



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP FINAL REPORT

Ecuador Assessment

October 2023

DISCLAIMER This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by The Cloudburst Group. The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Tasking N083

Contract No. GS-10F-0033M / Order No. 7200AA18M0001

Written and prepared by: Gina Chirillo, Daniela Chacón Arias, and Daniela Mora Santacruz with support from Nicole Rowsell.

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development, Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Center under the Learning, Evaluation, and Research II contract: GS10F0218U/7200AA18M00017.

Prepared by:

The Cloudburst Group

8400 Corporate Drive, Suite 550

Landover, MD 20785-2238

Tel: 301-918-4440

**DISCLAIMER** This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by The Cloudburst Group. The authors' views expressed in this publication do not

necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

# CONTENTS

- ACRONYMS** ..... 6
- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** ..... 7
- BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WPPL.....7
- RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION .....8
- INTRODUCTION**..... 11
- COUNTRY BACKGROUND..... 11
- METHODOLOGY ..... 15
- CURRENT STATE OF WPPL** ..... 18
- WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ..... 18
- WOMEN’S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ..... 19
- BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WPPL** .....23
- INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS..... 23
- SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS..... 29
- INDIVIDUAL FACTORS ..... 34
- RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION** .....38
- WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP..... 39
- ANNEX A. DATA COLLECTION SOURCES** .....44
- POLITICIAN SURVEY..... 44
- KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS..... 45
- FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS..... 46

## **TABLES**

Table I.1 Parties Targeted in the Study	15
Table A.1: Politicians Surveyed	43
Table A.2: Key Informants Interviewed	44
Table A.3: Focus Group Discussions	45

## ACRONYMS

CEPPS	Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening
CNE	National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral)
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador)
CSO	Civil society organization
FGD	Focus group discussion
KII	Key informant interview
NDI	National Democratic Institute
MEGA	Women's Association for Equality and Autonomy (Asociación de Mujeres por la Equidad y la Autonomía)
TCE	Electoral Dispute Tribunal (Tribunal Contencioso Electoral)
WPPL	Women's Political Participation and Leadership
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is a key moment to support and promote women's political participation and leadership (WPPL) in Ecuador. With the recent increase of the threshold for the electoral gender quota from 30 to 50 percent, there are more opportunities for women to be candidates and there are more new women elected officials than ever before. In addition, with about two years until the next presidential and legislative elections, electoral stakeholders are familiar enough with the challenges in the process to have the political will to accept support for improving women's participation while leaving enough time before the next elections to make actual meaningful change.

Though this unique moment is an opportunity to bring about more gender equality in political life, there are still a myriad of challenges that impede women's full and equal participation. The increase in violence and insecurity in Ecuador makes participating in politics a dangerous endeavor. One of the leading presidential candidates was assassinated less than three weeks before the first round of the elections, and women leaders face an onslaught of harassment, threats, and malicious rumors from the public but chiefly from members of their own political parties. Part of this violence stems from the endemic corruption inherent in politics in Ecuador, and linkages to political leaders and narcotrafficking are an ongoing concern. A weak political party system means that real internal democracy within parties is virtually nonexistent and parties lack the political will and the institutional structure to do anything meaningful about this violence, which, especially in the case of harassment, is normalized in political life. This growing instability casts a shadow over the political process.

But despite the challenges, both women and men have been motivated to enter politics by a resounding belief that politics is the way to make real social change. Although most men still lack an understanding of what barriers women face in politics and how those barriers should be overcome, young women and men tend to have more progressive ideas about women's participation in politics and gender equality in general.

This study investigates the barriers and opportunities to expand women's participation and leadership in the political landscape in Ecuador. It uses the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) WPPL Assessment Framework to document women's access to and power in politics along sociocultural, institutional, and individual dimensions. The report can be used by the relevant stakeholders to identify priority areas where their investments in programs and initiatives to support WPPL are likely to have the greatest and most meaningful impact.

## BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WPPL

Below is a summary of barriers to and opportunities for WPPL in Ecuador, further detailed in the report.

### BARRIERS TO WPPL

- Though the legal framework around women's political participation provides a strong basis for gender equality in political life, lax monitoring and enforcement of some of the provisions means that these laws are not being properly implemented.
- Political parties lack internal democracy, meaning that the leaders of political parties, who are mostly men, often make decisions behind closed doors and intentionally exclude women members, making it difficult for women party members to be part of that process.
- Violence against women in politics often comes from men in their own parties feeling threatened if women become too popular and attempting to undermine their leadership.
- Political parties do not provide equal resources to women candidates or leaders, and this distribution often depends on relationships with party leaders.

- Women’s wings in parties often do not have their own budget, resources for activities, or importance in the party structure.
- The media often reproduces false narratives about women leaders that are promoted on social media, and traditional media often focuses on women’s appearance or clothes rather than their work or policy proposals.
- Because women still do the majority of caregiving and are still expected to adhere to traditional gender roles, they have less time than men to participate in politics.
- Women in politics have the feeling of being surveilled all the time and feel that they cannot make any mistakes.
- Men do not believe it is their responsibility to change a violent and *machista* political environment; instead, they believe it is women’s responsibility to be better prepared.
- While accessing political leadership is often a challenge for women, getting women to choose to stay in politics is a greater challenge.
- Women often lack the necessary resources to participate in politics as party leaders, candidates, and elected officials.
- Women sometimes lack the campaign skills to run successful campaigns and may not fully understand the duties or responsibilities of the positions to which they are elected.
- Because of pervasive sexism and racism, Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women are still underrepresented and face stronger barriers to access to politics due to compounding discrimination.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR WPPL

- The legal framework around women’s political participation is relatively progressive and has given women more access to formal political opportunities than ever before.
- The law on political violence has been used to actually prosecute and sanction individuals who have committed violence against women in politics, though violence remains underreported and perpetrators often go unpunished.
- Women’s civil society is very strong and has successfully advocated for important gains for women’s rights.
- Secondary schools and universities provide an important space for women and men to begin engaging in politics, though these institutions are not without some similar challenges to political parties. In addition, higher education is more accessible for women than ever before.
- Society has seen women in many major political roles: as presidential candidates, party leaders, presidents of the National Assembly, head of the National Electoral Council (Consejo Nacional Electoral, CNE), etc. Women are also often the leaders of protests and other social activist movements and, in particular, there are many prominent Indigenous women leaders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Below is only a summary of the recommendations for action, which are detailed more fully in the report.

### SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- Engage men (in parties, in elected office, and in families) as allies and demonstrate why gender equality can benefit everyone. While women have done the majority of work to promote



gender equality, it is important to have men allies supporting women's efforts and demonstrating to other men that supporting women's participation is an important endeavor.

- Partner with leaders of religious organizations to show how religious views and gender equality can and should coexist. Religious beliefs that relegate women to secondary roles in society hold women back from participating equally in politics. Work with religious organizations and leaders to show how the principles of religion and gender equality can go together rather than be in opposition.
- Promote a school curriculum that challenges harmful gender stereotypes and typical gender roles.
- Implement awareness campaigns to address the influence and impact of misogyny and political violence on gender equality and women's political rights and demonstrate the importance of women's participation in politics.
- Create caregiving structures in parties and institutions to facilitate women's ability to have families and participate in politics. Because women still chiefly serve in the caregiving role in families, their domestic responsibilities can often keep them from taking on political leadership roles. Creating caregiving support in political institutions (such as parties, the National Assembly, local elected bodies, etc.) means that women will be better able to balance caregiving responsibilities with their political responsibilities.

## INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- Fund grassroots women's rights organizations and provide core funding for these organizations. Overwhelmingly, interviewees mentioned providing funding for grassroots women's organizations and, crucially, providing core funding for these organizations.
- Donors should focus their resources on funding grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs) in rural areas rather than continuing to fund higher-capacity organizations that have high levels of English fluency and strong organizational and financial standards based in urban centers like Quito and Guayaquil. Donors could see their dollars go further by providing technical assistance on organizational management, proposal writing, or other skills-building based on the needs of the organization and by looking to support organizations beyond the "usual suspects" who are targeted by international donors.
- Promote the participation of the private sector together with CSOs to work toward fundraising specifically for women's electoral campaigns.
- Support the CNE and the Electoral Dispute Tribunal (Tribunal Contencioso Electoral, TCE) to hold political parties accountable for electoral law violations related to political finance and to women's equal leadership within parties.
- Provide legal support for women who wish to bring forward cases of political violence.
- Provide gender-sensitive political reporting training for journalists and support independent media outlets to diversify media coverage.
- Support political parties to meaningfully promote the participation of women members through training and internal party efforts to support women's participation.
- Support parties to develop more robust internal structures and outreach efforts to civil society and voters, particularly women.
- Support a legal reform to the Electoral Code to ensure internal democracy in political parties.

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Provide sustained training for women on a variety of topics, including: campaign skills, resilience, strategic communications, conflict mitigation, and negotiation.
- Support existing networks of women in politics and facilitate regional or global meetings for women to share challenges and best practices.
- Provide programs that support women's access to and control over financial resources. Political campaigns and elected positions often require significant resources. Providing programs that support women's economic empowerment can have crossover effects on promoting their political empowerment, both by providing them with the necessary confidence and skills and by helping them earn the resources they need to be competitive in politics.

## INTRODUCTION

Under the Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Learning, Evaluation, and Research II Activity, USAID tasked The Cloudburst Group with implementing three country-level WPPL assessments (in Ecuador, Kenya, and Nigeria) based on the latest iteration of the WPPL Assessment Framework. The WPPL Assessment Framework aims to identify key barriers and opportunities to advance WPPL at the individual, socio-cultural, and structural levels. This report discusses the results of the Ecuador WPPL Assessment. These results are intended to guide program strategies, activity design, and allocation of resources aimed at advancing WPPL in Ecuador, as well as guide the work of other stakeholders working on gender and democracy in Ecuador.

## COUNTRY BACKGROUND

### ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The president of Ecuador is elected every four years via a two-round first-past-the-post system, in which a candidate must obtain an absolute majority or 40 percent of the vote with a 10 percent lead over his or her opponent to avoid a second round. Three different systems are used to elect national parliamentary seats: 15 seats are elected by closed party list proportional representation for a nationwide constituency, six seats are elected by out-of-country voters, and the 116 remaining seats are elected through multi-member constituencies with closed party lists. The CNE is the main institution responsible for administering elections and is headed by Diana Atamaint Wamputsar, a former member of parliament and advocate for Indigenous rights. The CNE does not have a dedicated department responsible for gender equality or women's rights.

### POLITICAL CONTEXT

Since 1979 when Ecuador held its first democratic elections after several dictators ruled the country, the country has experienced political turmoil with some periods of stability. Approximately every 10 years, Ecuador has changed its constitution to meet the demands of the population and existing institutional design shortcomings. The newest constitution, ratified in 2008, is already showing its limitations to respond to the current political, economic, and security crisis, and the last three presidents have turned to referendums to solve some of the most pressing issues. Likewise, social movements, especially the Indigenous movement led by the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, CONAIE), have taken to the streets to voice their disagreements, in some cases with violent protests that have pushed the democratic institutions to be more progressive. In fact, in 1990, CONAIE led the largest uprising in Ecuador's history, systematically blocking roads to stymie transportation and shut down the country for a week in order to fight for gains in Indigenous rights.<sup>1</sup> While CONAIE is a social movement, it is closely associated with the Pachakutik political party, whose platform focuses on Indigenous rights.

Because of the growing insecurity and unrest and due to the poor performance of his administration, President Guillermo Lasso faced social and political pressure for *muerte cruzada*,<sup>2</sup> to end his term early and call for new presidential and legislative elections. Those elected in these elections will serve to finish out the rest of the current term until 2025, when presidential and legislative elections are supposed to occur. The first round of the election was held on August 20, 2023; because no presidential candidate got more than 50 percent of the vote, the second round will be held on October 15, 2023, and the two

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195176322.001.0001/acref-9780195176322-e-492?rskj=fXSKjO&result=2>

<sup>2</sup> Literally translated as "mutual death," this term refers to Articles 130 and 148 in the current constitution that govern the impeachment of the president of Ecuador and the dissolution of the National Assembly.

presidential candidates, Luisa González and Daniel Noboa, have both campaigned on offering some sort of political and institutional reform.

Less than three weeks before the first round of elections, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated in Quito after a political rally. Villavicencio was an investigative journalist who was critical of corruption and narcotrafficking and had been polling in the top two or three of candidates in the race. On July 26, the mayor of Manta, Ecuador's third largest city, was also killed, and a party leader for *Revolución Ciudadana*, the party of González and former president Rafael Correa, was killed a week after Villavicencio in the Esmeraldas province.<sup>3</sup> A local council member from Duran near Guayaquil was kidnapped and killed on September 8.<sup>4</sup> This high level of political violence has created an environment of fear connected with the political process.

