

AUTHOR-PREPARED ENGLISH TRANSLATION

COVID-19 IN ECUADOR: HOW CITIZENS PERCEIVE THE POLITICAL SYSTEM'S RESPONSES TO THE HEALTH EMERGENCY

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Received September 2020 | Approved December 2021

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic demanded a response from the State. Authorities introduced measures that restricted certain freedoms enshrined in the Constitution, including freedom of movement and assembly. At the economic and social levels, drastic decisions affected citizens' perceptions of government action. From the perspective of political-system theory, these perceptions directly influence specific and diffuse support, both of which are fundamental to the stability of the political regime. Based on interviews with 1,097 families in Quito, this article provides a descriptive account of their circumstances regarding central and local government actions during the health emergency, and of the specific support generated by those actions.

Keywords COVID-19; Political system; Specific support; Public policy; Assistance.

1. Introduction

The arrival of SARS-CoV-2 altered the quality of life of the entire human community. A notion has been promoted that this virus does not distinguish between social classes, as a biological reference to the fact that no one holds resistance to the disease it produces. The evidence, however, shows a severe impact on the stability and development capacities of human communities belonging to the less favored economic strata.

This is why, throughout the pandemic's various stages, social debates over its impact on different spheres of society have been constant. It is worth noting that the pandemic did not only affect Ecuador's political relations, but has been a process that called into question administrations that had, until then, registered even high levels of popularity.

For right-wing populist governments, which maintained that the pandemic was even an invention of the press and the left, its outcomes have been devastating, eroding even their political capital. This is how Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Jair Bolsonaro, President of Brazil, and Donald Trump, President of the United States, even came to be infected by the very virus they had initially denied.

In this way, the debate over the importance of public health also became a constituent part of political discourse, and turned into a relevant factor for campaign strategies in many countries around the world. Certain currents have argued that the impact has been the same for everyone alike. The Ecuadorian

government itself, for instance, with Lenín Moreno at its head, spread alert messages to the Ecuadorian community carrying notions that generalized the impact of the economic crisis tied to the pandemic.

Along the same lines, on social media, spaces that gained relevance within an environment that had also become digitalized as a consequence of the pandemic, heated debate broke out over the first infections in the country's various cities. In this way, COVID-19 began to be associated as a consequence of irresponsibility and a lack of values. For certain sectors, the rise in infection rates in working-class neighborhoods of the hardest-hit cities was taken as a sign of a lack of education.

The Moreno government, given the low level of popular support it held even prior to the pandemic, reaching just 8% credibility according to a Cedatos/Gallup poll (Ecuavisa 2020), made use of this debate to shift responsibility onto the citizenry. Despite the State's constitutional obligation to guarantee access to health, education, and, above all, opportunities for survival, the government found itself facing a precarious situation that led to protests from various sectors of the citizenry, including university students and resident physicians.

The main reason behind these complaints lay in the lack of guarantees and payments owed by the State (Primicias 2020b). Other sectors affected by the crisis have included public officials, teachers, and retirees, to whom the State still owes money, or who have received their payments delayed by several weeks or months.

This context, together with an impoverished economic situation in which the State holds a debt reaching into the trillions of dollars, and a high country-risk index reaching 1,006 points (though below the levels of March 2020) (Ámbito 2020), have caused a high degree of dissatisfaction that constrains the government's role. Faced with this, the current administration's response has been secrecy and a disavowal of its own political involvement.

As will be shown throughout this article, the Moreno government, together with the figures who represented it before society, such as María Paula Romo, Minister of Government, Sebastián Roldán, Secretary General of the Presidency, Andrés Michelena, Minister of Telecommunications, Oswaldo Jarrín, Minister of Defense, and Juan Carlos Zevallos, Minister of Health, chose to apply mitigation strategies rather than take definitive decisions to address the crisis.

This article covers a debate and a reality that has received little attention from the news media, agents that, with some exceptions, also promoted the government's agenda of citizen responsibility. Through a series of surveys applied to a community of nearly 1,100 vulnerable families in the city of Quito, it is confirmed that a considerable share of the population found itself neglected by the government.

These data describe a problem that, given the size of the sample, can be generalized as a reality that contradicts a government position that presents itself as a responsible handling of the crisis. The data include a combination of Ecuadorian citizens and foreign residents in Ecuador, whose reality during the quarantine period bore witness to the State's indifference.

It is thus found that, beyond the government's discourse of an efficient response, there is conclusive evidence that a significant share of the population was forced into survival conditions during quarantine, a condition that left people forced to depend on third parties, such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), churches, and assistance from private individuals, rather than on the State's own involvement. This reality not only constrains the government's role, but also calls into question the role of the State and its political system.

