

Ecuador votes in presidential election led by Daniel Noboa, Luisa Gonzalez



Quito, February 9 (RHC)-- Voters in Ecuador are picking their next president in a race dominated by the country's security crisis and struggling economy. Polls opened at 7.am local time (12:00 GMT) on Sunday and will close 10 hours later (22:00 GMT).

Fifteen candidates are challenging hard-right incumbent President Daniel Noboa, the 37-year-old son of a billionaire banana magnate who ascended to power just 14 months ago. His top challenger is left-wing lawmaker Luisa Gonzalez, a 47-year-old protege of former President Rafael Correa.

Gonzalez will have to dramatically outperform pre-election polls to beat frontrunner Noboa, whose iron-fisted – or “mano dura” – approach to crime is considered by experts a key factor in his projected lead.

If no candidate gets 50 percent of the vote, or 40 percent with a 10-point lead on the nearest rival, there will be a second-round run-off on April 13.

The campaigns have largely focused on concerns about the slumping economy and cartel turf wars that have turned Ecuador from one of the safest countries in the world to one of the most dangerous.

Noboa, first elected in 2023 to finish out his predecessor's term, says his deployment of the military on the streets and within prisons has helped reduce violent deaths by 15 percent, led to a drastic fall in prison violence, and facilitated the capture of major gang leaders.

"Today, Ecuador has changed and wants to keep changing, it wants to consolidate its triumph," Noboa said at a closing campaign rally on Thursday in the capital, Quito. "This Sunday, reclaim your ability to dream."

But the president's rivals have said more needs to be done to fight the drug trade-related crime that has rocked Ecuador in recent years.

Gonzalez says she would respond to crime with military and police operations, pursue allegedly corrupt judges and prosecutors and implement a social spending plan in the most violent areas.

"We can't talk about controlling violence without thinking of social justice, of building an Ecuador with peace, not with war," said Gonzalez. "We are moving toward this transformation with each one of you ... we'll save ourselves, together."

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and NEWS AGENCIES]

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/376174-ecuador-votes-in-presidential-election-led-by-daniel-noboa-luisa-gonzalez>



Radio Habana Cuba