

Early Returns Point to Runoff in Ecuador

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QUITO, Ecuador, Oct. 15 — [Ecuador](#)'s voters appeared to be split Sunday between Álvaro Noboa, a banana magnate who favors close ties to the United States, and Rafael Correa, a leftist who is an admirer of Venezuela's [Hugo Chávez](#) and who, like Mr. Chávez, is known for his anti-American rhetoric.

Based on early election returns, the two men are likely to face a runoff on Nov. 26.

As of 11:45 p.m. local time, with 61 percent of the votes counted, Mr. Noboa was leading with 26.7 percent of the vote to 22.4 percent for Mr. Correa.

To avoid a runoff, one of the candidates needs to win a majority or 40 percent of the vote plus a 10 percentage-point lead over the nearest opponent. There were 13 candidates in the race.

Mr. Noboa's strong showing came as something of a surprise. In the final days of the campaign, Mr. Noboa, 55, a Swiss-educated billionaire scion of an elite family in Guayaquil, said he would limit political ties to Venezuela and fiercely criticized Mr. Correa's positions. He has also said he is strongly in favor of negotiating a trade agreement with the United States.

Mr. Correa angrily reacted on Sunday to the attacks from Mr. Noboa and said his campaign might have suffered from fraud in the electronic systems used to count votes.

"The irresponsible Noboa says I want to turn this country into a Cuba," he said. "This is not the case."

Mr. Noboa, who ran an unusual campaign combining right-wing ideology and populist promises, has made it to the second round of presidential elections twice before, losing each time. In this campaign, he appeared before audiences grasping a Bible and promising to build cheap housing, attract foreign investment and distribute computers.

In recent weeks, Mr. Correa, 43, had surged in the polls after railing against Ecuador's political establishment and criticizing American influence in the country.

Mr. Correa said he opposed negotiating a free trade treaty with the United States, jolted Wall Street banks by saying he would seek to renegotiate Ecuador's foreign debt and said he would end an arrangement allowing the United States military to use an air base in Manta, on the Pacific Coast, for drug surveillance flights.

"We can negotiate with the U.S. about a base in Manta, and if they let us put a military base in Miami, if there is no problem, we'll accept," Mr. Correa recently told reporters.

Mr. Correa cast himself as an anti-establishment candidate of a different stripe from other leftist populists in the region, who have largely had military or trade union backgrounds. An obscure university professor until briefly serving as economy minister last year, he dresses in well-tailored suits and speaks fluent English and French as well as some Quechua.

He obtained postgraduate degrees in economics from the [University of Illinois](#) and Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium.

But despite that background, Mr. Correa, like many of his countrymen, dislikes many of the reforms recommended a decade ago by international lending institutions, including those strongly influenced by the United States. Mr. Correa has taken inspiration from the nationalist policies of Mr. Chávez, supporting greater government control over Ecuador's oil industry and acknowledging warm ties to him.

Those types of nontraditional positions played well with some voters.

"He's going to end the Congress, which is a sewer," Cristina Navas, 37, said of Mr. Correa after voting today.

But others expressed fears. "Venezuela is a petroleum country; Ecuador is a country with petroleum," said Vicente Bustamante, 46, a lawyer. "Venezuela can subsist on its own outside any economic bloc; we are part of the international community."

Mr. Correa met with Mr. Chávez in Venezuela in August, spending the night at the home of Mr. Chávez's parents in Barinas, the provincial cattle-raising region where Mr. Chávez was raised. Still, Mr. Correa denied receiving Venezuelan

financing and emphasized a desire to also forge close ties with other leaders in the region.

While his background differs from that of Mr. Chávez, a former army officer, and President Evo Morales of Bolivia, a supporter of energy nationalization who is Mr. Chávez's closest ally in the Andes, Mr. Correa embraced their explicit criticism of the United States. At one point he described President Bush as a "tremendously dimwitted president who has done great damage to his country and to the world."

The rising distaste here for Washington belies economic and social ties to the United States that may be closer than ever. Ecuador uses the United States dollar as its currency, a six-year-old stabilization effort even Mr. Correa said needed to remain in place. More than 1 million Ecuadoreans are estimated to have immigrated to the United States since the 1990's, forming large communities in such states as New York, Florida and Illinois. The money they send home has become a vital source of income here. The United States, meanwhile, relies on Ecuador as its third-largest supplier of oil in South America after Venezuela and Brazil.

The winner of a runoff next month would face a perennial challenge: completing his term. Ecuador, which allows its Congress to remove presidents with ease, has had 7 presidents in the last 10 years.

Much of the next government's fortunes will depend on the price of oil, which is subject to the vagaries of the global energy market. Each \$1 decline in oil prices translates into a \$200 million decline in national income in Ecuador and a fall of 0.5 percent of gross domestic product, according to Barclays Capital.

Mr. Correa also showed signs of fatigue in recent days, potentially providing an opening for Mr. Noboa to adroitly appeal to voters in the likely runoff.

Adrián Bonilla, a noted analyst and director of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences here, where Mr. Correa once gave classes, said Mr. Correa was not as radical as some say. That may be why some prominent financiers and businessmen have backed him.

"Correa is clearly against the status quo, but that doesn't make him a Marxist or a messianic leader like Chávez," said Mr. Bonilla. "He's not about to turn Ecuador into a client state of Venezuela."

Mr. Chávez, for his part, has remained uncharacteristically restrained in commenting on the race, perhaps out of concern that he might weaken Mr. Correa's chances. Opponents of leftist populist presidential candidates in both Peru and Mexico won elections this year after attacking their rivals' perceived ties to Mr. Chávez.