



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

---

## Ecuadorians overthrow dictator (Glorious May Revolution), 1944

- Latin American Democracy Campaigns (1944)

*Time period notes:* Although the initial actions of the army against the carabinero may be considered violent, the civilian campaign that followed was largely nonviolent.

28 May

1944

to: 31 May

1944

**Country:** Ecuador

**Location City/State/Province:** Guayaquil, Ecuador

**Location Description:** Throughout Ecuador, but began in Guayaquil and spread to Quito, Cuenca, Cayambe, and Riobamba

### Goals:

Primary: To overthrow dictator Carlos Arroyo del Río and establish democracy with fair elections.

Secondary: Growth of national industries, improvement of the economic status of the working classes by establishing a minimum wage, ending of the marginalization of Indians, economic regulation of prices, and a better quality of life. It is important to note that all participants did not hold these secondary goals

## Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

**Methods in 4th segment:**

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:**

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › "Democracy with Velasco Ibarra!", "National Unity with Velasco Ibarra", "Here, we are all Velasquistas"
- 025. Displays of portraits › Circulated portraits of Velasco Ibarra
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

- 099. Peasant strike
- 116. Generalised strike
- 148. Mutiny
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction › Protestors completely encircled governmental buildings in Quito, most importantly the Governmental Palace
- 198. Dual sovereignty and parallel government › students take on role of carabineros to patrol streets

**Notes on Methods:**

As the revolution occurred within a matter of days and does not have much literature written about it, the timing of the methods is unfortunately unknown.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- Peasants
- Women
- eventually the general population..
- indigenous peoples
- intellectuals
- lower ranking military personnel
- students

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

While the movement looked to ex-president José María Velasco Ibarra as the head of the campaign, he was not directly involved with the campaign itself. Made into an icon of populism and hope for Ecuadorians by the ADE, the Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana, he eventually replaced president Arroyo del Río. However, the ADE cannot be directly credited with organizing all the events of the revolution. So, there is no known specific leader or group of leaders.

**Partners:**

Not known

**External allies:**

The ADE allied with the Partido Socialista del Ecuador (PSE) and the Partido Comunista del Ecuador (PCE) to campaign for Velasco, but it is not known if these groups specifically participated in planning or supporting the campaign itself.

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Additional notes on joining/exiting order:**

Not known

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 0.5 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Carlos Arroyo del Río (President of Ecuador) and the Liberal-Radical Party.

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

While there are reports that the campaign did carry out violence, it is not clear if this is true. It was certainly not an aim of the campaign, but could have possibly been used in defense against Arroyo del Río's forces that were using violence in attempting to repress the campaign.

**Repressive Violence:**

Arroyo del Río ordered troops to suppress the revolution on May 28th, and while the specifics of the violence are unknown, some forces did use violence to attempt to quell the campaign.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

4 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

While the campaign was successful at overthrowing Carlos Arroyo del Río and temporarily creating a more democratic state, Velasco quickly overturned these reforms and once again became a dictator. In the end, no gains were made for fair elections or democracy.

The campaign remained intact throughout its entirety, although loosely banded throughout.

The campaign grew from many marginalized groups within society, to include almost half of the population. Although, precise numbers of participants in the campaign are not known.

---

Beginning with the cacao surge during the 1870s, the conservative landowners in the Sierra and liberal exporting bourgeoisie in the Coastal region had fought for control of Ecuador. Indigenous and lower class Ecuadorians quickly became marginalized, and were extremely frustrated by this by the early 1900s. By this time, Ecuadorian politics and politicians were known to be corrupt and both the lower and even upper classes of society were disenchanted. This was only exacerbated by tough economic times, as the 1929 US Stock market crash greatly affected the Ecuadorian economy. Consequently, as the people were looking for economic justice, they turned to populism and its Ecuadorian champion, José María Velasco Ibarra, known as Velasco Ibarra,

the father of “velasquismo” a form of populism that dominated Ecuadorian culture during the 20th century.

Velasco was elected to Congress in 1932 and to the presidency of the nation in 1934. Velasco actively campaigned for votes all over Ecuador, creating a sense of efficacy in the Ecuadorian people, even though most of them were not able to vote. This created an image of him as a man for the people. Once president, feeling threatened by opposing Socialists and liberals, he jailed his rivals and began to censure the newspapers. Yet, when Velasco jailed the leader of the Radical-Liberals, Senator Arroyo del Río (later president), the military deported him to Colombia.

Velasco later sought to return to politics in Ecuador for the 1940 presidential election. Yet, participation in voting was extremely low, only 3.1% in 1933 and it would be 8.8% in 1940, as only men and women who were literate, registered, and who had paid the fee could cast their vote. This set the ground for the Ecuadorian campaign for fair elections and voting rights. While Arroyo del Río was declared the winner of the 1940 presidential election, many believed the election to have been rigged, with Velasco as the true victor. This damaged the new president’s image from the beginning. Furthermore, conceding land to Peru under heavy pressure from the United States, after Peruvian forces had invaded south Ecuador, made Arroyo del Río appear even lower in the eyes of the citizens. From there, the people began to believe President Arroyo del Río to be the root cause of many of their problems, such as a declining standard of living, hyperinflation, lowering wages, and outbreaks of disease. Strikes were frequent during this time period, as Ecuadorians demanded increases in salary, political and economic stability, and compliance to labor codes. Arroyo del Río only responded by using the carbineros, an elite police force, to repress these demonstrations.