One of the main current political concerns is the state of political parties. The reforms introduced to the Electoral Code during the 2010s have paved the way to an extremely fragmented system, with several small parties that work solely during elections and promote the participation of people as candidates who have little to no preparation or do not necessarily aspire to meaningfully represent citizens. The current circumstances enable the emergence of candidates lacking political experience, lacking a solid social or territorial foundation, and devoid of robust, qualified teams for effective public governance. This situation erodes the already fragile trust Ecuadorians place in their political system, pushing it further into a state of perpetual crisis.

There is no permanent legislative commission for women's issues, no technical unit ensuring gender mainstreaming in legislation, and no budget analysis for equality policies. There is no women's caucus in the Ecuadorian Assembly, but there is a mixed-gender Parliamentary Thematic Group for Women's Rights that is responsible for proposing initiatives that support women's rights.<sup>5</sup> In the National Assembly, parliamentarians can only be part of one committee; therefore, if there were an official women's caucus, those women would not be able to be part of other committees. According to one interviewee, this is the reason why there is no women's caucus.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In the late 1990s, Ecuador passed a gender quota law that required parties to include 30 percent of women on party lists for the National Assembly seats, city council seats, and rural parish seats. Though women were included on lists, parties placed them at the bottom of lists, so they didn't end up being elected. Ecuador's new constitution in 2008 included requirements for gender parity and alternation was approved, and parties were required to include 50 percent of women candidates on their lists for the National Assembly, city councils, and rural parishes. Again, men candidates were placed at the top of party lists, and because it was an open party list system (where voters not only choose a party but also choose a candidate), voters often chose the person at the head of the list, who was a man. The 2020 Democracy Code reforms brought about several changes, which included:

- The president and vice president must be from different genders.
- For candidates for mayor and *prefectura*, 30 percent of candidates from each party must be women (this provision came into force for the local elections held in 2023); this proportion will increase to 50 percent for the next local elections in 2027.
- For candidates for the National Assembly, city councils, and rural parishes, women candidates must make up the first 30 percent of candidates on the party lists (this provision came into force

<sup>3</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/ecuador-crime-political-killing-election-villavicencio-14a5fd781e52d31855f3fc4e9711ff84>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.barrons.com/news/councilman-killed-in-drug-violence-riddled-ecuador-8c19863c>

<sup>5</sup> Desafíos de la democracia paritaria en Ecuador. PNUD 2022. ONU Mujeres 2022.

for the National Assembly in 2021, and for the city councils and rural parishes in 2023); for the next election for these seats (national election in August 2023 and local elections 2027), 50 percent of candidates on the top of the list must be women.

Because the national elections were called early due to the dissolution of parliament (these elections were not supposed to occur until 2025), there was a dispute over whether the 50 percent gender quota would apply to the elections on August 20, 2023. The CNE maintained that it was not required to implement the 50 percent quota, but a group of women political party members and civil society activists brought forward a case to the TCE, who ruled that the CNE would be required to implement the quota at this level.<sup>6</sup> After the ruling, Atamaint Wamputsar said that she hopes that the new quota law does not result in women being placed on the list as “filler.”<sup>7</sup> The law also requires vertical alternation on party lists, meaning that a woman candidate must be followed by a man and vice versa. It requires horizontal alternation as well, which means women must head 50 percent of the party lists. If parties do not comply with the law, the party list is rejected by the CNE.<sup>8</sup>

The legal framework around women’s political participation in Ecuador is relatively progressive. Ecuador ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1981, and its constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on gender and enshrines the right to inclusive and equitable political participation. The electoral gender quota requires parity, has concrete penalties if parties do not comply, and requires both vertical and horizontal alternation. Despite these more progressive measures, Ecuador lacks a specific law on gender equality. The Law on National Equality Councils requires these councils to ensure the exercise of rights and promote equality and non-discrimination but does not elaborate on the right to equality, provide policy implementation powers to the councils, or grant regulatory or sanctioning authority.<sup>9</sup>

The Electoral Code includes a clause prohibiting gender-based political violence and classifies it as a very serious electoral offense with monetary fines, suspension of political rights, and removal from office for those who commit it.<sup>10</sup> Not only does this law exist, but it has been used in practice to penalize offenders. An Organization of American States election observation mission noted that “it is a major stride that the first penalties have been registered for [gender-based political violence], including against a government secretary, as well as the removal of a mayor.”<sup>11</sup> The Women’s Association for Equality and Autonomy (*Asociación de Mujeres por la Equidad y la Autonomía*, MEGA), an Ecuadorian feminist organization, has sponsored several cases of political violence against women before the TCE. As a result of MEGA’s strategic litigation work on political violence, there are currently four judgments sanctioning political violence in Ecuador. Here is a summary of the main cases:<sup>12</sup>

- **Case No. 024-2022-TCE:** The complaint of political violence against Nancy Muñoz, a member of the Rural Parish Council of San José de Chamanga in Esmeraldas province, was filed on February 10, 2022. The president of the council committed acts of violence, withholding Nancy’s wages and neglecting her health while she was pregnant. MEGA filed a protection action, resulting in the recognition of Nancy’s violated rights. In July 2022, the TCE ordered a fine,

---

<sup>6</sup><https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/politica/consejo-nacional-electoral-envuelto-en-reclamos-para-que-exija-la-paridad-de-genero-en-la-conformacion-de-listas-para-los-comicios-nacionales-anticipados-nota/>; <https://www.laprensa-latina.com/ecuador-election-chief-hopes-women-not-filler-on-vote-parity-lists/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Código de la Democracia.

<sup>9</sup> Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Nacionales para la Igualdad.

<sup>10</sup> Código de la Democracia, Art. 279, No. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Organization of American States Observation Report, 2023

<sup>12</sup> MEGA. La violencia política en contra de las mujeres en Ecuador. 2023.

suspension of political rights, public apologies, and training for the president. This case sets a precedent for gender-based political violence in Ecuador.

- **Case No. 026-2022-TCE:** Yennifer López, vice mayor of Paltas canton, Loja province, faced political violence for her refusal to blindly support the mayor's actions and for her efforts to oversee public resources. The case resulted in a sentence that included the removal of the mayor from office, a two-year suspension of his political rights, a fine, publication of the sentence, and training on political violence for the municipal government.
- **Case No. 072-2022-TCE:** María Salomé Ludeña, vice mayor of Celica canton, Loja province, filed a complaint against the mayor, Oswaldo Román, for political violence. María Salomé faced removal from her position, restricted access to public information, and obstacles in carrying out her duties as vice mayor. On September 7, 2022, the judge ruled in favor of María Salomé, marking the third case of political violence sanctions in Ecuador. The sentence included the mayor's removal from office, a two-year suspension of his political rights, a fine, public apologies, publication of the sentence, and gender-based political violence training for the municipal government.
- **Case No. 180-2022-TCE:** Verónica Saritama, councilor of Francisco de Orellana canton, Orellana province, filed a complaint. Verónica, elected as vice mayor, faced political violence due to her oversight and control of public resources, which made the mayor uncomfortable. The mayor orchestrated her removal from office using an illegal ordinance and a biased process, aiming to exclude her from her role. Furthermore, the mayor publicly made derogatory remarks about Verónica's private and intimate life to tarnish her reputation. The judge issued an unfavorable verdict, disregarding the political violence inflicted by the mayor. The appeal before the TCE was recently won.

Further information about the legal framework is included in the *Barriers and Opportunities* section later in this report.

## WOMEN'S STATUS

Ecuador's score on the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index scale is 0.362 (where a lower number means better performance regarding gender inequality), putting it below the world average of 0.465.<sup>13</sup> While only half the population has completed some secondary education, there is no significant gender gap between women (53 percent have completed some secondary education) and men (52 percent) aged 25 and older.<sup>14</sup> In terms of the labor force participation rate, however, there is a large gender gap between men participating in the labor force (76.5 percent) and women (53.3 percent). Gender-based violence is prevalent in Ecuador; according to a 2019 survey, 65 percent of women in Ecuador reported experiencing some form of violence<sup>15</sup> and Indigenous women and girls face the highest rates of gender-based violence compared to mestiza women and other ethnic groups, with a rate of 67.8 percent.<sup>16</sup> In 2022, there were 332 cases of violent murders of women because of their gender, and femicide was not criminalized until 2014.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> INEC. 2012. «6 de cada 10 mujeres sufren Violencia de Género en Ecuador». [https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Estadisticas\\_Sociales/sitio\\_violencia/boletin.pdf](https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Estadisticas_Sociales/sitio_violencia/boletin.pdf).

2019. «Encuesta Nacional sobre Relaciones Familiares y Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres» [https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Estadisticas\\_Sociales/Violencia\\_de\\_genero\\_2019/Boletin\\_Tecnico\\_ENVIGMU.pdf](https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Estadisticas_Sociales/Violencia_de_genero_2019/Boletin_Tecnico_ENVIGMU.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Shugulí, K. Mujeres indígenas, equidad y lucha contra la violencia de género. Corporación Participación Ciudadana. 2021.

<sup>17</sup> [2022, año mortal para las mujeres en Ecuador con 332 casos de femi\(ni\)cidio — ALDEA](#)

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the assessment is to understand the current state of WPPL and pinpoint challenges and opportunities for advancing WPPL in Ecuador. The assessment seeks to answer the following four questions:

- Are women politically engaged as citizens, in any of a wide range of possible political roles?
- Do women exercise political agency and influence as citizens?
- Do women serve as political leaders, whether in elected or non-elected roles?
- Do women exercise political agency and influence as political leaders?

While global indicators of WPPL largely focus on the numbers of women in elected and appointed political positions, this assessment methodology expands the definition of WPPL in two key ways. First, it divides this concept into two interrelated, yet distinct, components: **political participation**, referring to activities women can engage in as citizens, and **political leadership**, referring to activities women can engage in as elected and non-elected political representatives. Second, it recognizes that simply being granted political rights is not the same as exercising those rights to the fullest extent. A complete assessment of WPPL must therefore look at both **access**, women's ability to take part in the political process, and **power**, women's voice and agency as political actors.

Three interacting sets of factors shape opportunities for women to participate substantively in every aspect of political life. **Socio-cultural factors** involve assumptions about appropriate norms and practices, shaping social expectations as well as personal attitudes and behaviors. They include gender stereotypes, prevailing views on gender roles, and cultural ideas about gender equality. **Institutional factors** structure the political environment, establishing the formal and informal rules and systems in which political actors operate. They include the electoral system, the political party system, and the broader political and legal context. **Individual factors** refer to considerations shaping individual women's decisions and abilities to participate in politics. These include levels of political ambition, as well as resources and support for their political engagement.

Understanding these factors as an “ecosystem” emphasizes how they work together and inform one another to create environments supporting or undermining WPPL. Focusing only on one set of factors to the exclusion of the others is likely to lead to misinterpretations of the current situation and, in turn, to the adoption of only partially effective solutions to expand WPPL. In contrast, an ecosystem approach suggests the need to consider more holistic strategies, combining a focus on norm change, institutional reforms, and individual shifts in thinking. Because gender-based violence and violence against women in politics cut across all these factors, findings about violence are integrated throughout these sections.

The WPPL Assessment has three parts: part I involves mapping the current state of WPPL; part II entails analyzing barriers and opportunities to WPPL, and part III involves transitioning from the research to the writing of the final report and making evidence-based recommendations.

The assessment employs four tools: a desk review, a politician survey, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). These tools provide quantitative and qualitative sources of evidence to better understand the current situation as well as barriers and opportunities for advancing WPPL, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and diverse groups of women.

An overview of political parties targeted for the study is provided in Table I.1 below, which includes representation from parties elected to National Assembly seats in the 2021 national elections (President Guillermo Lasso dissolved the National Assembly earlier this year, so there currently is no parliament).

Parties that had representation in the National Assembly but had two or fewer seats are not included in this study and are not represented in the table below. Due to the fragility of political parties in Ecuador, the parties represented below did not retain this number of seats when the National Assembly was dissolved, as some representatives had switched parties or declared themselves independent.

