



## Research Article

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# Attitudinal Analysis of Women's Political Participation in Ecuador: Social and Legal Perspectives

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## Abstract

The main objective of this research is to analyze the participation of women in Ecuador in multi-person and single-person popular election processes at a legal and social level between 2019 and 2021. This is a documentary study corresponding to the qualitative paradigmatic modality, descriptive in scope and ethnographic design where the analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive-historical-logical and legal interpretation methods were used. Data from the 2019 elections corresponding to multi-personal positions such as mayors, prefects, urban and rural councilors and unipersonal positions corresponding to president, vice-president and national, provincial and foreign assembly members elected in the 2021 elections are analyzed. The findings show that women in Ecuadorian politics have difficulties in being elected and achieving parity, identifying a gender gap at all levels that is due to multidimensional factors explained in this study. It was determined that despite the existence of different regulations that promote gender equality and women's representation in the political world in Ecuador, these have not been able to materialize due to criteria related to the deep and marked social stereotypes that are maintained in the country.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Politics, Society, Law, Women, Ecuador

## 1. Introduction

Feminist struggles over the years have allowed the progressive incorporation of women into spaces that were completely closed to them until very recently. One of these spaces corresponds to political decision-making, where paths of equal participation have been opening, but despite the profound legal transformations that have taken place and following the full recognition of equality and non-discrimination in constitutions and legal texts, women continue to form part of vulnerable groups within society (Llorente, 2020). In the specific case of this study, the materialization of these legal measures on gender equality in Ecuador will be analyzed, focusing on the equal participation of women in that country in the last two elections of 2019 and 2021.

However, referring to women's participation in politics is not a trivial or recent issue. In fact, a sector of the doctrine considers it "the most effective mechanism for women to accelerate the process of equality" (Leyva and Gallardo, 2018, p. 287) and with regard to the principle of equality, according to Higuera et al. (2016) it can be understood as a "situation in which women and men have access with the same possibilities and opportunities to the use, control and benefit of goods, services and resources of society, as well as to decision-making" (p.18). In this context, for Chaparro (2020) equality tends to be a "value in itself" (p.32), so it is a principle that not only guides human relations but is also an essential requirement for any society that considers itself just (Navarro, 2017).

The principle of equality, regardless of the perspective from which it is studied, always has two dimensions that are known in the doctrine as formal equality and material equality. The former can be said to be precisely the normative enshrinement of the principle, while the latter refers to the fact that the norm is additionally enforced in the legal context in which it operates (Navarro, 2017). Therefore, material equality is intimately linked to the process of modernization of the state because of the aspirations of "a society that conceives itself as plural" (Orbegoso, 2016, p.1).

Along with the emergence of a plural society, the idea of non-discrimination also appears, understood as "differentiated treatment based on diverse reasons. It is the selection or singling out of a certain person with certain characteristics, assigning them a condition or sense of inferiority" (Nuvaez, 2018, p.1). Therefore, to the ideas expressed we must add that a sector of the doctrine points out that equality refers to the introduction of policies in two dimensions: on the one hand, the typification of situations that promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups in society and, on the other, the prohibition of any type of discrimination that may materialize in the practical sphere of application of the legal norm (Rodríguez and Caminotti, 2016).

In this sense, policies to promote equality and non-discrimination have been implemented in different legislations at national and international level with the aim of improving social conditions for traditionally vulnerable groups in the economic, social, and political spheres. However, the need to boost women's participation in the sphere of political decision-making has long been a concern of international organizations.

Initially, in 1995, the United Nations (UN) held the World Conferences on Women, which are among the most consistent initiatives for the achievement of gender equality at the international level and which allowed for the incorporation of the principle of gender mainstreaming in legislation. This incorporation helped to promote other public policies that would later constitute solid bases for women as a vulnerable group to be considered in the different spheres and spheres of decision-making.