As is analyzed throughout this article, the State's failure to meet its obligations ends up playing a negative role in citizens' perceptions, breaking the bridges connecting citizens and the State. This opens the door to a fragile political system, one in which institutions are relegated to a secondary role, opening the door in turn to demagoguery and to negative, extremist forms of populism.

2. Theoretical Framework

The political system is part of the social system, where an arbitrary allocation of values takes place, one that is binding on the members of a society. This allocation is generated from a flow of information that originates in the system's intra-societal and extra-societal environment in the form of disturbances.³ These may be economic, political, social, or cultural, and are transmitted to the political authority as demands or inputs.

These inputs or demands are carried to the authority by political parties, civil society organizations, and so on, for their attention, in exchange for legitimacy. Once the authority processes them as public policies or laws, feedback is generated back into the system, where specific or diffuse support can increase, contributing to the stability and legitimacy of the government (Baques 2015).

From another conceptualization, the Political System is understood as the interaction among Institutional Elements (the State), Institutionalized Actors (political parties and movements, relevant actors, and civil society), Values (culture and experience), and the International System.

The exchange of information generated among these components of the Political System gives rise to disputes over power, as a tool for implementing a specific agenda that addresses the demands of institutionalized actors. The feedback process, between the responses of institutionalized actors and the demands of actors, directly influences governability (Astudillo 2015).

According to David Easton (Easton 2001), public policies are among the outputs or results the system produces, and these are tied to the political direction of those who hold power within the Political System (Eugenio 2004). Social policies are part of these public policies, when they seek to reduce poverty and improve social welfare (Ramos et al. 2017). Social policies seek to address the particular needs of specific groups (Cecchini, Robles, and Filgueira 2014).

Social policies aimed at citizens' wellbeing can be grouped into different categories: on the one hand, those that provide social security to workers; those that provide assistance to those who are not part of the labor

market; and universal healthcare policies, which do not depend on the beneficiary's employment status and are accessible to all of a country's inhabitants (Heinz and Francie 2012).

These policies guide organizational activities and make it possible to intervene in solving specific problems, and, when properly identified, designed, implemented, and evaluated, can protect human rights, ensure the delivery of benefits, and create opportunities. They are tied to health, education, telecommunications, and social protection (McNutt and Hoefer 2020). Social policies are the responses the political system generates in an attempt to address citizens' demands on matters related to their wellbeing.

As a result of the declaration of the disease known as COVID-19 as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 (Organización Mundial de la Salud 2020), a call was issued to governments worldwide to take measures allowing them to control the pandemic, such as protecting the population against the possibility of community transmission, the detection, tracing, isolation, and treatment of all reported cases, the preparation of health personnel and health infrastructure, and access to public and private health services for all their inhabitants.

It could be observed that at least 190 countries implemented, almost immediately: 1) lockdown or "quarantine" measures for their population, with the aim of reducing the new virus's rate of spread,⁴ (2) restrictions on travel to and from abroad, 3) mass testing and tracing of confirmed cases, 4) warning systems, 5) public notices, 6) reduction of non-essential economic activities, 7) prohibition of mass gatherings, 8) closure of schools and universities, 9) curfews, 10) declaration of states of emergency or exception, 11) restrictions on internal mobility (Capano et al. 2020).

According to the article "Cross-Country Comparissions of COVID-19: Policy, Politics and the Price of Life," lockdowns made it possible to save around 14 million lives, according to a comparative analysis across Belgium, China, Hubei province, Denmark, Germany, Italy, South Korea, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The study concludes that a well-designed policy can save lives, despite negative effects on the economy, since these policies generate benefits for society (Balmford et al. 2020).

Lockdowns, however, also have effects on the economic, labor, and recreational presence of the countries that adopt these measures, affecting at the same time the sustainability of public finances, which in turn bears on the availability of the health resources needed to address the crisis, and on the implementation of temporary assistance policies for both businesses and vulnerable families (Pineda, Pessino, and Rasteletti 2020).

According to data from the Inter-American Development Bank, average public spending in Latin America to confront the crisis stands at 4.1% of GDP. Of this, 0.5% has been allocated to protecting family income, while 3.6% has gone toward preventing business failures.

On the economic front, governments reallocated budget items, renegotiated loans, eased conditions for new loans and labor relations, and injected greater liquidity into the economy (Capano et al. 2020). It is worth noting that investment in Ecuador was significantly lower compared with other countries in the region.

