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## **The Politics of Transforming Education in Ecuador: Confrontation and Continuity, 2006-17**

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**The Politics of Transforming Education in Ecuador:  
Confrontation and Continuity, 2006-17**

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## **Abstract**

Recent governments in Ecuador (2007-17) have achieved impressive improvements in education quantity and quality. Enrollments at all levels increased significantly, and Ecuador's learning gains on a regional test from 2006-2013 were among the largest in the region. A quadrupling of public spending on basic education (to five percent of GDP) supported the schooling expansion as well as a doubling of teacher salaries. But also important were a new focus on student learning results and key reforms of teacher policy implemented over strong union opposition: higher standards for new recruitment, regular evaluation of teacher performance with promotion based on performance (and dismissal after multiple poor evaluations). Among the political advantages favoring government reformers were: strong public support, sustained presidential engagement, the commodity boom of the 2000s, continuity in the government reform team, and a forceful communications strategy. Ecuador's experience offers lessons for other countries seeking to improve education by focusing on student learning and the quality of teaching.

“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

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Since 2006, 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, and 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 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 2014 and 2016 (although Chile had a longer trajectory of cumulative reform since the 1990s, including major teacher policy reforms in 2004).

Ecuador’s reforms produced impressive improvements in both the quantity and quality of education. On the 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).<sup>2</sup> 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 also expanded significantly. Between 2005 and 2013, primary enrollment rose from 95 to 97 percent, and secondary enrollments grew from 48 to 85 percent (Araujo and Bramwell, 2015, pp.8,10).

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<sup>1</sup> Pablo Cevallos Estarellas worked in the Ministry of Education during the major reform period from 2007 to 2013 and parts of the analysis presented here draw on that personal experience. We are grateful to Isabel Harbaugh for research assistance and to participants at the RISE conference 2017 for comments on previous versions.

<sup>2</sup> Chile is the region’s highest performer on international tests and showed continued gains on the TERCE tests. Traditional education leaders Costa Rica and Uruguay, however, have lost ground.

**Table 1. SERCE (2006) and TERCE (2013) tests for 6<sup>th</sup> 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*	492	511	494	506

Source: UNESCO (2014, 29, 41). \*Average also includes Nicaragua, Honduras, and Panama, which do not appear in the table.

How did Ecuador do it? Why, after decades of failed policies, were major reforms suddenly possible in the second half of the 2000s? What lessons are there from Ecuador's experience in adopting, implementing, and sustaining politically contested reforms?

From a comparative perspective, several things stand out (Bruns and Schneider, 2016). First, while organized civil society stakeholders (the business community, education NGOs, elite policy networks) were not as active in Ecuador as in other reform cases, a pervasive sense of crisis had 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 (reaffirmed in his first reelection in 2009). Third, reformers in the Ministry of Education enjoyed long tenure and sustained presidential support through the first six of Correa's years in power (2007-13). Fourth, the only active stakeholder outside government and key reform opponent – the teacher union – turned out to be weaker than anticipated, in part because of Correa's aggressive communications campaigns. The union called strikes and mass demonstrations against teacher performance evaluations and other key reforms, but was unable to stop or modify them. Finally, among facilitating factors, the commodity boom was crucial in generating government revenue increases that could be used to ramp up education spending.

It might be expected that leftist governments in Latin America would lead the education reform wave in the 2000s, as has been the pattern in Europe. Yet, among countries with the most radical left governments in the 2000s (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and

Argentina), education reform was central only in Ecuador. And, except for Chile, other moderate left governments (Brazil and Uruguay) did not undertake major quality reforms.<sup>3</sup> Correa's reforms were leftist in the sense of prioritizing public education (and opposing privatization and decentralization), promoting equity, and emphasizing education as a fundamental human right. Yet, unlike other left governments with close ties to organized labor, the Correa government enacted meritocratic teacher policy reforms that brought it into direct, intense conflict with teacher unions.

Section II briefly summarizes the main education reforms from 2006 to 2016, focusing on changes to core legislation governing teachers. Section III identifies the stakeholders who were active and influential in the reform process. Section IV analyzes the political dynamics of the reform process and the factors most significant in determining its outcomes. Section V draws cautious conclusions and policy recommendations for other countries from Ecuador's experience.

