

Referendum on oil drilling in Ecuador preserve rejected

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A man waves an Andean indigenous flag during a protest against the exploitation of oil in the Yasuni National Park, a biodiverse preserve of Ecuador's Amazon, in Quito on August 27, 2013

Ecuador's election authority has rejected a petition for a referendum on oil exploration and development in Yasuni, a unique nature preserve in the Amazon rain forest.

Yasunidos, the environmentalist group that filed the [petition](#), said it had met the law's requirements for a referendum by gathering nearly 728,000 signatures, more than five percent of the electorate.

But the National Electoral Council invalidated half the signatures, citing unspecified irregularities.

"The petition does not have the number of signatures necessary to approve the consultation," the council said in a statement.

The election authority added it would send its report to the country's constitutional court, noting that Thursday's decision was subject to appeal.

Yasunidos said the signatures were invalidated in an untransparent manner.

The Ecuadoran Congress voted last year in favor of drilling for oil in the national park, which is estimated to hold 20 percent of the country's 920 million barrels of crude oil reserves.

Home to two indigenous tribes that have resisted contact with the outside world, the park—designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve—covers an expanse of more than 9,800 square kilometers (6,090 miles) between two rivers and consists mainly of [rain forest](#).



Huaorani natives and Yasunidos ecologist group activists march in Quito on April 12, 2014 towards the National Electoral Council to leave the signatures collected to call a referendum to ban the oil exploitation in the Yasuni National Park

President Rafael Correa supports going ahead with the plans, after the failure of an international appeal for funds to avoid it.

The project, however, has sparked opposition from several environmental groups, as well as associations of indigenous people worried about the impact of pollution on the Yasuni preserve, which is located in eastern Ecuador.

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