**Table 1.1 Parties Targeted in the Study**

<b>POLITICAL PARTY</b>	<b>NUMBER OF SEATS (OUT OF 137)</b>
<b>PARTIES ELECTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN 2021</b>	
Citizen Revolution Movement <i>Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana</i>	49
Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement <i>Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik</i>	27
Democratic Left Party <i>Partido Izquierda Democrática</i>	18
Social Christian Party <i>Partido Social Cristiano</i>	18
CREO Movement <i>Movimiento CREO</i>	12

The assessment findings discussed in this report are derived from a desk review of relevant literature and USAID documents; a survey completed by 50 stakeholders (39 women and 11 men); 29 KIs; and ten FGDs with politicians, civil society, voters, and journalists in Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca. The Ecuador Assessment Team conducted in-country data collection for this assessment between September 4 and 15, 2023 in Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca. Further information about data sources is included in Annex A.

## LIMITATIONS

The researchers did have some limitations in putting together a representative sample of stakeholders for the KIs and the FGDs. First, the two-week period and available resources for fieldwork allowed the researchers to collect data in only three cities: Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca. Despite the researcher’s attempts to provide travel funding for participants to travel to these cities for KIs and FGDs, it was not enough to make up for the time women would spend away from their jobs and families if they were to travel for these data collection activities. While the researchers did interview individuals who were from outside these areas but currently living in or near these cities, interviewing women and men from more rural communities, particularly those in the Amazon region, would have brought a different perspective to the study.

Next, the two weeks for data collection were in between the two rounds of snap presidential and legislative elections. This timing meant that some stakeholders were busy working with political parties, on campaigns, and administering the upcoming elections. Not only was this a busy period, but the violence and instability that marked the electoral period, as described in the *Political Context* section, might have affected some stakeholders’ willingness to participate in a study about politics. During focus groups in Guayaquil, one of the participants had to cancel at the last minute, as a local councilor from his political party and his region was murdered.



Finally, the researchers relied on their own contacts and connections to recruit study participants, and while this meant that the team was able to interview a wide variety of stakeholders and women from high-level positions (including elected officials, party leaders, election commissioners, etc.), it also meant that it was sometimes difficult (in particular outside of Quito) to recruit individuals, in particular for FGDs. Despite this challenge, the researchers were able to leverage contacts of contacts to ensure diverse participation and used other creative ways to recruit participants. For example, one member of the team has a significant X (formerly known as Twitter) following in Ecuador and was able to post about one of the focus groups in order to solicit participation. So, despite some limitations, the researchers were still able to recruit a diverse group of participants for the study.

# CURRENT STATE OF WPPL

## WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation refers to a wide array of activities in which citizens can engage to influence political decision-making or solve collective problems. These can encompass both conventional and unconventional forms of participation, as well as actions taken individually or collectively in civil society. Common forms of political participation include voting, engaging in political discussions, contacting elected officials, attending political rallies and campaign events, signing petitions, protesting, and joining political parties. Given women's long-standing exclusion from and underrepresentation in more formal political roles, civil society—where citizens can have a voice on political issues despite not holding political office—has long been an important space for women's political engagement. Such activities may include membership in formal CSOs operating at the grassroots to national levels, as well as less structured participation in informally constituted social movements.

## ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND POWER IN PARTICIPATION

### WOMEN AS VOTERS

Voting is compulsory in Ecuador, and therefore overall voter turnout rates are often high. In the 2021 elections, 83.2 percent of registered women voted (about 5.5 million of 6.6 million registered women voters), while 82.1 percent of registered men voted.<sup>18</sup> In the 2023 local elections, women made up 50.7 percent of registered voters (about 6.8 million women voters out of 13.5 million total voters).<sup>19</sup> According to the databases of the CNE, the null vote of women was 2 percentage points higher than the null vote of men in both rounds of the general elections in 2021.<sup>20</sup> Gender disaggregated data is not publicly available regarding the voter turnout for the 2023 elections, and there is no disaggregated information based on ethnicity or race, making it difficult to know the voter turnout of Indigenous, *Montubias* (mestizo women from the countryside of coastal Ecuador), or Afro-Ecuadorian women. Though disaggregated data is not available, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Committee expressed its concern about the “very low rate of participation of women belonging to disadvantaged and marginalized groups in political and public life” in its 2021 concluding recommendations.<sup>21</sup> Though there is generally high turnout amongst voters (in part due to compulsory voting policies), data from the World Values Survey in 2018 revealed that an overwhelming majority of women and men said they were not members of political parties (86 percent of men and 90 percent of women).<sup>22</sup>

### WOMEN IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Women's CSOs are strong in Ecuador and have successfully advocated for important gains for women's rights. Most recently, ahead of the snap elections in 2023, women's rights advocates successfully brought forward a case to compel the CNE to enforce the gender quota at 50 percent (previously, the CNE intended to enforce it at its previous threshold of 30 percent, as the elections were called early). One element of this specific advocacy effort that was particularly helpful was that not only did CSOs advocating for women's rights band together, but women in elected office also spoke out in favor of the 50 percent quota threshold, which helped apply more pressure. Multiple interviewees also cited the effort to

<sup>18</sup> Desafíos de la democracia paritaria en Ecuador. PNUD 2022. ONU Mujeres 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Ecuador Midterm Elections Card 1 | I.png | IFES - The International Foundation for Electoral Systems

<sup>20</sup> Because voting is compulsory in Ecuador, some voters will cast a “null vote” as a form of protest, where they leave their ballot intentionally blank and not select any candidates.

<sup>21</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Concluding Observations, 2021

<sup>22</sup> WVS, Ecuador, 2018

decriminalize abortion as a successful example of CSOs and elected leaders working together on a women's rights issue. Despite these positive efforts, competition among women's rights organizations can lead to a lack of cohesion or solidarity within the broader women's movement, as these organizations are often staffed by women's activists who are competing against each other for limited funding opportunities on which they are dependent.

## **WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES**

Out of the five parties studied for this assessment, only the Social Christian Party and the Citizen Revolution Movement have provisions in their bylaws for units dedicated to women or equality within their internal structure (as of 2022).<sup>23</sup> Despite this, according to interviewees, neither of these parties dedicate specific funding or resources for these women's wings, despite legal requirements to do so. In addition, no parties have specific regulations or protocols for preventing and responding to gender-based political violence within their internal structure.<sup>24</sup>

In her research on the participation of women in political parties in Ecuador, academic Romina Accossato found that despite legal advancements, political organizations have not fully and effectively incorporated gender equality into their structures. Accossato developed a Gender Equality in Political Parties Index that evaluates various aspects, including party discourse and statutes, internal organization, electoral candidacies, and legislative attitudes, which revealed a low level of implementation of mechanisms and strategies to promote gender equality within parties. In terms of party statutes, the research found that most parties lack regulations related to gender equality and some do not include specific bodies responsible for addressing this issue. No parties allocate a budget for promoting women's participation or activities to support gender equality.<sup>25</sup>

While the five parties examined in this assessment have achieved gender parity in their party base, with women constituting 50 percent or more of their membership, they have yet to actively foster the development of women party leaders. These parties have not invested in training programs to enable women to run as candidates or to access leadership positions within the party.<sup>26</sup> These challenges are detailed further in the Barriers and Opportunities section below.

## **WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**

Political leadership refers to activities women can engage in as elected and non-elected political representatives. This can entail running for and occupying elective and appointed offices at various levels in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. It can also include serving in leadership positions in political parties, as well as CSOs and social movements. In many parts of the world, women were largely absent from political leadership until recently. Since 1995, however, major shifts have occurred in all regions of the world and nearly all countries have seen improvements in the share of women running for and holding political office. Although there is little systematic data, women are also increasingly visible as party and civil society leaders.

In the survey administered for this study, 46 percent of women and 64 percent of men think that women and men have the same opportunities to access political leadership positions. While these are certainly not lower percentages, the gender gap between men and women does show that men may not fully understand the true barriers women have in accessing and having power in leadership positions. Sixty-five

---

<sup>23</sup> TANDEM. Diagnóstico Pachakutik. Diagnóstico Izquierda Democrática. Diagnóstico Revolución Ciudadana. Diagnóstico Creo. 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Accossato, Romina. «El lugar de las mujeres en los partidos políticos de América Latina: el caso de Ecuador». Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals, n.º 127 (abril de 2021), p. 201-228. DOI: doi.org/10.24241/rcai.2021.127.1.201

<sup>26</sup> TANDEM. Diagnóstico Pachakutik. Diagnóstico Izquierda Democrática. Diagnóstico Revolución Ciudadana. Diagnóstico Creo. 2022.

percent of women respondents said that one of the main reasons for this was “people don’t support women in political leadership” and 55 percent said that it was due to the violence and discrimination women face in politics.

## ACCESS TO AND POWER IN LEADERSHIP

### WOMEN IN ELECTED OFFICE

While one of the two candidates for presidency heading into the second round is Luisa González, a woman, she is viewed by many stakeholders not as a candidate with her own ideas and policies, but as a candidate handpicked by Rafael Correa, the controversial and divisive former president of Ecuador, to implement his vision (she has said he will be a close advisor if she is elected). Both González and the other presidential candidate, Daniel Noboa, hold some conservative views about women’s rights, and Noboa’s vice presidential candidate Verónica Abad (who is legally required by the gender quota to be a woman) opposes abortion, even in cases of rape, and has declared that mothers should not expect to earn the same wages as men. She even went so far as to claim that “feminists invented gender violence to make money” and asserted that gender violence does not exist.<sup>27</sup> Abad has also praised authoritarian, anti-rights leaders like former U.S. President Donald Trump and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. Women’s rights activists who were interviewed saw both candidates as harmful to the progression of women’s rights in the country.

In terms of the National Assembly, in January 2020, a suite of electoral reforms that in part instituted a gender quota that requires 50 percent of women in the leadership of political parties and as candidates for elected bodies for the upcoming elections was passed (the gender quota is further analyzed in the *Institutional Factors* section below). Before the 2023 legislative elections, Ecuador’s National Assembly was made up of 38.7 percent women (53 women out of 137 total representatives), ranking Ecuador 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 186 countries for which there was data.<sup>28</sup> In the most recent elections, 60 women were elected to the National Assembly and make up a record-high 44 percent of all members. This proportion is higher than the global average (26.8 percent) and the South American average (31 percent).<sup>29</sup> Out of the total number of women elected as assembly members in the 2021 elections, only one self-identifies as Afro-Ecuadorian and four as Indigenous.<sup>30</sup> The elections in August 2023 represented the first national parliamentary elections in which the 50 percent gender quota was in effect (in previous elections, the proportion of women required under the quota was less). The National Assembly has had women speakers and women have headed various committees within the assembly, but according to interviewees, these women still are often made to feel as though they are in spaces where they do not belong.

In the local elections that took place in February 2023, the gender quota regulation required 30 percent of women to be represented on party lists as candidates and also required parties to zipper party lists, meaning that for every two men on the list, there would need to be one woman. For every elected position, the number of women candidates increased compared with the 2019 elections:

- In the 2019 local elections, 18 percent of women headed the candidate lists for prefectures, while in the 2023 local elections, this increased to 24 percent.
- For mayoral positions, in 2019, 14 percent of women headed the candidate lists, whereas in 2023, this percentage increased to 31 percent.

<sup>27</sup> <https://radiolacalle.com/para-la-candidata-veronica-abad-la-violencia-de-genero-es-un-mito/>

<sup>28</sup> Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments | Parline: the IPU’s Open Data Platform

<sup>29</sup> [https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=5&year=2023&op=Show+averages&form\\_build\\_id=form-lak8xuMNx6TDcUXwHZah-IHbZzFPfLDSMlewwbDdTo&form\\_id=ipu\\_women\\_averages\\_filter\\_form](https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=5&year=2023&op=Show+averages&form_build_id=form-lak8xuMNx6TDcUXwHZah-IHbZzFPfLDSMlewwbDdTo&form_id=ipu_women_averages_filter_form)

<sup>30</sup> Desafíos de la democracia paritaria en Ecuador. PNUD 2022. ONU Mujeres 2022.