## **II. Summary of Reform in Ecuador, 2006-17**

There are two key strands to Ecuador's education transformation: i) a focus on student learning; and ii) a focus on teacher quality. In the 1990s, Ecuador declined to participate in the first Latin America regional test of learning, but in 2006, it joined the test and President Correa vocally used the country's poor results to make the case for reform. A national learning assessment was introduced in 2013 and in 2015 Ecuador

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<sup>3</sup> The García (2007-2011) and Humala (2011-20s16) governments in Peru enacted major education reforms, but scholars have a hard time fixing them on a left-right ideological spectrum. Garcia was a left populist president in the 1980s but centrist in his second term in the late 2000s (Cameron, 2011) when his government initiated a 2009 teacher reform, with higher standards and pay for new recruits. Humala campaigned on the moderate left – and was supported by the teachers' union – but then governed further to the right, introducing a comprehensive teacher reform in 2012 that was strongly opposed by the teachers' union.

joined PISA for Development, to benchmark learning progress against OECD countries. After decades of no learning measurement, tracking and benchmarking learning progress and feeding results back to schools became central to the education system.

The focus on teacher quality has been equally strong, with two major pieces of legislation driving five key changes that raised the bar for teacher quality at entry and made teachers in service more accountable for performance. The first, in 2009, was the reform of the 1990 *Ley de Carrera Docente y Escalafón del Magisterio Nacional* (National Teacher Career Path Law). The 2009 law introduced 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 poor evaluations, notwithstanding teachers' civil service status.

Two years later, the 2011 *Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural* (Intercultural Education Law, hereafter Education Law) was adopted by a rare consensus in the National Assembly. This law incorporated most of what was in the Ten-Year Plan for Education (*Plan Decenal de Educación*, PDE, approved by referendum in November 2006), and in several areas, was even more ambitious and comprehensive (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell, 2015). The first pillar of the 2011 Education Law expanded the power of the government vis-à-vis corporatist interests, eliminating the role of the union in teacher hiring and Ministry appointments, and prohibiting the collection of mandatory union dues from teachers.<sup>4</sup> The second pillar – universalizing education access – combined aggressive school construction and teacher hiring to expand supply

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<sup>4</sup> These changes parallel reforms adopted in Mexico, aimed at reasserting State authority over education (see Heredia 2017).

with actions to stimulate demand such as the elimination of school fees and the introduction of free textbooks, uniforms, and school meals. The third pillar – improving education quality – sought to institutionalize higher teacher quality through policies to attract, retain, and motivate the best candidates.

This paper focuses on Ecuador's policies regarding teachers, as they are central to the pursuit of higher quality and, for all governments, present the most difficult political challenge. The 2011 Education Law codified five key policies, covering all stages of the teaching career: (a) more selective entry into pre-service teacher education and higher quality 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 (Cevallos Estarellas, 2017). These policies were first introduced in the 2009 Teacher Career Law, and further strengthened in the 2011 Education Law.

***More selective, and higher quality, pre-service teacher education.*** Pre-service teacher education had long been perceived as defective in Ecuador (Fabara, 2013). When the government first introduced an entrance test for teacher hiring, applicants from pedagogical institutes had lower scores than applicants from university-level education programs, and these graduates had lower scores than applicants from other disciplines. These poor results motivated a reform of pre-service 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 low-quality pedagogical institutes, (b) requiring a minimum

score for entry into teacher training institutions (at least 800 out of 1000 on the university entrance test); and (c) creation of a new National University of Education, UNAE (somewhat modeled after Singapore’s National Institute for Education), which began operation in 2015.

**Higher standards for new teachers.** Before 2007, public teachers were selected by local committees formed by provincial authorities of the Ministry of Education, with an important influence of the teachers’ union (UNE). 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. 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 entry exam, and in 2008, Ecuador’s 24 provinces applied the exam for the first time to 55,000 applicants.<sup>5</sup> Under the new standards, on average, less than 20 percent of teacher applicants are hired.

