

Violence: One of the great challenges for Ecuador's president-elect



By María Josefina Arce

The prison crisis and high insecurity seem to have no end in Ecuador. This is one of the main concerns of Ecuadorians and one that businessman Daniel Noboa, elected president last October in the second round of unprecedented early elections, will have to face.

In recent days a new confrontation between criminal gangs took place in the Litoral penitentiary, the largest in the country and where last week a riot took place with the retention of security agents and prison officials.

Since 2020, the Andean nation's prisons have seen a succession of massacres, without the state of emergency declared by President Guillermo Lasso and the intervention of the army and police forces having put a stop to the situation.

Some 500 inmates have lost their lives in these events in overcrowded prisons, with poor hygienic conditions and the absence of a stable and reliable system for social rehabilitation.

But the violence in the prisons has also moved to the streets. The South American country closed 2022 with four thousand 603 violent deaths, a rate of 25 cases per 100 thousand inhabitants.

Last year, Ecuador was the Latin American nation with the highest increase in violence, registering a growth of 82% in this index between 2021 and 2022.

This year, up to October, more than six thousand murders have already been recorded, among them those of the mayor of the city of Manta, Agustín Intriago, in July, and of the presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio, in August, just days before the first round of elections.

The types of violent actions have been diversifying. The Ecuadorian population is now also facing extortion, kidnappings and bombings.

The Lasso government's response of declaring several states of emergency and taking the military to the streets has not solved the much more complex problem.

The lack of social investment to curb rising poverty and guarantee basic services to the population has left them vulnerable to criminal gangs.

Noboa faces a major challenge. He will have until May 2025 to give a convincing and effective response to this problem, considered by more than 60% of citizens as the most serious facing Ecuador.

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