- In urban councilor positions, 24 percent of women headed the lists in 2019, while in the 2023 elections, it was 40 percent.
- Regarding rural councilor positions, in 2019, 22 percent of women headed the candidate lists, and in 2023, it increased to 43 percent.
- For local positions in parish councils, in 2019, 20 percent of women headed the lists, whereas in 2023, this percentage increased to 39 percent.<sup>31</sup>

While the law requires parity, because mayoral posts are first-past-the-post positions, women remain underrepresented as mayors. The percentage of elected women mayors in 2019 barely reached 8.1 percent, a representation rate that has remained almost unchanged in three consecutive elections.<sup>32</sup> In the 2023 elections, following the reforms to the Electoral Code, the percentage reached 19 percent.<sup>33</sup> The participation of women from ethnic minorities also remains low. For the 2023 local elections, out of the 14,878 women candidates, 7.14 percent (or 1,063) were Indigenous, and only 1.98 percent (or 295) were Afro-Ecuadorian.<sup>34</sup> The province with the highest participation of Afro-Ecuadorian women was Esmeraldas, with 200 Afro-Ecuadorian women candidates, while Imbabura had the largest number of Indigenous women candidates with 169.<sup>35</sup>

While descriptive representation is important, it does not always translate to substantive representation for women. Past research shows that the inclusion of women in these positions “does not necessarily equate to access to power” and that “concerns about women's equality often remain at the declarative and even rhetorical level, as they are not a priority for the circles of power that decide on policies and resources.”<sup>36</sup> A report from the [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance](#) and the Organization of American States revealed that some women political leaders “have become part of the logics that fuel clientelism, *caudillismo* (strongman rule), and the defense of particular interests and groups without questioning the power relations and practices of Ecuadorian politics that do not embody or create collective values such as the State, the nation, or the general interest.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition, there are no institutionalized mechanisms for women’s CSOs to interact with women politicians and push for agreed agendas on women’s rights. Some women politicians refer to the lack of support they receive from women’s groups once in office. Elected women are often strongly encouraged by parties to promote the policy platform decided by the party leadership, while CSOs may pressure the same women to take an extremely progressive stance. This dynamic can make elected women feel isolated while at the same time being accused of betraying their party if they adopt a different position, but also being accused of betraying women’s organizations or “selling out” if they do not promote the same policy positions as the larger women’s rights movements.

## WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES

---

<sup>31</sup> Estudio para el fortalecimiento de la participación política de mujeres pertenecientes a pueblos y nacionalidades indígenas, afroecuatorianos y montubios en el Ecuador en el marco del Proyecto P/00119592 “Apoyo al Ciclo Electoral en Ecuador.” Dayana León Franco, 2023.

<sup>32</sup> <https://resultados2023.cne.gob.ec/>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Estudio para el fortalecimiento de la participación política de mujeres pertenecientes a pueblos y nacionalidades indígenas, afroecuatorianos y montubios en el Ecuador en el marco del Proyecto P/00119592 “Apoyo al Ciclo Electoral en Ecuador.” Dayana León Franco, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> La apuesta por la paridad: democratizando el sistema político en América Latina.

Casos de Ecuador, Bolivia y Costa Rica. Instituto Internacional para la Democracia y la Asistencia Electoral 2013. Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

In Ecuador, there are 279 registered political parties, though only nine had at least one seat in the National Assembly, and only five parties had more than two seats, according to the 2021 election results: the Citizen Revolution Movement (*Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana*, 49 seats); the Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement (*Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik*, 27 seats); the Democratic Left Party (*Partido Izquierda Democrática*, 18 seats); the Social Christian Party (*Partido Social Cristiano*, 18 seats); and the CREO Movement (*Movimiento CREO*, 12 seats). Although women make up about 40 to 60 percent of party membership, only two of these political parties are led by women: Analía Ledesma García, who leads the Democratic Left, and Marcela Aguiñaga of the Citizen Revolution Movement. In fact, the national average of women in executive positions in political parties ranges from 17.3 percent to 33.3 percent.<sup>38</sup>

**“It is really difficult for someone to grant you power in a historically male space; they resist the idea of allowing women to have key roles,”**  
—A high-level woman politician based in Quito

## **WOMEN IN ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

As mentioned previously, Diana Atamaint Wamputsar, from the Indigenous Shuar community from the Amazon, became president of the CNE in 2018. She was previously a member of the National Assembly and, although she left her party, one interviewee noted that her election to the National Assembly (during which she earned more votes than the first candidate on the party list and was the first national legislator from the Shuar community) shows other Indigenous women that they, too, can access politics. Out of the five election commissioners, three are women, including Diana. Esthela Acero is also from an Indigenous community, the Kayambi people, and Elena Nájera Moreira is a lawyer who has defended cases that have been important in promoting women’s rights. One interviewee noted that the CNE endeavors to ensure all election councils in the provinces have gender parity and to promote from within to ensure that women and people from minority groups have the opportunity to lead departments.

---

<sup>38</sup> ONU Mujeres (2021). *Hacia una participación paritaria e inclusiva en América Latina y el Caribe*. Panorama regional y aportes de la CSW65.

# BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WPPL

## INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Institutional factors structure the political environment, establishing the rules and systems in which political actors operate and the formal and informal dynamics of political life. These factors interact with socio-cultural norms and individual-level characteristics and decisions to shape opportunities for women and men to become politically engaged and exercise political influence. Institutional factors shaping WPPL include features of the electoral system, the political party system, and the broader political and legal context. Elite behaviors in the face of these opportunities and constraints can also be considered institutional factors, with elites serving as gatekeepers to women's entry to, and exclusion from, political institutions and, in turn, political voice.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK

As noted in previous sections, the legal framework around women's political participation is relatively progressive and has given women more access to formal political opportunities than ever before. Requiring gender parity (50 percent) and horizontal and vertical alternation and imposing sanctions (a rejection of the list) as described above are key elements that make Ecuador's gender quota law more effective at ensuring women's representation and leadership than gender quota laws without these provisions. Every individual interviewed for this study who discussed the quota considered it a positive measure for women's participation, even if they had some critiques of how it works in practice. For example, many interviewees cautioned against having a gender quota and a gender quota *only* as the way to promote women's access to politics. Even progressive people who wholeheartedly support women's participation worried that when parties are required to fill the 50 percent quota, they have trouble finding women willing to participate (because of all the challenges outlined as part of this report), and so women who are potentially less qualified are put on party lists. If and when these women win, and if they are not successful in their elected roles, women interviewees in particular worried that this would lead citizens to generalize about women being unfit to serve in elected office (in a way, of course, that they would not generalize about unqualified men in office). While interviewees voiced support for the gender quota when asked in interviews, the survey results were more mixed. Fifty-four percent of women and 50 percent of men said they "support[ed] measures such as quotas to increase the number of women in elected positions," while the other half of participants did not.

The law on political violence is also an important part of the legal framework, especially as it has been used to actually prosecute and sanction individuals who have committed violence against women in politics. The law not only defines political violence but also describes the specific sanctions that can be levied when the law is violated. One important change when this law was passed was that perpetrators need to demonstrate with evidence that they did not commit the act of which they are charged. Previously, perpetrators could just testify and deny the allegations and that was considered sufficient. The four cases described in the section above show that the law is actually used to punish perpetrators, but it is also important to recognize that there are many cases of violence against women in politics and public life that are never formally reported. In addition, this strategic litigation has identified several opportunities to improve how the current Electoral Code protects women's rights to participate in politics free from violence. These opportunities include enhancing mechanisms for reporting and sanctioning, as well as establishing instruments within political organizations to address the cases internally and allow party members to report incidents, avoiding the perpetuation of impunity resulting from the normalization of such cases.

One significant challenge arising from the enforcement of electoral sanctions for political violence is the tendency of some political figures, including women, to label any political criticism or attack against a woman candidate as "political violence," even when it does not meet the criteria for such a classification. This overuse of the term can diminish the credibility of this crucial legal mechanism, making it harder for genuine cases of political violence against women to be recognized and addressed.

Another useful provision in the electoral legal framework is the law on political finance, which requires political parties to spend 20 percent of their public funding to promote women's participation. This law, in theory, should give parties the needed resources to fund their women's wings, recruit women party members, and train women candidates and elected officials, but this money is often not used in earnest for these types of activities. According to interviewees, there is no robust monitoring mechanism to ensure that parties are using this money how it is legally intended to be spent. Without a monitoring mechanism and consequences for not upholding this provision, parties will continue to use this money in other ways and blame a lack of resources as a reason for not focusing more on women's political participation.

Furthermore, there is no effective penalty or enforcement mechanism in place for the legal provision within the Electoral Code that mandates gender parity in the leadership of political parties. Consequently, only a handful of political parties actually adhere to this requirement.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

**“This is as much my party as theirs, so I have the right to be here.  
I think about that during difficult times.”  
—A woman politician**

While the legal provisions provide stakeholders with a framework to follow to promote WPPL, political parties are the institutions required to implement many of those laws. Many interviewees expressed the sentiment that political parties lack internal democracy, meaning that the leaders of political parties, who are mostly men, often make decisions behind closed doors, making it difficult for women party members to be part of that process.<sup>39</sup> An assessment report from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republic Institute demonstrates “that the Ecuadorian political party system, through its legal framework and cultural characteristics, has overwhelmingly created disincentives for parties to be representative, accountable, inclusive and participatory. In response, party processes for member participation in decision-making, internal democracy for leadership and candidate selection, campaign finance, and outreach to citizens are inconsistent and often minimal.”<sup>40</sup> As part of a larger report, an interview with the head of the National Council for Gender Equality revealed that internal party democracy exercises are not carried out effectively within political organizations. Instead, parties often use opaque practices and the interests of those who lead the organization, disregarding equality and the leadership potential of women in politics.<sup>41</sup> Another serious problem mentioned by several women in

---

<sup>39</sup> Estudio para el fortalecimiento de la participación política de mujeres pertenecientes a pueblos y nacionalidades indígenas, afroecuatorianos y montubios en el Ecuador en el marco del Proyecto P/00119592 “Apoyo al Ciclo Electoral en Ecuador.” Dayana León Franco, 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Ecuador Political Party System Joint Assessment Report. NDI. International Republican Institute. 2021. \*Not for Public Distribution\*  
Submitted to: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State  
Submitted by: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and International Republican Institute. Date: March 31, 2021

<sup>41</sup> Estudio para el fortalecimiento de la participación política de mujeres pertenecientes a pueblos y nacionalidades indígenas, afroecuatorianos y montubios en el Ecuador en el marco del Proyecto P/00119592 “Apoyo al Ciclo Electoral en Ecuador.” Dayana León Franco, 2023.



political parties is the sale of candidacies within those parties. This practice discourages women's participation and favors candidates who have the resources to purchase candidacies, who are predominantly men.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, the legal framework is vague on how parties can fulfill the requirement of primaries or internal democratic mechanisms to select candidates for elections, allowing parties to say that they carried out meaningful democratic mechanisms within the party (without really doing so), which are then validated by the CNE, giving them more legitimacy than they deserve.

In addition to this lack of transparency, current and former women politicians who were interviewed cited examples of them and other women party members being intentionally excluded from meetings and events. As a candidate for a local council, one interviewee explained that her party leadership was holding a candidate event with the media, and they specifically did not invite her. She was also often told the wrong time for meetings so that she could not attend. The mayor, from her own party, did not support her reelection, sought to damage her reputation, and made negative remarks about her publicly. In choosing which candidates to represent the party, leaders often want women who are well-known and popular, but if these women become *too* popular, party leaders feel threatened and attempt to discredit them or pressure them into stepping down from their leadership roles. And because there has traditionally been limited space for women's participation, women often feel like they need to compete with other women in their party for space. This means that it can be difficult for women party members to use their collective voices to make meaningful changes for gender equality within the party or to push the party to adopt progressive positions on issues that are particularly important to women.

**“It is not a problem of the political parties, it is a problem of the women.”**  
—Male political party leader in Quito

Though parties attempt to follow the letter of the gender quota law, parties use different strategies to continue to marginalize women leaders. For example, interviewees noted that parties will place women as the head of party lists (women are required to head 50 percent of the lists for each party by law) in areas where they know they have no chance of winning the seat. That way, they fulfill the quota, but they still keep the power in the hands of those they selected for the winnable seats. One woman lost the mayor position by three votes, and yet her party did not want to challenge the results to ask for a recount. She mentioned she was not able to communicate with the party leader to submit a formal challenge and that he never answered the phone or responded to her requirements until the legal deadline passed. In addition, most interviewees said that parties do not distribute resources or support equally to women and men candidates.

**“Politics have not adapted to gender equality, but women have had to adapt to existing patriarchal structures.”**  
—Young male party leader from Quito

One key issue when trying to support parties in promoting women's participation is that political parties lack an overall internal structure, and there is a sentiment that parties are only active or visible ahead of elections, particularly in the provinces or more local offices. This makes it difficult for parties to build the

---

<sup>42</sup> ONU Mujeres Ecuador. “Estudio sobre violencia política contra las mujeres en el Ecuador.” Instituto de la Democracia. Consejo Nacional Electoral. 2019.

next generation of qualified leaders who are ready to run in elections. Women’s wings in parties often do not have their own budget, resources for activities, or importance in the party structure. One woman mentioned that usually other women in the party are given the responsibility to search for women candidates, but if these candidates are not elected, there is no support from the party to continue engaging these women between elections, which puts more pressure on the women recruiters, as they do not have a pipeline of women from which to draw. In addition, a plurality of both women and men survey respondents said that their parties did not have specific measures to recruit women candidates.