**Individual teacher performance evaluation.** Teacher performance evaluations 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.<sup>6</sup> The external evaluation included tests of linguistic abilities, pedagogical

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<sup>5</sup> <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 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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,

knowledge, and content knowledge. From 2009 to 2013, 90,397 of Ecuador's 150,000 basic education teachers were evaluated. To lessen opposition, the government 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 four years (until their next evaluation). The bonus was US\$1,200 for teachers rated excellent and US\$900 for those rated very good. Teachers rated as good (60 to 78 percent) received no bonus and had to be evaluated again within two years. Teachers rated below 60 percent were rated as unsatisfactory, and mandated 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 (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.<sup>7</sup> 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, which vary according to teachers' level and specialty (48 percent of the total score). Teaching skills, professional leadership, and socio-emotional and citizenship aptitudes are measured on additional instruments:

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teachers, and students— had role in evaluating teacher performance and selecting new teacher applicants (Bruns and Luque 2015, 237).

<sup>7</sup> 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 (nor has it under Peru's similar 2012 teacher law).

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 evaluate classroom practice (15 percent). Monetary incentives for high performers were phased out.

***Higher quality in-service professional development.*** Before 2007, the Ministry of Education did not offer teacher training programs, but rather validated courses offered by many other organizations including the teacher union and the Catholic Church. However, there was no quality control or guarantee that courses had any impact on teachers' performance. 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 reached almost 300,000 teachers (Ministry of Education n.d., p.4). In 2014, however, the ministry suspended Siprofe (Creamer Guillen, 2016, p.115), and the Ministry took direct charge of teacher training.<sup>8</sup> Under the new program, the Ministry offered a range of different types of professional development: from short, in-service training courses delivered by local higher education institutions to masters' degree programs offered remotely by international universities.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://educacion.gob.ec/ministro-de-educacion-presento-el-programa-de-formacion-y-capacitacion-de-alto-nivel-soy-maestro-nunca-dejo-de-aprender/>

**Promotion based on tested competencies.** 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 almost doubled the starting salary for new teachers, from US\$395/month in 2010 to \$775 in 2011 (Figure 1) (Cevallos Estarellas 2017, p.16).

**Figure 1. Entry-level salaries for teachers in Ecuador, 2006-17**



Source: Cevallos Estarellas (2017, 13). Note: Figures are in U.S. Dollars (also Ecuador's currency) and not adjusted for inflation.

In sum, the Correa government's top-to-bottom reform of Ecuador's education system introduced major changes in teachers' incentives and 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 just the first five years of implementation produced significant changes in the composition of the teaching force and student learning results.

### **III. Main Stakeholders in Education: 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 degree of executive dominance, the extent of government actions to sideline the teacher union, and the absence of business engagement.

***Executive branch.*** Rafael Correa won the 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, p.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. Correa empowered a technically competent young team in the Ministry of Education to play an important role in framing issues and identifying policy options.

**Teacher unions.** The UNE (*Unión Nacional de Educadores*) was the largest teacher union in 2006.<sup>9</sup> By conventional metrics, it was a formidable political force, representing 90 percent of Ecuador's 190,000 public teachers (Grindle 2004, 121). UNE historically enjoyed the right to name high-level Ministry officials and a say in the selection of ministers. UNE was allied politically with a Maoist party, the *Movimiento Popular Democrático* (MPD). MPD initially supported Correa's bid for 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, though this would deteriorate), and strength of party relationship (high) (Grindle, 2004, p.121).<sup>10</sup> UNE also had significant disruptive power.

Comparative data are scarce, but in the years prior to Ecuador's reform process, it ranked at the top with Bolivia among non-federal countries in Latin America, in terms of days of teacher protests (Figure 2).

**Business associations** played no visible role in the reforms. This may be due 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. This business abstention was similar to the lack of

