

The Politics of Transforming Education in Ecuador: Confrontation and Continuity, 2006–2017

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Recent governments in Ecuador (2007–17) have achieved impressive improvements in education. Enrollments increased significantly, and Ecuador's learning gains on regional tests from 2006 to 2013 were among the largest in the region. Ecuador's recent PISA performance provides further confirmation of genuine progress in raising student learning. A central part of Ecuador's strategy was the Correa government's implementation—over strong union opposition—of major teacher policy reforms, especially higher standards for recruitment and regular evaluation of teacher performance. Among the political advantages favoring government reformers were strong public support, sustained presidential engagement, and continuity in the government reform team. Ecuador's experience offers lessons for improving education by raising the quality of teaching and supports theories on the role of policy entrepreneurs and veto points (with some modification) as core factors in effective education reform but provides little support for theories that highlight strong roles for civil society organizations.

Article 349. The State shall guarantee, for the teaching staff . . . job security, modernization, ongoing training, and teaching and academic improvement, as well as fair pay, in accordance with their professional development, performance, and academic merits. The law shall regulate the teacher career stream and salary and promotion scale; it shall set up a national performance evaluation system and salary policies at all levels. (Ecuador's 2008 Constitution)

Introduction

From the late 2000s, there has been an Andean wave of education reform with some of the most profound and systemic reforms in the developing world—especially of teacher policy—unfolding in Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and to a lesser extent, Colombia. The politics of these reform experiences varied, as they were launched by left, center-right, and center-left governments. But

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all benefitted from strong popular support for reform and sustained implementation across multiple ministers of education and presidential administrations of different political parties. Within this Andean wave, Ecuador led with major reforms starting in 2006 followed by Peru in 2009 and Chile in 2016, although Chile had a longer trajectory of cumulative reform since the 1990s.

Ecuador's reforms have produced impressive improvements in the quantity and quality of education. On the UNESCO Latin American regional test of sixth graders between 2006 and 2013, Ecuador made the largest gains in reading scores among the 15 countries tested and the second-largest gains in math after Chile (table 1). In the space of 7 years, learning levels rose from among the lowest in the region to above the regional average in math and close-to-average in reading. Enrollments—especially at the secondary level—also expanded significantly. Between 2005 and 2016, net secondary enrollments rose from 53 to 87 percent (World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/source/education-statistics/>).

More recently, Ecuador joined the OECD's Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) for Development, and the scores released in December 2018 showed Ecuador's performance in all three areas tested—math, reading, and science—on par with the 2015 PISA results of Brazil and Peru, countries it had trailed badly on SERCE (*Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo*) 2006 (OECD 2018). This is further confirmation that Ecuador has achieved a major improvement in student learning over the past decade.

This article has three purposes. The first is to analyze the politics of a major reform of teacher policy in Ecuador and to identify factors that best

TABLE 1
SERCE (2006) AND TERCE (2013) TESTS FOR SIXTH-GRADE STUDENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

	Math		Reading	
	SERCE 2006	TERCE 2013	SERCE 2006	TERCE 2013
Argentina	513	530	506	509
Brazil	499	519	520	524
Chile	517	581	546	557
Colombia	493	515	515	526
Costa Rica	549	535	563	546
Ecuador	460	513	447	491
Guatemala	456	488	451	489
Mexico	542	566	530	529
Paraguay	468	456	455	469
Peru	490	527	476	505
Dominican Republic	416	437	421	456
Uruguay	578	567	542	532
LA average ^a	492	511	494	506

SOURCE.—UNESCO (2014, 29, 41). SERCE = *Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo*; TERCE = *Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo*.

^a Average also includes Nicaragua, Honduras, and Panama, which do not appear in the table.

explain the trajectory of reform and its impacts. The second is to highlight key areas of comparison with teacher policy reforms elsewhere in Latin America. The third is to use the Ecuador case to assess general theories of education politics.

From a comparative perspective, several aspects of reform politics in Ecuador stand out (Bruns and Schneider 2016). First, while organized civil society stakeholders (education nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], elite policy networks, the business community) were not as active in Ecuador as in other reform cases, a pervasive sense of crisis in the early 2000s generated broad public support for change, manifested in a 2006 national referendum on education reform. Second, when Rafael Correa campaigned for the presidency in late 2006, education reform was the centerpiece of his campaign, and his large margin of victory provided a strong mandate, which was reaffirmed in his first reelection in 2009. Third, reformers in the Ministry of Education enjoyed long tenure and sustained presidential support through the first 6 of Correa's 10 years in power (2007–13). Fourth, the only active stakeholder outside government and main reform opponent—the teacher union UNE (*Unión Nacional de Educadores* [National Union of Educators])—turned out to be weaker than anticipated, in part because of Correa's strong mandate for reform. Finally, among facilitating factors, the commodity boom increased government revenue that could be used to ramp up education spending.

The process of designing and implementing reforms to teacher careers was very much top down and concentrated in the reform team in the Ministry of Education. As such, it confirms Merilee Grindle's (2004, 58–59) argument that reforms in the 1990s in Latin America depended on the centrality of “reform mongers, policy entrepreneurs,” and champions for success. In terms of civil society, the absence of significant participation and influence by parents' associations, think tanks, and other civil society organizations contrasts with recent theories of education reform in the United States (Finger 2017) and in Chile (Mizala and Schneider 2018) that find civil society organizations to be crucial backers of reform.

The absence of business participation in Ecuador also seems to go against arguments developed for explaining education reform in the United States (Rhodes 2012) and for developing countries (Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Kosack 2012). However, the main theories of education politics for developing countries tie business pressure for reform to the exposure of manufacturing firms to export markets (as in East Asia) and the consequent need of these firms for skilled workers trained at public expense (Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Ansell 2010; Kosack 2012). Ecuador's main exports are oil and agricultural products. Export firms in these sectors need few skilled workers and therefore need not—following these theories—engage actively in education politics.

