

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

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Abstract. Recent governments in Ecuador – starting with Alfredo Palacio in 2006 and continuing through Rafael Correa’s three terms (2007-17) – have achieved impressive improvements in education quantity and quality. Enrollments at all levels – pre-school through high school – increased significantly, and Ecuador’s learning gains on the Latin American regional test from 2006-2013 were the largest in the region in reading and second-largest in math (after Chile).

A quadrupling of annual spending on basic education (to reach five percent of GDP) supported the expansion of schooling supply as well as a doubling of teacher salaries. But equally important were major, politically sensitive, reforms of teacher policy. Over union objections and sometimes violent resistance, the Correa government implemented five key reforms, including higher standards for new recruitment, higher standards for entry into teacher training, regular evaluation of individual teacher performance, promotions based on tested competency rather than years of service, and dismissal from the civil service after multiple poor performance evaluations.

Among the political advantages favoring government reformers were: strong public support grounded in a pervasive sense of education in crisis (first expressed in a national referendum), sustained presidential support, the commodity boom of the 2000s, continuity in the government reform team, and communications strategies that built popular sympathy for the government position against union efforts to block reforms. However, relatively few details about reform implementation are publicly available and there is uncertainty about its sustainability under the recently elected government of Lenin Moreno. Still, there are relevant lessons from Ecuador’s experience for other countries seeking to improve education by raising the quality of teachers.

“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 a salary policies at all levels. ...”

Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution

I. Introduction¹

Over the past decade, 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 have been launched by left, center-right, and center-left governments. But all three benefitted from strong popular support for reform and enduring support within government 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 (though Chile had a longer trajectory of cumulative reform since the 1990s, including major teacher policy reforms in 2004).

Ecuador’s reforms have produced impressive results, in both education quantity and quality. 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

¹ 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.

gains in math (after Chile) (Table 1).² 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. Enrollment also expanded significantly. Pre-school enrollment grew almost ten-fold over the 2000s to 21 percent of children in 2013; primary enrollment rose from 93 percent in 2005 to 97 percent in 2013; and secondary enrollments grew from 63 percent in 2005 to 81 percent in 2013. An explicit reform goal was to improve educational equity, and enrollment among indigenous populations went from 24 percent in 2001 to 56 percent in 2010 (Araujo and Bramwell 2015, 6-10).

Table 1. TERCE (2013) and SERCE (2006) tests for 6th 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

² Chile continued to be the regional leader in performance on international tests and showed continued gains on the TERCE tests. Traditional education leaders Costa Rica and Uruguay, however, have lost ground.

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 education policies, were major reforms suddenly possible in the second half of the 2000s? What lessons are there for other countries from Ecuador's experience in adopting, implementing, and sustaining politically contested reforms? This paper focuses on the politics of Ecuador's reform experience, applying frameworks set out by Heredia (2017) and Bruns and Schneider (2016).

From these comparative frameworks, several things stand out in explaining the reform process in Ecuador. First, reforms had strong public support, as manifested first in a 2006 national referendum on education reform. Second, when Rafael Correa campaigned for the presidency in late 2006, education reform was centerpiece of his campaign, and a large margin of victory gave his government a strong mandate (as did 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, among stakeholders outside government, the key reform opponent – the teacher union – turned out to be weaker than anticipated, in part because Correa's communications strategies were effective in turning public opinion against the union. The union called strikes and mass demonstrations against systematic teacher performance evaluations and other key reforms, but was unable to stop or modify them. Fifth, no other major stakeholders were influential in Ecuador's reform process, unlike other countries in Latin America, where policy networks in civil society (Chile, Peru, Mexico) and business associations (Mexico and Brazil) actively contributed to reform design and/or mobilizing popular support. Lastly, among factors that facilitated the reform process, the commodity boom was crucial in providing additional government revenue that could be used to ramp up education spending.

It might be expected, as elsewhere, especially Europe, that leftist governments in Latin America would lead the reform wave in education in the 2000s. Yet, among countries with the most radical left governments in the 2000s (Venezuela, Bolivia, and Argentina), education was central only to Ecuador (Argentina's major initiative was in technical education). And, except for Chile, other moderate left governments (Brazil and Uruguay) did not undertake major quality reforms.³ 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 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, especially the major changes to core legislation governing the teacher career path. Section III identifies the main stakeholders who were active and influential in the reform process. Section IV analyzes the political dynamics of the reform process and the factors that were 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

By the early 2000s, Ecuador's education system was in a calamitous state. Ecuador was the only country in Latin America where education spending fell from 1990 to 2000, dropping

³ The García (2007-2011) and Humala (2011-2016) 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 teacher reform in 2009, with higher standards and pay for new recruits. Humala campaigned on the moderate left – and was supported by teachers' unions – but then governed further to the right, introducing a comprehensive teacher reform in 2012 that was strongly opposed by the unions.