Chile, for example, invested 4.7% to deal with the pandemic crisis, Brazil 6.5%, while Peru comes close to 7% (IMF 2020). These investments sought to mediate the impact in both economic and social terms. Ecuador, on the other hand, reaches barely 0.5% in investment (Barría 2020), prolonging a strategy of cutbacks the government had already been applying, without taking into account the new context the country was facing.

Many aspects of COVID-19 have generated a thorny political problem, not only because of the type of responses the system has produced, given the lack of consensus among experts, the possibility of reactions being taken that may be considered unnecessary or that fail to address the problems, political support for certain types of state intervention, or perceptions surrounding governmental trust and diffuse support for democracy (Capano et al. 2020) (Bol et al. 2020) (Milanovic 2020).

In Latin America's case, the region faces worrying indicators regarding attitudes toward democracy. On average, 30% of the region's inhabitants were satisfied with this type of regime in 2017, a figure closely tied to the assessment of government performance (Santos González and Martínez-Martínez 2020).

Added to this is a worrying degree of tolerance for corruption in Ecuador, where an average of 25.4% of the population justifies the payment of bribes, placing it fourth in Latin America (Moscoso Moreno and Moncagatta 2020).

Given the existence of a weak Welfare State, which would allow the State to command greater resources and infrastructure to confront the pandemic (Ponce de León 2020), together with the fact that the halt in economic activity and the health crisis have exposed the State's failings (Chacón et al. 2020), such as coordination problems between central government and subnational governments (Abrucio et al. 2020), or authoritarian-style actions carrying high levels of legitimacy, as in El Salvador (Martínez 2020), the perception of government action in this crisis is fundamental to governability and to support for political institutions (Bol et al. 2020).

According to the work of Johnson, Saletti-Cuesta, and Tumas (2020), the main feelings generated around the pandemic are: uncertainty, fear, and anguish. As for uncertainty, the economy and family wellbeing are the most closely associated responses. Among the positive aspects, solidarity stands out, along with an appreciation for the environment, the State and its institutions, and for family and friends. It is worth noting that migrant groups are among those most affected by the health emergency.

Both in Ecuador and in Peru and Chile, the departure of Venezuelan citizens returning to their country of origin has been recorded, mainly due to the loss of jobs in the informal sector,⁵ owing to the lockdown measures decreed in these countries. In the receiving countries, the main limitations that people in a situation of human mobility have faced relate to access to food, medicine, evictions for failure to pay rent, and social assistance provided by governments (Response for Venezuelans 2020).

3. Methodology

This article applies an exploratory-descriptive model in which information was compiled through online interviews. This section describes the strategies and conditions under which the data was collected. The importance of this approach lies not only in the compilation of statistical information, but also in its significance for understanding the reality of the pandemic context, with evidence that can inform public policy responsive to the needs of the population residing in Ecuador.

Within the framework of the pandemic, following the declaration of a health emergency in March 2020, the Ecuadorian State chose to apply a mandatory isolation model. Within a few weeks of this strategy's implementation, the city's most vulnerable communities began requesting urgent help through various channels. In the city of Quito, the use of pieces of cloth, or other materials in their place, was seen as flags that identified households as needing food assistance.

These flags were white or red, depending on the neighborhood and how they had been organized. Other families, meanwhile, had chosen to seek help through social media, mainly Facebook, as well as through phone calls and WhatsApp messages. It was in this context that the social cooperation organization "QUID" launched its #JuntosContraElCovid19 aid campaign.

Given the large volume of requests for help, the organization applied a vulnerability-analysis methodology that allowed it to estimate which families required greater attention compared with others. Given how the data was obtained, it is important to bear in mind a generational bias, since older adults and seniors who do not use social media or digital platforms are underrepresented in the sample. In this way, information was collected from 1,097 families concentrated in the city of Quito.

For the vulnerability analysis, questions were asked about family organization, compiling the number of family members, the number of children or dependents in the household, the number of minors, the number of seniors, and the number of women between 12 and 45 years of age. Nationality was also taken into account as an additional vulnerability factor for foreign families unable to seek support from the State.⁶ The next section of questions was tied to applicants' access to assistance channels.

Participants were accordingly asked whether they were part of the list held by the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), which estimated the delivery of the so-called Emergency Bonus for humanitarian reasons, providing \$60 a month to the most vulnerable sectors. They were also asked whether they had received help from the municipal government, as the local governmental agent. Finally, for this section, aid applicants were asked whether they had received assistance from agents outside the State, such as NGOs, churches, relatives, or people on the street.

If the answer was positive, a follow-up question asked what the source of that help had been. The next section asked questions tied to factors that could increase exposure to the virus. Applicants were accordingly asked whether, within the five days prior to the survey, the participant or any member of the household had been forced to go out.

