

FOCUS GROUP STUDY RESEARCH REPORT ON POLITICAL
PARTIES IN ECUADOR

Research conducted by

CEDATOS Gallup International
Greenberg Quinlan & Rosner Research Group

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I. SUMMARY

Ecuadorians are profoundly disgruntled with their parties. As in most Latin American countries, the public sees political leaders as corrupt and self-interested. Politicians are blamed for the range of ills that beset Ecuador, from unemployment to crime to substandard education. There is a sense that the country should be so much better off, and that it is only because of bad governance that Ecuador is, in the view of many of the focus group participants, a rich country with poor people.

At the same time, however, the corruption that characterizes Ecuadorian politics is seen to be part of a larger societal problem. To many of the participants, corruption is a common feature of life in Ecuador, and it is therefore unsurprising that it would be prevalent in politics as well. The participants blame economic need, a declining sense of ethics, and the lack of moral guidance for children for the corruption that grips the country.

The public has little confidence that the parties can or will change this state of affairs. The focus group participants do not view the new political movements as a real alternative.

Ecuadorians, the focus groups suggest, do not feel empowered to bring change either. They express a desire to participate in politics, but they feel that the parties provide little opportunity for average citizens to do so outside of elections. At the same time, however, many of the participants acknowledge that whatever interest they have in working with parties is driven more by self-interest (potential patronage in the form of a job) than motivation to make parties more responsive to the public's needs.

Ecuadorians express some hope and optimism about politics and the parties, however. Despite the negative view the participants hold about politicians generically, they speak favorably about individual figures, both past and present.

The parties can regain some public confidence if they do some of the things Ecuadorians are looking for, like develop stronger grass-roots connections with communities; design platforms that speak to the concerns of the public; and incorporate younger people, with new ideas. The latter element is particularly important, as many of the participants express great hope in the role that youth can play to turn around the country.

Ultimately, however, the image of the parties will be driven by their perceived ability in government to make progress on key issues, such as: **job creation, security, healthcare, and education**. Nevertheless, there are actions the parties can take to burnish their images and convey that they are committed to serving the people. An ambitious reform agenda, focused on fighting corruption and ensuring that resources reach the people, could help increase confidence in the parties.

II. OBJECTIVES

In May 2006, NDI contracted both Quito-based CEDATOS and Washington, D.C.-based Greenberg Quinlan & Rosner Research group to conduct and oversee a qualitative investigation on citizen attitudes towards political parties. The study provided valuable information for gauging citizen concerns on needs and concerns as well as views on political parties in Ecuador.

III. METHODOLOGY AND FOCUS GROUP COMPOSITION

The findings and conclusions are based on discussions with eight focus groups, including a sample of nearly 70 Ecuadorians in Guayaquil, Otavalo, Quito, and Santo Domingo. Demographic groups included: undecided voters, pre-disposed voters, women, men, as well as a range of age groups.

COMPOSITION OF FOCUS GROUPS

<p>GRUPO 1</p> <p>QUITO</p> <p>Undecided Youth</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(25 to 42 years old)</p>	<p>GRUPO 2</p> <p>QUITO</p> <p>Undecided Adults</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(more than 45 years old)</p>	<p>GRUPO 3</p> <p>GUAYAQUIL</p> <p>Undecided Youth</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(25 to 40 years old)</p>	<p>GRUPO 4</p> <p>GUAYAQUIL</p> <p>Undecided Adults</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(more than 45 years old)</p>
<p>GRUPO 5</p> <p>QUITO</p> <p>Tendencies Center Left Center Right</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(25 to more than 56 years old)</p>	<p>GRUPO 6</p> <p>GUAYAQUIL</p> <p>Tendencies Center Left Center Right</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(25 to more than 56 years old)</p>	<p>GRUPO 7</p> <p>OTAVALO</p> <p>General Population Indigenous</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(25 to more than 56 years old)</p>	<p>GRUPO 8</p> <p>SANTO DOMINGO</p> <p>General Population</p> <p>Medium-low to Medium Strata</p> <p>(25 to more than 56 years old)</p>

NDI has found that focus group research is an effective tool to obtain qualitative data on research areas by capitalizing on ideas generated by participants. A group of targeted audiences is brought together for face-to-face interactive discussions on specific topics under the guidance of trained moderators. Each group lasts approximately 90 to 120 minutes each. Through this

investigation methodology, information is obtained on perceptions and views of participants on issues.

IV. KEY FINDINGS

Profound Dissatisfaction with Parties

Like most Latin Americans, Ecuadorians are deeply disgruntled with their political parties. They see party officials as driven by self-interest and a desire to use public office to enrich themselves. “*Cualquier persona que llega al poder lo primero que piensa es en enriquecerse él mismo o el grupo que está a su alrededor,*”¹ says a Quito participant. Many Ecuadorians are looking for wholesale change and a complete renovation of the political class – “*cambiar a todos con gente nueva,*”² as a Quito participant suggests.