The defeat of the strongest opponent in civil society, the teacher union, seems to fit Moe and Wiborg's (2016) general theory on veto points. Using examples from OECD countries, they argue that teacher unions manage to block reforms in political systems with multiple veto points (such as in the US, Germany, and Japan). In contrast, reformers succeed where political systems offer few veto points (such as in British and Scandinavian countries). This argument requires reformulation for contexts with weak institutions. The Correa government's reforms faced no formal veto points. However, in contrast to Moe and Wiborg, veto power in Ecuador depended less on formal political institutions than on the president's electoral mandate and popularity vis-a-vis organized social movements and political parties. In this way, Correa enjoyed the upper hand throughout his three successive presidential terms.

Two other factors were crucial in Ecuador's reforms but are neglected in the still thin literature on education politics.¹ The first concerns state building or state recovery. In restricting the influence that teacher unions and other groups in civil society had over education policy and teacher careers before 2006, Correa insisted that his goal was to reestablish state control over public education.² Prior weaker governments had traded away influence over education and had institutionalized measures to strengthen teacher unions, for example, automatic deduction of union dues, in return for political support. The Correa government worked to reverse this trend and restore control of the education system by the central government.

A second neglected factor—broad societal consultation—was also important to the reform process in Ecuador. In what was innovative at the time but has since become a more common practice, policy makers in Ecuador in 2006 conducted a broad national consultation and held a national referendum on education reform before embarking on concrete reforms. Similar sorts of national consultations have since preceded major education reforms in Chile, Mexico, and Brazil, although Ecuador's was the only one to end in a national referendum. In all cases, these consultations served to raise awareness among participating stakeholders on problems, possible solutions in education, and to find areas of consensus on the reform agenda. Consultations thus smoothed the path for reformers and gave them a strong mandate for change while simultaneously isolating groups such as teacher unions opposed to particular aspects of reform. These consultation initiatives are difficult to fit into standard theories. They brought in many actors in society. However, they were often top-down, rather than bottom-up processes, espe-

¹ The general scarcity of research and theorizing on education politics has been a consistent lament (Kingdon et al. 2014; Moe and Wiborg 2016; Gift and Wibbels 2014).

² Heredia (2017) develops a similar argument on the intent of reformers in Mexico in 2013 to exclude the teacher union from influence over policy and hiring and reassert State control of public education.

cially in Ecuador and Mexico.³ In both of these cases, consultations were crucial for enhancing the salience of education in public debate and subsequent electoral campaigns.

In this article, we examine the Ecuadorian reform through a qualitative, process-tracing analysis that relies on multiple sources including government documents (laws, reports, and other publications), secondary literature, periodical reports (primarily online), public opinion data, and data on learning assessments from UNESCO and the OECD. In addition, we interviewed eight people who were either outside observers not in government but who followed the reforms closely or insiders who held top positions in the Correa government.⁴ One of the coauthors, Pablo Cevallos Estarellas, was also a top official in the Ministry of Education (2007–13). For transparency and consistency, the parts of the empirical analysis that draw most heavily on his insider experience are cited as interviews.

We use these sources of evidence to establish which major stakeholders were active, what they wanted, and how they interacted over the reform trajectory. This process tracing is of the theory-testing kind, designed to assess whether variables that existing theories (noted earlier) claim should be instrumental, in fact, had the expected effects (Bennett and Checkel 2014). We also note factors that were important in Ecuador's reform experience but are insufficiently appreciated by existing theories. We turn first to a brief summary of the reforms.

Teacher Policy Reforms in Ecuador, 2006–17

Two laws were at the core of the reforms. The first, in 2009, rewrote the 1990 *Ley de Carrera Docente y Escalafón del Magisterio Nacional* (National Teacher Career Path Law). The 2009 law introduced three radical changes: teacher hiring based on competency tests and clear standards, promotion based on performance evaluations rather than years of service, and the possibility of dismissal for two successive performance evaluations deemed “insufficient.” Two years later, the National Assembly in a rare consensus adopted the 2011 *Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural* (Intercultural Education Law, hereafter Education Law). This law incorporated most of what was in the 10-Year Plan for Education (*Plan Decenal de Educación* [PDE], approved by referendum in November 2006) and in several areas of teacher policy was even more ambitious and comprehensive than the 2009 reform (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell 2015). In addition to expanding funding for schools and supplies,

³ In Mexico and Ecuador, State actors orchestrated the consultation. In Brazil, the process (major curriculum reform) was coordinated by big education foundations in São Paulo (Barros 2018). In Chile, the consultation was more bottom up (Mizala and Schneider 2018).

⁴ See app. A. Most of our interviewees are former government officials. But all interviewees, even those from civil society, emphasized that after Correa's election in 2006, government officials were the main actors designing and implementing reforms, with little participation by civil society.

the 2011 Education Law expanded the power of the government vis-a-vis corporatist interests, along with other measures to proscribe union influence in teacher hiring and Ministry appointments and to end mandatory union dues from teachers.⁵ The 2011 Education Law codified five key policies, covering all stages of the teaching career: (a) more selective entry into preservice teacher education and higher accreditation standards for these institutions training, (b) more rigorous selection of new teachers, (c) performance evaluation for all teachers at regular intervals, (d) higher-quality professional development programs for teachers, and (e) a restructured teacher career path with promotion based on tested competencies and performance evaluation (Cevallos Estarellas 2017).

Preservice teacher education had long been perceived as defective in Ecuador (Fabara 2013). When the government first introduced entrance tests for teacher positions, applicants from pedagogical institutes had lower scores than applicants from university-level education programs, and all teacher graduates had lower scores than applicants from other disciplines. These poor results motivated a reform of preservice teacher training. In 2012, the government promulgated a new Higher Education Law that expanded government oversight of teacher training and allowed it to implement three important measures: (a) closure of 23 pedagogical institutes deemed low quality, (b) a minimum score for entry into teacher training institutions (at least 800 out of 1,000 in the university entrance test), and (c) creation of a new National University of Education (*Universidad Nacional de Educación* [UNAE], modeled after Singapore's National Institute for Education), which began operation in 2015. The initial design for UNAE called for highly selective admission and faculty hiring with a strong focus on teaching practice in contrast to traditional university programs in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America that stressed theory and philosophy.