Fundación TANDEM, an Ecuadorian CSO, analyzed the bylaws and governance structures and interviewed leaders and party members of four different parties: Pachakutik, CREO, Revolución Ciudadana, and Izquierda Democrática. Across all parties, it was clear that men did not understand or act on their roles in promoting gender equality. Below are other key findings regarding each party:

- The Pachakutik Movement references gender parity in its statutes but lacks a strong commitment to realize this goal. Interviews revealed “a significant gap between what is established in the statute and the reality of women within the Pachakutik movement” and that “women face discrimination, violence, and inequality, but no concrete actions have been taken to address this situation.”<sup>43</sup> One woman from this party mentioned that women are encouraged to take on community-based leadership roles but face significant barriers when trying to transition this leadership to electoral processes.
- CREO has the lowest proportion of women in its nationally elected representatives, who are almost 90 percent men. Though CREO has a specific unit dedicated to women, it “appears to perpetuate traditional gender roles without specific functions to promote women’s political participation, despite it being one of [its] responsibilities.”<sup>44</sup> A candidate for mayor in Quito for this party mentioned that she did not receive any support from the party and was left on her own during the campaign.
- Revolución Ciudadana specifically calls itself a feminist movement in its statutes. It is also the only party that has a specific body focused on women and gender issues that is mandated to create and implement an action plan related to those issues. Though this body exists, interviews reveal that “it is not an influential body capable of proposing specific measures to address the inequalities recognized by the party members.”<sup>45</sup>
- Interviews with Izquierda Democrática members revealed that political violence and discrimination within the party are not addressed and are not even recognized as such. The research found that “it is evident that the political organization has an understanding of the effects of gender inequality, as the interviewees clearly discuss gender roles and how they impact women’s political participation, as well as the difficulties they face in internal campaign processes and accessing leadership positions. However, this has not resulted in the party taking actions or establishing regulations to close the inequality gaps.”<sup>46</sup> Internal disagreements in this party have affected women’s political participation, stalling their attempts to appoint a person responsible for gender issues.

---

<sup>43</sup> TANDEM. *Diagnóstico Pachakutik*. 2022.

<sup>44</sup> TANDEM. *Diagnóstico CREO*. 2022.

<sup>45</sup> TANDEM. *Diagnóstico Revolución Ciudadana*. 2022.

<sup>46</sup> TANDEM. *Diagnóstico Izquierda Democrática*. 2022.

## MEDIA

Another institution that creates both barriers and opportunities for women in politics is the media. The mass media continues to play a central role in this issue, as their coverage of women in the public sphere can either perpetuate stereotypes, as often happens, or incorporate a gender perspective in their news reporting to promote and accelerate cultural changes.<sup>47</sup> In a survey for NDI, 42 percent of participants did not believe that the media treats men and women candidates equally. This perception is more common in Azuay and slightly more prevalent among women.<sup>48</sup>

The way that large, national, and well-known traditional media (television, radio, and newspapers) operate in Ecuador leads to editors and journalists prioritizing content that supports their political beliefs or financial incentives, rather than prioritizing quality journalism and objective reporting. To increase page views—and thus revenue—the media tends to look for stories about women leaders that might have a salacious angle: “There is more interest in digging up women’s pasts, and [journalists] don’t do that with men,” said one male political scientist based in Quito. Women often are not given the same access to media coverage as men, and when they are covered in the media, the focus is on women’s appearance and clothes, rather than on their politics and policies. Almost every interviewee who spoke in detail about the media, including some men, highlighted this difference.

**“The debate with [the] media is not a real debate but a created narrative.”  
—A former woman politician**

The media produces content that perpetuates existing harmful gender stereotypes by focusing on a woman’s appearance, beauty, and weight rather than what she has to say. One woman politician from Quito noted that “the media tried to show that women don’t think for themselves or have their own opinions; you are an instrument or following orders of someone else.” Another interviewee said that a journalist asked her for money in order to speak positively about her, and when she did not agree, the journalist began attacking her publicly.

These issues are likely due to several factors. As mentioned above, media owners are driven by profits rather than by facts, so that incentivizes them to capitalize on stories that draw attention rather than stories that are important to the public. In addition, journalists might lack training on how to report on women leaders in a gender-sensitive way. There may not be any political will among journalists and editors to fix these issues. Journalists also face an increasingly hostile and dangerous environment, particularly those who report on violence and corruption.<sup>49</sup> Sexism in newsrooms and by sources makes the job particularly challenging for women journalists, who are subject to sexual harassment, name-calling, and challenges to their intelligence and authority. Women journalists mentioned that most of the editors and decision-makers in media are men, making it difficult to include a gender perspective in articles. Journalists also face challenges when trying to find diverse sources, as many women fear the risk of overexposure and do not want to be public figures, as they would likely be subject to the violence described below and throughout this report.

---

<sup>47</sup> ONU Mujeres (2021). Hacia una participación paritaria e inclusiva en América Latina y el Caribe. Panorama regional y aportes de la CSW65.

<sup>48</sup> NDI Women Survey Final-report mar 2021.

<sup>49</sup> [https://cpj.org/reports/2023/06/ecuador-on-edge-political-paralysis-and-spiking-crime-poses-new-threats-to-press-freedom/?mc\\_cid=c3b82ecb57](https://cpj.org/reports/2023/06/ecuador-on-edge-political-paralysis-and-spiking-crime-poses-new-threats-to-press-freedom/?mc_cid=c3b82ecb57)

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Violence against women in politics is a global problem that prevents women from accessing opportunities to participate in politics and public life. The Organization of American States provides the following definition:

“Violence against women in political life’ is to be construed as any action, conduct, or omission, carried out directly or through third parties that, based on gender, causes harm or suffering to a woman or several women, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women of their political rights. Violence against women in political life includes physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic, or symbolic violence.”<sup>50</sup>

Violence against women in politics remains a major barrier to women’s leadership in Ecuador, and institutions have played a role in mitigating it as well as perpetuating it. Violence is often committed against women in political parties by men in their own parties. One-third of the women surveyed for this assessment who identified harmful acts that had happened to them when participating in politics said that these acts were perpetrated by members of their own party. A study conducted by UN Women-Ecuador, *Fundación ESQUEL*, and the CNE found that psychological and symbolic violence were the most common forms of this type of violence. Two-thirds of the interviewed women identified various forms of psychological violence, including sexist language. Over half of the women reported being discredited and excluded from political activities. Physical violence was witnessed by one-third of the participants, while two out of ten had experienced harassment and sexual violence. The study also revealed that the majority of attacks (58 percent) were perpetrated by political actors such as leaders, electoral candidates, and party activists.<sup>51</sup> The findings in this report were confirmed by interviewees who, when asked about violence from their own party members, almost universally identified it as one of the most common barriers to women’s participation. In particular, psychosocial violence (name-calling, threats, harassment, and attempts to discredit them and their expertise) was the most prominent type of violence women cited, with rarer instances of sexual harassment and physical violence. While the majority of women who participated in this study’s survey said that they did not change their behavior in the face of these harmful acts, one in five women surveyed said that they stopped sharing their political opinions in person.

“He said to me, ‘that’s why they kill you women; you’re always lying,’  
and he said it in front of everyone.”  
—Woman journalist from Guayaquil

As described previously, there are laws in place that both define and spell out sanctions for perpetrators of violence against women in politics. Though the TCE did prosecute cases of violence against women in politics and did issue actual sanctions to the perpetrators (including removal from office), women still find obstacles in bringing cases forward to the TCE; in particular, a lack of knowledge about how the process works and a lack of legal support for their cases. Some interviewees also had negative feedback about both the CNE and the TCE, noting that citizens do not fully trust these institutions, and one woman activist went so far as to say the CNE was a “sham.”

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/ViolenciaPolitica-ProtocoloPartidos-EN.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Desafíos de la democracia paritaria en Ecuador. PNUD 2022. ONU Mujeres 2022.

Further, when these instances of violence fall outside the jurisdiction of the TCE, the Ecuadorian judicial system is not well equipped to effectively and efficiently handle cases, nor is it trusted by citizens to bring about a swift and fair resolution. One interviewee filed a motion to get a restraining order against a man who started verbally attacking her family and, after three years, the process is still in its initial stages; “Justice is slow when you need protection,” she said. Another interviewee cited a case where a presidential candidate who was involved in a case was meeting with a judge at his home days before that judge issued a decision in the case. In general, there is a sense that the justice system is corrupt, and those with more money and power can control outcomes in ways that people without those resources cannot.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

Socio-cultural factors embody assumptions about appropriate norms and practices, shaping social expectations as well as personal attitudes and behaviors. In the case of WPPL, these factors reinforce an association between political power and men and masculinity, making it difficult for women to be seen and accepted as legitimate political actors.

These gender stereotypes, ideas about gender roles, and cultural views are formed as children, and it was clear from interviews that men with more progressive parents (or men whose mothers were activists or elected leaders) had more progressive views, some even identifying as feminists.

## GENDER STEREOTYPES

Existing gender stereotypes can impact women’s ability to participate in politics and political leadership. These stereotypes can affect whether or not citizens consider women to be qualified to hold political office or be decision-makers in political parties. In the 2018 World Values Survey, almost 30 percent of men and 17 percent of women agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “Men make better political leaders than women do.”<sup>52</sup> In a survey from NDI, 42 percent of participants believed that women leaders are not equally accepted as men leaders.<sup>53</sup> This perception was much more widespread among the population of higher socioeconomic status, totaling 55 percent of respondents.<sup>54</sup> In the survey administered for this study, 47 percent of women and 64 percent of men said that harmful gender stereotypes and a negative societal attitude toward women’s participation were some of the main reasons that there are more men than women in politics. This reason was the most chosen answer in both the women’s and men’s surveys. Women also said that women’s lack of confidence in themselves and a lack of funding were other key reasons for this gender gap.

Opinions from interviewees and focus group participants were mixed on whether or not voters would vote for women candidates or not. Some interviewees cautioned that voters do not want to elect women, especially in times of insecurity. Others (both women and men) did not see this as a problem, as the quota law has existed for decades and women have held high-level elected positions. Many men interviewed did highlight the importance of women’s participation, not only because of the quota requirement but because they acknowledged that women have a unique perspective. While that is certainly the case, women have never held a majority of seats in any elected body, but this may have less to do with voters’ attitudes and more to do with the other barriers and challenges (especially within their own parties) that they face. Nonetheless, some men still believe that the quota forces women to be in politics against their own interests and do not recognize that women need to be present in spaces where decisions are being made.

---

<sup>52</sup> WVS, Ecuador 2018

<sup>53</sup> NDI Women Survey Final-report mar 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

One focus group participant wondered: “Maybe women don't want to be in politics; perhaps we are forcing them.”

Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women also face higher constraints to participate in politics due to restrictive gender stereotypes that dictate their role in society.<sup>55</sup> A study led by UN Women-Ecuador highlighted the discrimination faced by women from rural communities, including racism stemming from the urban-rural divide. Specifically, it noted that Indigenous women’s participation in politics “exposes them to gossip and rumors that question their femininity, the way they construct themselves as women, the care of their children, and public overexposure are the most criticized factors when they are in the political scene.”<sup>56</sup> While the gender quota meant that Amazonian Indigenous women have been nominated and elected to local positions, “their lack of experience in political tasks and limitations in Spanish language proficiency make them dependent on the men in their communities who have more experience. Nevertheless, for them, the mere possibility of being local authorities represents a significant step, and they appreciate that fact.”<sup>57</sup> Mestizo women and women of a higher socioeconomic status who were interviewed often acknowledged their own privilege and described how it is more difficult for women who do not have the same benefits they have. While these sentiments show that there is an understanding of compounding discrimination and unique barriers that women from other marginalized groups face, interviewees, especially those from minority ethnic groups, did point out pervasive racism and a culture that stereotypes Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people based on the color of their skin.