Some of the participants recognize there are well-intentioned politicians but say that they are ultimately thwarted by a system that blocks positive initiatives. As an older participant in Quito said, “*Existen presidentes que entran con buenas ideas, pero la mafia económica y política no les deja actuar como desean.*”³

The current presidential campaign is doing little to inspire confidence in the voters. The participants in the study see essentially the same people from previous elections making the same empty promises to get elected. Many Ecuadorian voters seem to have tuned out the politicians, having been disappointed time after time as new governments quickly broke their promises. As a participant in Santo Domingo says: “*Tanto nos han mentado que nadie cree nada.*”⁴

Voters are also frustrated by the sheer number of parties, which promotes political division and creates an unstable political environment. Many point to the United States as a model system, with its two stable parties.

The new political movements do not appear to be the answer for voters. On the contrary, the participants tend to group the parties and movements together. Asked for a preference, many tilt in favor of the parties because they are seen as stronger and more stable. The new movements tend to be seen as mostly more of the same, dividing the country’s politics further rather than providing an alternative outlet for the public.

There is a sense that the national parties try to co-opt the indigenous leaders, and that the latter let it happen. “*Los partidos tradicionales, lo que tratan es de dividir y utilizar a nuestros*

¹ “Whoever gets to power, they first think of enriching themselves or the group around them.”

² “Replace everyone with new people”

³ “There are presidents that enter office with good ideas, but the economic and political mafia do not allow them to act as they would like.”

⁴ “They have lied to us so much that no one believes anything.”

compañeros dirigentes indígenas para que formen parte de sus partidos,"⁵ says a participant in Otavalo.

Desire for More Representative Parties

As the parties initiate their presidential campaigns, they should bear in mind the advice proffered by the focus group participants. Ecuadorians are looking for parties to be better aware of and more responsive to the needs of the people. The participants urge the parties to emphasize grass-roots efforts to reach out to people in their communities, listen to the public's concerns and share the party platforms – and not just communicate in a vague and distant fashion on television. "*Yo pienso que los partidos políticos deben formar grupos estratégicos en cada cantón para que informe sobre el plan de gobierno,*"⁶ says a Santo Domingo participant. "*Pueden empezar por los pueblos mas remotas. Así ganarían credibilidad.*"⁷

One of the most important steps the parties can take to convey that they are committed to reform and a new way of doing things is to give younger people more prominent roles in the parties. As a Quito participant says, "*si aparecería gente nueva, renovada, el país cambiaría; pero como sigue la misma gente, no hay nada nuevo.*"⁸

The concept of new people and new ideas can be strikingly powerful. Rarely, if ever, does a voter there suggest that youth means sacrificing experience.

Numerous participants, young and old, suggest that youth should be given greater opportunities, as they are not tarnished by corruption. "*Debemos confiar en los jóvenes. Son más honestos, más puros; no conocen de la corrupción,*"⁹ says a Quito participant.

Arguably, the best way to reach out to the public is to give average citizens an opportunity to participate actively in the parties. The participants express an interest in getting involved with the parties, but they articulate frustration that the parties do not seem to welcome greater citizen involvement.

At the same time, however, it is difficult to judge how genuine and deep the expressed interest to get involved with the parties really is. Many participants acknowledge that they are driven by self-interest, namely putting themselves in a position to get a political job. "*Yo soy profesional y siempre he anhelado conseguir un cargo en un ministerio,*"¹⁰ says a Guayaquil

⁵ "The traditional parties, they try to divide and use our fellow indigenous leaders so that they become part of their own parties."

⁶ "I think political parties should form strategic groups in each district to communicate their government plans."

⁷ "They can begin in the most remote towns. They would win credibility this way."

⁸ "If new people, reformers would emerge, the country would change; but we continue with the same people, there is nothing new."

⁹ "We should believe in young people. They are more honest, purer; they are not familiar with corruption."