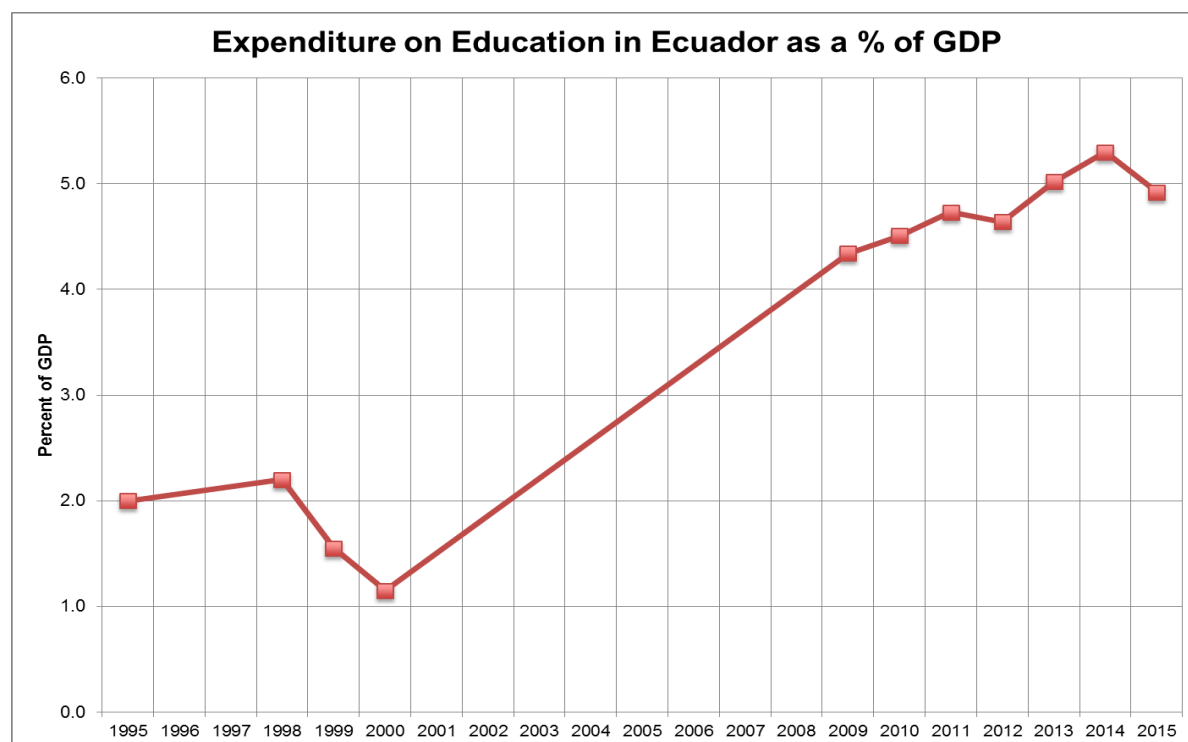
from close to 3 percent of GDP to around 1 percent of GDP, well below the regional average (Bruns and Luque 2015, 295). In early 2003, 14 percent of teachers were absent on an average day during unannounced school visits (compared with 11 percent of Peruvian teachers); by another measure, teachers were present in schools only 62 percent of their contractual hours (Chaudhury et al. 2006, 2004, cited in Bruns and Luque 2015, 230, 319). In 1999, Ecuador declined to participate in the first UNESCO regional learning assessment (LLECE). In 2006, on the second regional assessment (SERCE), Ecuador had some of the lowest scores in Latin America (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell 2016, 342).

After a period of enormous political instability – seven presidents in the prior ten years – in 2005 President Palacio appointed Rafael Correa as Finance Minister, and in 2006 appointed Raul Vallejo as Education Minister. As Finance Minister, Correa pushed social spending, while as Education Minister, Vallejo shepherded the development of a Ten-Year Plan for Education (*Plan Decenal de Educación*, PDE), which was approved by referendum in November 2006 (Araujo and Bramwell 2015, 4). The PDE had eight policy goals, four of which centered on expanding access to education: universal early childhood education, universal basic education, increasing upper secondary enrollment to 75 percent, and eradicating illiteracy and improving adult education. Three measures focused on quality: improve infrastructure and equipment, improve education quality and equity; and enhance the prestige of the teaching career and the quality of teacher training. The eighth goal was a commitment to raise 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, spending almost quadrupled in nominal terms, from US\$1.1 billion in 2006 to \$3.9 billion in 2012 (Araujo and Bramwell 2015, 5), and rose as a share of GDP from one percent in 2000 to five percent in 2013 (see Figure 1),

on par with many countries in Latin America (including richer ones such as Chile) and not far behind higher spenders such as Brazil and Argentina, with about six percent of GDP spent on education.

Figure 1. 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.

Two laws were at the core of quality reforms designed to restructure teaching careers. 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 new teacher 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 continuous insufficient performance results, notwithstanding teachers' civil service status. The teacher union, UNE, bitterly opposed it with a 23-day strike, but it passed the legislature nonetheless.

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 PDE, and in several areas was even more ambitious and comprehensive (Cevallos Estarellas and Bramwell 2015).

A first pillar of the Education Law focused on expanding the power of the government vis-à-vis corporatist interests in the education system, for example, eliminating the power of the teachers' union over teacher hiring and the appointment of Ministry officials, and prohibiting the collection of mandatory union dues from teachers. In this, the Correa reforms bear some resemblance to education programs elsewhere aimed at building or rebuilding State capacity (see Heredia 2017 on Mexico).

