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Strategy Flash – Ecuador

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Ecuador Strategy Flash

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On Tuesday, the Assembly decided to move forward with the impeachment against Mr. Lasso with an overwhelming majority. The motion needed 59 votes to pass (more than half of the present representatives) and was approved with 88 votes in favor. The initiative counted 23 votes against, 21 absents, and 5 abstentions. Most of the affirmative votes came from correism, the PSC, and factions of Pachakutik and the ID, while the entirety of the negative votes came from the administration's caucus. The remainder of the ID did not participate in the vote, while most of the absent assembly members belonged to Pachakutik. However, the approval of the measure was dubious, as the Assembly greenlighted the motion to impeach the president for the same crimes the report the Control Commission could not find grounds to move forward for. The distribution of the opposition's votes aligned with the incentives of each of the parties, which we described recently in another piece (For an in-depth view [click here](#)). Both the PSC and correism favor the impeachment, even as the latter would prefer Mr. Lasso called for the muerte cruzada, with them enjoying top-dog status in the political spectrum after the February elections. This is also true with the rebel factions of both Pachakutik and the ID, which are currently aligned with correism. Instead, the remainder of the Pachakutik bloc decided not to attend the meeting. Said faction of the Assembly is the one which has the most to lose if Mr. Lasso calls the muerte cruzada, as with the significant internal turmoil inside the party, it is difficult to envisage for the current representatives to be reelected to finish the current tenure if Mr. Lasso dissolves congress, putting their positions on the line.

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Next week, the Assembly must vote on whether to oust Mr. Lasso or not, with the former alternative looking increasingly likely. With Tuesday's result, the administration has very few options left to avoid losing next week's vote, and the chances of surviving the impeachment process look slim. For Mr. Lasso to be ousted, the opposition would need to round up 92 votes. On Tuesday, they managed to gather 88, now being 4 short to effectively destitute Mr. Lasso. As described above we believe that the main factor keeping the rest of Pachakutik from voting for the impeachment is the fear of Mr Lasso calling the muerte cruzada. However, this threat expires the session to discuss Mr. Lasso's impeachment starts. The moment Pachakutik assembly members are free from the Damocles sword the muerte cruzada poses to their seats, their incentives to vote for the impeachment increase substantially. In addition, of the 21 absent members in Tuesday's session, the opposition only needs 4 to secure the destitution. Another recent proxy of the impeachment vote was the motion to approve the report which started the impeachment process. On said occasion, the opposition mustered 104 votes to approve the report, which would be more than enough to oust Mr. Lasso.

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With the impeachment process now reaching critical mass, the showdown between the President and the Assembly is scheduled for next week. The process for the impeachment now goes as follows. First, Mr. Saquicela, the president of the Assembly, must call for the session to start the actual impeachment against the President. Said session is expected to take place next week. The administration's government minister, Mr. Cucalón, already stated that Mr. Lasso will attend the session, as he is granted up to three hours to defend himself in the Assembly. First, the prosecution will have two hours to present the case. Then, each part will have another hour to respond to the other party's arguments. Once that finishes, the Assembly will continue to debate the motion, with each Assembly member having up to ten minutes to intervene. This will mean the ordeal will probably last more than one day. Once the debate finishes, the President of the Assembly has up to five days to call for another session, to finally put the matter to vote. If 92 assembly members agree to oust Mr. Lasso, then the president will be discharged.

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With this in mind, the administration's options are few, and the clock is ticking, with the next few days being the last chance for Mr. Lasso to invoke the Muerte cruzada. With Mr. Cucalon already stating Mr. Lasso will go to the Assembly to defend himself, it seems unlikely he will trigger the Muerte cruzada. Dissecting the administration's decision to act in this way, we believe there are some reasons to justify this behavior. The first plausible reason for Mr. Lasso to not call the Muerte cruzada is because he believes he will be able to emerge from the impeachment attempt unharmed. While possible, as the opposition did not reach the magical 92 number in the last vote, the high number of absentees and the tight difference suggests it is more likely the opposition sways four extra representatives to their cause than Mr. Lasso can talk his way out of the impeachment attempt. The second reason to not call the Muerte cruzada is due to the fact that the impeachment process is now fully developed, and to call for it now could be seen as an admission of guilt by the general public. In addition, with his popularity metrics at historic lows, it seems unlikely he could be competitive in the subsequent elections. Still, Mr. Lasso's strategy in the face of the impeachment seems quite obscure. We argued that the president would consider triggering the Muerte cruzada once he was completely certain the impeachment attempt would succeed. It seems the administration cannot decide if it's too soon, or too late for such measures, and in said uncertainty, it is condemning itself to a trial with a very unfavorable jury; the Assembly with whom it has been at odds since the start of its tenure. All in all, with the impeachment process gaining critical mass, and with the main threat the administration had to sway assembly members to its side starting to fade, the decision to impeach Mr. Lasso currently stands with the Assembly, with all evidence pointing at a tight vote, whereas the threat of the Muerte cruzada dilutes, the opposition gains a slight advantage.

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