Before 2007, public teachers were selected by provincial committees of the Ministry of Education, in which representatives of the teacher union (UNE) had direct participation and significant influence. Candidates were supposed to be tested on content knowledge and pedagogical skills, but tests tended to be arbitrary, and there were many cases of favoritism based on political or union affiliation or even bribery (interviews with Peñafiel and Cevallos Estarellas). One of the government's first measures was to centralize and tighten the recruitment process. Through a presidential decree in 2007, the government introduced a national hiring exam, and in 2008, Ecuador's 24 provinces applied the exam for the first time to 55,000 applicants.⁶ Re-

⁵ The 2008 constitution in Ecuador eliminated compulsory membership in unions, business associations, and other corporatist organizations.

⁶ See http://web.educacion.gob.ec/_upload/LaPizarra-Mayo08.pdf. Initially the entry exam covered content knowledge, reasoning ability, and pedagogical knowledge, and included a demonstration class to assess pedagogical skills. In 2012, the government dropped the test of reasoning ability and

flecting the higher standards, on average, less than 20 percent of applicants were hired.

The new system of teacher performance evaluation initially had two components: internal and external. The internal component evaluated teachers' school performance through six elements: self-evaluation, peer feedback, principal feedback, class observation by the principal, parent feedback, and student feedback.⁷ The external evaluation included tests of linguistic abilities, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge. From 2009 to 2013, 90,397 of Ecuador's 170,000 basic education teachers were evaluated. The new program significantly raised the incentives for good performers. Teachers and principals evaluated as excellent (90 percent or higher) or very good (80 to 89 percent) received a monthly bonus for 4 years (until their next evaluation). The bonus was US\$1,200 per month for teachers rated excellent and US\$900 per month for those rated very good, initially more than double average teacher salaries. Teachers rated as good (60 to 78 percent) received no bonus and had to be evaluated again within 2 years. Teachers rated below 60 percent (unsatisfactory) were required to take training and be evaluated again the following year. A teacher scoring below 60 percent a second time could be dismissed from the education system.

The government in 2012 created the National Institute for Education Evaluation (*Instituto Nacional De Evaluación Educativa* [INEVAL]) as an autonomous body in charge of all assessment processes. In 2016, INEVAL revamped the teacher evaluation process, now called "SER Maestro," and determined that the 2016 process would be considered the first teacher evaluation for all legal purposes.⁸ SER Maestro evaluates four dimensions of competency: content knowledge, teaching skills, professional leadership, and socio-emotional and citizenship aptitudes. Content knowledge is measured on written tests designed for the grade levels and specialties of teachers (48 percent of the total score). Teaching skills, professional leadership, and socio-emotional and citizenship aptitudes are measured on additional instruments: a self-evaluation questionnaire (3 percent), a questionnaire for students and their families (4 percent), a questionnaire for principals (5 percent), a portfolio graded by their teaching peers (8 percent), a rubric to evaluate classroom practice graded by peers (17 percent), and a rubric graded by INEVAL to assess classroom practice (15 percent).

added a psychological test. In 2014, government renamed the hiring procedure "Quiero Ser Maestro" ("I Want to Be a Teacher") and opened it to professionals from other fields.

⁷ The reform not only raised standards, it also strengthened the accountability of school-level personnel to parents. Starting in 2008, *Gobiernos Escolares Ciudadanos*—school-level councils formed by representatives of parents, teachers, and students—had a role in evaluating teacher performance and selecting new teacher applicants (Bruns and Luque 2015, 237).

⁸ A key implication is that any teachers evaluated as "unsatisfactory" will need to be evaluated two more times before they can be dismissed from their jobs. Although some of the teachers evaluated in the lowest performance category between 2009 and 2013 should have already been re-evaluated and dismissed, there is no record that this has happened yet.

Before 2007, the Ministry of Education did not offer teacher training programs but rather validated courses offered by many other organizations, including the teachers' union and the Catholic Church. However, there was no quality control or evaluation. In 2008, the government created SiProfe (*Sistema Integral de Desarrollo Profesional Educativo* [System for Professional Educational Development]) and gave it responsibility for designing teacher development courses based on needs identified through the teacher evaluation program. Courses were delivered by universities, and teachers were assessed after each course. From 2008 to 2012, SiProfe created 64 courses and enrolled almost 300,000 teachers (some teachers taking multiple courses; Ministry of Education 2014, 4). In 2014, however, the Ministry suspended SiProfe (Creamer Guillen 2016, 115) and began to outsource teacher training to national and international universities.⁹

Until 2011, the teacher career path in Ecuador was like elsewhere in Latin America, with promotions and pay increases based solely on years of service. The 2011 law based promotions on teacher performance evaluations and expanded the range between top and bottom salaries (US\$817 to \$1,676 per month). The law also created a parallel career path for education administrators (principals, mentors, advisors, and auditors), with monthly salaries as high as US\$2,230. Finally, the law doubled the starting salary for new teachers, from US\$395/month in 2010 to US\$775/month in 2011 (fig. 1; Cevallos Estarellas 2017, 16).

In sum, the Correa government's top-down reform of Ecuador's education system radically increased both teachers' rewards and their accountability for performance. Reformers ramped up spending and enrollments at the same time they established new institutions for teacher preparation, performance evaluation, student assessment and in-service professional development. The full impact of these reforms will unfold over time, but even the first 7 years of implementation produced significant changes in the composition of the teaching force and student learning results (table 1).