Even men with more progressive ideas about gender equality rely on these gender stereotypes to talk about positive qualities that women possess, linking women’s positive traits to their roles as mothers and praising women for their loyalty and organizational abilities. Demonstrating traditional stereotypes and roles for men, male interviewees also talked about the need to “protect” and “defend” women from violence. Some men interviewed did not believe there was a difference in how women and men experienced political violence nor in how women were treated in the media, because men wanted to be more “careful” or “gentle” with women. One interviewee noted that because women have “few opportunities to win,” and since they are not as famous and popular as men leaders, politicians attack men and not women. He also said that women are more “respected” so men avoid attacking them. Though it is valuable to learn how men appreciate women for the different skills and perspectives they bring, continuing to rely on gender stereotypes and specific gender roles to highlight women’s contributions serves to reinforce those stereotypes and roles that hold women back in the first place. The fact that men are acknowledging women’s unique contributions and highlighting men’s roles in preventing violence, however, does represent important progress that cannot be ignored. One man interviewed even noted: “People blame women for violence, but we need to avoid justifying violence.”

Marital status also plays a major part in how women are viewed and stereotyped. If women are married, they are often asked what their husbands think about their candidacy or policy positions. If they have children, they will also be asked about who is at home with their children or who is taking care of them while their mother is working. On the other hand, if women are unmarried, they are often insulted (e.g., “no man wants to be with her”) or mistrusted (e.g., “she is having an affair” or “she only got there by sleeping around”). One unmarried woman interviewee said that she was not permitted to stand next to a married man political leader in photos, in part because his wife did not want her to be near him and in part so that rumors would not surface about them having an affair. In a high-level meeting within a political

---

<sup>55</sup> Estudio para el fortalecimiento de la participación política de mujeres pertenecientes a pueblos y nacionalidades indígenas, afroecuatorianos y montubios en el Ecuador en el marco del Proyecto P/00119592 “Apoyo al Ciclo Electoral en Ecuador.” Dayana León Franco, 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

party, one of the party leaders, when asked about the lack of women's presence in the meeting, commented, "If my wife finds out there are women here, she won't let me come next time."

## GENDER ROLES

While affirmative action measures, followed by political and electoral gender parity measures, have accelerated and increased women's access to elected positions, there are still restrictive, harmful gender roles that affect women's power in politics. One of the main factors related to gender roles that limit women's ability to participate is the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities, which are predominantly performed by women, including at the community level. According to the Economics Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (*Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe*) Gender Equality Observatory, women spend 37 hours per week doing unpaid work, while men only spend 10 hours doing unpaid labor.<sup>58</sup> Indigenous women dedicate 86.3 hours per week to both paid and unpaid work, whereas men only dedicate 62.1 hours.<sup>59</sup> Despite its importance, this unpaid work remains invisible, underestimated, and neglected in the design of economic and social policies in the region, and there is no legal framework to promote a more equal distribution of caregiving tasks. The stereotype of caregiving as a "natural" role assigned almost exclusively to women and girls creates an overload of work. This limits their opportunities and choices, undermines their rights, and becomes a fundamental obstacle to gender equality, empowerment, and women's autonomy. In many cases, this hinders their ability, time, and resources to participate in political and public life, especially in electoral processes and holding elected or appointed positions at all levels of government.<sup>60</sup> The fact that it is difficult for women to perform this role at home as well as be part of public life means that women feel like they have to make a choice between politics and their families.<sup>61</sup> They also cite feelings of guilt for not being home as much as they would be if they did not participate.<sup>62</sup> Policy around parental leave also reinforces these stereotypes; maternity leave is 12 weeks, while paternity leave is just 15 days.<sup>63</sup>

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, women in Latin America and the Caribbean already carried a disproportionate burden of caregiving and household tasks. Women's unpaid work in the private sphere far exceeded that of men, particularly among those in poverty. Despite advancements in women's economic and public lives, there was still a lack of shared responsibility for household and caregiving duties, perpetuating a patriarchal model. This imbalance limited women's opportunities in other areas, as time became a precious and scarce resource.<sup>64</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the gender gap in unpaid care work, disproportionately increasing the time women spent on these domestic tasks.<sup>65</sup> This sentiment—that women are still responsible for the majority of the unpaid care work and caregiving required in households—was repeated by women and men interviewees alike.

In addition, women in public life are often questioned about their capabilities and face unrealistic expectations. Multiple interviewees noted that women are often asked to prove their qualifications, while men's qualifications are taken at face value. They are judged based on appearance, personal matters, and age—judgments to which men are not subjected; "We are in the spotlight every day," said one high-level woman politician based in Quito. Women themselves may internalize limiting beliefs due to societal

---

<sup>58</sup> [Tiempo de trabajo no remunerado según ingresos propios por sexo | Observatorio de Igualdad de Género](#)

<sup>59</sup> Shugulí, K. Mujeres indígenas, equidad y lucha contra la violencia de género. Corporación Participación Ciudadana. 2021.

<sup>60</sup> ONU Mujeres (2021). Hacia una participación paritaria e inclusiva en América Latina y el Caribe. Panorama regional y aportes de la CSW65.

<sup>61</sup> ONU Mujeres Ecuador. "Estudio sobre violencia política contra las mujeres en el Ecuador." Instituto de la Democracia. Consejo Nacional Electoral. 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Código del Trabajo, Art. 152.

<sup>64</sup> ONU Mujeres (2021). Hacia una participación paritaria e inclusiva en América Latina y el Caribe. Panorama regional y aportes de la CSW65.

<sup>65</sup> [Caring in times of COVID-19: A global study on the impact of the pandemic on care work and gender equality | Economics Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

pressures. There is a perception that certain attributes traditionally associated with masculinity, such as strength, rationality, ambition, and competitiveness, are positively valued in men—but not in women—when it comes to leadership. Women in politics also have the feeling of being surveilled all the time, and they feel like they cannot make any mistakes: “They were watching me closely, trying to find any way to blame me,” a woman former politician noted in an interview. There is an opportunity, however, as young people—women and men—are more open to progressive ideas about gender roles. One of the women expressed, referring to the way women’s experience, qualifications, and actions are judged: “We don’t want the bar to be lowered for us [women] but to raise it to the same level for everyone [including men].”

## CULTURAL VIEWS

Cultural views regarding gender equality and women’s and men’s roles in society have a great bearing on women’s participation and leadership in politics. Political science professor Santiago Basabe-Serrano noted that “Ecuador is one of the countries with the most conservative cultural views in Latin America,” leading to a “strong exclusion of women from political life.”<sup>66</sup> He goes on to reason that “in a sexist society, political parties and politics in general only reflect that process of exclusion of greater scope.”<sup>67</sup> Several men interviewed recognized politics as a misogynist and violent space but failed to identify their own contribution to it. Instead, they placed the burden on women to adapt to the system instead of changing themselves.

A survey from NDI in March 2021 further examines cultural views on WPPL. The vast majority of participants (92 percent) strongly agreed or agreed with electing a woman as a candidate for public office (agreement was higher among younger interviewees and those with higher levels of education).<sup>68</sup> Among the minority who disagree with electing women, almost a quarter of participants stated that it is because women are not qualified for public office, an opinion that was more common in the province of Guayas compared with other regions. Seventy-one percent of participants think that women are underrepresented to a significant or some extent in public or political positions, a perception that was more widespread in the province of Pichincha, a province where 80 percent of inhabitants live in Quito, which is urban and tends to be more progressive. Regardless of the extent to which they perceive women as underrepresented, 86 percent of participants agree that government mechanisms should exist to reduce barriers to women’s political participation (there is no gender gap between the opinions of men and women on this issue).

Cultural views about minority populations impact the ability of women from those groups to access and have power in politics. As part of the same NDI survey, 65 percent of respondents perceived discrimination against Indigenous peoples, and 67 percent recognized discrimination against the Afro-Ecuadorian population.<sup>69</sup> While the Indigenous movement highlights social justice as part of its discourse, “Ecuador’s contemporary Indigenous movement counts few women in its leadership.”<sup>70</sup> The head of the National Council for Gender Equality in an interview mentioned the critical challenges that women from different ethnic groups believe they face when deciding to participate in politics. Specifically, she noted that there is still a significant amount of racism in society, and parties follow parity mechanisms not to consciously promote rights but rather to comply with regulations.<sup>71</sup> Lourdes Tiban, an Indigenous politician, said in an interview: “The discrimination is threefold: they see you as poor, as a woman, and as

---

<sup>66</sup> Desk Research Report. Actors, institutions, and political performance in Ecuador. An approach to the 2021 electoral process. Santiago Basabe-Serrano.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> NDI Women Survey Final-report March 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1660145274?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>

<sup>71</sup> Estudio para el fortalecimiento de la participación política de mujeres pertenecientes a pueblos y nacionalidades indígenas, afroecuatorianos y montubios en el Ecuador en el marco del Proyecto P/00119592 “Apoyo al Ciclo Electoral en Ecuador.” Dayana León Franco, 2023.



an Indigenous person. If a mestiza arrives at the Assembly in a car, nothing happens, but if someone like me arrives in a car, they say, ‘Look, an Indigenous woman driving a car, how much did she steal?’”<sup>72</sup>

One academic interviewed had recently completed research for a study on the political participation of women from ethnic minority communities like Indigenous women, Afro-Ecuadorian women, and *Montubia* women, or women from the coastal countryside of Ecuador. She found that Indigenous women needed to ask permission from their families and communities before running for office. This is not only the case for Indigenous women; when a provincial president of a party was recruiting candidates to run for provincial elected posts, all 18 women he spoke with said they had to ask their husbands for permission before agreeing to be part of the party list. While it is important to determine whether the woman's political life will affect her husband in his public and private life, in particular in terms of family time and caregiving responsibilities, it should be an equal conversation between the two partners rather than the husband dictating what choice his wife will make.

Many Indigenous people in Ecuador follow a worldview called *cosmovision*, or the conception of how the physical and spiritual world intersect. This worldview emphasizes complementarity; there is no day without night, no hot without cold, and no man without woman.<sup>73</sup> These are not meant to be conceived as opposite pairs, but as items that complement each other in “harmonious integration.” The interpretation of this worldview can entrench some existing gender roles that allow women and men to “complement” each other while still remaining in their domains of influence.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Violence against women in politics and public life often stems from socio-cultural expectations of how women and men are supposed to behave, and when women deviate from that prescribed role, they are met with different forms of violence. Because some cultural and religious beliefs identify women as more “pure” or “moral,” criticizing women for behavior that differs from these expectations can lead to attacks. Forty-two percent of women surveyed said they have witnessed people spread fake news of a sexual nature about women leaders. These insults are of a sexual nature in particular because women are not “supposed” to behave in a sexual way, so developing false content about this topic can greatly affect a woman's reputation not only in her public life but also in her private life.

In addition, women who support more progressive policies related to women's rights seem to be more likely to face violence. One man interviewed mentioned that women leaders who supported the decriminalization of abortion were particularly targeted for violence and sexist messages. Indeed, it seems that around this issue, men party leaders were less tolerant of women politicians who did not toe the party line. In 2013, then-President Rafael Correa insisted that three women in his party be suspended from their posts for a month for supporting the decriminalization of abortion, even after they withdrew their proposal to keep party unity.

There is also a prevailing idea—among both women and men interviewees—that women commit acts of psychological violence (name-calling, insults, etc.) against other women. While this has often been a sentiment that men have used to excuse themselves from having to do anything to prevent violence, this is a phenomenon that is part of Ecuadorian politics. While some interviewees did blame the women themselves (one woman party leader said that other women were “jealous” of her rise to power), others blamed the exclusionary, patriarchal system for making women have a scarcity mindset around positions of power in politics and making them feel like they have to tear each other down to succeed.

---

<sup>72</sup> Historias de Violencia Hacia las Mujeres en Política en América Latina. Onu Mujeres. 2019

<sup>73</sup> Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos, “State and Cosmovision: Basic Manual.” 2017. [https://inredh.org/archivos/pdf/c\\_cosmovision\\_2017.pdf](https://inredh.org/archivos/pdf/c_cosmovision_2017.pdf)

Social media was often cited as a space for this type of violence. Because of the inherent “features” of social media—users can be anonymous and news can travel fast—women leaders are subject to false news, increased scrutiny, and attacks without repercussions. One man interviewed noted that, for example, if there was a video of a woman leader dancing that is posted to social media, the public reaction would be much different than if the same video of a man were posted. Participación Ciudadana, an Ecuadorian CSO, monitored online violence against women in politics and in public positions from December 1, 2019 to July 31, 2022, tracking and reviewing posts on the Twitter accounts of about 30 women, including government officials, journalists, and members of civil society. A total of 9,960 tweets with 799 discriminatory expressions and 1,598 similar phrases were recorded throughout the monitoring period.<sup>74</sup> More than one in five women surveyed for this assessment noted that they had been harassed online.

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

“It is difficult to get [into politics] and even more difficult to stay, because everything there is made to expel you.”