In this context, in the search for the achievement of gender equality, two regulations by the United Nations can be mentioned: the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in force until 2015 (UN, 2015a) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are expected to be achieved by 2030 (UN, 2015b). According to the final MDG report of 7 July 2015, by that year women had achieved parliamentary representation in at least 174 countries, an increase of almost 90% over the 2000 statistics. In this document, when analyzing the reasons for the inequality between men and women, the UN (2015) urged states to continue to develop legal regulations consistent with gender equality, establishing as a priority several criteria for women such as gender-based violence, economic empowerment and above all their difficulties to be part of the spheres of power.

In 2015, the UN set out the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is an action plan for people, the planet and the achievement of prosperity. The document contains 17 goals and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. Of interest for this study is goal number 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls", indicating as a target in the same document the fulfilment of this goal, as an outstanding debt of the States to end all forms of discrimination and violence against all women and girls. The MDGs and the SDGs are thus the first effort that countries, including Ecuador, made at the international level to promote public policies on gender.

In this international context, it is now worth mentioning Ecuador, where the establishment of egalitarian legal measures for women has had a historical trajectory of which it is worth mentioning the approval in 1997 of the Law of Labor Protection through the presidency of the republic (Durango, 2016). This law established the obligation of employers to incorporate a certain number of women on their payroll, according to a percentage to be determined by the Ministry of Labor (Goyes, 2013). At the same time, the law obliged the progressive incorporation of women in the judiciary up to a minimum of 20%, except in the case of the Supreme Court (Goyes, 2013, p.54).

Subsequently, with the entry into force of the Montecristi Constitution in 2008, more concise gender equality measures were introduced. In fact, the current constitutional norm invokes a broad and developed recognition of rights and its indivisible nature illustrates full justiciability (Casado et al., 2016). In terms of parity, the Constitution of Ecuador makes enormous efforts and establishes it as an express mandate on up to thirteen occasions in articles 61; 65; 108; 116; 157; 176; 179; 183; 210; 217; 224; 434 and additionally in article 4 of the transitional regime of the constitutional text. This figure makes it sufficiently novel and progressive, especially if contrasted with a single reference in the Bolivian Constitution of 2009 or none in the Venezuelan text or in the Constitution of Ecuador, which together have been considered by many authors as part of the New Latin American Constitutionalism and which would be among the most modern and advanced texts (Salaman and Casado, 2019). Nor will we find any allusion to parity in other texts of reference for Ecuador, such as the Spanish Constitution of 1978.

When analyzing the constitutional principles, we find the principle of equality in Article 12, which indicates that all persons are equal and must also have the same faculties, duties and opportunities in the social sphere. The law establishes that the Ecuadorian State shall take affirmative action measures to promote real equality for people in situations of inequality. In the same sense, Article 66.4 refers to the prohibition of discrimination. It is worth mentioning at this point that the normative provision of Article 88 of the CRE also contemplates the so-called action for protection as an effective mechanism for persons who consider that their constitutional rights have been violated. Specifically, the regulation states that the purpose of this action is "the direct and effective protection of the rights recognized in the Constitution", which means that it can be brought by anyone who considers that, in each situation, *de facto* or *de jure*, their constitutional rights have been violated, whether by reason of subordination, defenselessness or discrimination. The most interesting aspect of this mechanism is the versatility with which it can be used, as it does not require the assistance of a lawyer to file an action for protection and its expedition, as the constitutional judge is obliged to process it as soon as possible.

Protective actions have been used, for example, from the perspective of strategic litigation as an effective tool to act against different forms of labor discrimination against women, especially in cases of unfair dismissal of women in vulnerable situations due to pregnancy, breastfeeding and maternity, where the maternity leave is based on the constitutional norm that aims to prevent the worker who is pregnant from being discriminated against due to her exceptional state. It is therefore a materialization of the right to equality, which establishes that no one can be treated differently except for legitimate reasons (Argudo-González et al, 2020).