Main Forces in Education Reform: Popular Support and Executive Dominance

This section reviews the main stakeholders and their involvement in the teacher policy reforms. Among recent cases of systemic education reform in Latin America, Ecuador's political dynamics are distinctive in the narrower range of stakeholders, the higher degree of executive dominance, the extent of government actions to sideline the teacher union, and the absence of business engagement.

⁹ <http://educacion.gob.ec/ministro-de-educacion-presento-el-programa-de-formacion-y-capacitacion-de-alto-nivel-soy-maestro-nunca-dejo-de-aprender>.

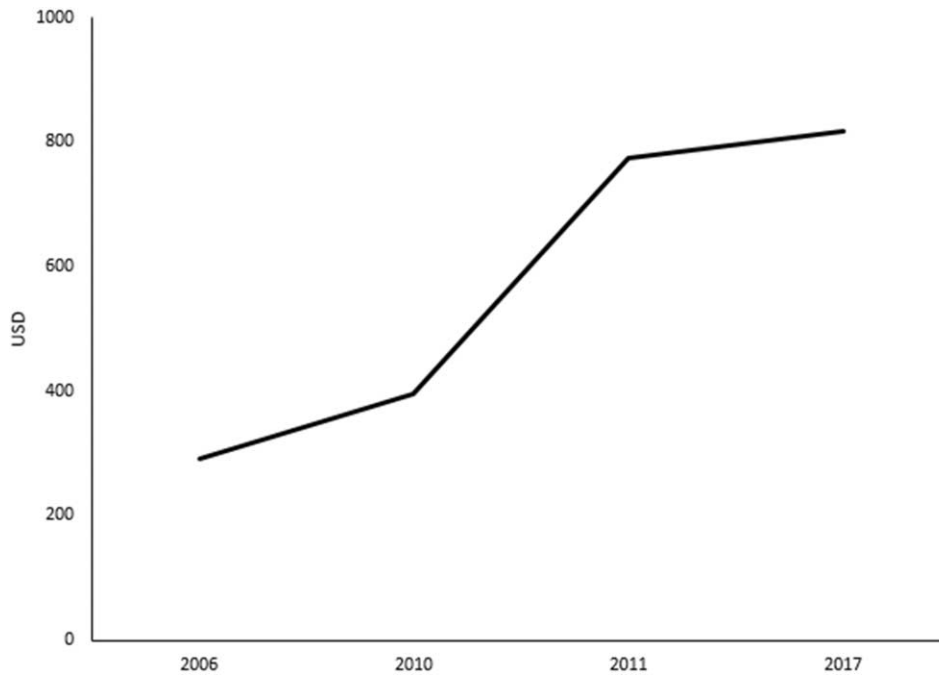


FIG. 1.—Entry-level salaries for teachers in Ecuador, 2006–17. Source: Cevallos Estarellas (2017, 13). US dollars, also Ecuador’s currency, not adjusted for inflation.

Executive Branch

Rafael Correa won his first presidential election by a large margin, with 57 percent of the vote, and began his term in January 2007 with a 73 percent approval rating (Conaghan 2011, 271). Correa had long held a personal commitment to education, having worked as a teacher after university, and he campaigned on the promise of education as a tool for more equitable distribution of opportunity and income. The 2006 referendum provided a strong mandate for the Correa government to promote education expansion and reform. While dramatically increasing education spending, Correa, an economist, incessantly stressed that the main motivations for reform were to improve equity and raise spending efficiency. Ministry staff recall many internal meetings where the president emphasized that, contrary to popular belief, a leftist government of a poor country has an even stronger obligation to guarantee spending efficiency (interview with Cevallos Estarellas). Correa retained the technocratic team in the Ministry of Education recruited in the previous government, which played an important role in framing issues and identifying policy options. The central role of this team in designing and implementing reforms fits well with Grindle’s (2004) theories on the importance of change teams and “reform mongers.”

Teacher Unions

UNE was the largest teacher union in 2006. By conventional metrics, it was a formidable political force, representing 90 percent of Ecuador's 170,000 public teachers (Grindle 2004, 121).¹⁰ UNE historically enjoyed the right to name high-level Ministry officials and had a say in the selection of ministers. It was allied politically with a Maoist party, the *Movimiento Popular Democrático* (MPD) that initially supported Correa's bid for the presidency and had a small contingent in the legislature. In the 1990s, the UNE ranked as strong among unions in Latin America in terms of centralization (high), relations with the Ministry of Education (medium, although this would deteriorate), and strength of party relationship (high; Grindle 2004, 121).¹¹ UNE also had significant disruptive power. Comparative data are scarce, but among nonfederal countries in Latin America (1998–2003), Ecuador ranked at the top with Bolivia in terms of days lost to teachers' strikes and protests (Gentili et al. 2004, 1265).

UNE engaged in several efforts to block Correa's reforms from 2007 to 2009, but the government sidelined it thereafter. In broad terms, this outcome fits Moe and Wiborg's (2016) argument that education reform can only prosper where unions do not block it. However, the Correa government went well beyond denying UNE access to veto points to fatally weakening the union organizationally by stripping it of funds and influence in the Ministry and over teacher careers, and ultimately revoking its legal registration.

Business Associations

Business associations played no visible role in the reforms, and Ministry officials reported few contacts with business except for consultations on technical areas such as vocational training (interviews with Peñafiel, Creamer, and Martinez). This may be due in part to the business community's general estrangement from the Correa government (Wolff 2016) but also appears to stem from a longer-standing tradition of little business involvement with education in Ecuador.¹² This business abstention was similar to the lack of engagement of Chilean business in recent education reforms (Mizala and Schneider 2018) but contrasts with more active pro-reform stances by big business in Mexico through the NGO *Mexicanos Primero* (Mexicans First) and

¹⁰ Bruns and Luque (2015, 299) put union density at 79 percent after 2000. Calculating union density is difficult in part because of different estimates of the total number of teachers. These estimates, from interviews and publications, range from 150,000 to over 200,000. Much of the discrepancy is likely due to whether or not contract teachers are included along with formally appointed (*con nombramiento*) teachers. We use 170,000, near the median, as the best estimate, but convey our calculations of teacher turnover and later union density as ballpark figures.