—Woman political leader from Cuenca

The third component of the political ecosystem focuses on decisions made at the individual level by women that block or support women’s access and voice as a group in political spaces. Informed by socio-cultural norms and political institutions, these individual decisions fundamentally shape who participates and has a voice in politics, and thus overall levels of WPPL. Participating in politics is a time-intensive endeavor, so women’s participation in politics often depends on how much time they have available to dedicate to their participation. Because socio-cultural norms dictate that women be responsible for the home, women who also work outside the household have a double working day and even less time to participate in politics.<sup>75</sup> For example, women may not have the time or resources to dedicate to needed training to prepare themselves to run for office, which then deters them from running at all. Relatedly, the digital gender gap and lack of knowledge about how to properly use social media platforms were also cited as important factors that prevent women from entering political spaces, as technology and social networks are often important resources for campaigns.

---

<sup>74</sup> *Participación Ciudadana*. REPORTE CONSOLIDADO: Balance del monitoreo de violencia política en Twitter contra las mujeres con representatividad pública. 2022.

<sup>75</sup> According to interviews with WPPL experts such as Omar Cacho Gil, Ivania Padilla and Ana Ruth Garcia.

It was “one of the most difficult decisions of my life”  
to stay in politics.  
—Woman political leader from Quito

In particular, while accessing political leadership is often a challenge for women, getting women to choose to stay in politics is a greater challenge. One interviewee talked about how—once elected to the National Assembly—her party did not provide training or support her, but “it was important for me to be there to open the door for other women like me.” Her party also did not support her reelection campaign, trying to humiliate her and harass her during her campaign. Ultimately, she determined, “it was not worth it.” She no longer serves in elected office but is still involved in the political space (though in a non-partisan position).

“I am tired, but you cannot be tired.”  
—Woman business leader in Quito

## ACCESS TO FUNDING

As with many countries around the globe, participating in politics, especially as candidates, elected officials, and high-level party members, requires a great deal of resources. The global labor force participation in 2021 revealed that 54.5 percent of women of working age are engaged in or actively seeking paid employment, compared to 78.6 percent of men. According to the Economics Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Ecuador has an economic participation rate of 80.2 percent for Indigenous people, though there is a significant 20 percentage point gender gap favoring Indigenous men.<sup>76</sup> In 2021, the multidimensional poverty rate for rural women reached 68.5 percent while for urban women, it was 23.8 percent. The multidimensional poverty rate for women in rural coastal areas (*Montubias*) was 57.3 percent, and the highest rate was among Indigenous women, reaching 78.1 percent.<sup>77</sup> The gender gap in employment and the high poverty rate of some groups of women from ethnic minorities or rural areas likely means that women have less access to and control over resources compared with their male counterparts, making it more difficult for them to participate in politics.

Women also have historically faced difficulties in campaign financing, which hinders their ability to achieve economic autonomy and limits their financial resources for political candidacies. They often have less access to networks of power and less time for fundraising activities. In many cases, men financiers may hold biases regarding the viability of women’s candidacies, and women may be unwilling to engage in practices of political clientelism that are sometimes expected in exchange for financial support.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, electoral campaigns in several countries in the region have very high costs, especially when

<sup>76</sup> Shugulí, K. *Mujeres indígenas, equidad y lucha contra la violencia de género*. Corporación Participación Ciudadana. 2021.

<sup>77</sup> ONU Mujeres, *Perfil de País Según Igualdad de Género en Ecuador*. ONU Mujeres 2023.

<sup>78</sup> ONU Mujeres (2021). *Hacia una participación paritaria e inclusiva en América Latina y el Caribe*. Panorama regional y aportes de la CSW65.

the electoral systems allow for preferential votes toward candidates and there are no mechanisms for public campaign financing. However, experience has also shown that even when such funds exist, parties have devised strategies to divert them to men candidates or parties do not distribute them equally among women.<sup>79</sup> As noted in a report from UN Women, “Personal contributions are always necessary for the campaign, and in most cases, women do not have available resources.”<sup>80</sup> Seventy-one percent of women surveyed for this assessment felt that promoting the economic autonomy of women and encouraging their economic participation in the economy would greatly increase their capacity to participate in politics, while 24 percent said it would increase their capacity a bit.

## LACK OF CAPACITY AND CONFIDENCE

While women might not have much access to economic resources, higher education is more available to women than before, though women from more rural areas and from Indigenous communities often have greater challenges in accessing higher education. This is a key element of promoting women’s participation, as many interviewees cited their experience in secondary school or university student government as the first time they engaged in political life. Continuing to foster these student government programs—and ensuring that they are rooted in principles of gender equality—is critical in building the next generation of leadership. Women also have experience on the frontlines of protests or advocacy campaigns, particularly women from Indigenous groups, but when it comes to transitioning to formal politics, because of the challenges described in this report, they elect not to participate more formally. During interviews, however, when asking what motivated them to get into politics, both women and men see politics as a real way—and sometimes, the most effective way—to make change for their country and their communities.

Despite greater access to education than previously, women might also not have as much knowledge or training regarding how to participate politically compared with men. Though there is a legal requirement that 20 percent of the amount allocated for training by political parties be reserved for priority groups, like women, the reality is that the monitoring of this law is not robust.<sup>81</sup> The CNE did offer training sessions for some women candidates in 2023, but its resources are also limited.<sup>82</sup> Certain political parties mentioned in interviews that they had held training for women and young people (and had plans to continue this ahead of the 2025 elections), but the training program does not seem to be permanent or comprehensive. Unfortunately, several men politicians and party members who were interviewed did not believe it is their responsibility to change a violent and *machista* political environment but that it is women’s responsibility to be better prepared or to found their own party. In addition, women from more rural or remote areas may not have the necessary information to know how to participate in formal politics; this information is often not shared by parties, as they often tend to be concentrated in Quito and Guayaquil and are weaker or not present at all in the other provinces and areas. Several women from smaller cities or rural areas expressed that there are few ways to start a political career, but that it was easier if you had a relative in politics or participated as a community leader in social and religious groups.

## FAMILY SUPPORT

In addition to resources, support from family and the community plays a significant role in women’s political involvement, from candidate selection to career decisions. In some cases, families decide on women’s participation before these women are even aware of it. Other women seek permission or consult with their families before getting involved. Some make decisions in dialogue with their families, seeking

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> ONU Mujeres Ecuador. “Estudio sobre violencia política contra las mujeres en el Ecuador.” Instituto de la Democracia. Consejo Nacional Electoral. 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Organization of American States Observation Report, 2023.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

opinions and support.<sup>83</sup> When asked about the cost-benefit relationship of political participation in women's lives, the general finding is that the personal costs women have to bear to maintain their participation are very high, and rarely do they outweigh the benefits or exceed the costs. The detailed costs include moral harm, loss of autonomy and freedom, health issues, economic losses, and most significantly, strains in their relationships with partners and children.<sup>84</sup> As noted above, women feel like they need to choose between their families and their political careers, and they often feel guilty when they choose the latter.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Violence against women in politics is a major issue in Ecuador. Women in political life often face psychological, physical, and sexual violence. A 2019 UN Women Ecuador report revealed that two-thirds (66 percent) of the 50 interviewed women candidates and elected officials, as well as participants in focus groups, identified psychological violence as the most frequent form of violence. Study participants noted that party colleagues or individuals in their work or community environment speak to them with an air of superiority or address them with diminutives or belittling words.<sup>85</sup> A majority of participants also cited the spreading of rumors against them; insufficient promotion of their candidacy or of their performance as elected leaders; and isolation, exclusion, or marginalization within the party, local government, or community as other forms of violence that are very common.<sup>86</sup> Almost a third of study participants mentioned that their families or campaign teams experienced attacks or personal harm, and 12 percent to 14 percent of participants noted that they themselves were victims of physical assaults or injuries.<sup>87</sup> In exceptional cases, they received death threats or experienced attempted murder (8 percent).<sup>88</sup> Regarding sexual violence, 16 percent of participants mentioned forms of sexual harassment such as unwanted sexual innuendos, gestures, words, or non-consensual sexual actions. On the other hand, mentions of solicitation of sexual favors and forms of sexual violence with physical contact were exceptional (only 4 percent of participants cited those forms of violence).<sup>89</sup> Within the family context, the most common form of violence toward women involved in politics is harassment and surveillance by their partners, which 16 percent of study participants experienced. Less frequent (only 8 percent) is the control of economic resources and the withholding or destruction of objects or property owned by them.<sup>90</sup>

The highest percentage (58 percent) of those who perpetrate gender-based political violence against women are political actors (party leaders, electoral candidates, party members, and campaign staff). Thirty-two percent of incidents are perpetrated by social actors (voters, family members, community members or groups, religious or traditional leaders, media and social media, employers, and colleagues), while 10 percent involve state actors (police, military personnel, and other government officials from all branches of the State, including electoral officials and personnel).<sup>91</sup> In the survey administered for this assessment, 75 percent of women respondents and 90 percent of men respondents said that women always or sometimes experience political violence during their campaigns. Ninety-three percent of these women and all of the men surveyed said that this violence greatly or somewhat affected these women's ability to be elected.

---

<sup>83</sup> ONU Mujeres Ecuador. "Estudio sobre violencia política contra las mujeres en el Ecuador." Instituto de la Democracia. Consejo Nacional Electoral. 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> ONU Mujeres Ecuador. "Estudio sobre violencia política contra las mujeres en el Ecuador." Instituto de la Democracia. Consejo Nacional Electoral. 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

There are several international donors and organizations working in the WPPL sector in Ecuador, as well as multiple local organizations. Various international donors and implementers that were mentioned during data collection include: UN Women, the United Nations Development Programme, the National Endowment for Democracy, USAID, the U.S. State Department, the European Union, and the German GIZ, which fund many of the programs described below. Some of the interviewees from these stakeholders mentioned a coordinating committee, or a “gender table,” with the goal of information sharing in order to complement development efforts. As part of that committee, there is a sub-group focused on programming related to WPPL. Based on the fact that there are various ongoing initiatives related to women in politics, it will be important to use this group for coordination to avoid duplication of donor efforts.

During desk research and interviews, the researchers learned of the following relevant programs:

- The International Republican Institute has a regional program working with women parliamentarians from Bolivia, Colombia, and Ecuador to provide training and is beginning a program working with women from outside the capital (mostly in the Andean region) on entrepreneurship. The organization is also working with political parties to empower youth to participate in politics.
- NDI has been working with political parties partly to teach men how to be allies for gender equality and how to prevent violence against women in politics. NDI has also been engaging with local CSOs on their various initiatives, as described below.
- The International Foundation for Electoral Systems worked closely with the CNE ahead of the February 2023 elections on election administration and on some gender-related initiatives, such as holding a workshop with CNE staff on masculinities and participating as part of the CNE’s election observation mission. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems does not currently have active programming in Ecuador.
- MEGA is a local CSO that has led the charge in supporting women in bringing cases of political violence forward. The organization is now chairing the *Coalition Violeta*, a group of CSOs with the goal of eliminating gender-based political violence (for more information, view the full list of CSOs who are part of the coalition), which is an initiative supported by NDI.
- Fundación TANDEM is working on a project focused on various cities in Ecuador in order to incorporate the gender perspective in budgets, public policies, or legislation in local governments and is also working with political parties to promote women’s leadership and participation in politics.
- Fundación ESQUEL has worked with political parties and other institutions to promote women’s participation in Ecuador, including doing research on online violence and harassment against women in politics and working with men to help them understand how restrictive gender roles harm everyone, not only women.
- Participación Ciudadana has an Observatory of Women’s Political Participation through which they monitor violence committed against women in politics through social media.

# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

## SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

While socio-cultural factors are often the most difficult barriers to change and overcome, they are often the most important to mitigate in order to see lasting, meaningful change in attitudes toward gender equality, gender roles, and women's participation in politics.

- Engage men (in parties, in elected office, and in families) as allies and demonstrate why gender equality can benefit everyone. While women have done the majority of work to promote gender equality, it is important to have men allies supporting women's efforts and demonstrating to other men that supporting women's participation is an important endeavor. These programs work best when they target men who are adjacent to women in politics who are also receiving training; for example, if local elected women are receiving training on the responsibilities of their jobs, public speaking and communications, etc., they could have some joint sessions with local elected men and then break out into single-gender groups. With this type of program design, women's individual capacity is being built (and removing individual-level barriers) while also shifting cultural attitudes and institutional barriers and ensuring that women's male colleagues do not resent them for receiving training support. It is recommended that sessions with men cover issues like power and privilege, intersectionality, and practical ways that men can support women's meaningful participation. These programs work best when they: provide support over a span of time, with regular check-ins with participants; include assignments or projects in between training sessions (and provide funding for those initiatives); and use a local trainer from the same background as participants. Training should not only be at a party level, but should include multiparty workshops, when feasible, that could make it clear that the problem is not only within the party but also affecting every political party for which it could be categorized as a systemic problem.