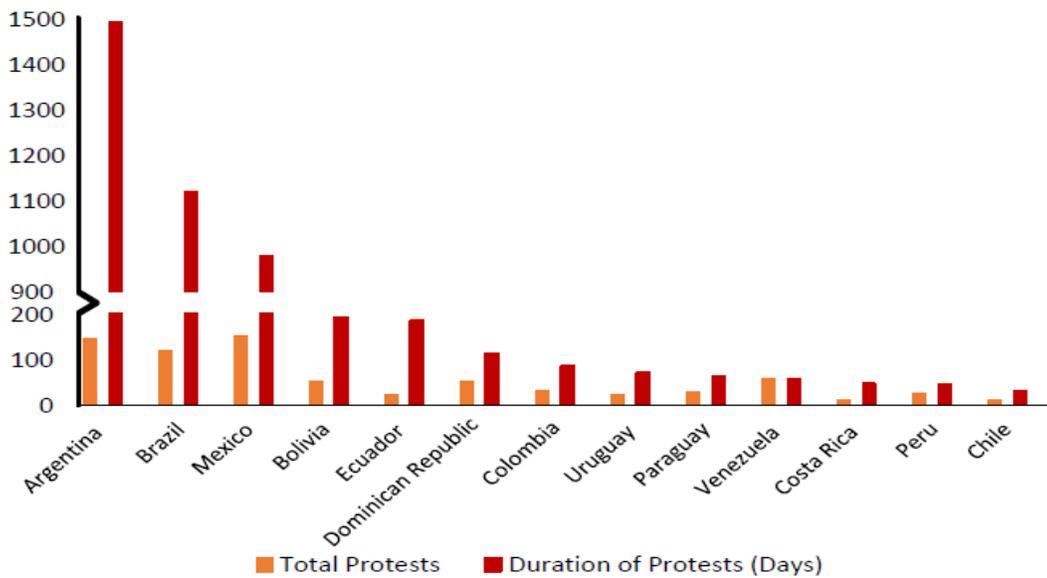
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<sup>9</sup> A second, smaller union was the FUTE (Frente Unionista de los Trabajadores de Educación del Ecuador). There are also smaller regional associations.

<sup>10</sup> By Grindle's rankings on these dimensions for the 1990s, UNE was weaker than SUTEP in Peru, but stronger than SNTE in Mexico. The relatively weaker rating for SNTE is a reminder that the SNTE expanded power substantially over the 1990s and 2000s.

engagement of Chilean business in recent education reforms (Mizala and Schneider, 2017), but contrasts with more active pro-reform stances by big business in Mexico through the NGO *Mexicanos Primeros* and by business in Brazil through multiple foundations grouped together in *Todos Pela Educação*.

**Figure 2. Number and duration of teacher protests in Latin America, 1998-2003**



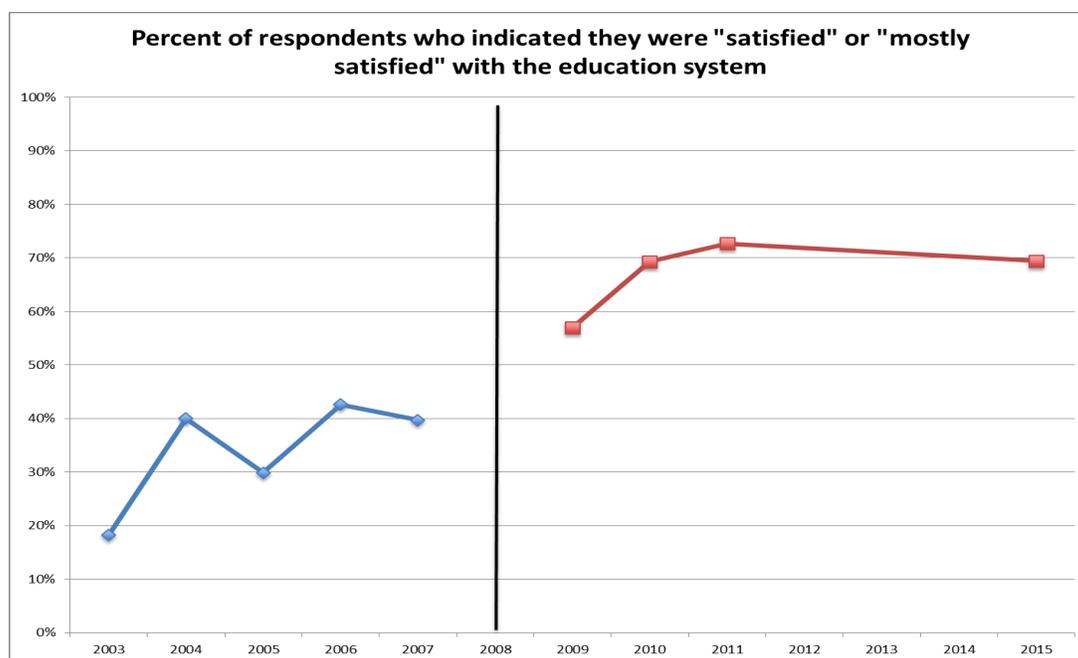
Source: Gentili et al. 2004, p.1265.