In response, many of the nation’s political factions combined to try to achieve democracy in an alliance called Alianza Democrática Ecuatoriana (ADE), and supported Velasco Ibarra as its next presidential candidate. The ADE was also affiliated with the Partido Socialista del Ecuador (PSE) and the Partido Comunista del Ecuador (PCE) in its fight to oust Arroyo del Río. However, because the alliance represented so many different ideologies, it did not actually hold much power, nor agree on any specific goals besides fair elections. As Velasco, having been deported, was unable to campaign for himself, the ADE began a campaign of propaganda throughout the state, portraying Velasco as the one who would save Ecuador, “The Great Absentee”. His past as a repressive dictator was overshadowed by his renewed image as an enlightened man of the people. Many even believed him to be the Savior, “Redentor”, and that his suffering had enlightened him, making him ready to lead the country away from the corruption of Arroyo del Río.

As many worried that Arroyo would once again fail to recognize the actual results of the coming presidential election in July of 1944, by April, politicians and young army officers started to plot a coup in Guayaquil. Although they agreed that such action should only be taken in response to a massacre, imprisonment of one of the conspirators, or electoral fraud, Arroyo’s government caught wind that something was occurring, so the conspirators were pushed to act.

On May 28, 1944, Ecuadorians from all walks of life came together to rebel against Carlos Arroyo del Río, the Liberal president. At 10pm, the army revolted, capturing members of the carbineros and burning their barracks. Participating protesters similarly destroyed businesses and institutions of those thought to be allied with the Radical-Liberal Arroyo. As some civilians were armed and protecting themselves against troops called in to stop the rebellion, there were injuries as well as casualties.

In the morning, women, students, Indians, peasants, intellectuals, lower ranking military personnel, Communists, Catholics, marched down the streets of Guayaquil, filling with songs, portraits of Velasco, and chants of “Democracy with Velasco Ibarra!”, “National Unity with Velasco Ibarra”, and “Here, we are all Velasquistas”. Similar demonstrations were replicated in Quito, Cuenca, Cayambe, and Riobamba. As the carbinero had been eliminated, students now took up their responsibilities, patrolling the streets. Protestors completely encircled governmental buildings in Quito, as well as the Government Palace, signifying their defiance, as leaders made speeches calling for change.

On May 31st, Arroyo del Río resigned, stepping down as president. The ADE governed Ecuador as a junta during the 4 days it took Velasco Ibarra to arrive in Quito. Velasco returned to his country to overwhelming support. The legacy of Velasco’s consequent presidency is controversial. While he was in power when the assembly crafted Ecuador’s most progressive constitution ever in 1945, he quickly reversed all social gains in the 1946 Constitution, as he felt threatened by the checks put in

place on his executive power. This new version of the Constitution severely crippled the recently established reforms for workers, indigenous peoples, and women. Velasco became more and more dictatorial, increasing his power and repressing his opponents once again. A diverse group of Ecuadorians had overthrown one dictator, only to have him replaced by another.

The success of the campaign is intensely debated; some contend that it failed to result in any profound or long-lasting changes in either government structures or the situation of the marginalized people. Yet, it is important to note that the campaign was successful in that it did overthrow Arroyo del Río, and thereby achieved its most important goal, although no form of democracy or election reform took root. Furthermore, the Constitution of 1945, the most progressive to date, although discredited quickly by Velasco, was utilized in later years to craft new Constitutions. Additionally, a short time after Velasco was reinstated as president and before he became repressive once again, the Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador and the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios were founded and would later become key players in representing these marginalized factions of Ecuadorian society.

While the Ecuadorians were successful in their campaign to overthrow President Arroyo del Río, they were not able to move toward democracy or fair elections, but did put in place organizations and institutional framework for later years.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Influenced by general strike in El Salvador, removing Maximiliano Hernández Martínez from power on May 9, 1944 (see "El Salvadorans campaign for democracy, 1944")(1). Also connected to uprisings in Honduras, Guatemala (see "Guatemalans overthrow a dictator, 1944"), Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

### Sources:

Becker, Marc. *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.

Becker, Marc. "Nonviolent Insurrection in Ecuador: The 1944 Glorious May Revolution". *Peace Work: The Labor of Peace Activism, Past, Present, and Future*. April 25-27, 2003, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. Web.

Burgos, Dalton, and CEDIS (Organization). *Historia De Las Luchas Populares*. Quito, Ecuador: Centro de Estudios y Difusión Social, 1985. Web.

Moncayo, Patricio. *El 28 De Mayo De 1944: Una Democracia Fallida: Significados históricos Del 28 De Mayo*. Quito, Ecuador: Abya Yala : FLACSO Ecuador, 2008. Web.

Mottier, Nicole. *La "Revolución Gloriosa" and the Struggle for Political Inclusion in Ecuador*. 3 Vol. Centro de Estudios Bicentenario, 2004. Web.

Sharp, Gene. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Boston: P. Sargent Publisher, 1973. Web.

Torre, Carlos De La. "Velasco Ibarra and 'La Revolución Gloriosa': The Social Production of a Populist Leader in Ecuador in the 1940s." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 26.3 (1994): pp. 683-711. Web.

### Additional Notes:

This campaign is representative of a case where nonviolence was employed not due to principles, but instead because it was the most effective strategy for achieving their goal, ousting their dictator and gaining democracy.

Although the initial actions of the army against the carabinero may be considered violent, the civilian campaign that followed was largely nonviolent.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Kate McClellan, 6/11/2011

**A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.**

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

---

**Source URL (retrieved on 02/28/2020 - 02:10):** <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/ecuadorians-overthrow-dictator-glorious-may-revolution-1944>

**Links:**

- [1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/latin-american-democracy-campaigns-1944>
- [2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-people-color>
- [3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-paradox-repression>
- [4] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-regime-change>
- [5] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/included-participation-more-one-social-class>