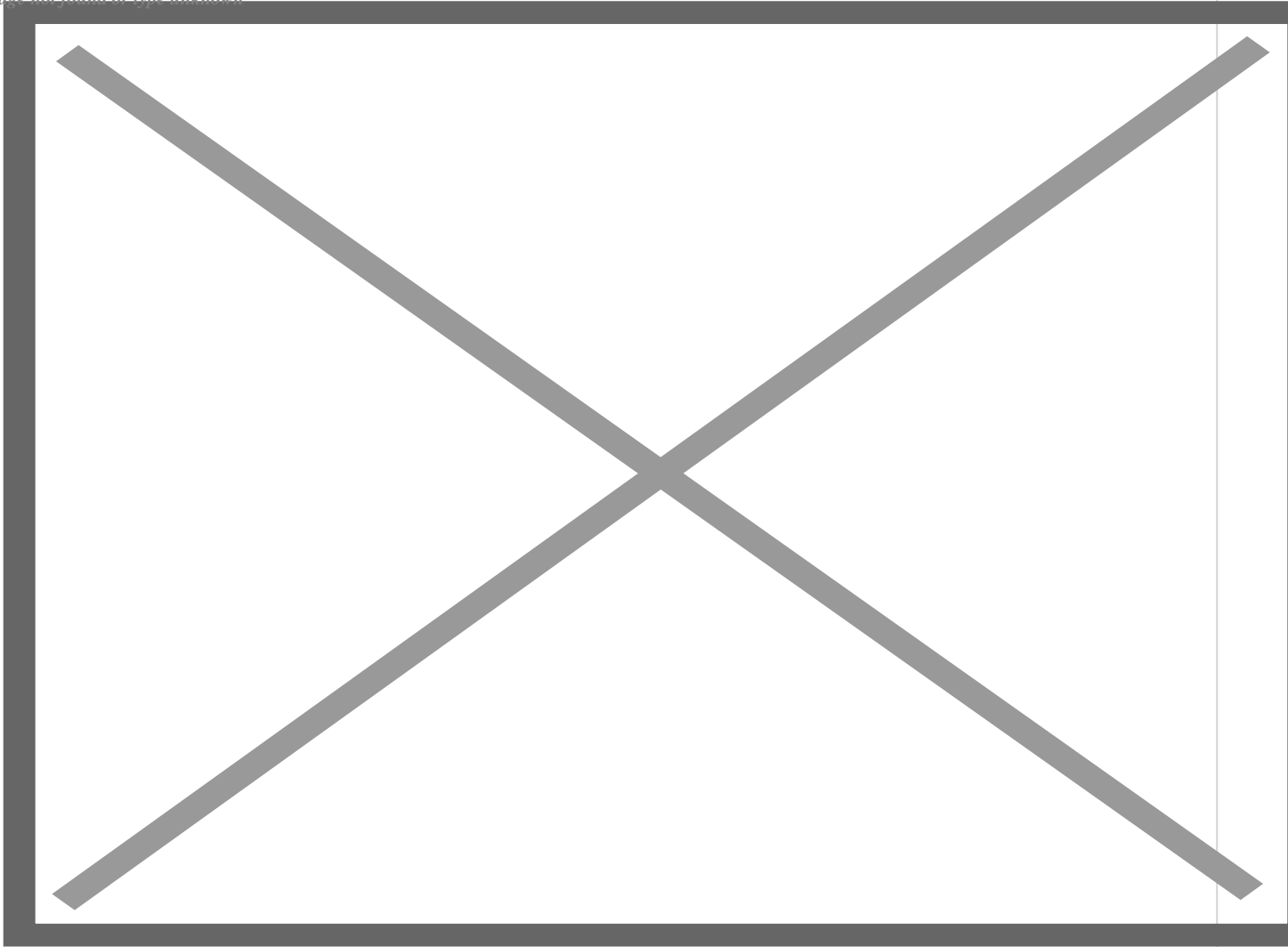


Ecuadorians go to the polls amid economic crisis

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Ecuadorians go to the polls amid economic crisis

Quito, February 6 (RHC)-- Ecuadorians will head to the polls on Sunday to elect a new president amid widespread discontent over the country's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, an economic crisis worsened by COVID-19, and several corruption scandals.

Sixteen presidential candidates will be on the ballot, though most have polled under two percent support and are not expected to be major contenders on voting day.

The race is shaping up to be a fight between ex-banker and longtime presidential hopeful Guillermo Lasso, and Andres Arauz, an economist and former head of the central bank, who are leading in most recent polls with around 25 to 30 percent support.

Lasso, with the right-wing Creating Opportunities (CREO) party, has pledged to create jobs through more international investments and oil extraction projects, while Arauz of the Democratic Center party has promised to return to the socialist policies of former President Rafael Correa.

Third in recent polls, at about 10 to 15 percentage points behind the pair, is Yaku Perez of Pachakutik, the party of the country's Indigenous movement, who is known for his opposition to mining and support for greater environmental protections.

Experts say it is unlikely that anyone will get the 40 percent support and at least a 10-point lead over their opponents that is needed to win the presidency, which means a runoff will be held on April 11 between the top two candidates.

The elections will be monitored by more than 2,500 local and 225 international observers, including the Organization of American States, the European Union, and the Inter-American Union of Electoral Organizations.

Voters will also elect lawmakers to fill 137 seats in the National Assembly.

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