In addition, they were asked whether all household members had face masks. Questions were also asked regarding access to basic services such as water, electricity, and internet; for the latter, it was determined whether access was through a data plan, WiFi, or shared with a third party.

Finally, the employment situation of the people requesting help was addressed.⁷ For this work, the data was compiled and cleaned in such a way as to protect against any possible risk of identifying participants. This safeguards applicants' wellbeing so that no political or social sanctions befall them. At the same time, this protects human dignity by avoiding any negative impact on the psyche of survey participants.

It should be emphasized that among the people who took part in the survey are groups with high vulnerability due to their migratory situation, making the protection of their information through anonymity all the more necessary.

4. Results

The data was compiled during the red traffic-light period established by the national Emergency Operations Committee (COE), from the last week of April 2020 through June of that same year. Data was received from a total of 1,097 families, with a median of 4 members per family, for a total of 4,667 people. Of these, 1,985 were the children or dependents of aid applicants, 1,804 of whom were minors, representing 38.65% of the sample. Among the general population, meanwhile, 155 people were seniors, representing 3.32%.

Finally, 1,250 people are girls and women between 12 and 45 years of age, representing 26.78% of the participating population. It is worth noting that these groups represent sectors with particular vulnerabilities that, within the isolation context, required specialized attention. The risk of lacking food for minors, especially in the first years of life, can mean the permanent loss of basic capacities throughout their lives (CEPAL 2018).

On the other hand, the high mortality rate COVID-19 shows among older adults made isolation without additional resources a risk factor in both health and nutritional terms. Finally, girls and women faced the serious problem of domestic and sexual violence, which increased during the pandemic.

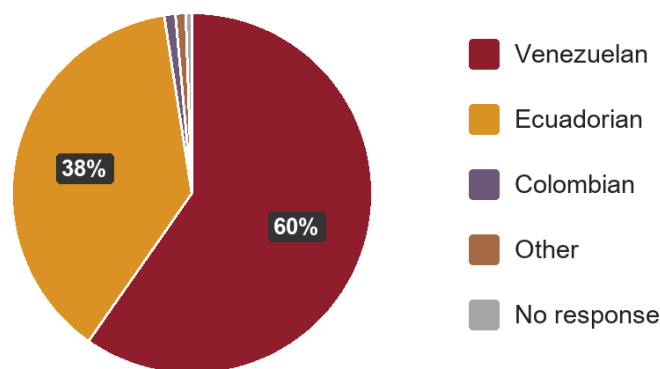
As of May 30, the toll had left at least 26 victims of femicide (Defensoría Pública del Ecuador 2020). At the same time, few initiatives took reproductive health and feminine hygiene factors into account.

Table 1. Statistical description of vulnerable groups in the sample

Population group	Overall total	Group total	Share of overall population
Minors	4,667	1,804	38.6%
Older adults	4,667	155	3.32%
Girls and women aged 12–45	4,667	1,250	26.78%
Source	Authors' own elaboration		

Another of the analysis's findings identified a considerable percentage of foreign citizens requiring attention. The context of xenophobia and the lack of opportunities for citizens of other nationalities turned isolation into a scenario of precarity and abuse.⁸

Figure 1. Nationality of aid applicants

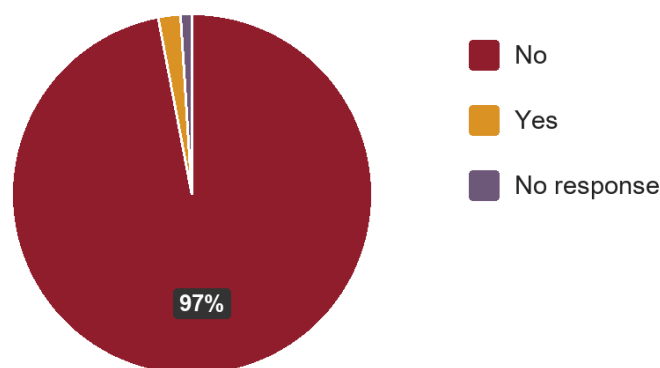


Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 1,097.

The complex situation of the migrant population was made worse by the lack of channels for accessing resources to cover basic needs such as food, and by the pressure to cover rent payments. Their level of vulnerability was accordingly considerably higher than that of the local population, whose financing channels were more accessible, and who could count on the government's obligation to generate support pathways. In this sense, a greater need was evident among the foreign population to go out and work informally, despite the risk of infection.