In this sense, the materialization of the principle of equality contemplated in the norms or what is known as material equality is one of the fundamental concerns of the Ecuadorian Constituent, which resulted in the creation of national equality councils "responsible for ensuring the full validity and exercise of the rights enshrined in the Constitution and in international human rights instruments" (art. 156, CRE). These councils will be, by mandate of article 157 of the CRE, made up of representatives of civil society and the State on a parity basis.

In this way, the Ecuadorian constitutionalist establishes a series of mechanisms that in law are called affirmative actions and which arise from the legislator's need to establish legal means to equalize the rights of traditionally excluded groups "such as women in general and indigenous groups, with special emphasis on spaces for representation and active political participation in decision-making" (Durango, 2016, p.140).

These affirmative action measures are clearly visible in the constitutional text with regard to parity representation. In electoral matters, the constitutional mandate states that political parties and movements shall be "inclusive and non-discriminatory" and must necessarily have a "parity between women and men in their leadership" (art. 108). For multi-candidate elections, the constitutional text again expressly emphasizes "parity and alternation between women and men" (Art. 116), but like the electoral law, it does not establish parity criteria for single-candidate elections.

In this regard, the legislative provisions in Ecuador regarding gender parity are contained in the Organic Law on Elections and Political Organizations, also known as the Code of Democracy of 6 February 2012. Article 3 of the law refers to the need for the state to promote equal representation of men and women "in positions of nomination or designation in the public service, in its management and decision-making bodies, and in political parties and movements. In candidacies for multi-person elections, their alternate and sequential participation shall be obligatory".

This idea of parity or equal representation between men and women is reflected throughout the legal text. In this regard, Article 94 establishes the imperative need to consider the principles of parity, alternation and sequentially in electoral processes. On the other hand, Article 163 indicates that for the election of prefects, the use of male-female pairings should be considered. About representatives to the National Assembly and the Andean Parliament, regional councilors and district and municipal councilors, as well as parish councilors, according to Article 160 of the same legal text, they must also be elected based on gender parity criteria. All these legislative measures are supported by Article 105 of the law, which gives both the National Electoral Council and the Provincial Electoral Boards the power to prohibit the registration of candidates whose lists do not comply with these principles.

Of interest in this research is the content of Article 99 of the code in question about multi-person candidacies, specifically when there are complete lists with principal and substitute candidates. Regarding the composition of the lists, the legal text indicates the need for them to be made in the sequence of woman - man or man - woman until the total number of principal and substitute candidates has been reached. Positions such as urban councilors, rural councilors, members of parish councils and assembly members are elected by list.

However, the same article 99 indicates that in the case of high-level posts such as the candidatures of President, governors, prefects, and mayors; In this respect, the Ecuadorian legislator only establishes a system of electoral parity with respect to the forms of multi-person or list elections, as we have seen, but with respect to the high positions of popular election, which are expressly categorized within the forms of "unipersonal candidacies", there is no support for gender parity. The establishment of legislative measures to include or encourage the inclusion of women within these unipersonal candidacies would have been interesting for our study, since it is precisely the high positions of power that allow for greater visibility of women within the decision-making spheres in the legislative models of states.

Article 120 of the Organic Electoral Law - Code of Democracy, which empowers voters to have the possibility of electing candidates in lists, but also allows them to choose between lists, which means that the election, which in principle is a multi-person election of candidates, may end up being a single-person election of candidates.

These types of measures are described in the doctrine as "patriarchal strategies" (Albani, 2016), but they are also known as reverse discrimination, i.e. legal measures that are adopted by states to establish preferences or reserve a minimum number of places (whether in the political or labor sphere, among others) for vulnerable sectors of society that supposedly seek to favor these groups, but in reality end up producing a completely opposite effect or one that does not allow for the materialization of this parity (Navarro, 2017).