¹⁰ "I am a professional, and I have always wanted to pursue a position in a ministry."

participant. Adds another person from Guayaquil: “*Depende a quién me dé un puestito público. Si a mi me ofrecen una partidita, me meto ahí, como sea.*”¹¹

There is nothing sinister or unusual about that. It is what drives much political activism elsewhere, including in the United States. The problem arises when parties solicit citizen involvement as a quid-pro-quo for employment, rather than as part of a collaborative effort to change the country for the good. A Guayaquil participant shared an experience:

*Había una central en Portete y estaban unos ocho dirigentes, que decía que les van a dar trabajo a unas 800 personas en la empresa eléctrica, 800 en la aduana y que se necesita bastante gente. Tenían que darle unos cinco dólares, otros dos dólares, lo que tenían a los dirigentes. Entonces así, pasábamos en reuniones todos los sábados, pasé como 5 o 6 meses y hasta ahora nada el trabajo.*¹²

Good Governance Essential

The parties can do all the citizen outreach possible, but it will not matter much if the parties do not govern effectively. Ultimately, they will be judged by how well they deliver on their promises. A Santo Domingo participant describes this well:

*La gente volverá a creer en los partidos políticos cuando ellos demuestren con hechos; cuando no entreguen la soberanía del país; cuando no violen los derechos humanos; cuando garanticen la gobernabilidad y den solución a los problemas de la gente en todos los órdenes; cuando la gente pueda comer, vivir; cuando las ciudades sean satisfechas; ahí volverá la credibilidad.*¹³

Although we do not have survey data that would tell us exactly what the public’s leading priorities are and in what order, the groups suggest that unemployment, crime and education would top the list. This would be consistent with most other Latin American countries. As long as unemployment is high, crime is on the rise, and teachers and school materials are seen to be sub-par, then people will score politicians for poor performance.

The political figures with good images in Ecuador are those who are seen to have governed effectively and made tangible improvements.

¹¹ “It depends on who gives me a public position. If they give me a little title, I would take it, whatever it is.”

¹² “There was a central election office in Portete, and eight leaders were there who said that they would give jobs to 800 people in the electric company, 800 in customs and that many people were needed. Some people had to give the leaders five dollars, others two dollars, whatever they had. After that, we kept going to meetings ever Saturday – I went for five or six months, and I still don’t have a job today.”

¹³ “People will believe in political parties again when the parties show results; when they do not cede the sovereignty of the country; when they do not violate human rights; when they guarantee governability and provide solutions to the people’s problems; when people can eat, live; when the cities are satisfactory; then credibility will return.”

Corruption is Parties' Greatest Liability

There are still things that parties can do short of governing effectively that would help them begin to build credibility with the public. The most important is related to anti-corruption. As we noted, Ecuadorians believe their politicians are interested in power mostly to enrich themselves – and that they profit from political power illicitly. That is the fundamental reason that the standing of the parties is so low.

Corruption is not just a moral issue. Ecuadorians believe that the country's problems are due in large part to corruption and the diversion of resources away from public projects and into private hands.

For Ecuadorians, the corruption problem is not confined to politics. On the contrary, there is a sense that corruption is rampant at all levels of society. As a Guayaquil participant says: "*Muchas veces, nosotros como ciudadanos hacemos uso también a veces de la corrupción.*"¹⁴

Corruption in Ecuador is seen to be driven by economic need. People are poor and need to care for their families, so they sometimes seek illicit ways to do so. "*Aquí en nuestro país, a los empleados les pagan muy poco,*"¹⁵ explains a Guayaquil participant, continuing: "*Entran a la corrupción. Pero, por qué? Porque se ve obligado, porque lo que pagan, tienen que pagar casa, tienen que pagar luz, agua, y los niños comen.*"¹⁶

Another factor cited as a cause of corruption in Ecuador is the decline of moral values. Many of the participants suggest that children are not being inculcated with the right values, such as honesty and civic duty, and that corruption has reached such levels, even in schools, that children see it as the norm.

To regain credibility and burnish their images, the candidates and parties should take advantage of the current presidential campaign to put forward ambitious plans to fight corruption. The plans cannot just be comprised of big, vague promises; those will not be credible. Rather, the parties need to propose an agenda of simple, concrete, credible things they can do to fight corruption. Ideally, the parties would demonstrate their anti-corruption credentials by taking steps *during* the campaign.

¹⁴ "Often, we citizens sometimes take advantage of corruption."

¹⁵ "Here in our country, employees are paid very little."

¹⁶ "They enter into the corruption. But, why? Because they feel obligated, because of the bills they have to pay, for rent, for light, for water and so their children can eat."

APPENDIX I FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

GENDER

GENDER	PERCENTAGE
WOMEN	46%
MEN	54%
TOTAL	100%

AGE

EDAD	PERCENTAGE
24 to 34 years old	31%
35 to 45 years old	42%
45 to 65 years old	28%
TOTAL	100%

OCCUPATION

OCCUPATION	PERCENTAGE
TEACHERS	15%
PROFESSIONALS	24%
BUSINESS	17%
RETIRED	6%
SMALL ENTREPRENEURS	4%
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EMPLOYEES	19%
HOUSEWIVES	13%
FARMERS	3%
TOTAL	100%

EDUCATION LEVEL

EDUCATION	PERCENTAGE
SECONDARY	35%
SUPERIOR STUDIES	65%
TOTAL	100%