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Daniel Noboa’s Re-Election

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April 2025

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The re-election of Daniel Noboa in Ecuador's April 2025 presidential election marks a critical moment in the country's turbulent political trajectory. At just 37 years old, Noboa's renewed mandate extends his authority amid a fraught national context of economic contraction, escalating criminal violence, and institutional fragmentation. Despite securing a decisive electoral victory, his political legitimacy is being challenged by his opponent Luisa González, raising questions about his domestic governance and Ecuador's international orientation, including its nascent but potentially increasing engagement with the Gulf region.

Noboa's victory was officially confirmed when Ecuador's National Electoral Council declared the result an "irreversible trend" with over 90% of ballots counted. Noboa secured 55.87% of the vote, defeating leftwing rival Luisa González of the Citizen Revolution movement, who garnered 44.13%. The vote margin—over 1.1 million ballots—was significant, and international observers from both the European Union and the Organization of American States affirmed the transparency of the electoral process.

Nevertheless, González refused to accept, claiming a "grotesque electoral fraud" and demanding a recount and the opening of ballot boxes. Her claims, despite lacking concrete evidence and standing in contrast to independent observations, have resonated with her base, some of whom have protested and called for legal action. This scenario repeats broader trends in Latin America, where electoral outcomes are increasingly contested in populist and polarized political environments.

While the legal foundation of Noboa's win appears secure, the political implications of González's refusal to recognize the results could hamper his domestic agenda. Social fragmentation, coupled with a weakened institutional trust, may limit his room for maneuver unless he can quickly re-establish cross-partisan legitimacy.

Noboa's first term was defined by aggressive moves to curb the spiraling violence linked to drug cartels and organized crime. His security doctrine drew comparisons to the approach of El Salvador's President, Nayib Bukele, involving military deployments, the declaration of a state of internal armed conflict, and constitutional reforms to allow foreign military bases.

Economically, Ecuador remains under severe pressure. In 2024, GDP contracted by 2.5%, the poverty rate rose to over 31%, and informal employment surged. Noboa responded with fiscal measures including a VAT hike from 12% to 15%, a move designed to fund the anti-crime push but criticized for its regressive effects on the poor. Yet his re-election, and the subsequent drop in Ecuador's country risk index—from 1,908 to 1,282 points—suggest a level of investor confidence in his administration's stability and direction, particularly with regard to public debt obligations and economic management.

Noboa's continued leadership may also mark a turn in Ecuador's foreign policy, especially in relation to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Historically, Ecuador's engagement with the GCC has been minimal, overshadowed by Brazil and Mexico in Latin America–Gulf relations. However, changing geopolitical and economic dynamics provide a promising ground for increased cooperation. Noboa's administration, with its pro-business orientation and active search for diversified international partnerships, may see the GCC as an attractive bloc for trade, investment, and diplomatic outreach. Ecuador's agricultural export potential aligns well with the GCC's food security strategies, and its energy and mining sectors could also attract Gulf investment. Moreover, shared interests in regional stability and counter-narcotics might offer openings for security and intelligence collaboration.

Additionally, Noboa's offers to the United States—including talks about establishing a U.S. military base and free trade agreement—signal a Western-aligned foreign policy that may appeal to key Gulf states such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, who value stable partnerships with Washington's allies. At the same time, Ecuador must balance these interests against its regional integration goals, particularly with left-leaning governments in neighboring states such as Colombia and Chile.

International responses to Noboa's victory have been largely positive. Regional leaders—including Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Uruguay's Yamandú Orsi, and Chile's Gabriel Boric—have all recognized his win and expressed a willingness to deepen cooperation. Lula's message emphasized multilateralism, South American integration, and sustainable development in the Amazon—key themes that may align with both regional and Gulf diplomatic agendas. Uruguay's cautious approach—delaying recognition until the electoral dispute subsided—reflects broader concerns about democratic legitimacy in Latin America. Nonetheless, Noboa's broad regional acceptance may bolster his credibility abroad and provide the diplomatic capital necessary to expand Ecuador's external engagements.

Daniel Noboa's re-election offers a mix of continuity and uncertainty. On one hand, it affirms the Ecuadorian electorate's preference for a security-oriented, technocratic approach to governance. On the other, domestic polarization and economic fragility pose persistent risks to governability. For international actors, particularly in the GCC, Noboa's second term represents an opportunity: Ecuador could serve as a gateway for Gulf interests in Latin America, provided it can stabilize internally and implement a coherent foreign policy strategy. Ecuador's relationship with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries remains modest but steadily evolving and there is room to grow. Trade data from 2023 reveals that Ecuador has established varying degrees of commercial ties with several GCC members, with the United Arab Emirates emerging as the most significant partner. Ecuador exported $617 million to the UAE, predominantly in gold, making it the 13th largest destination for Ecuadorian exports. In contrast, exports to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman were notably smaller, primarily consisting of agricultural products like bananas, while imports from these nations included industrial goods such as coal tar oil from Saudi Arabia, aluminum wire from Bahrain, and fish oil from Oman.

This pattern highlights the complementary nature of Ecuador-GCC trade, with Ecuador supplying natural and agricultural commodities and the GCC states exporting industrial, petrochemical, and processed products. Despite the economic asymmetry—GCC countries generally have higher GDP per capita and more diversified export portfolios—these exchanges offer a foundation for deeper collaboration. The modest trade volumes indicate untapped potential, particularly in food security, energy cooperation, and investment in infrastructure or sustainable development initiatives.

However, several challenges hinder the expansion of these ties. Geographical distance and limited logistical connectivity can inflate transport costs and complicate supply chains. Moreover, the lack of robust bilateral or multilateral trade agreements between Ecuador and the GCC can act as a barrier to scaling up commercial activities. On the other hand, opportunities exist in sectors such as agribusiness, mining, renewable energy, and tourism. Ecuador could attract investment from GCC sovereign wealth funds seeking diversification in emerging markets, while the GCC can benefit from reliable food imports and new partnerships in Latin America. For the relationship to grow beyond its current modest level, both sides would benefit from targeted diplomatic engagement and trade facilitation efforts, and an exchange of investments.

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