Now, once a doctrinal and normative approach has been taken to the subject of study, it is necessary to point out that the main purpose of this paper will be to analyze whether the legal norms described above for the achievement of gender parity have had a positive effect on the election of women in the country's political bodies. In this sense, we will proceed to analyze the statistical data corresponding to the last two electoral periods in Ecuador 2019 and 2021.

## 2. Methodology

To carry out this study, a methodology described by Gómez et al (2017) was used, framed in the qualitative modality of research where first, legal norms were described with respect to the parliamentary representation of women in Ecuador and statistical data were used to create a criterion on the way in which these norms are materialized in the country. An ethnographic design was used, which is typical of research that interprets and describes in depth a group, in this case women, contextualized within Ecuador's legal and social system in electoral matters. In this respect, we analyzed whether the legislation in force in Ecuador is truly materialized in the practical sphere of application of the electoral norm and if indeed, because of the legal provisions we have described, there has been a real election and representation of women in the country's political bodies. The research is a descriptive study in that it considers what the object of analysis described above, and its components are like and how they are manifested. Finally, the methods applied in this research correspond to the theoretical level of knowledge where phenomena (law and society) are studied to present different solutions.

The analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive and historical-logical methods were used. The analytical method was used to break down the field of study into all its parts and to systematize the most important criteria for the purposes of the research. The inductive-deductive method allowed the use of general criteria to apply them to cases and in this study, it was used to relate the legal norms analyzed with respect to the manifestation they have in the practical sphere of their application. Finally, the historical-logical method studied the actual trajectory of the historical and normative phenomena and events of the object of our study by using logic to investigate the general laws of operation and development of these phenomena, in this case, women and their political participation in Ecuador. Additionally, following the thesis of Professor Villabella (2015), we also made use of the method of legal interpretation, which allowed us to analyze in depth the legal norms that are in force in Ecuador in electoral matters.

## 3. Discussion and Results

This section analyses the statistical criteria corresponding to the last two elections held in Ecuador, both in 2019, when mayors, prefects, urban councilors, and rural councilors were elected, and in 2021, when the unipersonal posts of president and vice-president and those of national and provincial assembly members and parliamentary representatives abroad were elected. Firstly, we describe how women's participation in the 2019 elections has behaved in the single-member posts, those where Ecuadorian law does not require parity. The single-member posts analyzed in this study are those of mayors and prefects, the results of which can be seen in the table below for mayors in the 2019 elections.

**Table 1:** Mayors elected by province in the 2019 elections

Province	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of elected officials	Men	Percentage	Women	Porcentaje
Azuay	15	15	100.00%	0	0.00%
Bolívar	7	5	71.42%	2	28.57%
Cañar	7	7	100.00%	0	0.00%
Carchi	6	6	100.00%	0	0.00%

Province	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of elected officials	Men	Percentage	Women	Porcentaje
Chimborazo	10	8	80.00%	2	20.00%
Cotopaxi	7	7	100.00%	0	0.00%
El Oro	14	13	92.85%	1	7.15%
Esmeraldas	7	6	92.85%	1	14.28%
Galápagos	3	3	100.00%	0	0.00%
Guayas	25	22	88.00%	3	12.00%
Imbabura	6	5	83.33%	1	16.66%
Los Ríos	13	10	76.92%	3	23.07%
Loja	16	15	93.75%	1	6.25%
Manabí	22	19	86.36%	3	13.63%
Morona Santiago	12	12	100.00%	0	0.00%
Napo	5	5	100.00%	0	0.00%
Orellana	4	4	100.00%	0	0.00%
Pastaza	4	4	100.00%	0	0.00%
Pichincha	8	8	100.00%	0	0.00%
Santa Elena	3	3	100.00%	0	0.00%
Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas	2	2	100.00%	0	0.00%
Sucumbíos	7	6	92.85%	1	14.28%
Tungurahua	9	9	100.00%	0	0.00%
Zamora Chinchipe	9	9	100.00%	0	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>88.68%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8.14%</b>

**Source:** Own elaboration from the National Electoral Council (2019)

Now, with regard to the above, according to official data from the National Electoral Council contrasted with data provided by the United Nations (UN) in 2019, women achieved a total representation of 18 mayorships. This proportion in consideration of the 221 mayoralties that were elected at that time is quite low and corresponds to only 8.14%. Regarding the prefectures, women were only represented in 4 of the 23 prefectures, which proportionally corresponds to 17.39%. These four prefectures were Pichincha, Azuay and Guayas, which currently has two female prefects.