Another effective strategy to engage men that was recommended by one interviewee is to facilitate these types of workshops with men at similar or higher levels; for example, working with men political party leaders from Ecuador and bringing men from the region at a similar level together would both convey a sense of importance onto the topic (encouraging party leaders to participate) and demonstrate that high-level men support gender equality initiatives.

- Partner with leaders of religious organizations to show how religious views and gender equality can and should coexist. Religious beliefs that relegate women to secondary roles in society hold women back from participating equally in politics. Working with religious organizations and leaders will show how the principles of religion and gender equality can go together rather than be in opposition. One interviewee suggested framing work around gender equality as work that improves the lives of children and families and to tie gender equality work to liberation theology because Catholicism emphasizes the liberation of the oppressed. Using these strategies, those who have adopted more conservative religious values might better understand how gender equality fits into that framework. Many interviewees in the smaller provinces and rural areas use religion-based community service as a stepping point to enter into local politics.
- Promote a school curriculum that challenges harmful gender stereotypes and typical gender roles. Many interviewees highlighted their childhood experiences growing up in more gender-equal households as what encouraged them to hold more progressive ideas about gender equality. To ensure more children experience that type of education, Ecuador's Department of Education could ensure that, starting in primary school, the curriculum includes education about the importance of gender equality, not only through unique lesson plans with gender equality as

the main focus but also by gender mainstreaming the full curriculum to ensure women and men are shown in equally active roles as part of lessons or activities.

- Implement awareness campaigns to address the influence and impact of misogyny and political violence on gender equality and women's political rights and demonstrate the importance of women's participation in politics. Awareness campaigns targeted at the population will help to combat the normalization of harassment and violence against women in politics. This campaign should first educate the population on what is considered to be violence against women in politics and its impact on women's political participation.
- Create caregiving structures in parties and institutions to facilitate women's ability to have families and participate in politics. Because women still chiefly serve in the caregiving role in families, their domestic responsibilities can often keep them from taking on political leadership roles. Creating caregiving support in political institutions (such as parties, the National Assembly, local elected bodies, etc.) means that women will be better able to balance caregiving responsibilities with their political responsibilities. While this is not a solution for all women, it can help facilitate women's participation by allowing them to participate in meetings and/or events during times when they are responsible for dependents. Given that political parties lack constant funding for this kind of initiative, they should endeavor to make alliances with CSOs and entities such as state childcare services in order to give options to women in their parties.

## INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

There are a myriad of institutions that have the power to strengthen women's participation and leadership in politics in public life, many of which are analyzed in this report. Many political institutions do not benefit from public trust and thus working with these institutions to promote women's participation will also require building trust with the population. One note in particular about political parties is that many interviewees noted that parties are often only present during electoral periods and lack internal organization and thus do not have the structure between elections to successfully implement initiatives. One interviewee specifically noted that because political parties are so volatile with leadership changes and internal power jockeying, it can feel impossible to make meaningful changes within parties. Despite these difficulties, parties are the gatekeepers to formal political power, so any efforts to promote women's political participation will likely (and should) involve parties to some degree.

- **Fund grassroots women's rights organizations and provide core funding for these organizations.** Overwhelmingly, interviewees mentioned providing funding for grassroots women's organizations and, crucially, providing *core funding* for these organizations. A sentiment often expressed by women civil society leaders and rights activists is that they are so dependent on project-based funding that it leaves them little room (or funding) to focus on general activism for women's rights or to maintain their organization. The precariousness of short-term projects leaves them constantly focusing their attention on future opportunities, as the consequences of *not* receiving funds means laying off staff or not taking a paycheck themselves. In addition, the tendency of international donors to focus on CSOs in urban centers like Quito and Guayaquil and to continue to fund high-capacity organizations that can write proposals in English and can follow the rigorous financial requirements demanded by these donors harms smaller, more local grassroots organizations. Donors could see their dollars go further by providing organizations core funding (and providing technical assistance on organizational management, proposal writing, or other skills-building based on the needs of the organization) and by looking to support organizations beyond the "usual suspects" who are targeted by international donors. Providing long-term funding can also help with making programming more sustainable and more likely to be impactful over a longer time horizon.



The recommendation to support CSOs' core funding underscores the importance of providing them with sustained financial support at their foundational levels. Core funding refers to essential operational support that enables CSOs to cover basic expenses such as staff salaries, office space, and administrative costs. This recommendation is crucial for advancing WPPL as it recognizes that many CSOs, particularly at the grassroots level, often lack the financial resources necessary for effective operation. By offering core funding, CSOs can overcome financial constraints, allowing them to establish and maintain organizational budgets that facilitate their functioning. The absence of sufficient core funding can indeed act as a barrier to the success of both CSOs and women in civil society, hindering their ability to implement impactful programs and initiatives. Providing core funding not only ensures the sustainability of CSOs but also empowers them to focus on their core mission and objectives, ultimately fostering the advancement of WPPL. With reliable funding for operating costs, CSOs can enhance their outreach, implement targeted advocacy campaigns, and create a more conducive environment for women to actively participate and lead in political spheres. While it is difficult to establish a direct link between core funding and the advancement of WPPL, supporting core funding emerges as a strategic approach for unlocking the full potential of CSOs and catalyzing positive change in women's political engagement and leadership.

- **Promote the participation of the private sector together with CSOs to work toward fundraising specifically for women's electoral campaigns.** Currently, one of the main barriers to women's political participation is access to funding as well as unequal distribution of party funds that usually go mainly to men. Understanding that donors cannot provide funds for campaigns, programming should promote the creation of networks among these sectors that help raise funds either for campaigns or for supporting women and their families' livelihood while they are participating in campaigns. While some funders present in Ecuador might be able to undertake this activity (like the German political organizations), no interviewees mentioned these funders as a potential source for women's campaign funding.
- **Support the CNE and the TCE to hold political parties accountable for electoral law violations related to political finance and women's equal leadership within parties.** Currently, the legal framework provides a structure to allow institutions to punish parties and individuals who do not adhere to political finance laws, but these institutions do not have the political will or the capacity to do so. The legal framework also establishes the obligation of parties to achieve gender parity in their leadership structures. The CNE and the TCE should develop a monitoring mechanism and enforce a regular reporting requirement, with evidence required, to demonstrate that political parties are actually spending 20 percent of their public funding on initiatives that meaningfully promote political participation and that parties have achieved gender parity within their leadership structures and should impose meaningful sanctions (fines, deregistration, etc.) if parties do not comply.
- **Provide legal support for women who wish to bring forward cases of political violence.** While some existing CSOs, like MEGA, provide this type of political support, because of the volume of political violence and the increased participation of women in politics due to gender quotas, additional support for women who are survivors of this violence to seek justice is necessary. This support could include: providing information on how to pursue cases, providing lawyers or legal personnel to support women in filing cases and understanding the law, and providing psychosocial support.
- **Provide gender-sensitive political reporting training for journalists and support independent media outlets to diversify media coverage.** The way that the media covers women leaders not only causes challenges for them personally but can serve to perpetuate existing harmful gender stereotypes that can cause some of the socio-cultural barriers women

face. To mitigate this issue, training for journalists on how to cover women leaders, supporting repositories of women experts on particular issues, working with men in major media outlets, and supporting independent journalism outlets (who are less likely to be swayed by personal interests or money) is important. GK, an independent news outlet with a human rights focus, has attempted to create a list of women experts in Latin America called [Voces Expertas](#) to ensure more diversity of voices in sources for articles. Building on an initiative like this could be helpful in making the media more inclusive. Another GK initiative included developing a code of ethics for journalists, which GK staff presented in several newsrooms across the country. Without additional funding, though, the code of ethics has not been disseminated further. Supporting initiatives like these—rather than necessarily trying to build something new or different—would be a meaningful way to support local Ecuadorian independent media, build off efforts that already exist, and resist duplicating efforts.

- **Support political parties to meaningfully promote the participation of women members through training and internal party efforts to support women’s participation.** In the 2023 national legislative elections, party leaders found it difficult to find women who were willing to be candidates. One way to build a pipeline to candidacy and elected office for women leaders is for parties to invest in training opportunities for women to prepare them to be candidates. Once elected, parties should train newly elected women to support them in their new roles. Beyond training, parties can adopt policies that include zero tolerance for political violence and platforms that actually address women’s needs and priorities while ensuring their bylaws and other party documents include language and policies that support women’s participation in their party. Political parties should also prioritize their support between elections toward the women who have already been candidates (but were unsuccessful) in order to promote their future participation in politics.
- **Support parties to develop more robust internal structures and outreach efforts to civil society and voters, particularly women.** Promoting internal party democracy and developing more transparent and fair internal structures would help individuals, particularly women, who do not have close relationships with party leaders to have a more active role in making important decisions for the party. More meaningful outreach to women voters and civil society leaders would also help the party build its membership, making it easier to recruit candidates during electoral periods. Building closer connections with constituents will also help parties serve citizen interests and specifically, if parties do a better job at demonstrating that they are responsive to women’s priorities, women will be more likely to be interested in being a member of or running for office for that party.
- **Support a legal reform to the Electoral Code to ensure internal democracy in political parties.** The current legal framework does not establish robust internal party democracy for candidate selection, which often results in excluding women who have been actively involved in the party. Given that Ecuador is frequently amending its laws, there is an opportunity to promote specialized CSOs’ involvement in pushing for the reforms needed to create more democratic parties.

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

While less directly connected to political participation, one necessary condition for participation is having basic human needs met, something that is unfortunately not the case for many Afro-Ecuadorian, Indigenous women and women living in the rural areas of the country. Providing direct assistance, small loans, and/or other initiatives to promote economic empowerment is especially important in poorer communities. While training is important, one interviewee mentioned that she had spoken to a woman from the Guayas province who said that “the training certificates don’t buy us food.”

- **Provide sustained training for women on a variety of topics, including campaign skills, resilience, strategic communications, conflict mitigation, and negotiation.** Providing women with the necessary skills to feel comfortable and confident in political roles is key and was mentioned by a majority of interviewees. It is especially important to target 1) women from Indigenous communities, 2) women from Afro-Ecuadorian communities, and 3) women who live outside of Quito and Guayaquil who might not often have the opportunity for these types of training and who can make a meaningful impact in their local communities.
- **Support existing networks of women in politics and facilitate regional or global meetings for women to share challenges and best practices.** These networks not only allow for coordinated advocacy campaigns, but women who participate benefit from learning from each other and feeling less alone in dealing with the challenges they face. While maintaining a network often depends on that network receiving funding from an outside source, providing opportunities for women in politics to interact (even through focus groups implemented for this study) will allow women to make connections across party lines and coordinate on issues that are important to them.
- **Provide programs that support women's access to and control over financial resources.** As noted above, political campaigns and elected positions often require significant resources. Providing programs that support women's economic empowerment can have crossover effects on promoting their political empowerment, both by providing them with the necessary confidence and skills and by helping them earn the resources they need to be competitive in politics. Programming could focus on livelihood maintenance while women participate in political campaigns.

## ANNEX A. DATA COLLECTION SOURCES

### POLITICIAN SURVEY

Table A.1: Politicians Surveyed

POLITICAL PARTY	GENDER	NO. OF SURVEYS
Partido Izquierda Democrática	Women	11
	Men	6
Movimiento CREO	Women	9
	Men	4
Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik	Women	8
	Men	
Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana	Women	3
	Men	
Partido Social Cristiano	Women	3
	Men	
NA/ No soy parte de partidos políticos	Women	2
	Men	
Con mucho orgullo	Women	1
	Men	

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

*Table A.2: Key Informants Interviewed*

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	NO. OF KIIS (WOMEN)	NO. OF KIIS (MEN)
Women's political participation experts	8	1
Politicians	9	8
Donors or implementing partners	1	2
Election officials	2	0
Political party leaders	2	2
Business leaders	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

*Table A.3: Focus Group Discussions*

NO.	GROUP DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
1	Women political leaders	Quito	13
2	Women political leaders	Guayaquil	10
3	Women political leaders	Cuenca	12
4	Men political leaders	Quito	6
5	Men political leaders	Guayaquil	10
6	Women journalists	Quito	4
7	Women voters	Quito	4
8	Women voters	Guayaquil	3
9	Men voters	Quito	7
10	Men voters	Guayaquil	1*
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>70</b>

\*This was conducted as an interview, as only one participant attended.

**U.S. Agency for International Development**  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004