**Indigenous groups.** The CONAIE (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del 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 Directorship of Bilingual Inter-cultural Education) within the Ministry. However, Correa's impulse to free government from corporatist control in education also led to the expulsion of CONAIE and Pachakutik from their domination of indigenous education policy. President

Moreno, however, announced in 2017 that he would incorporate indigenous peoples into the planning of indigenous education.<sup>11</sup>

**Parents and public opinion.** Throughout Correa's tenure, changes in education were visible and enjoyed a high level of popular support. According to the independent Chilean survey company, *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 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Public Opinion on Education in Ecuador, 2003-15**



Source: Latinobarómetro. <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>, accessed 21 March, 2017. The wording of the questions changed after 2007 from satisfaction with “the education to which you have access” (blue line) to satisfaction “with the way public education functions” (red line).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/leninmoreno-ecuador-cambios-educacionintercultural-indigenas.html>, accessed 12 December 2017.

**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, Colombia, and Brazil were also not visible in Ecuador from 2007 to 2016 (on Chile, see Mizala and Schneider, 2017). 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. An important consequence is the absence of independent research on the government's reform programs and their impact, and the informed public debate that is part of the education policy landscape elsewhere in Latin America.

**International organizations.** Ironically, despite Correa's anti-imperialist, anti-“Washington consensus” discourse, his reforms of teacher careers – especially the introduction of individual teacher performance evaluation and elimination of civil service tenure – coincided with best practices recommended by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Bruns and Luque, 2015). However, these organizations were not involved in specific policy recommendations or other support to the government during the period, although UNESCO played a limited contributing role.

**Universities.** A major pillar of the reform was more selective entry into teacher training institutions and actions to raise the quality of that education. The legislation gave the *Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación, y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior* (CEAACES) power to close low-quality teacher training institutes, which had proliferated in Ecuador, as in other Andean countries. The council closed down most of Ecuador's *Institutos Superiores Pedagógicos*, formerly known as *Escuelas Normales*

without facing the degree of push-back experienced in Peru (which forced a change in policy).

The legislation also created a new university, UNAE, envisioned as a high-quality center for the preparation of excellent teachers and advanced research on education. The initial design for the 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. However, decisions in the Ministry of Education after 2014 led to a faculty composition and course offerings that are little different from Ecuador's other university faculties of education.

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 teachers' union, business, and independent policy networks. Within the executive, Correa's steady support for the reform team in the Ministry of Education was essential. However, top-down reform without teacher buy-in and support among organizations in civil society raises questions about long-term reform durability.

## **IV. The Process of Reforming Teacher Careers: Headwinds, Tailwinds, and Strategy**

From 2007 through 2013, Correa's reforms had strong tailwinds with little opposition. Key factors favoring reform success were broad public approval and increasing fiscal resources. Because of the perception that the education system had been in deep crisis for the decade before Correa took office, the government had 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 2009-2010 period were confronted head on, with police responses, cuts to the union budget, 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.

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 GDP to around 1 percent of GDP, shockingly low and well below the regional average. In early 2003, 14 percent of teachers were absent on an average day during unannounced school visits (compared with 11 percent of Peruvian teachers). By another measure, teachers were present in schools only 62 percent of their contractual hours (Chaudhury et al., 2006, 2004). In 1997, Ecuador declined to participate in the first UNESCO regional learning assessment (PERCE). But on the

second assessment (SERCE) in 2006, Ecuador had some of the lowest scores in Latin America (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell, 2016, p.342), on the level of much poorer countries.