In this way, by 2019, women continued to face great difficulties in obtaining visible spaces in the highest spheres of power representation. Only proportionally, as can be seen in the data presented, in most of the provinces they did not obtain representation, while in the provinces where they were elected, they did not even obtain 10% or 20% of representation in the mayoral and prefecture offices, respectively. In other words, in the 2019 elections, they did not manage to obtain any prominence over men, who by then were leading the spheres of power representation, in the single-person positions that are not elected on a list. On the other hand, this study also analyzed the statistical data corresponding to the results of the multi-person elections held in 2019, where urban councilors, rural councilors and parish councils were elected. For this analysis, the data from the parish councils will not be considered since they are not divided by sex but by political party:

**Table 2:** Urban councilors elected by province in the 2019 elections

Provinces	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of elected officials	Men	Percentage	Women	Percentage
Azuay	53	40	75.47%	13	24.53%
Bolívar	27	22	81.48%	5	18.52%
Cañar	28	19	67.86%	9	32.14%
Carchi	18	11	61.11%	7	38.89%
Chimborazo	36	31	86.11%	5	13.89%

Provinces	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of elected officials	Men	Percentage	Women	Percentage
Cotopaxi	22	18	81,82%	4	18,18%
El Oro	60	50	83,33%	10	16,6%
Esmeraldas	22	16	72,73%	6	27,27%
Galápagos	12	6	50,00%	6	50,00%
Guayas	137	84	61,31%	53	38,68%
Imbabura	21	10	47,62%	11	52,38%
Los Ríos	49	13	26,53%	36	73,47%
Loja	59	38	64,41%	21	35,59%
Manabí	100	62	62,00%	38	38,00%
Morona Santiago	31	21	67,74%	10	32,26%
Napo	16	11	68,75%	5	31,25%
Orellana	10	7	70,00%	3	30,00%
Pastaza	12	9	75,00%	3	25,00%
Pichincha	43	33	76,74%	10	23,26%
Santa Elena	14	11	76,57%	3	21,43%
Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas	15	7	46,67%	8	53,33%
Sucumbíos	18	13	72,22%	5	27,78%
Tungurahua	36	26	72,22%	10	27,78%
Zamora Chinchipe	25	24	76,00%	6	24,00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>67,36%</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>33,21%</b>

Note: Own elaboration from the National Electoral Council (2019)

The representation of women in these positions can be seen in Table 2, which contains information on urban councilors elected by province in the 2019 elections. At this time, 864 urban councilors were elected at the national level, of which the average for men is 67.36%, while the representation of women is 33.21%, which shows the gender disparity. As can be seen, for the positions of urban councilors, women achieve less than 40% representation compared to men in most of Ecuador's 24 provinces. Only in the province of Galapagos is parity observed, while in Imbabura, Los Ríos and Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, elected women councilors reach percentages between 52% and 73% with respect to men. Only in the case of Los Ríos did they obtain a more marked difference with 73.47%. Table 3 below shows the data corresponding to the rural councilors elected by provinces for 2019:

**Table 3:** Rural councilors elected by province in the 2019 elections

Provinces	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of elected officials	Men	Percentage	Women	Percentage
Azuay	42	34	80,95%	8	19,05%
Bolívar	10	9	90,00%	1	10,00%
Cañar	13	10	76,92%	3	23,08%
Carchi	14	14	100,00%	0	0,00%
Chimborazo	20	18	90,00%	2	10,00%
Cotopaxi	21	17	80,95%	4	19,05%
El Oro	22	17	77,27%	5	22,73%
Esmeraldas	21	15	71,43%	6	28,57%
Galápagos	3	2	66,67%	1	33,33%
Guayas	24	21	87,50%	3	12,50%
Imbabura	17	11	64,71%	6	35,29%
Los Ríos	37	28	75,68%	9	24,32%
Loja	20	10	50,00%	10	50,00%
Manabí	38	28	73,68%	10	26,32%



Provinces	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of elected officials	Men	Percentage	Women	Percentage
Morona Santiago	29	17	58,62%	12	41,38%
Napo	11	11	100,00%	0	0,00%
Orellana	12	10	83,33%	2	16,67%
Pastaza	10	8	80,00%	2	20,00%
Pichincha	19	13	68,42%	6	31,58%
Santa Elena	9	8	88,89%	1	11,11%
Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas	3	2	66,67%	1	33,33%
Sucumbíos	19	13	68,42%	6	31,58%
Tungurahua	19	15	78,95%	4	21,05%
Zamora Chinchipe	20	16	80,00%	4	20,00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>76.60%</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>23.40%</b>

**Source:** Own elaboration from the National Electoral Council (2019)

As can be seen, 453 rural councilors were elected at that time, of which 76.60% were men and 23.40% were women. Thus, for this popularly elected position, marked differences between men and women can be observed. Elected women authorities are significantly outnumbered by men. For example, in the provinces of Napo and Carchi, no women were elected as rural councilors. In addition, the percentages of women's representation tend to be minimal in all provinces, ranging from 10 to 30 per cent. Only in the province of Loja do women reach 50% representation, followed by the province of Morona Santiago where they have 41.38%.

Of all the statistics analyzed for 2019, women continued to face great difficulties in reaching representative positions even though they go to elections in an equal proportion to men by legal mandate and that they are mostly elected in list or multi-person positions as we have mentioned. It should be remembered at this point in the study that although the legal regulations require women and men to vote in elections in the same proportion and also on a list, it is also true that the regulations allow voters, despite voting in multi-personal elections, to vote between lists, that is, individually, which gives them the possibility of electing different candidates from the lists, whether they are women or not, as indicated in Article 120 of the aforementioned Code of Democracy. As can be seen for the 2019 elections, gender parity did not materialize even in the positions that were presented in lists. Women did not achieve large spaces of representation in almost none of the multi-personal positions.

However, with regard to the results of the 2019 elections for single-member positions, where, as could be seen, women obtained almost no representation whatsoever, this type of phenomenon, in the opinion of the authors and as indicated by Meza (2018), tends to have effects that are contrary to gender equality, since by being less represented in positions of power, they are also less considered for making important decisions in the economic and social contexts of the countries, and this contributes to feeding the false perception that men are more prepared to be at the forefront of positions of power than women.

In the case of the recent 2021 elections for single-member posts, only one woman ran for the Presidency of the Republic, and she did not obtain even 5% of the votes of the citizens who make up the electoral roll. According to official CNE data, the female candidate only obtained 1.54% of the total of 399,985 processed voter registers. Also in this electoral process, 137 representatives to the National Assembly were elected at the national and provincial level, as well as representatives abroad. The results of this election can be seen sufficiently in the table below:



**Table 4:** Assembly members elected in the 2021 elections

Type of Assemblyman	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of Elected Authorities	Men	Percentage	Women	Percentage
National	15	7	46.67%	8	53.33%
Provincial	117	73	53.84%	44	37.60%
Foreign representatives	5	4	80%	1	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>60.58%</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>39.41%</b>

Note: Own elaboration from the National Electoral Council (2021)