A second pillar – universalizing education access – was manifested in an aggressive strategy of, on the one hand, expanding public supply, with new school construction and teacher hiring, and, on the other hand, stimulating demand for education services. The Government for the first time forbade public schools to charge fees to students and their families, and initiated social programs to eliminate budget constraints that caused families to withdraw their children from schools, introducing free textbooks, uniforms and school meals.

The third pillar – improving education quality – was manifested in three strategies: (a) raising teacher quality through policies to attract, retain and motivate the best possible candidates; (b) redefining the core objective of the education system as equalizing educational opportunities for all, and (c) stimulating and supporting schools to become the main engine of quality improvement.

This paper focuses on Ecuador's policies regarding teachers, as they were central to the pursuit of higher quality and presented 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 pre-service training; (b) more rigorous selection of new teachers, (c) individual teacher performance evaluation at regular intervals, (d) high-quality professional development programs for in-service teachers, and (e) a restructured teacher career path with promotion based on tested competencies (Cevallos Estarellas 2017). While these policies were first introduced in the 2009 *Ley de Carrera Docente*, the 2011 law went further in several areas.

More selective, and higher quality, pre-service teacher education. The education of pre-service teachers had always been perceived as defective in Ecuador (Fabara 2013). This belief was confirmed when the government first introduced standardized entrance tests to apply for teacher positions in 2007, and applicants who graduated from pedagogical institutes (formerly known as normal schools) had lower scores than applicants who graduated from university-level education programs.

Teacher graduates, in turn, had lower scores than applicants with degrees in other disciplines. This evidence motivated the government to try to focus on reform of pre-service teacher training institutions. Because the legal framework guaranteed universities autonomy, in 2012 the government obtained legislative passage of a new Higher Education Law which expanded government oversight powers and allowed it to implement three important measures: (a) it closed 23 low-quality pedagogical institutes, (b) it established a minimum score for entry into teacher training institutions (at least 800 out of 1000 in the university entrance test, ENES); and (c) it created the government-operated National University of Education, UNAE, which began operations in 2015.

Higher standards for new teachers. Before 2007, public teachers were selected by local committees formed by Ministry of Education provincial authorities, with an important presence of teachers' union (UNE) representatives. Candidates for public teachers were supposed to be tested on content knowledge and pedagogical skills, but given the relative autonomy of hiring committees, tests tended to be arbitrary, and there were many cases of favoritism based on political or union affiliation and even cases of bribery. One of the government's first measures was to centralize and tighten the recruitment process. Through a Presidential Decree signed in November 2007, the government introduced a national exam to determine candidates' aptitude. In April 2008, Ecuador's 24 provinces applied the exam for the first time, to almost 55,000 applicants.⁴ Initially the national exam included content knowledge, reasoning ability and pedagogical knowledge, and was complemented with a demonstration class that was used to assess pedagogical skills. In 2012, the test of reasoning ability was dropped, and teacher candidates began to be required to pass a psychological test.

Since 2014, the hiring mechanism for new public teachers is called "Quiero Ser Maestro" ("I Want To Be a Teacher"). Thanks to a 2015 reform of the Education Law, hiring program is now also open to professionals from other fields. So far, the Ministry of Education has conducted five rounds of hiring under the new mechanism. In the first four of these rounds, between 2014 and 2015, approximately 30,000 new public teachers were hired. According to Ineval, only approximately 17 percent of applicants are approved for hiring. In 2016 the Ministry began the fifth round of "Quiero Ser Maestro", and 5,000 new candidates were approved and are in the hiring process.

⁴ <http://web.educacion.gob.ec/upload/LaPizarra-Mayo08.pdf>

Individual teacher performance evaluation. Prior to 2007, Ecuador's Ministry of Education had a department of evaluation, but it concentrated on student assessment and had never evaluated teachers. In 2007 the government created a teacher evaluation system with the explicit purpose of diagnosing needs for training. Having analyzed Chile's reform, which in 2004 introduced teacher performance evaluations on a voluntary basis (teachers could opt in, with the carrot of monetary bonuses if they were evaluated as effective, but promotions remained based on years of service), Ecuador chose the same route in 2008. The Ministry believed this would allow time to refine the evaluation criteria and processes. However, only one percent of teachers – 1,500 out of about 150,000 – volunteered to be evaluated, so in 2009, the Ministry of Education made the process mandatory for all teachers and school principals.

This produced vehement resistance and a strike from the teachers' union UNE.⁵ Teacher performance evaluation 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.⁶ The external evaluation included tests of linguistic abilities, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge. From 2009 to 2013, 90,397 public teachers were evaluated (out of a total of approximately 150,000). To lessen teacher opposition, the government strengthened the economic 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

⁵ This early episode of Ecuador's education reform was vividly narrated by *The Economist*: <http://www.economist.com/node/14258942#print>

⁶ 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 role in evaluating teacher performance and selecting new teacher applicants (Bruns and Luque 2015, 237).

those rated very good. Teachers rated as good (60 to 78 percent) did not receive a bonus and had to be evaluated again within two years. Teachers rated below 60 percent were rated as insufficient, and had to undergo mandatory and comprehensive training, and be evaluated again the following year. A teacher scoring below 60 percent a second time was supposed to be dismissed from the education system.