After a period of enormous political instability – seven presidents and nine ministers of education in the prior ten years – in 2005 President Palacio appointed Rafael Correa as Finance Minister and in 2006 Raul Vallejo as Education Minister. Correa pushed social spending and Vallejo shepherded the development of a Ten-Year Plan for Education (*Plan Decenal de Educación*, PDE), approved by a national referendum in November 2006 (Araujo and Bramwell, 2015, p.4). The PDE had eight policy goals, four of which centered on expanding access to education: universal early childhood education, universal basic education, 75 percent of the age group in upper secondary, and expansion of adult education to eradicate illiteracy. Three measures focused on quality: improving infrastructure and equipment, improving education quality and equity, 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, public education spending almost quadrupled in nominal terms, from US\$1.1 billion in 2006 to \$3.9 billion in 2012 (Araujo and Bramwell, 2015, p.5), reaching 5 percent of GDP in 2013 (see Figure 1), 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, who had begun his post a year earlier. When Vallejo stepped down in 2010, his Vice Minister Gloria Vidal replaced him. Vidal remained as minister from 2010 to 2013. Over a critical seven-year period, Ecuador had a degree of continuity that is rare in education ministries, and which contrasts sharply with policy prior to 2006. In the decade before Correa (1996-2005), Ecuador's nine different education ministers averaged just over a year in office. From 2006 to 2017, Correa appointed only three different ministers with average tenure of four years, double the regional average of around two years (Schneider, 2017).<sup>12</sup>

The most crucial components of the PDE were included in the 2008 Constitution, which was also passed by referendum. Ecuador is one of relatively few countries (along with Mexico in 2013) to have teacher performance evaluation embedded in a constitutional reform. In general, constitutional provisions signal greater consolidation and institutionalization. However, Ecuador has had 19 constitutions, so constitutional law may not necessarily be a guarantee of continuity.<sup>13</sup>

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

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<sup>12</sup> After the 2013 appointment of Minister Augusto Espinosa, some policies began to shift, even though no official changes in direction were announced. For example, Siprofe, the key program for teacher in-service professional development was dismantled and replaced by outsourcing courses with national and international universities. Another shift was in policy on early childhood education services for 3- and 4-year-olds. Despite intense public demand for expanded public pre-school spaces, until 2012 the Ministry opted for gradual expansion, to protect quality. Espinosa began to reverse this strategy, ramping-up expansion of pre-school spaces, which jumped more than 60% in a single school year (from 183,827 in 2012-13 to 301,449 in 2013-14) (*Ministerio de Educación* 2015, 37).

<sup>13</sup> From 1830 to 2005, Ecuador had 19 different constitutions (Conaghan 2011, 264).

performance evaluations on a voluntary basis (teachers could opt in, with the carrot of monetary bonuses if they were evaluated as effective, but no sanctions if they were rated poorly), the government chose the same route in 2008.<sup>14</sup> The Ministry believed this would allow time to refine the evaluation criteria and processes. However, only 1 percent of teachers – 1,500 out of about 150,000 – volunteered to be evaluated, so in 2009, the Ministry made the process mandatory for all teachers and school principals. This produced vehement resistance and a 23-day strike from the UNE.<sup>15</sup>

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, p.59). Similar to the experience with teacher evaluation in Washington, DC, the mere introduction of teacher performance evaluations prompted the retirement of many public teachers who did not want to be subjected to potential consequences. To speed up this “natural” process of teacher renewal, the government introduced an attractive incentive for early retirement, and a large number of teachers and school directors applied. A younger, better-trained cohort began to take their place (Bruns and Luque, 2015, p.236).

Part of Correa’s political strategy was to undermine the 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

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<sup>14</sup> The team researched the policies of higher-performing Latin American countries such as Cuba, Colombia, and Chile; the design of Ecuador’s teacher performance evaluation reflected conscious efforts to differentiate it from some elements of Chile’s *Docentemas* teacher evaluation system and Colombia’s 2004 reform of the teaching career.

<sup>15</sup> This early episode of Ecuador’s education reform was vividly narrated by *The Economist*: <http://www.economist.com/node/14258942#print>

government (Vallejo) over union objections. Second, in 2008 the government stopped the automatic payment of union dues from teacher salaries, requiring teachers to “opt in” to union support, 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 governing social organizations.<sup>16</sup> Overall, it is hard to think of other reform experiences that have been so completely devastating to a teachers’ union, especially one that appeared so strong before 2007.

