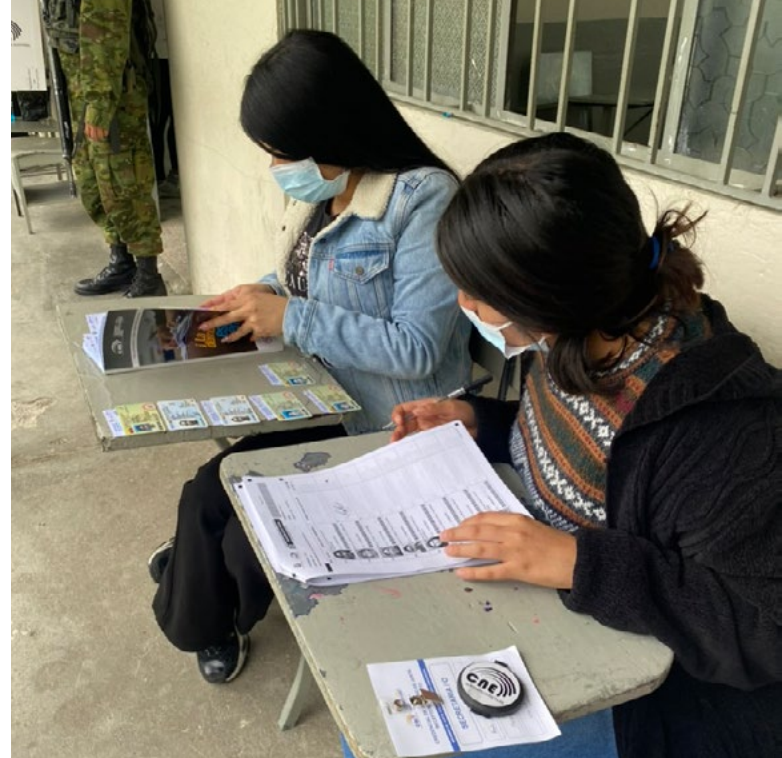




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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT | ECUADOR

Findings and Recommendations

It is a key moment to support and promote women's political participation and leadership in Ecuador. With the recent increase of the threshold for the electoral gender quota from 30 to 50 percent, there are more opportunities than ever for women to be candidates and elected officials. Additionally, 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.

Under the Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Learning, Evaluation, and Research II Activity, USAID tasked The Cloudburst Group with implementing a country-level **women's political participation and leadership (WPPL) assessment in Ecuador**. This study investigates the barriers to and opportunities for expanding women's participation and leadership in the political landscape in Ecuador. It uses the latest iteration of **USAID's WPPL Assessment Framework** to document women's access to and power in politics along socio-cultural, 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 women's political participation and leadership are likely to have the greatest and most meaningful impact. The research included a desk review of relevant literature and USAID documents, a survey completed by 50 stakeholders (39 women and 11 men), 29 key informant interviews, and ten focus group discussions with politicians, civil society, voters, and journalists in Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca.

FINDINGS

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- 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 party members.
- Violence against women in politics often comes from men in their own parties; they often feel threatened if women become too popular and attempt to undermine their leadership.
- The media often reproduces false narratives about women leaders that are promoted on social media, and traditional media often focuses on women's appearances 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.
- While accessing political leadership is often a challenge for women, getting women to choose to stay in politics is a greater challenge. As a woman in Cuenca said, "It is difficult to get [into politics] and even more difficult to stay, because everything there is made to expel you."
- Women often lack the necessary resources and campaign skills to participate in politics as party leaders, candidates, and elected officials.
- Because of pervasive sexism and racism, Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women are still underrepresented and face stronger barriers to politics due to compounding discrimination.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- 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.
- Society has seen women in many major political roles as presidential candidates, party leaders, presidents of the National Assembly, heads of the 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.

“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



SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- Engage men (in parties, in elected office, and in families) as allies and demonstrate why gender equality can benefit everyone.
- Partner with leaders of religious organizations to show how religious views and gender equality can and should coexist.
- 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.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- Fund grassroots women's rights organizations and provide core funding for these organizations.
- Promote the participation of the private sector together with civil society organizations to work toward fundraising specifically for women's electoral campaigns.
- Support the CNE and the Electoral Dispute Tribunal (Tribunal Contencioso Electoral) to hold political parties accountable for electoral law violations related to political finance and to women's equal leadership within parties.
- Provide gender-sensitive political reporting training for journalists and support independent media outlets to diversify media coverage.
- Support political parties to meaningfully promote participation of women members through training and internal party efforts.

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.