One of the channels the foreign population could not count on was precisely the funding line generated by the State through the MIES. In this sense, the survey results found that, of the 415 Ecuadorian citizens who required help, barely 3.61% were on the MIES list. Overall, then, 97.27% of the surveyed population had not received attention from this state institution.

Figure 2. MIES assistance to aid applicants



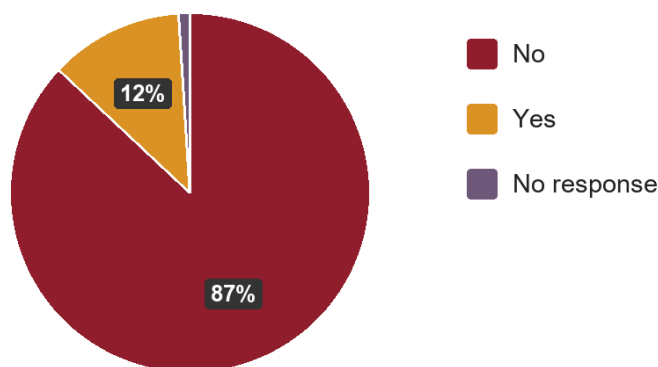
Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 1,097.

This shows, among other things, that the poverty line the State worked with did not account for the fact that the isolation period would affect even those above it.

On the other hand, although proportionally higher, support from the Metropolitan District of Quito (DMQ) municipal government was likewise a minority share. The data shows that barely 12% of aid applicants had received attention from the municipal administration.

It should be emphasized here that aid requests spanned neighborhoods in both the north and south of Quito, as well as the valleys. In this sense, insufficient local attention was evident, something also visible in the fieldwork.

Figure 3. Metropolitan District of Quito municipal assistance to aid applicants

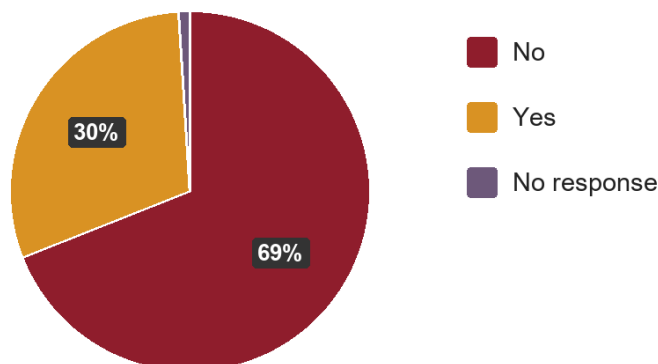


Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 1,097.

Along these same lines, it was found that the greatest assistance came from agents outside the State.

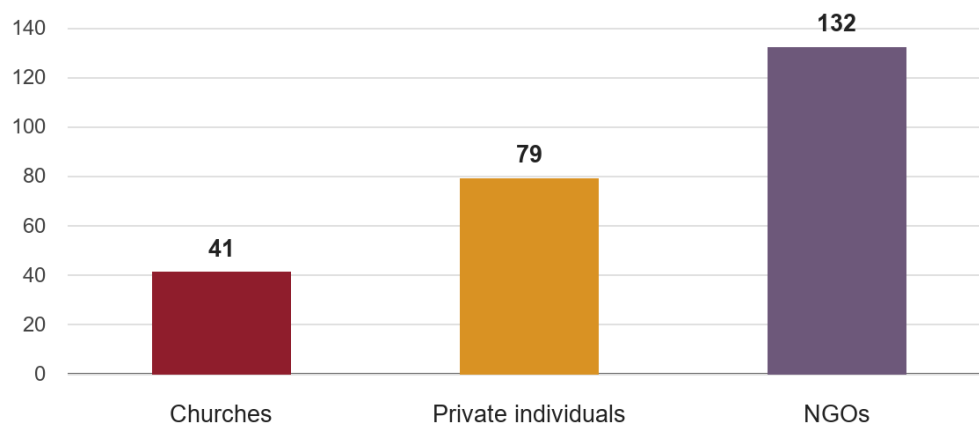
The data thus confirms that at least 30% of the applicant population had received help either from NGOs, churches, or private individuals, among whom were relatives, neighbors, or people on the street. Of this percentage, NGOs were found to have covered 52.38%, private individuals 31.35%, and churches 16.27%. This data shows that State agents underestimated the impact the crisis had in spheres outside the traditional lists.

Figure 4. Assistance from non-state actors to aid applicants



Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 1,097.

