
Ecuador, a Powder Keg

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31/10/2025



Three weeks after the protests against Daniel Noboa's government began, the movement upholds its fighting spirit, despite intensifying official repression and half the country being under a state of emergency, exacerbated by two attempts to execute the millionaire president.

What began as a protest over the elimination of the diesel subsidy has changed into a broad movement rejecting the government.

Despite the tensions caused by some Indigenous leaders' betrayal of the pact with the opposition Citizens' Revolution in the last elections—which led to a Noboa victory tainted by suspicions of fraud—the party representing Correísmo emphasized this Friday its support for the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and that it will continue to offer aid to the protesters.

"I ask Mr. Noboa, just as he orders his ministers to meet with criminal gang leaders in a well-appointed 'little room,' to respond to the call made by the authorities of CONAI in the province of Imbabura," said the leader of the Correísmo movement, Luisa González.

Previously, González had offered lawyers, food, and all kinds of support to the protesters on strike, and she challenged President Daniel Noboa to go after her and not her activists, because she is the one who gives the directives, emphasizing:

"Here is Luisa González, I am the president of this organization. If you want to go after someone, don't go after my comrades. I am here to represent them, to speak for them, and to confront you. If you want to come after someone, I will wait for you here. I am not afraid of you. You are the one who hides, the one who doesn't come out, the one who doesn't show your face (...) and as long as I am at the helm of the Citizens' Revolution, there will be no lukewarmness or pacts."

QUESTIONS

Ecuador is experiencing significant social mobilizations. The streets of Quito and other cities in the country have become the stage of clashes between protesters and security forces, as part of the national strike called by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). President Daniel Noboa's economic measures, which have procured to the International Monetary Fund, are strongly questioned by several sectors of the country.

The discontent over the elimination of the diesel subsidy has transformed into a broad movement rejecting the government of President Daniel Noboa, who faces growing criticism for his handling of the economic crisis, police repression, and his proposal for a new Constituent Assembly.

Indigenous leaders denounced the executive branch's "excessive use of force" and "warlike policies," and CONAIE President Marlon Vargas condemned the events and held the government directly responsible for the acts of violence. "The right to protest is legitimate and "It's protected by the Constitution," he stated.

Vargas also noted that "repression does not bring peace, it only deepens indignation and strengthens the people's resistance," referring to the widespread social discontent that is already spreading beyond Indigenous communities. On their banners, protesters responded to the official rhetoric that labeled them "terrorists" with slogans such as "We are mothers, not terrorists" and "The people do not surrender."

TRIGGER

The trigger for the conflict was the elimination of the diesel subsidy, decreed by Noboa on September 12. The measure raised the price of fuel from \$1.80 to \$2.80 per gallon, particularly affecting farmers, transporters, and rural communities that depend on diesel for their daily activities.

But as the days passed, the demands of the Indigenous movement expanded. Conaie is now demanding a reduction in the value-added tax (VAT) from 15% to 12%, improvements in health and education, and the rejection of the A referendum called by the president for November 16th will be held to discuss the establishment of a Constituent Assembly.

The government, for its part, accuses indigenous leaders of promoting political destabilization and taking advantage of the protests to weaken the executive branch.

Noboa has asserted that "no one can come and take over the capital by force" and has reiterated his willingness to "apply the law." Despite this, CONAIE leaders have announced a "radicalization of the strike" and threaten to spread the protests to more cities if channels of dialogue are not opened.

So far, the protests have left one protester dead from alleged gunfire by the Army, around 160 wounded among civilians and law enforcement officers, and more than 110 arrested, according to official figures and human rights organizations.

SYMBOL

In Ecuador, fuel is not just an economic good. It's also a political symbol. And touching it without prior consensus can be devastating. This can have consequences that are difficult to contain. Lenín Moreno experienced this in 2019, when an uprising led by the indigenous movement forced him to retreat. Guillermo Lasso attempted the same three years later, resulting in weeks of clashes, injuries, deaths, and a political fracture from which he never recovered.

Aware of what social mobilization can cause, Noboa moved the Executive Branch to the city of Latacunga, in the province of Cotopaxi, 100 kilometers from Quito. There, in the mountains, some of the most organized indigenous communities are concentrated. And also the most combative. State abandonment and the broken promises have fueled the large mobilizations that have marked the last decade. "We see it as a persecution of the indigenous movement, a way to provoke the organizations, the grassroots, and we will not allow that," declared Rafael Negrete, president of the Indigenous and Peasant Movement of Cotopaxi.

Latacunga is also home to indigenous leaders who have led protests in the past like Lourdes Tibán and Leonidas Iza, the former presidential candidate who led the protests against Lasso in 2022. This time, Iza didn't make a specific call for mobilizations, but his message on social media made his rejection clear. "With the experiences

lived in the two uprisings and in the face of the Noboa government's rejection of dialogue, there is only one way to confront this plutocracy that represents the government of a handful of oligarchs."

The diesel subsidy was one of the last standing. That fuel that powers heavy transport, cargo trucks, construction dump trucks, interprovincial, school, and business buses, and which has been a silent (and annoying) pillar of the Ecuadorian economic model for five decades. It's also used by farmers in their Tractors, fishermen filling their boat tanks, and hundreds of remote communities that depend on electricity generators because the national grid doesn't reach their territories.

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