Out of the 90,397 public teachers evaluated from 2009 to 2013, 1.11 percent were rated as excellent; 34.41 percent, very good; 62.26 percent, good, and 3.21 percent, poor (*Ministerio de Educación* 2014, 59). It is interesting to note that (as in a similar reform in Washington DC) the mere introduction of consequential teacher performance evaluations prompted the retirement of many public teachers who did not want to be subjected to such evaluations. To speed up this “natural” process of generational renewal, the Ecuadorean government introduced an attractive incentive for early retirement, and a large number of teachers and school directors applied. As a consequence, a younger, better-trained cohort began to take their place (Bruns and Luque 2015, 236).

In November 2012, the government created the National Institute for Education Evaluation (Ineval), an autonomous body that in 2013 took charge of all assessment processes, including teacher performance evaluation. In 2016 Ineval launched a new teacher evaluation process, known as “SER Maestro,” to replace the process used from 2009 to 2013, which Ineval said had technical problems that made it non-comparable to the new one. Thus, the 2016 process was to be considered the first teacher evaluation for all legal purposes.⁷ Ineval based the new

⁷ One important implication is that teachers evaluated as “unsatisfactory” in the previous process (approximately 3 percent of those evaluated) 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).

process on a new Model of Teacher Evaluation (Sánchez, 2016), which strives for a holistic evaluation of teacher performance, with four dimensions of competency: content knowledge, teaching skills, professional leadership, and socio-emotional and citizenship aptitudes. To measure content knowledge, Ineval uses a written test, which varies according to the level and specialty of teachers, worth 48 percent of the total score. The other three components (teaching skills, professional leadership, and socio-emotional and citizenship aptitudes), are measured on additional instruments: a self-evaluation questionnaire (worth 3%), a questionnaire for students and their families (4%), a questionnaire for principals (5%), a portfolio graded by their teaching peers (8%), a rubric to evaluate classroom practice graded by peers (17%), and a rubric graded by INEVAL to evaluate classroom practice (15%). Since 2014, the government no longer offers monetary incentives for high-performing teachers and principals, presumably because it considers that these payments are no longer necessary to maintain a policy that has been accepted by the education community.

High quality in-service professional development. Before 2007, Ecuador's Ministry of Education did not offer teacher training programs, but instead validated and certified a great variety of courses offered by a multitude of organizations (including the teachers' union, and the Catholic Church). There was no quality control or guarantee that courses had any impact on teachers' performance. Courses frequently had little connection with teachers' most pressing needs. In 2008, a new agency called Siprofe was created, with responsibility for in-service teacher development and charged with designing courses focused on needs identified through the teacher evaluation program. Courses were offered by Ecuadorean universities. To guarantee quality, the Ministry required that all instructors take an instructors' seminar, and also required that students must be assessed upon completion of each course. The scale of training launched by

Siprofe offer was massive: between 2008 and 2012, it created 64 courses and 297,862 spots for teachers (Ministry of Education n.d., 4). According to the same source, the percentage of public teachers who enrolled in at least one Siprofe course varied from year to year: 17.47 percent in 2008, 37.19 percent in 2009, 66.46 percent in 2010, 39.62 percent in 2011, and 26.85 percent in 2012. Siprofe also began to offer training programs for school principals and other Ministry personnel (advisors, auditors and mentors). In 2014, however, Siprofe was suspended (Creamer Guillen 2016, 115), and replaced by the training program “Soy Maestro, Nunca Dejo de Aprender” (“I am a Teacher, I Never Stop Learning”).⁸ Under the new program, the Ministry offers several types of professional development: short, in-service training courses and international master's programs. The former are offered by local higher education institutions; the latter are masters' degree programs offered remotely by international universities.

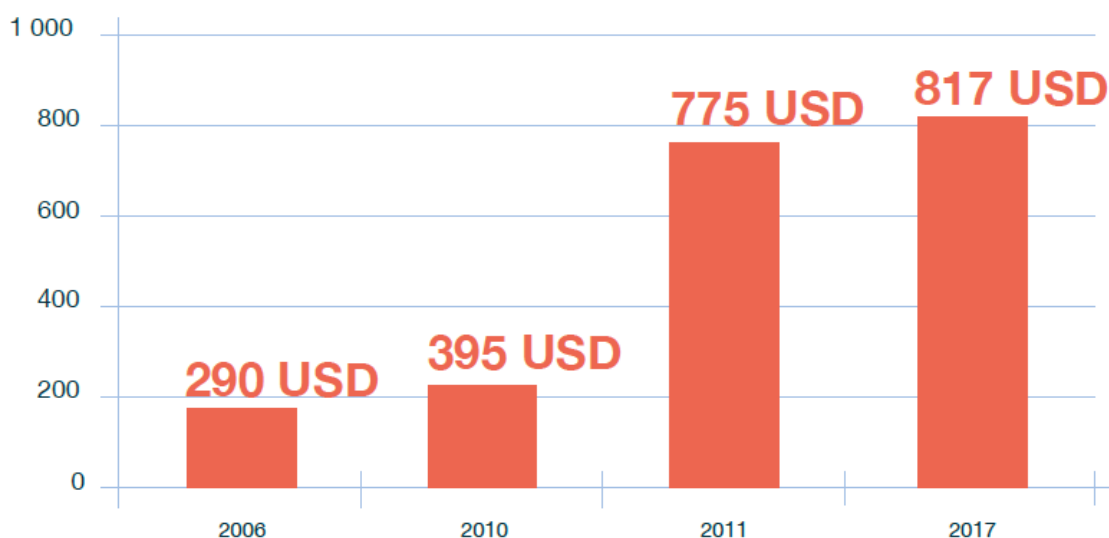
Promotion based on tested competencies. Until 2011, the teacher career path in Ecuador was like most Latin American countries, with automatic promotions (and corresponding pay increases) based on seniority. The 2011 Law, established a merit-based career path, with promotions based on teacher performance evaluations and an expanded range between top and bottom salaries (US\$ 817 to \$1,676 per month). The law also created parallel career paths 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 2) (Cevallos Estarellas 2017, 16).