The commodity boom allowed the government to undertake the most rapid increase in education spending and teacher salaries in Latin America from 2006-2014 (Figure 4). But the doubling of salaries was not part of a quid pro quo with the union in the early phase of the reforms; the increases came in 2011, after major conflicts with the union in 2009 had played out, and when the new teaching career mandating higher quality standards at entry and performance-based promotions and salary increases was in place.

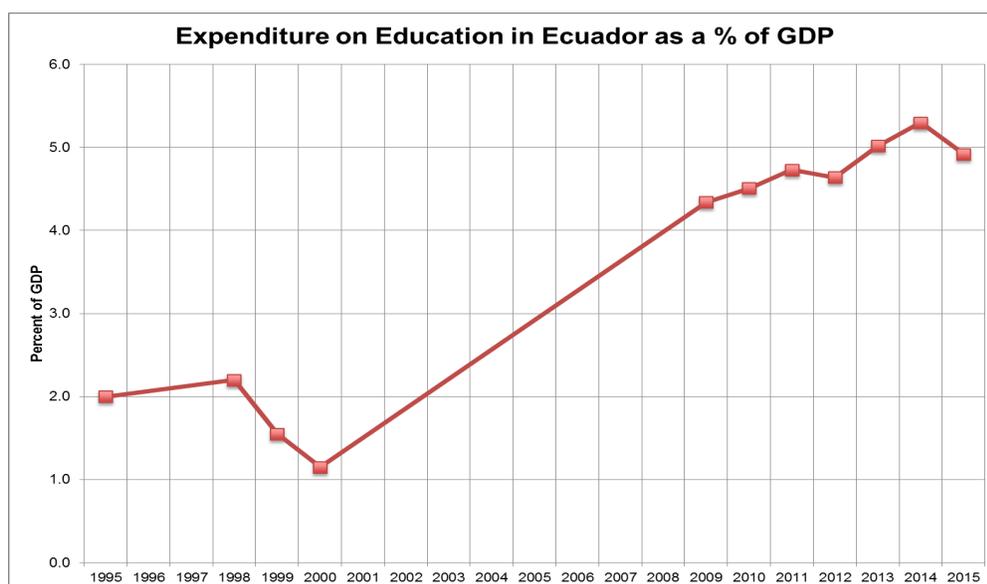
Correa used “relentless communications to mobilize public opinion on the side of reforms” (Bruns and Luque, 2015, p.319). The President devoted full energy to

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/resolucion-disolucion-une-ministerio-educacion.html>. The act of declaring the UNE dissolved was politically unnecessary and gave the fading union something of a “martyr” status (see, for example <http://contratosocialecuador.org/index.php/noticias/noticias-y-eventos-cse/605-cse-y-clade-disolucion-de-la-une>). It also confirmed the impression that the Correa government did not respect opposing political organizations.

persuading the public that the education system was in crisis and that serious reform was the only option. Correa often argued that his political project (which he called a “citizen revolution”) required well-informed citizens with the capacity for critical thinking and a commitment to the broader national interest, as opposed to their own petty interests. He asserted that the “citizen revolution” was not possible without an “education revolution.”<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 4. 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 21 March 2017.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.elciudadano.gob.ec/presidente-correa-sin-revolucion-educativa-no-hay-revolucion-ciudadana/>

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 had 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. In 2017, students in Ecuador took their first PISA test to benchmark performance against OECD countries. Tracking and cross-national benchmarking of learning progress became central to the education system.

Although the government legally decertified UNE in 2016, that was not the end of the story 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).<sup>18</sup> 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 Ministry conceded its members political privileges. By 2016, however, many of the old UNE unionists had regrouped and allied themselves with Correa, and the leader of the *Red*, Wilmer Santacruz, was a former UNE member.<sup>19</sup> Then, in its first year, the Moreno government re-instated UNE. It remains to be seen how these renewed unions will engage with the reforms of the Correa government.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/plataforma-maestros-gobierno-rafaelcorrea.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/red-maestros-celebra-une-sobrevive.html>

In sum, resources from the commodity boom, Correa's personal conviction and high political capital, and broad public support for educational change all favored the reform process. Staff continuity in the Ministry of Education and the inclusion of reform components in key 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 creates uncertainty about the sustainability of these policies and institutions in the post-Correa era.