¹¹ By Grindle's rankings on these dimensions for the 1990s, UNE was weaker than SUTEP in Peru but stronger than SNTE in Mexico.

¹² The *Grupo Faro*, a general policy think tank with business support, generally agreed with Correa's reform agenda in education but did not have much impact on the content of the reforms or public backing for it.

by business in Brazil through multiple foundations grouped together in *Todos Pela Educação* (Everyone for Education). Business absence in Ecuador fits with theories that expect business engagement where many lead firms export manufactured goods as in East Asia (Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Kosack 2012), because outside of petroleum, Ecuador's other main exports are agricultural.¹³

Indigenous Groups

The CONAIE (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* [Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador]), affiliated with the indigenous Pachakutik party, was traditionally a major stakeholder in Ecuador's education system. Prior to 2007, it was de facto in charge of the *Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (National Department of Bilingual Intercultural Education) within the ministry. Correa's efforts to free government from corporatist influence in education led to stripping CONAIE and Pachakutik's control of indigenous education policy. However, one of the first public acts of Lenin Moreno after his election in May 2017 was to "return" the planning of indigenous education to indigenous peoples.¹⁴

Parents and Public Opinion

Throughout Correa's tenure, changes in education were visible and enjoyed a high level of popular support. According to *Latinobarómetro*, satisfaction with education rose from an average of 30 percent in the years prior to Correa to an average of 70 percent under Correa (see fig. 2).

Policy Networks

The think tanks, university centers, foundations, and other education-focused research and advocacy groups in civil society that have been important in reform efforts in Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and the United States were not visible in Ecuador from 2007 to 2016 (on Chile, see Mizala and Schneider 2018; Finger 2017).¹⁵ This likely reflects in part the lack of engagement from the business community, which is often a major source of financing for non-government education advocacy and research organizations. Important con-

¹³ Flowers are a major export, but the sector mostly relies on private solutions for skills through in house training and programs run by the sector association ExpoFlore (interview with Martinez, January 23, 2018).

¹⁴ <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/leninmoreno-ecuador-cambios-educacionintercultural-indigenas.html> (accessed December 12, 2017).

¹⁵ Two NGOs active in education in Ecuador are the *Grupo Faro* and *Contrato Social por la Educación*. The latter formed in 2002 to work to make education a national priority and grew to include over 100 NGOs concerned with education. *Contrato Social* did not though have much influence after 2006, and Correa ended up in conflict with them. *Grupo Faro*, as noted earlier, deals with public policy generally, not just education, and also did not have much influence on the reforms. It did, however, have regular contact with the Ministry of Education through monitoring of the implementation of a grant from the European Union.

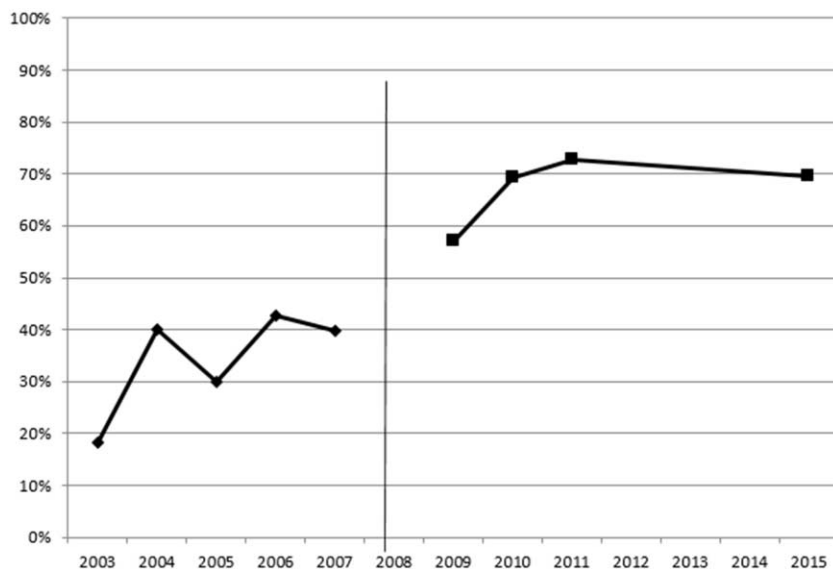


FIG. 2.—Public opinion on education in Ecuador, 2003–15. Source: Latinobarómetro. <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp> (accessed March 21, 2017). The wording of the questions changed after 2007 from satisfaction with “the education to which you have access” to satisfaction “with the way public education functions.”

sequences are the absence of independent research on the government’s reform programs and the lack of informed public debate that is part of the education policy landscape elsewhere in Latin America. A corollary is that fewer data are publicly available in Ecuador on key elements of reform implementation, such as teacher evaluations, compared with Chile, Peru, and Brazil.

International Organizations

Interestingly, despite Correa’s anti-imperialist, pro-public education discourse, his government’s reforms of teacher policy—especially the introduction of individual teacher performance evaluation and elimination of civil service tenure—coincided with practices recommended by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Bruns and Luque 2015).¹⁶ Ecuador’s reform challenges the traditional assumption that policies to increase accountability for performance and reward merit are exclusive to right-wing or “neoliberal” governments.

¹⁶ However, these organizations were not involved in specific policy recommendations or other support to the government during the Correa government.

In sum, among recent cases of systemic education reform in Latin America, the process in Ecuador under Correa stands out for the power of central actors in the executive branch, the high levels of popular support, and the weakness of influences from organized civil society actors, including the teacher union, business, and independent policy networks. Within the executive, Correa's consistent support for the reform team in the Ministry of Education was essential. However, top-down reform without abiding support from civil society organizations raises questions about long-term reform durability, an issue we return to later.