In sum, the Correa government implemented a sweeping, top-to-bottom reform of Ecuador's education system, including radical changes in teachers' incentives and accountability for performance that have been politically impossible to implement elsewhere. Reformers

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

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 only unfold over time, but the first five years of implementation have already produced significant improvements in education coverage and student learning. Who were the stakeholders and what were the political dynamics that made this possible?

Figure 2. 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.

III. Main Stakeholders in Education: Popular Support and Executive Dominance

This section covers the main groups that were politically active in the process of designing and implementing Ecuador's education reform. The focus is on those active in the most contentious aspect of the overall transformation, namely reform of the teacher career path and teacher evaluations enacted over the period 2007-09 (Bruns and Luque 2015, 251). This

section also notes the important absence of stakeholders such as policy networks and business associations that have been central protagonists in other education reforms in Latin America.

Executive branch. In late 2006, Rafael Correa was elected president by a large margin, with 57 percent of the vote compared to 41 percent for the losing candidate. By the time of his inauguration in January 2007, Correa had 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 importance of education for achieving a more equitable distribution of opportunity and income in Ecuador. The 2006 referendum provided a strong mandate for the Correa government to promote education expansion and reform.

Notwithstanding the rise in spending, Correa continued to emphasize that the main motivations for reform were improving equity (creating equal educational opportunities for all) and raising spending efficiency. Ministry staff recall many internal meetings where the President asserted that, contrary to popular belief, a leftist government of a poor country (such as Ecuador) has an even stronger obligation to guarantee spending efficiency.

Correa empowered a technically competent young team in the Ministry of Education. Ministry staff played an important role in framing key issues and identifying policy options. The Ministry team researched the education policies of high-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 program and Colombia's 2004 reform of the teaching career.

Teacher unions. The UNE (*Unión Nacional de Educadores*) was the largest teacher union in 2006.⁹ By conventional metrics, the UNE was a formidable political force. It

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

represented 170,000 teachers or around 90 percent of public teachers (Grindle 2004, 121). UNE “historically enjoyed the right to name high-level officials within the Ministry and at times to a say in the selection of ministers” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 306). UNE was allied politically with a Maoist party, the *Movimiento Popular Democrático* (MPD), which initially supported Correa’s bid for presidency. Overall, in the 1990s, UNE ranked as fairly 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, 121).¹⁰ UNE had significant disruptive power. Between 1998 and 2003, Mexico had the highest number of days per year lost to teacher strikes (21), followed by Argentina, Ecuador and Brazil, with 14 days each (Bruns and Luque 2015, 305).

Part of Correa’s political strategy was an effort to undermine systematically the UNE’s sources of power. First, he denied it any influence in Ministry appointments, by reappointing the Education Minister of the previous 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 had the effect of drastically diminishing UNE’s income. Third, the 2009 Teacher Career Law reform made striking teachers who interrupted their work 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.¹¹

¹⁰ 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 1990 and 2000s decades.

¹¹ <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->

In February 2015, the government, through the Ministry of Education, created a rival teacher union that would be fully aligned with the government, the *Red de Maestros y Maestras por la Revolución Educativa* (Network of Teachers for the Education Revolution).¹² This network had been acting informally at least since 2011, amalgamating teachers who favored the Correa government, but it had not been in a full alliance with the government because until 2013 the Ministry refused to concede political privileges to its members. 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.¹³

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 2007.¹⁴ However, given their large numbers and potential political power, teachers are rarely disorganized for long, so it remains to be seen if the new union becomes an adversary of the government of President Moreno, which began in May 2017.

Business associations. There was no initiative taken by business organizations to support the reforms. This may be partly due to the business community's general estrangement from the Correa government, but also appears to stem from a longer-standing tradition of little business involvement with education in Ecuador. This lack of business involvement is unusual in Latin America. In Mexico, Brazil, and Chile, high-profile business leaders (Carlos Slim, Jorge Paulo Lemann, Andronico Luksic) have been active in the education space, especially through support

[la-une](#)). It also confirmed the impression that the Correa government did not respect opposing political organizations.

¹² <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/plataforma-maestros-gobierno-rafaelcorrea.html>

¹³ <http://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/red-maestros-celebra-une-sobrevive.html>

¹⁴ If anything, the UNE experience recalls the fates of coal miner unions in Thatcher's Britain or air traffic controllers in the Reagan era in the United States.