On average, men represent 60.58% and women 39.41% of the assembly members elected this year. It is worth noting that among the national assembly members, men represent 46.67% while women obtained 53.33% of the seats, showing an advance in terms of parity. At the provincial level, of the 117 elected assembly members, 53.84% are men and 37.60% are women. Among the five foreign representatives, the gender gap is wider in percentage terms, with a ratio of 80% men to 20% women. However, to go more deeply into this study, the statistical data in Table 5 are presented with respect to the provincial assembly members:

**Table 5:** Assemblymen elected by province in the 2021 election

Provinces	TOTAL ELECTED				
	Number of elected officials	Men	Percentage	Women	Percentage
Azuay	5	3	60.00	2	40.00
Bolívar	3	2	66.66	1	33.33
Cañar	3	3	100.00	0	0.00
Carchi	3	3	100.00	0	0.00
Chimborazo	4	3	75.00	1	25.00
Cotopaxi	4	2	50.00	2	50.00
El Oro	5	3	60.00	2	40.00
Esmeraldas	6	4	66.66	2	33.33
Galápagos	2	2	100.00	0	0.00
Guayas	20	11	55.00	9	45.00
Imbabura	4	3	75.00	1	25.00
Los Ríos	6	5	83.33	1	16.66
Loja	4	2	50.00	2	50.00
Manabí	9	5	55.55	4	44.44
Morona Santiago	2	1	50.00	1	50.00
Napo	2	1	50.00	1	50.00
Orellana	2	0	0.00	2	100.00
Pastaza	2	2	100.00	0	0.00
Pichincha	16	8	50.00	8	50.00
Santa Elena	3	2	66.66	1	33.33
Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas	4	2	50.00	2	50.00
Sucumbíos	2	2	100.00	0	0.00
Tungurahua	4	3	75.00	1	25.00
Zamora Chinchipe	2	1	50.00	1	50.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>66.20</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>33.80</b>

**Source:** Own elaboration from the National Electoral Council (2021)

Going deeper into the data for provincial assembly members, some provinces show that parity is achieved, such as Cotopaxi, Loja, Morona Santiago, Napo, Pichincha, Santo Domingo de Tsáchilas and Zamora Chinchipe. However, on average by provinces, men obtain 66.20% of the seats in the

Assembly and women 33.80%. In general terms, these data analyzed for both the 2019 and 2021 elections indicate that gender parity has not materialized in Ecuador. Therefore, it can be inferred that the background of the limited political representation of women in Ecuador responds to another factor, which is, possibly, the social/cultural aspect, but that in the doctrine there are different positions on the matter.

The UN (2020), which refers to these electoral statistics in Ecuador, takes an interesting position on the fact that women in this country are constantly suffering from political and psychological violence. With regard to political violence, the UN (2020) indicates that 58% of those responsible for all these acts against women are people who are part of other parties and electoral campaign staff, while it also recognizes that at least 32% of these acts come from groups in which women are involved, such as family members, voters in the same communities, the media or even members of society through the use of social networks. Psychological violence is identified as one of the most frequent forms of violence in the country. There are also other factors, among them the anticivilization of the female sector in relation to the lack of dissemination of their candidacies or rumor campaigns against them, which causes strong discrediting of their public image and other effects such as "isolation, exclusion or marginalization either within the party, in the local government or in the community" (UN, 2020, p.1).

Discussions can also be found in the doctrine on the source of this marked inequality, even when gender parity norms exist in the country. An example of this is the approach of the doctrinaire Moscoso (2016), which agrees with that of Guzmán (2018) where it is indicated that in Ecuador there is still a deep-rooted archaic social model that is framed in the historical context well described by both doctrinaires in their research and is related to the idea that women should perform within the reproductive function and not in the productive function of society.

About the previous comment, the doctrine is not uniform with respect to the subject of analysis. For example, in the opinion of the authors Sotomayor and Huertas (2017), when analyzing the Ecuadorian legal system, with respect to the legislative and sometimes also discretionary measures that have been taken on gender parity in popular election processes, there is always a certain influence of social and inclusive factors with respect to equality and non-discrimination, which reflect the need for legal systems to implement better conditions for vulnerable groups. In the opinion of these doctrines, society, beyond impeding the achievement of equality, has been constituted to guarantee it and has been shown in this way in the Ecuadorian legal system.