Reform Dynamics: Headwinds, Tailwinds, and Strategy

From 2007 through 2013, Correa's reforms had strong tailwinds with little opposition (see the timeline in app. B). Broad public approval and increasing fiscal resources greatly facilitated reform. The widespread perception that the education system had been in deep crisis for many years gave the government unusual latitude to undertake radical reform. Given this favorable context, the reform team perceived little need to devise strategies to mobilize support and undermine opposition, such as side payments or compensatory benefits. Opposition strikes, marches, and violence from UNE in the 2009–10 period were confronted head on, with police responses, and legislation to dismiss teachers on strike. Tellingly, actions to mollify teachers—such as the doubling of entry-level salaries and the incentives for teacher retirement—came in 2011, well after the most intense period of strikes and conflicts with UNE in 2009. Correa's style was generally confrontational, and he fought also with other groups in civil society and with the media.

By the early 2000s, Ecuador's education system was badly degraded. It was the only country in Latin America where education spending fell from 1990 to 2000, dropping from close to 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to around 1 percent of GDP, well below the regional average. By early 2003, 14 percent of teachers were absent on an average day during unannounced school visits compared with, for example, 11 percent of Peruvian teachers. By another measure, teachers were present in schools only 62 percent of their contractual hours (Rogers et al. 2004). As noted earlier in table 1, by 2006, Ecuador had some of the lowest test scores in Latin America, on the level of much poorer countries.

After a period of enormous political instability—seven presidents and nine ministers of education in the prior 10 years—in 2005, President Alfredo Palacio appointed Rafael Correa as Finance Minister and in 2006 Raul Vallejo as Education Minister. Vallejo shepherded the development of the 10-Year Plan for Education, approved by a national referendum in November 2006 (Araujo and Bramwell 2015, 4). Palacios had appointed Vallejo and his Vice-Minister Gloria Vidal in the last year of his term as president. Without enough time to initiate meaningful reform, Vallejo and Vidal decided instead to

promote a national debate on education reform (interview with Vidal). This dialogue began with extensive open forums and consultations around the country. The Ministry team then distilled this input into the PDE and the referendum. Vallejo and Vidal thus laid the groundwork and prepared voters and other stakeholders for major, disruptive reforms. This broad, extended consultation and later national referendum were major innovations in education politics. Later reformers in Brazil, Mexico, and Chile all conducted similar national consultations (though not referenda).

Candidate Correa thoroughly endorsed the PDE in the referendum and, once elected, asked Vallejo and Vidal to stay on and implement it. The PDE had eight policy goals, four of which centered on expanding access to education at all levels. Three goals focused on quality: improving infrastructure and equipment, improving quality and equity with a national assessment and accountability system; and enhancing the prestige of the teaching career and the quality of teacher training. The eighth goal was to raise public spending on K–12 education by 0.5 percent of GDP annually, until it reached 6 percent of GDP. Buoyed by high oil prices and economic expansion (see app. C), public education spending almost quadrupled in nominal terms, from US \$1.1 billion in 2006 to US\$3.9 billion in 2012 (Araujo and Bramwell 2015, 5), reaching 5 percent of GDP in 2013 (see fig. 3), on par with many countries in Latin America, including richer ones such as Chile, Brazil, and Argentina.

The democratic alternation of parties in power regularly stalls or rolls back education reform efforts, so the great continuity across Correa's three terms was a major boon to consolidating reform. In January 2007, Correa reaffirmed his commitment to the PDE and maintained Raul Vallejo as minister. When Vallejo stepped down in 2010, his Vice-Minister Gloria Vidal replaced him and stayed on until 2013. Over a critical 7-year period, Ecuador had a degree of continuity that is rare in education ministries, and which contrasts sharply with the decade before Correa (1996–2006), in which Ecuador's 11 different education ministers averaged less than a year in office. From 2007 to 2017, Correa appointed only three different ministers with an average tenure of 4 years, double the regional average of around 2 years (Schneider 2017).¹⁷

In 2007 the government created a teacher evaluation system with the explicit purpose of diagnosing needs for training. Having analyzed Chile's experience with teacher performance evaluations on a voluntary basis (teachers could opt in, with the carrot of monetary bonuses if they were evaluated as effective), the government chose the same route in 2008. The Ministry be-

¹⁷ The most crucial components of the PDE were included in the 2008 Constitution, also passed by referendum. Ecuador is one of a few countries (along with Mexico in 2013) to have evaluations of teacher performance written into the constitution. In general, constitutional provisions signal greater consolidation and institutionalization. However, from 1830 to 2006, Ecuador had 19 constitutions (Conaghan 2011, 264), so constitutional law may not guarantee continuity.