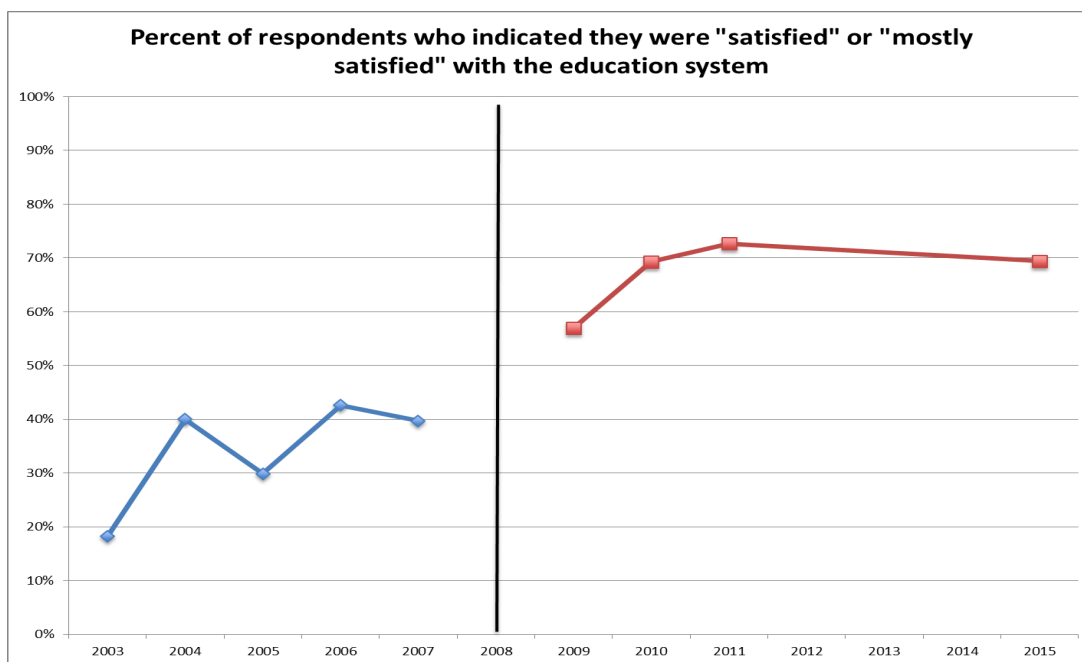
for high-quality, education-advocacy NGOs, such as *Mexicanos Primeros*, *Todos Pela Educação*, *Educacion 2020*) and technical assistance to schools and school districts by foundations such as Brazil's Lemann Foundation and Chile's *Elige Educar*. In Peru and Colombia, individual business leaders have been less visible, but active and respected NGOs such as the *Fundacion Escuela Nueva* in Colombia and education-focused business associations exist (*Empresarios para la Educación*, Peru 2021, etc.). The reform processes in Ecuador seem to be unique in the virtual absence of engagement by the business community.

Indigenous groups. 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). However, in the first years of Correa's mandate, the same impulse to free the government from corporatist control in education led to two parallel actions: the elimination of UNE and MPD influence in the Ministry of Education (mentioned earlier), and the expulsion of CONAIE and Pachakutik from their domination of indigenous education policy. Recently elected President Moreno has announced that he will return education to the indigenous peoples.¹⁵ This could be interpreted as an attempt to go back to the pre-Correa times, when the indigenous communities controlled the provision of indigenous education.

Parents and public opinion. Throughout Correa's tenure, education reforms were visible and enjoyed a high level of popular support. According to *Latinobarómetro*, an independent survey company located in Chile, satisfaction with education (responses "very" or "somewhat satisfied") rose from 57 percent in 2009 to 69 percent in 2015 (Figure 3).

¹⁵ <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/leninmoreno-ecuador-cambios-educacionintercultural-indigenas.html>

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).

Policy networks. The sorts of 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, Peru and Brazil were not very visible in Ecuador from 2007 to 2016. This is likely related to a deliberate policy by the Correa government to discourage civil society groups as well as the lack of engagement from the business community, which is typically the major source of financing for non-government education advocacy and research organizations.

International organizations. Ironically, despite Correa’s anti-imperialist, anti-IMF, anti-“Washington consensus” discourse, his reforms of the teacher career – especially the introduction of individual teacher performance evaluation – coincided with best practices

recommended by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. However, these organizations were not involved in specific policy recommendations or other support to the government during the period, although UNESCO played a limited supporting role.

Universities. A major pillar of the teacher reform was more selective entry into teacher training institutions, as well as actions to raise the quality of pre-service education. To this end, 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 legislation also created a new institution, envisioned as a high-quality center for the preparation of excellent teachers and advanced research on education, called the UNAE (National University of Education), somewhat modeled after Singapore's National Institute for Education. The initial design for the UNAE called for highly selective admission, and faculty hiring with a strong focus on teaching practice – to differentiate it from traditional university programs which, as elsewhere in Latin America, stress theory and philosophy, rather than teaching practice or research. However, early decisions by the new team 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 business and the teachers' unions. Within the executive, Correa's consistent support for the reform team in the Ministry of Education was essential and likely sustained by personal convictions. However, this sort of top-down reform, without teacher buy in, raises questions about long-term durability.