## **V. Conclusions, Comparison, and Policy Lessons**

One political lesson from the Ecuadorean experience may be the benefits of explicitly mobilizing broad support before attempting costly, contentious reforms. The 2006 national referendum gave education enormous 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 in the LAC region and the lowest level of spending (1 percent of GDP) in the region – made it easier for 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. Few Ecuadoreans doubted his personal commitment to education quality and equity.

A second observation is that the degree to which major 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 serious challenges to

reforms in education that can take decades to have full effect. Many reforms are overturned or diluted by incoming presidents; a seven-year period of sustained implementation by a stable team in the Ministry of Education is exceptional in Latin America.

A third lesson from Ecuador is the value of renewing school leaders and teachers quickly. The expansion of the school system meant that a significant number of teachers and school directors were hired through the new, meritocratic processes, bringing in younger and better prepared teachers. The government also offered an attractive incentive for early retirement, and a large number of teachers and school directors who did not want to be subjected to the new performance evaluations applied. 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 can help.

While Ecuador's progress has been clear, both technical and political concerns have been raised about the reforms. Among technical concerns, the most serious relate to the instruments used to evaluate teachers. The predictive power of the multiple-choice tests Ecuador uses in teacher hiring has not been validated with research on candidates' subsequent effectiveness as teachers. Similar research is needed on the instruments used for teacher performance evaluations. If classroom observation rubrics and the questionnaires applied to peer teachers, school directors, and parents are not proven to discriminate between highly effective and less effective teachers, the impact of the reform is undermined. To protect the huge political and economic investment that Ecuador has made in reforming education, it is critical to commission the kind of

research done in Chile and Washington, DC to test the correlation between teachers' evaluation ratings and their students' learning outcomes (See Taut et al, 2011, and Dee and Wyckoff, 2013).

The key political question is the degree to which deep reforms implemented by a committed leader are sustainable under subsequent administrations. Correa's successors may not enjoy as strong a mandate and may face new opposition from a teachers' union that is beginning to reorganize. With less scope for new spending, public support for continued reform - or even past reforms - may erode, especially if the pace of learning gains and enrollment expansion generates less sense of progress among parents and society. Sustained progress in education is an ongoing political and institutional challenge. However, Ecuador remains one of the rare cases where systemic reforms have changed the education trajectory and the institutional base upon which to build.

## Glossary of Acronyms

**CEAACES** -- Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (Council for Evaluation, Accreditation, and Quality Control in High Education)

**CES** -- Consejo de Educación Superior (Council for Higher Education, replaced CONESUP after 2012).

**CONAIE** -- Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador).

**CONESUP** -- Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior (National Council of Higher Education).

**ENES** -- Examen Nacional de Educación Superior (National Exam for Higher Education).

**Ineval** (Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa).

**LOEI** (*Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural*). National Law of Education.

**LOES** (*Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior*). National Law of Higher Education.

**PDE** (Plan Decenal de Educación). Ten-Year Education Plan 2006-2015.

**PERCE** (Primer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo). First assessment of student learning in Latin American countries, performed by UNESCO, which took place in 1999.

**SERCE** (Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo). Second assessment of student learning in Latin American countries, performed by UNESCO, which took place in 2006.

**SENESCYT** (Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación).

**Siprofe** -- Sistema Integral de Desarrollo Profesional Educativo (System for Professional Educational Development).

**TERCE** (Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo). Third assessment of student learning in Latin American countries, performed by UNESCO, which took place in 2013.

**UNAE** -- Universidad Nacional de Educación (National University of Education).

**UNE** -- Unión Nacional de Educadores (National Union of Educators)

## Appendix. 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 Ten-Year Education Plan (PDE). Correa elected in second round run-off 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 Escalafon del Magisterio reformed
	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) approved by a majority that includes all political parties

	September	Bachillerato General Unificado (higher secondary) curriculum reform begins
2012	November	Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEVAL) created, responsible for teacher evaluation and student assessment
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
	September	Latin America TERCE test applied
	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 x minister of education.
	October	UNE legally reinstated

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