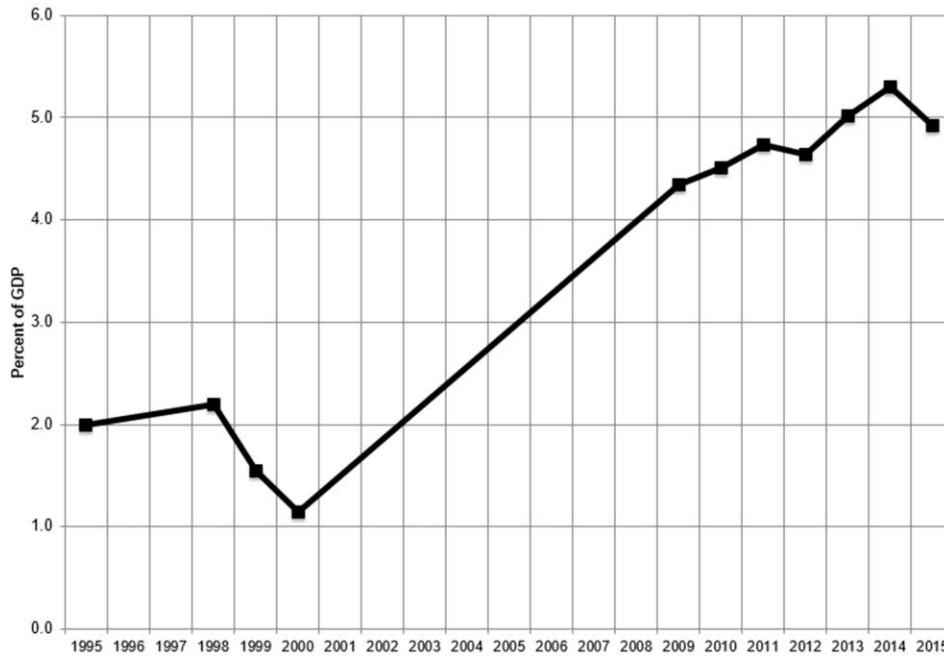


FIG. 3.—Public education spending in Ecuador as a percent of GDP, 1995–2015. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/?queryid=181#> (accessed March 21, 2017).

lieved this would allow time to refine the evaluation criteria and processes (interview with Cevallos Estarellas). However, less than 1 percent of teachers—1,500 of about 170,000—volunteered to be evaluated. So in 2009, the Ministry made evaluations mandatory for all teachers and school principals.¹⁸ This produced vehement resistance and a 23-day strike by UNE.¹⁹

Part of Correa’s political strategy was to undermine UNE’s sources of power. First, after assuming office in 2007, he denied UNE its traditional influence in Ministry appointments, and Correa reappointed the Education Minister of the previous government (Vallejo) over union objections. Second, the 2008 constitution ended obligatory union dues which drastically diminished UNE income. Third, the 2009 Teacher Career Law made striking teachers subject to immediate dismissal. After 2009, UNE began losing political strength, and by 2014 it was virtually extinct. In August 2016, the Ministry of Education declared it legally “dissolved” through a ministerial resolution, arguing that the union had violated its own statutes as well as new rules gov-

¹⁸ Of the 90,397 public teachers evaluated from 2009 to 2013, 1 percent were rated excellent; 34 percent very good; 62 percent good, and 3 percent unsatisfactory (*Ministerio de Educación* 2014, 59).

¹⁹ This early episode of Ecuador’s education reform was vividly narrated by *The Economist*: <http://www.economist.com/node/14258942#print>.

erning social organizations. Overall, it is hard to think of other reform experiences that have been so completely devastating to a teacher union, especially one that appeared so strong before 2007.

The government also promoted rapid turnover in the teacher corps. Before Correa, UNE and the government had negotiated a series of extra payments to teachers on top of their base salaries. Over time, for many teachers it meant that most of their income came from supplemental payments, not base salary. However, the base salary was used to calculate teacher pensions. The result, without any mandatory retirement age, was that many teachers stayed on the payroll into their 70s and 80s and beyond, and many were too infirm to teach (interview with Vidal). To clear out the aged and many other teachers (including presumably those who feared they would fare badly on evaluations), the government started offering in 2008 a retirement bonus of \$32,000 (more than 6 times the annual base salary before 2011; see fig. 1). About 20,000 teachers took the retirement package in the first year, and 4,000–5,000 in each of the following 4 years, for a total of about 40,000 retirements, around a quarter of all teachers (interview with Peñafiel). A younger, better-trained cohort began to take their place (Bruns and Luque 2015, 236). This massive turnover smoothed the path of reform, especially teacher evaluations, as teachers who opposed performance evaluations could leave the profession, and new teachers entering the profession did so through more selective exams and knew regular assessments would be part of their careers.

Correa used “relentless communications to mobilize public opinion on the side of reforms” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 319; see Bruns et al., forthcoming). The president devoted full energy to persuading the public that the education system was in crisis and that a transformation was the only option. Correa often argued that his political project that he called a “citizen revolution” required well-informed citizens with the capacity for critical thinking and a commitment to the broader national interest. In various occasions, he asserted that a “citizen revolution” was not possible without an “education revolution.”²⁰ By 2011, in public opinion polls, Ecuador ranked third highest among countries in Latin America in the percent of respondents who said education had improved over the past 10 years (56 percent) and last in the percent who said it had deteriorated (7 percent; OEI 2012, 44).

The Ministry of Education adopted an overarching focus, for the first time, on measuring and improving learning through both national and international assessments. Whereas Ecuador declined to participate in Latin America’s first regional learning assessment in 1997, it did so in 2006, and President Correa vocally used the country’s poor results to make the case for reform. Tracking and transparent cross-national benchmarking of learning progress became central to the education system.

²⁰ See http://www.ecuadorinmediato.com/index.php?module=Noticias&func=news_user_view&id=2818762163.

Although the government legally decertified UNE in 2016,²¹ that was not the end of teacher organizing. For one, in February 2015, the Ministry of Education created a rival teacher union fully aligned with the government, the *Red de Maestros y Maestras por la Revolución Educativa* (Network of Teachers for the Education Revolution).²² This network had begun acting informally in 2011, amalgamating teachers who favored the Correa government, but was not in full alliance with the government until 2013, when the new minister started supporting it more actively. Minister Espinosa had more political ambitions than his more technical predecessors and leveraged support from the Red into a successful campaign for election to the National Assembly in 2017. By 2018, the Red had 60,000 affiliated members (around a third of all teachers) and officially supported performance evaluation and the other teacher policy reforms (interview with Nelly Miño, Red leader). However, the Red remained weak in organizational terms with few resources (members do not pay dues) or paid staff and leaders.²³ To complicate union representation, in October 2017, the Moreno government derogated the presidential decrees that closed UNE, and UNE started proceedings to get reinstated.²⁴ However, even a resurrected UNE would be a pale imitation of the pre 2007 UNE, with fewer members and resources.