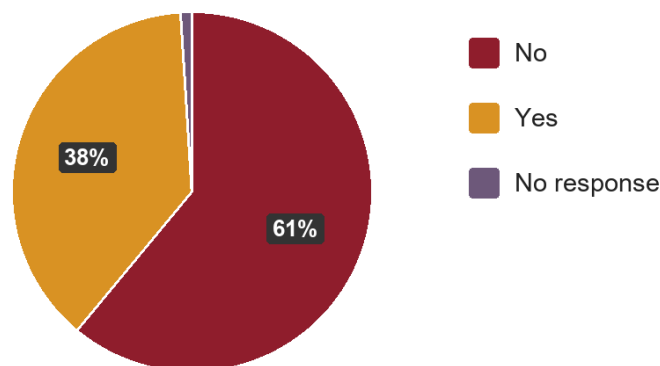
Figure 5. Distribution of assistance from non-state actors



Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 252.

With respect to factors of exposure to the virus, it was found that, despite mobility restrictions and recommendations to stay home, at least 61.53% of applicants had had to leave their homes at least once in the five days prior to the survey. As a result, the probability of infection increased for these households.

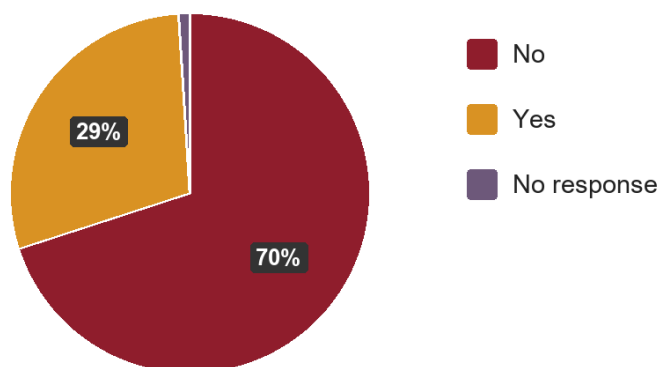
Figure 6. Households in which at least one family member had to leave home during the five days before the survey



Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 1,097.

On the other hand, while it is true that a majority of 70.56% of respondents said they had face masks for all family members, there was still 29.44% of households where this was not the case. Added to this, fieldwork evidence showed that in many cases the masks did not meet biosafety conditions, and in the vast majority of cases the replacement frequency recommended by health authorities was not followed.

Figure 7. Households in which all family members had face masks

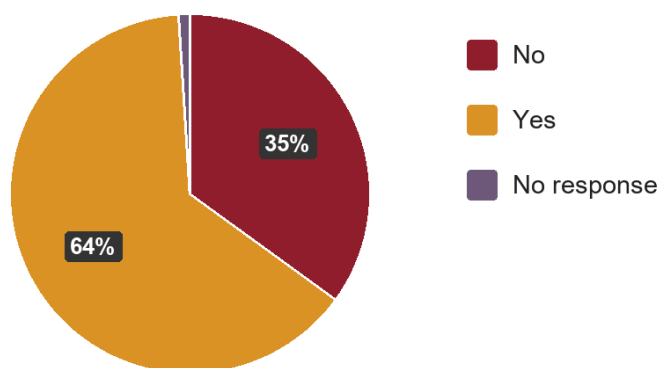


Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 1,097.

On the other hand, one of the areas with the greatest coverage was access to electricity and drinking water, where 99% of respondents were recorded as having electricity, while 96.5% had drinking water. This percentage was lower, however, with respect to internet access, a source of information of utmost relevance during the pandemic period, which was available to only 63.81% of aid applicants.

It should be noted that, of this internet-access percentage, only 51.98% had their own WiFi, while 28.05% had internet shared by neighbors or relatives, and 19.97% had only a data plan.

Figure 8. Internet access among aid applicants



Source: Authors' own elaboration. n = 1,097.

Finally, and probably the most revealing piece of information, it was found that 97.81% of the people requesting help lacked stable employment.

Given that the unemployment rate has risen to at least 13.3% (INEC 2020), there is a high probability that the reality evidenced in the sample has been replicated, to a greater or lesser degree, in hundreds of thousands of households across Ecuador. As the data itself reveals, the lack of assistance is particularly more severe for the migrant population.

4.1 Citizen Perception of State Actions During the Health Emergency

According to the pollster Informe Confidencial, both in Quito and Guayaquil, the perception is that the health system's response capacity will be unable to resolve the current health problem (Nieto 2020). Along the same lines, according to the pollster "Pulso Ciudadano," 85% of respondents rated the national government's handling of the health crisis negatively, with former Vice President Otto Sonnenholzner rated most favorably, with a 67% positive rating (Rivadeneira 2020).