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

From 2007 through 2013, Correa's reforms had mostly strong tailwinds with little opposition. Key factors favoring reform success were strong public approval and growth in fiscal resources from the commodity boom. Because of a widely-held perception that the education system had been in deep crisis for the decade before Correa took office, the government had wide latitude to undertake radical reform. Given this favorable context, there was little perceived need in the reform team to devise strategies to mobilize support and undermine opposition. What opposition there was, from UNE, Correa confronted head on without offering side payments or compensatory benefits. Tellingly, the doubling of teacher entry-level salaries came in 2011, well after the most intense period of strikes and conflicts with UNE in 2009.

Continuity. The democratic alternation of parties in power regularly stalls or rolls back reform efforts, so the great continuity across Correa's three terms was a major boon to consolidating reform. Taking office in January 2007, Correa reaffirmed his commitment to the PDE and maintained Raul Vallejo as minister, who had began his post a year earlier. When Vallejo stepped down in April 2010, his Vice Minister Gloria Vidal replaced him. Vidal remained as minister from April 2010 to May 2013. Over a critical seven-year period, Ecuador had a degree of continuity that is rare in education ministries, and which contrasts sharply with education policy prior to 2006.

After the 2013 appointment of Minister Augusto Espinosa, some policies began to shift, even though no changes in direction were officially announced. For example, Siprofe, the key program for teacher in-service professional development described earlier, was dismantled, and replaced by outsourcing courses with some national and international universities. Another shift

was visible in policy on early childhood education services for 3- and 4-year-olds. Despite intense public demand for expanded public pre-school spaces, up to 2012 the Ministry had opted for gradual expansion, out of concern for guaranteeing adequate quality. Espinosa began to reverse this strategy in September 2013, with a ramped-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). The result, with school over-crowding and untrained teachers reassigned from other levels, was seen by many Ministry staff as unacceptably chaotic.

Legislation. 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.¹⁶

Resources. Correa took office at the height of the global commodity boom and oil prices. After a dip during the world recession of 2009-09, oil prices recovered and stayed at historically high levels through most of the intense reform period until starting to fall in 2015. The commodity boom allowed the government to undertake the most rapid increase in education spending and teacher salaries in Latin America from 2006-2014. The government used “increases in real teacher salaries... as the main strategy for mollifying teachers’ opposition” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 319). 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 the major conflicts

¹⁶ From 1830 to 2005, Ecuador had 19 different constitutions (Conaghan 2011, 264).

with the union in 2009 had played out, and when the new teaching career mandating performance-based promotions and salary increases was in place.

Communication. Correa used “relentless communications to mobilize public opinion on the side of reforms” (Bruns and Luque 2015, 319). The President devoted full energy to 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.”¹⁷

Managing political opposition. As in many other policy areas, the Correa government’s strategy was direct confrontation with political opponents, taking advantage of the President’s high political capital. Initially in 2009, Minister Vallejo attempted to negotiate with the teachers’ union, but was unsuccessful because the union did not want any form of evaluation of in-service teachers. This led to the decision to make teacher evaluations mandatory.

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 will 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.

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

V. Conclusions, Comparison, and Policy Lessons

There are at least two overwhelming challenges in reforming education. First, the most important agents in the production of education results – teachers – are also politically powerful stakeholders in reform processes and their individual interests can conflict with the goals of education quality; key reforms of teacher policy – to raise standards, link promotions to performance, and eliminate job stability for poor performers – are inevitably conflictual and difficult. Second, high quality education delivery requires the alignment of a great many factors, from curriculum design to student assessment to textbook provision to teacher standards and incentives to school-level resources and management. If there are disconnects between the curriculum and the tests students take or between teacher standards and their salary scale or between school-level resources and the capacity to manage these, quality suffers. We are hard pressed to identify any country that has achieved significant, sustained improvement in education results without a systemic reform that included core standards and incentives for teachers.

Ecuador over the 2006-2017 period is a case where the government achieved impressive increases in student learning at the same time as it expanded schooling access significantly to poorer and more marginalized students. Although it is impossible to disentangle their relative importance, it seems clear that core drivers were a comprehensive reform of teacher policy and very large increases in education spending. Direct measures are unfortunately limited, but it appears that the higher recruitment standards, salary incentives, and accountability for performance resulted in early retirement of less effective teachers and their replacement with better prepared and more motivated teachers. Reinforcing this was a focus on measuring learning results, with the introduction of a national student assessment and, for the first time, participation

in regional and international assessments. Several core elements of the education system became better aligned.

However, implementation in other areas was undermined by lack of alignment. To raise the bar for new teachers, the government raised the minimum university entrance score for students applying to teacher training (as has been recently done in Chile) to the level required for medicine. While teacher salaries have increased substantially over the past decade, they remain well below those of doctors, and the result was a drastic fall in the number of students accepted into teaching programs. Rather than lower the academic standards for prospective teachers, the government has decided to open the public teaching positions to university graduates from other disciplines, providing that they complete a graduate program in education within three years of gaining a temporary teaching position. This is a potentially positive direction, and the NGO Teach for Ecuador is helping to identify and support some of these new teachers, but it will be important to research how their classroom effectiveness compares with traditionally trained teachers.