In sum, resources from the commodity boom, Correa's personal conviction and high political capital, the ultimate weakness of the teacher union, and broad public support for educational change all favored the reform process even without organized support in civil society. Staff continuity in the Ministry of Education and the inclusion of reform components in legislation and the constitution were key advantages during initial implementation that increased the odds that reforms would be consolidated and sustained. However, the heavy weight of Correa's involvement in the reform process, and the subsequent acrimonious split between Correa and his successor Moreno, have created uncertainty about reform sustainability. Through Moreno's first year and a half in office, the main policies and institutions of the Correa reforms remained mostly in place, at least formally, though without the strong political backing they had under Correa.

Conclusions and Policy Lessons

One political lesson from the Ecuadorean experience may be the medium-term benefits of explicitly mobilizing broad public support before

²¹ See <http://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/une-disolucion-estatuto-educacion-organizaciones-sociales.html>.

²² See <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/plataforma-maestros-gobierno-rafaelcorrea.html>.

²³ See <http://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/reddemaestros-error-dialogo-une-leninmoreno.html>.

²⁴ See <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/leninmoreno-deroga-decreto16-organizaciones-sociales-rafaelcorrea.html>, <http://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/solicitud-fanderfalconi-restitucion-personeria-juridica-union-nacional-de-educadores.html>.

attempting costly, contentious reforms. The 2006 national consultation and referendum gave education enormous political salience. Ecuador also illustrates the maxim that, in mobilizing public opinion, crises should not be wasted. The terrible state of education—including some of the worst learning outcomes and the lowest rate of spending (1 percent of GDP) in Latin America—allowed reformist politicians to tap into public discontent. While electoral campaigns in Latin America and elsewhere often promise education reform, Correa kept education in the spotlight throughout his three terms in office.

The degree to which major, contentious, reforms were implemented owes a great deal to the continuity of Correa and his education team, at least through 2013. Democracies with regular turnover in elected offices pose challenges to reforms in education that can take decades to have full effect. Many reforms are overturned or diluted by incoming presidents; a 7-year period of sustained implementation by a stable team in the Ministry of Education is exceptional in Latin America. A corollary recommendation is to renew school leaders and teachers quickly, as reformers did in Ecuador. Part of the reason that teacher policy reforms take a long time to impact student learning outcomes is that they typically only affect newly hired teachers. So mechanisms to accelerate turnover—as with the teacher early retirement program in Ecuador—can help.

In terms of building on existing theories of education politics, Ecuador's experience provides further confirmation, in a later and different sort of reform, for Grindle's (2004) arguments on policy entrepreneurs with solid support from the top. The absence of business engagement provides negative support to theories that emphasize the keen interest in education among manufacturing exporters, of which there were few in Ecuador. Ecuador's reform trajectory lends little support to arguments highlighting strong roles of pro-reform civil society, and modified support for the absence of veto points due in large measure to the very strong mandate and authority in the presidency. Where Ecuador's experience suggests the need for further theorizing is in state building (or state restoring) motivations among top policy makers, and in the benefits of broad consultation and electoral mobilization through referenda on education reform.

Appendix A

Interviews

Josette Arevalo, executive director of INEVAL, January 25, 2018.

Pablo Cevallos Estarellas, advisor to the Minister of Education (2007–9); undersecretary of educational quality (2009–10); Deputy Minister of Education (2010–13); coauthor.

Monserrat Creamer, undersecretary of professional development, Ministry of Education (2012–13), January 22, 2018.

- Miguel Herrera, official in the Ministry of Education 2016–17, January 22, 2018
 Alejandro Martínez, CEO, ExpoFlor 2011–, and president of Comité Empresarial Ecuatoriano (CEE), 2015–17, January 23, 2018.
 Nelly Miño, national subcoordinator, Red de Maestros, January 24, 2018.
 Freddy Peñafiel, Minister of Education, 2016 (and previously Vice-Minister and undersecretary for coordination), January 24, 2018.
 Rosemary Terán, professor of education at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, January 22, 2018.
 Gloria Vidal, Vice-Minister of Education, 2006–10, and Minister of Education, 2010–13, January 24, 2018.

Appendix B

Timeline of Education Reform, 2005–17

2005	April	President Alfredo Palacio appoints Rafael Correa as Minister of Finance
2006	January	President Alfredo Palacio appoints Raúl Vallejo as Minister of Education
	May	Ecuador participates in Latin America regional test (SERCE) for first time
	November	Referendum on 10-Year Education Plan (PDE). Correa elected in second round runoff election.
2007	January	President Correa takes office. Vallejo reappointed as Minister of Education.
	December	Teacher performance evaluations begin on a voluntary basis
2008	June	SERCE test results show Ecuador near bottom in every grade and subject tested
	September	Referendum on new Constitution passes with 65% in favor, 28% opposed
	December	Sistema Integral de Desarrollo Profesional Educativo (SiProfe) created
2009	February	Correa reelected for a second term (2009–13)
	July	Ley de Carrera Docente y Escalafón del Magisterio
	July	Government discontinues compulsory collection of union dues from teacher salaries
	October	UNE strikes for 23 days against compulsory teacher evaluation culminating with a march on Quito and violence
2010	April	Gloria Vidal (previous Vice Minister) takes over from Vallejo as Minister of Education
2011	March	Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural (LOEI, Organic Law of Intercultural Education) approved by majority including all political parties
2012	November	Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEVAL)
2013	February	Correa is reelected for a third presidential term (2013–17)
	May	Vidal steps down as minister. Augusto Espinosa appointed. INEVAL launches national student assessment system
	November	Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE) established
2014	December	TERCE results show Ecuador with big learning gains in every grade and subject tested
2015	May	UNAE begins regular classes Ecuador joins OECD PISA for Development test
2016	May	SER Maestro teacher evaluation begins
	August	Government dissolves UNE legally
2017	April	Lenin Moreno elected president. Appoints Fander Falconi minister of education.
2018	December	Fander Falconi resigns. Milton Luna appointed as Minister of Education. PISA for Development results released.

Appendix C



FIG. C1.—Total government spending in Ecuador and world oil prices. Source: World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

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