5. Discussion

The evidence in Ecuador's capital is conclusive: during the mandatory isolation period, the State, at both the national and local level, was unable to respond appropriately to the community's needs. While it is true that one could argue a government's priority, from a political standpoint, should be directed toward the national population, it is no less true that the Constitution of Ecuador recognizes the universal right to have one's needs met, based on the principle of universal citizenship set out in Article 416 of the country's charter.

Added to this is one of the pandemic's technical principles: greater exposure means greater risk of infection. And in this sense, populations in a situation of human mobility have shown greater exposure. As a result, they carry a higher probability of infection, not only within their close circles but also for the rest of the community they interact with. This is why the State was under an additional obligation to generate channels for meeting the needs of vulnerable communities such as migrants.

The combined database of nationals and foreigners, however, shows that the absence of State intervention was widespread. It therefore comes as no surprise that support levels for the government are so low. Beyond the organic tensions that exist within the political system as a consequence of the Moreno-Correa schism, and the existing pressure from other opposition movements such as CREO and the PSC, the lack of support for the government is a consequence of its own mistakes.

Although attempts have been made to soften the truth through announcements and broadcasts promoted by ministers and members of the central government such as Romo, Martínez, Roldán, Michelena, Jarrín, and Zevallos, the evidence suggests serious neglect. In the medium and long term, this absence of the State and its failure to address demands generated from the intra-societal environment contributes negatively to society's trust in public administration, which opens space for populist leadership lacking any technical grasp of how to manage the State.

At the same time, a harmful impact is generated on trust in democracy as a system of government, owing to poor outcomes and the failure to satisfy interests. The model of democracy as a channel for the population's needs is fractured by the arrival of authorities who show themselves indifferent to those needs. As a result, demagogic and messianic discourses find a niche within a frustrated, exhausted society that justifies disregard for institutions so long as what was promised is delivered.

From a technical standpoint, the results also indicate a need to redesign the categories used to define poverty in Ecuador. In an attempt to demonstrate artificial growth, poverty baselines are not adjusted to

the country's endemic reality, and for this reason crises such as the one triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be met with all the necessary tools, leaving a broad share of the population affected without the resources needed to avoid hunger, malnutrition, and exposure to the virus.

According to estimates from the International Monetary Fund, around 1.8 million Ecuadorians will fall into poverty in 2020, making it urgent to adopt social assistance measures for the most vulnerable sectors (Primicias 2020). Taking into account both citizen perception and the need for attention to the most vulnerable sectors, it is evident that Ecuador's Political System faces the most significant challenge of the century so far.

Being able to manage the resources needed to address the crisis effectively and efficiently, and from there generate favorable feedback within the system's intra-societal environment, with the aim of strengthening its legitimacy. Because of this context, a major barrier arises to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the start of 2020, Ecuador was at risk of falling short on 8 of the 11 indicators used to measure SDG compliance (Mideros 2020).

Many of these indicators coincide with the factors revealed in the survey during the pandemic, indicating a high probability of delays in reaching the 2030 targets.

Among the indicators at risk of falling short are:

- Eradicating the incidence of extreme income poverty, reducing it from 8.7% to 3.5%, with only 8.4% reached in 2018.
- Reducing the multidimensional poverty rate from 35.1% to 27.4%, even recording an increase to 37.9% by 2018.
- Increasing from 53% to 61.6% the number of households with their own decent housing that are in a situation of extreme poverty, going on to show a reduction to 52.3% in 2018.
- Eradicating child labor among those aged 5 to 14, reducing the figures from 4.9% to 2.7%, showing an increase to 5.4% in 2018, and a worrying rise to 8.41% due to the pandemic (Morán 2020).
- Increasing the percentage of people covered by some form of contributory public social security from 47% to 51.2%, showing a reduction to 44.4% by 2018.
- Reducing the infant mortality rate from 8.95 to 8.14 per 1,000 live births, with an increase to 9.7% in 2018.
- Reducing from 24.8% to 14.8% the prevalence of chronic malnutrition in children under 2, showing a rise to 27.2% in 2018.
- Reducing from 23.9% to 13.2% the prevalence of chronic malnutrition in children under 5, with a reduction to just 23% in 2018.

Adding in the effects of the pandemic, it can be estimated that conditions for reaching these goals have been drastically reduced. Field evidence shows a visible setback, with an increase in people begging on the

street, children working, and also a rise in crime reports (Primicias 2020b). In this sense, it is found that pressure on the political system will tend to intensify, given the high level of unmet needs.

Beyond the government's discourse, reality shows an inefficient handling of the crisis, one that puts at risk the stability of the nation-state and its inhabitants.