A second disconnect is between the strong focus on raising the quality and prestige of teachers and limited attention to the quality of school principals and other key actors of the education system, such as advisors and auditors (ex-supervisors) and teacher mentors, all of which are crucial for school quality (Cevallos Estarellas 2016).

Ecuador's experience also generated lessons on the importance of implementation quality. The Ministry's focus on raising the quality of pre-service teacher education was laudable, and the vision of a high-quality National University of Education (UNAE) directly controlled by the Ministry and producing a new breed of teacher was exciting. But it appears that the actual design and staffing of UNAE is co-opted by the same practices responsible for existing

university programs: faculty hiring has emphasized formal qualifications rather than school-level practice or research and there has been little innovation in the curriculum.

Similar concerns have been raised about the instruments used to evaluate teachers. Critics contend that the predictive power of the multiple-choice tests used 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 undone. 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 Washington DC, measuring the extent to which the new teacher evaluation system actually raised teachers' classroom effectiveness and their students' learning.¹⁸

Political lessons from the Ecuadorean experience include the benefits of mobilizing broad support before enacting costly, contentious reforms. The 2006 national referendum on education 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 and the lowest rate 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 not only during the campaign but also throughout his three terms in office. Few Ecuadoreans doubted his personal conviction about the importance of education quality and equity.

¹⁸ See Dee and Wyckoff, 2013 and Jacob et al., 2016.

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 serious challenges to reforms in education that can take decades to have full effect. Many reforms are overturned or diluted by incoming presidents, and a seven-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.

The experience of the Correa government with UNE, the teachers' union, should not be taken to suggest the policy lesson that reformers must ignore and then dismantle the unions, when they try to obstruct reform. This may have worked due to the exceptional conditions in Ecuador, but cannot be generalized as a blanket recommendation, in part because not all governments have the popularity needed to withstand a year of strikes. However, Presidents Garcia and Humala in neighboring Peru, from 2010-2012, and Peña-Nieto in Mexico, in 2013, also remained resolute in pursuing major reforms of teacher policy against union opposition and disruption. These experiences suggest that the scope for reformist presidents to isolate unions and generate public support for contentious teacher policy reforms may be expanding in Latin America.

In a more speculative vein, Correa's reforms may ultimately provide a negative example of top-down reform without investing in building a broader coalition of civil society support and cultivating stronger buy-in from teachers. Correa's successor may not enjoy as strong a mandate

and may face stronger opposition from reorganized teachers. A more depressing possibility is that substantively important reforms such as making promotions conditional on performance may produce little impact, if evaluation instruments and processes do not assess teacher quality with validity. With education no longer in crisis, public support for continued reform – or even past reforms – may erode, especially if the pace of learning gains and enrollment expansion slows, and generates less sense of education progress among parents and society. These threats and pressures are real, and sustained progress in education is an ongoing political and institutional challenge. However, the fundamental, systemic reforms that Ecuador achieved between 2006 and 2017 have changed its education trajectory and given it a base upon which to build.

Glossary of acronyms

CEAACES (Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior). Government agency in charge of the evaluation and accreditation of Ecuador's colleges and universities.

CES (Consejo de Educación Superior). The supreme government agency in charge of higher education in Ecuador, which replaced CONESUP after 2012.

CONESUP (Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior). Collegiate body integrated by representatives of all Ecuador's colleges and universities, which ruled higher education system until 2012, and was replaced by CES.

ENES (Examen Nacional de Educación Superior). National academic aptitude test that all high school graduates must take in order to enter higher education programs.

Ineval (Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa). Government agency, independent from the Ministry of Education, created in 2012 to evaluate the education system.

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, approved by majority vote in November 2006.

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). The main government agency in charge of higher education in Ecuador.

Siprofe (Sistema Integral de Desarrollo Profesional Educativo). The national system of professional development for public teachers, created in 2008 and closed in 2014.

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). The government-run university specialized in teacher education.

UNE (Unión Nacional de Educadores). Main teacher union in Ecuador, until 2016, when it was dissolved by the government.

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.
2006	November	Referendum on Ten-Year Education Plan (PDE) takes place. Correa is elected in second round run-off election.
2007	January	Correa takes office. Vallejo is reappointed as Minister of Education.
2007	December	Teacher performance evaluations on a voluntary basis begin.
2008	September	Referendum on new Constitution passes with 65% in favor, 28% opposed.
2008	December	Sistema Integral de Desarrollo Profesional Educativo (SIPROFE) is created.
2009	February	Correa is reelected for a second presidential period (2009-13).
2009	March	UNE strike for 23 days against compulsory teacher evaluation culminates in march on Quito.
2009	July	Ley de Carrera Docente y Escalafón del Magisterio is reformed.
2009	July	Government discontinues compulsory collection of union dues from teacher salaries.
2010	April	Gloria Vidal (previous Vice Minister) takes over from Vallejo as Minister of Education.
2011	March	Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural (LOEI) is approved by a majority that includes all political parties.
2011	September	Bachillerato General Unificado (higher secondary) curriculum reform begins.
2012	November	Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEVAL) is created.
2013	February	Correa is reelected for a third presidential period (2013-17).
2013	May	Vidal steps down as minister. Augusto Espinosa is appointed new minister.
2013	November	Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE) is established.
2015	May	UNAE begins regular classes.
2016	May	SER Maestro teacher evaluation begins.

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