In a more intermediate position, the doctrinaires Umpierrez et al., (2016) refer to the important need for the social aspect to be combined with the electoral factor, in order to achieve a more equal participation in Ecuador in elected office. The authors mention some doctrinal postulates that lead them to consider the theory that the social, regional and economic context has an impact on the indices of female representation, and this is reflected in all types of government, whether in developed countries, developing countries or models of less prosperous states.

Less recent but interesting research also refers to these types of social factors that make women invisible in the electoral context, despite the legal backing they have. This is the case of the authors Pérez and Pinchulef (2015), who indicate the importance of confronting the social obstacles that prevent women in countries such as Ecuador from attaining positions of unipersonal popular representation. In this regard, the doctrinaires insist that despite significant legislative advances, they continue to be insufficient to transform the living conditions of women, especially due to the social context in which they develop, which minimizes their possibilities of holding such positions in the decision-making spheres of the country.

Finally, Albaine (2020) warns of the reality of the influence of entrenched criteria in society regarding women in decision-making spheres, and her findings show that the population has a negative perception of the participation of women in the country's political world. The doctrine indicates that this may be due to two factors: one of them is that the existence of norms that promote equal representation does not guarantee that this is really in the interest of the social groups in that country, and the other factor mentioned by this doctrine is undoubtedly that of gender-based

political violence, which has been mentioned previously in this research. In other words, there is a cultural factor that constitutes a structural problem of the parties that corresponds to the lack of commitment of political and social actors to achieve gender parity in practice.

To conclude with these approaches, it is worth mentioning the approach of Meza (2018) who indicates that "it is recognized that the barriers that make up the glass ceiling are subjective, fueled by aspects related to gender stereotypes" (p.17) and that "female leadership is culturally less accepted as it is considered less effective" (p.30). Society as a whole values men as better leaders than women, and coinciding with what Albaine (2020) indicates, this author states that affirmative action measures go hand in hand with the existence of unfavorable social conditions for female political participation that hinder their possibilities of access to positions of citizen representation. We agree with this approach.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, in a first approximation, it is important to indicate that the legislative incorporation of measures that favors traditionally vulnerable groups within society, such as women, has also allowed for more inclusive legal systems, as in the case of Ecuador, which has had a normative development that has progressively incorporated positive actions for the inclusion of women in the country's decision-making spheres.

This incorporation of public policies for vulnerable groups is indispensable for the establishment of a state that guarantees rights, and yet, as this research has analyzed, despite the enshrinement of these types of norms, in Ecuador they have not led to the materialization of a true statistical representation of women in popularly elected positions. In fact, as could be observed, a very low proportion of women have obtained popularly elected positions in the country's multi-person lists and almost no representation in single-person positions.

In this sense, having analyzed the doctrine and the different positions on the subject, the authors believe that there is a glass ceiling or a social and cultural background that inevitably influences these results. In other words, the traditional obstacles for women to reach decision-making spheres remain entrenched in Ecuador under the false and mistaken conception that they are less apt to occupy these spaces than men. These obstacles translate into the anticivilization of women or the implementation and maintenance of measures of gender-based political violence that discredit them in the eyes of society and pigeonhole them in roles that impede their political empowerment.

Finally, in the opinion of the study's authors, although Ecuador has legislative measures that promote parity election systems, these must be combined with legislative criteria that consider numerical factors and data that are broken down by sex, to analyze gender-related measures more concretely. For this reason, the introduction of new laws should depend on the effectiveness of the current ones to create legislative forms that achieve gender equality in the political sphere of Ecuador, especially through the real incorporation of women in the representative context of the country, which also requires the impulse and promotion of public policies that involve society and educate it on the need to establish more egalitarian parameters in electoral matters.

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