6. Conclusions

This article finds that the population's negative assessment of the measures and strategies adopted by national and local authorities in Ecuador is rooted in the lack of attention to basic needs. Despite lockdown recommendations, the population was pushed to go out to work owing to the country's socioeconomic needs, a situation made worse by the fact that the emergency's impact is greater on vulnerable sectors, mainly migrants, who are mostly part of the informal economy.

The data compiled shows that most assistance was concentrated among non-governmental organizations, civil society, and churches, with the first being the most important in providing assistance during the lockdown. The negative assessment of the crisis management, together with the State's inability to meet the needs of vulnerable sectors, affects specific support within the Political System, undermining the system's levels of legitimacy.

In the short term, this is evident in the demonstrations against the economic measures taken by the government, and in the long term, it can directly affect the perceived effectiveness of democratic institutions. In political terms, the discontent generated among the population opens the door to a violation of democratic order.

While it is true that the government has taken on a role of preserving political order by rejecting expressions of popular discontent that take over public space (which opens the door to the larger debate between the right to protest and the preservation of institutions), it is also true that efforts to strengthen the government-society relationship have been vague and scarce. In response, a strategy of disregarding the opposition has been applied, reducing the debate to a childish "correísmo vs. anticorreísmo."

The effect this discontent can have, when social demands go unanswered, ends up being polarization, and even political radicalization, turning the outlook for the 2021 elections into a scenario of confusion with little room for dialogue between diametrically opposed camps. This lack of dialogue will likely lead to a similar reality in terms of governability.

As a result, the pursuit of legislative majorities emerges as a pressing need for a weak party system that will seek to prevent the opposing side from taking the lead in the debate, a process that does not necessarily unfold in favor of the popular interest. At the same time, discontent in times of political and economic crisis is also fertile ground for populist and demagogic positions.

As Errejón and Mouffe (2016) have noted, populism is a political communication strategy that breaks with the good-evil duality, which creates room to put it to use for the population's wellbeing, though it also leaves a window open for reaping political rewards with no benefit at all to the electorate.

Demagoguery, on the other hand, as a category of analysis, frames all actions and tools that fail to solve problems or achieve positive outcomes but instead serve merely to satisfy political interests, even causing harm to the human community in the short, medium, or long term, since resources are invested in patching gaps without offering lasting solutions. In any case, times of crisis can open the door for these political phenomena to find a foothold among a frustrated Ecuadorian population.

By way of reflection, and in light of the evidence shown in this research, it is essential to find ways to solve the country's central problems: the lack of work, hunger, poverty, and inequality. Without a holistic response to all of these factors, one can only expect decline, punctuated by brief pockets of stability, that fall short of both ethical and technical objectives (as in the case of the SDGs). This makes clear the need to keep building evidence-based public policy, a practice not yet well established in the country.

Without losing sight of ethical and moral interests, it is of vital importance that actions taken on the country's behalf be grounded in Ecuador's endemic reality, rather than poorly implemented copies of external models. The compilation of information, together with fieldwork, is a scenario that will not only refine public administration but also open the door to new professions and jobs. Just as the pandemic has generated risks of a sociopolitical debacle, it is also a window of opportunity toward a better system.

The evidence in this article demonstrates the need.

Notes

3. Disturbances are problems present in a society that arise from situational or structural conditions.
4. The rate of spread is the number of new cases of the disease officially reported within a specified period.
5. Between April and May, the departure of 136 people was officially recorded despite restrictions on entry and exit through land and air borders.
6. Families of mixed origin with at least one Ecuadorian member were classified in the Ecuadorian category.
7. Additional questions were asked in order to contact beneficiaries; for reasons of personal security, they are not included in this article's analysis.
8. The remaining percentage corresponds to respondents who did not answer.

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Original title	COVID-19 en el Ecuador: ¿Cómo perciben los ciudadanos las respuestas del Sistema Político a la gestión de la emergencia sanitaria?
Journal	Democracias, vol. 9 (August 2021), pp. 41–66
DOI	https://doi.org/10.54887/27376192.65
Version of record	Spanish
License	Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)
Translation	Bernardo Gortaire-Morejón, with assistance from OpenAI GPT-5.6 Sol

Publication notice

Status. The Spanish-language publication is the version of record. The underlying article was reviewed and published by Democracias. This English translation was not edited, reviewed, or endorsed by the journal. In the event of any discrepancy, readers should consult the Spanish version of record.

Translation disclosure. The English translation was prepared by Bernardo Gortaire-Morejón with assistance from the OpenAI GPT-5.6 Sol model. Responsibility for the final wording rests with the translator.

Faithfulness. The article has been translated from Spanish into English without substantive additions, corrections, or updates.