



OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Ecuador Presents Recommendations Ahead of Second Round of Presidential Elections

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The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS/EOM) in Ecuador, led by former Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernández, is presenting findings and recommendations in order to point out areas of progress and identify opportunities for improvement ahead of the second round of the presidential elections, which will be held on April 2.

During the pre-electoral stage, the Mission —comprised of 66 observers and experts— met with electoral and government authorities, candidate tickets, and representatives of civil society. It is important to note that the OAS/EOM maintained an open-door policy so that all political actors could express their points of view about the electoral process.

During this stage, the OAS/EOM took note of complaints and challenges expressed by citizens and political organizations regarding the preparation and purging of the electoral roll, a document that is created based on the Civil Registry. The Mission verified that there were inconsistencies stemming from the process of modernizing the Civil Registry and digitizing and inputting Ecuadorian citizens' physical records. The Mission also observed that deceased individuals were registered, as they could not be eliminated without a death certificate.

However, these situations cannot be considered a deliberate alteration of the electoral roll. The OAS/EOM has observed improvements in the voter list when compared with past elections. One such improvement is the incorporation of a photograph of the voter, a measure recommended by previous OAS missions in Ecuador. To increase confidence in the process, something that might be considered as an additional voting security measure is the use of indelible ink to mark the voter's finger.

On Election Day, OAS observers visited 375 voting centers in 17 provinces in the country. Despite some difficulties during the day, the Mission observed areas of progress in the organization and management of the elections, and it recognizes the efforts made by officials of the National Electoral Council (CNE), led by its president, Juan Pablo Pozo.

The Mission welcomes the steps taken to expand the exercise of political rights for all Ecuadorians through mechanisms for at-home voting and voting by persons deprived of liberty

who have not been convicted of a crime. The Mission also notes the installation of special polling stations to attend and assist people with disabilities, elderly people, people holding children in their arms, and pregnant women. In addition, the OAS/EOM recognizes the efforts made to facilitate voting in the LGBTI community by allowing voters to queue up according to the gender with which they identify with.

The members of the Mission reported that all the polling stations observed were set up at 7:30 a.m., on average, and had the necessary electoral materials on hand for people to vote. The OAS/EOM verified that the polling places were adequate for people to be able to cast their ballots in secret and securely, and it notes the important presence of security forces, who worked with citizens who needed assistance inside the polling places. During the set-up of the polling stations, the Mission observed that not many delegates from political organizations were present, although their numbers increased as the day went on.

The combination voting booth/ballot box that was used for the first time in this electoral process had some drawbacks. In addition to the complications of assembling it, the Mission noted that the security tape provided by the CNE had not been used in the assembly process, and the spaces into which the ballots were dropped were too small to handle the size and number of ballots. In addition, there was some confusion observed as citizens went to deposit their votes, as once the ballots had been folded, the voter could not identify which office they corresponded to and therefore which slot they should go in. The OAS/EOM suggests modifying the design of the voting booths and establishing a mechanism to make it easier for the voter to identify the respective ballots.

During the voting process, the Mission received three complaints from voters who saw marked ballots in the polling stations. Even though this situation was pointed out on social media, the truth is that it involved isolated cases and the ballots that were called into question were not recorded. To create more confidence in the process, the Mission suggests that the members of the polling stations inspect the ballots and sign them before the voting begins.

The Mission recognizes the efforts made by the CNE to include a large percentage of young people as members of polling stations. It also noted that the percentage of people who had been trained was higher than in the 2013 election. However, OAS observers reported that some of the processes carried out at precincts varied from one polling station to another.

In this regard, the OAS/EOM suggests carrying out refresher training sessions in the days before the second round of the presidential elections to reinforce and solidify the concepts so that members of polling stations can carry out their tasks as established in the training manuals.

After the polls closed, the OAS/EOM observed that members of polling stations sometimes filled out the official statements of poll with the red marker meant for filling out the draft statements of poll. As the system was not set up to read red ink, these official statements of

poll were not immediately published on the website, which delayed the scrutiny process at the provincial electoral boards. The Mission suggests eliminating the red marker for the second round of the presidential elections.

The Mission observed arithmetic errors in the process of filling out statements of poll; these accounted for most of the inconsistencies and caused delays in the vote count. Public hearings at the provincial electoral boards allowed these inconsistencies to be cleared up.

The participation of delegates from political organizations, national observers, the news media, and various international organizations that were there to accompany and observe the elections provided additional assurances to the electoral process.

During the counting process, political delegates were present at most of the polling stations observed, and these delegates were given a copy of the Statement of Poll of Public Information or Summary of Results. The Mission noted that this statement of poll contained the same information as the two other statements of poll and observed that, even though political organizations had expressed their concern before the elections, there were no problems with this in practice.

The process of taking the official statements of poll to the area where they would be scanned and transmitted, and then to the provincial election board, was carried out securely. The OAS/EOM underscores the CNE's decision to eliminate the intermediary boards for this election. This facilitated and accelerated the scrutiny process.

In terms of the release of results, the OAS/EOM observed that from the time the first official statements of poll arrived at the scanning and transmission area, the results were tallied and posted online. It was noted that the release of results online was interrupted for a few minutes around 8:50 p.m. The Mission recommends conducting an analysis of the system and strengthening its capacity.

The Mission commends the initiative of posting online all statements of poll that were processed, making them available to citizens and making this stage of the process transparent. However, the Mission considers that there should be better coordination between technical staff of the CNE and of the political organizations so that the latter do not encounter obstacles when the time comes to receive results and can do the appropriate cross-checking of information, thus averting some of the complaints filed by the parties.

Once the polls had closed, results of exit polls were released. These mechanisms should serve to inform citizens; however, the Mission could observe that in some cases they were used for political purposes.

The OAS/EOM also noted that some candidates proclaimed themselves to be winners without waiting for the official results to be published. The Mission reiterates its call to all players to act responsibly and prudently. Attacks on electoral institutions do not foster citizens' confidence in the process. During this stage, the electoral management body kept citizens continuously informed and proved itself to be the guardian of the people's will.

After the second round of the presidential elections, the Mission will issue a report with additional recommendations on structural aspects of the electoral process, including issues such as women's political participation, campaign financing, and electoral justice.

Finally, the OAS/EOM appreciates the cooperation it has received from electoral authorities and officials, as well as from the Ecuadorian people, which enabled it to properly carry out its observation activities. The Mission also appreciates the contributions made by Bolivia, Korea, Spain, the United States, Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Serbia, which made the deployment of this Mission possible.