidacies were represented. Early on election day, the EU EOM observed some difficulties in the access of party representatives to the polling stations, which were gradually addressed during the day.

Polling stations visited in the morning opened on time or with slight delays, mostly due to the unpreparedness or late arrival of polling staff. Opening procedures were largely followed. Throughout voting, EU observers assessed the performance of polling staff as positive in 96 per cent of polling stations; only few complaints were registered in the polling stations visited by the EU EOM. Overall, voting was assessed as good or very good by EU observers in almost all polling stations. Thirty per cent of polling stations visited throughout the day were not

accessible for people with disabilities. Positively, CNE help desks for voters with disabilities were functioning in most polling centres visited by the EU EOM.

During the counting process, the insufficient training of polling staff, who had problems to fill the results protocols in 18 out of 41 cases, became evident. Still, the process was assessed as transparent by EU observers who did not detect any attempt to manipulate the results. Within six hours of the closing of the polls, the CNE had processed and published presidential results of 75 per cent of polling stations, ensuring transparency and traceability of the results transmission. The EU EOM will continue to observe the process in the Results Processing Centres at provincial level as well as the aggregation of official results.

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

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

   @moeUEcuador25

For further information, please contact:

Verónica Sánchez, Press Officer, tel. (+593) 0958686471

veronica.sanchez@moeye-ecuador2025.eu

European Union Election Observation Mission

Swissôtel Quito, planta 2. Avenida 12 de octubre 1820. Quito, Ecuador
