

Women's collective and digital action in snap elections in Ecuador (2023)

Acción colectiva y digital de mujeres en las elecciones anticipadas en Ecuador (2023)

Ação coletiva e digital das mulheres nas eleições antecipadas no Equador (2023)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2025.8985>

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The article examines the repertoires of collective action and the digital advocacy strategies of a group of organized women in the context of Ecuador's snap elections (2023). Through a qualitative content analysis and a relational discourse analysis (RDA), three key moments that shaped the agenda are identified: legal actions, public and media activation, and the achievement of objectives. The study demonstrates how activists and collectives compelled the electoral authorities (CNE-TCE) to restore the principles of parity, sequencing, and alternation in the composition of multi-person lists, revealing the powerful relationship between communication, gender, and society.

KEYWORDS: Political violence against women, gender-based violence, collective action, parity, democracy.

El artículo examina los repertorios de acción colectiva y las estrategias de incidencia digital de un grupo de mujeres organizadas en el contexto de las elecciones anticipadas de Ecuador (2023). A través de un análisis cualitativo de contenido y un análisis relacional del discurso (ARD), se identifican tres momentos clave que marcaron la agenda: las acciones legales, la activación público-mediática y el logro de los objetivos. El estudio demuestra cómo las activistas y los colectivos obligaron al poder electoral (CNE-TCE) a restablecer los principios de paridad, secuencialidad y alternabilidad en la composición de las listas pluripersonales, lo que revela la potente relación entre comunicación, género y sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Violencia política contra las mujeres, violencia de género, acción colectiva, paridad, democracia.

O artigo examina os repertórios de ação coletiva e as estratégias de incidência digital de um grupo de mulheres organizadas no contexto das eleições antecipadas no Equador (2023). Por meio de uma análise qualitativa de conteúdo e uma análise relacional do discurso (ARD), são identificados três momentos-chave que definiram a agenda: as ações legais, a ativação público-midiática e a conquista dos objetivos. O estudo demonstra como essas táticas obrigaram o poder eleitoral a restabelecer o princípio da paridade na composição das listas pluripessoais, fortalecendo assim a democracia e fornecendo evidências empíricas sobre a relação entre comunicação, gênero e poder social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Violência política contra as mulheres, violência de gênero, ação coletiva, paridade, democracia.

How to cite:

Valdez-Sarabia, M., Koerner, L., Andrade-Vásquez, M., & Carrera Mendoza, J. (2025). Women's collective and digital action in snap elections in Ecuador (2023). *Comunicación y Sociedad*, e8985. <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2025.8985>

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Submitted: 01/13/25. Accepted: 08/12/25. Published: 12/03/25.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based political violence imposes barriers to participation derived from power relations that generate inequalities in political, electoral, and party systems. This reinforces gender roles, stereotypes, and tropes in hierarchical structures that encourage discriminatory practices, aggression, and harassment against women interested in politics or because of their gender.

Political scientists have studied this phenomenon from a gender perspective in Latin America. In recent years, monographs and practical guides have been published on the lack of women in politics (Alanis, 2020; Albaine, 2020; Fernández-Matos et al., 2020; Freidenberg, 2017; Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2016a, 2016b; ONU Mujeres, 2020, 2022a; Peña, 2022; Torres García, 2017; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021), in addition to official pronouncements by international parliaments (ParlAméricas and the Latin American and Caribbean Parliament).

However, some authors overlook the fact that the visibility of political violence against women in the region is partly due to the efforts of social movements, collectivities, and organizations. Little research has been conducted on the forms of resistance and public discourse that question the institutionality and gender biases of states (Jessop, 2018). In this sense, we propose an interdisciplinary approach from Political Sociology and Communication Studies, analyzing the repertoires of collective and discursive-digital action in the context of the snap elections in Ecuador (2023), when a group of “organized women” demanded the Contentious Electoral Tribunal (TCE) to comply with the principles of parity, equity, alternation, and sequentiality in the multi-person and presidential lists, after being denied by the National Electoral Council (CNE).

We gathered documents, proclamations, public petitions, communiqués, and media interventions associated with the #Paridad2023 hashtag on X. Our methodological design combines qualitative content analysis in ATLAS.ti and discourse analysis to reconstruct narratives against gendered political violence that dominated the public sphere between May and June. We show that when women use collective action and

discursive repertoires with public-digital advocacy tools, they strengthen their positioning in collective agendas. By strategically analyzing the facts, we identify three key moments: the interposition of legal actions, public media activation, and achievement of objectives.

A notable limitation of this study is the insufficient exploration of internal digital communication processes among organized women. Although we know that they created a WhatsApp group to form a coalition and make decisions, we did not access the internal mechanisms of discourse preparation because we focused exclusively on the public, political, and digital.

In general, we observe that the communiqués and proclamations of collective actors can be studied, but it is crucial to analyze how these texts are used in the hegemonic public sphere. During this period, women captured the attention of traditional and digital media, taking advantage of the coverage to highlight the underlying problem. Discourse constitutes a central aspect of socio-communicative processes and direct action, suggesting a line of study on the practice-discourse relationship. Incidentally, we call “organized women” the intermediary collective action of various organizations, collectivities, and movements in the context observed. In this paper, we offer data on political violence against women in Ecuador and compare them with other countries to approach the problem theoretically. We then present the methodological strategy and results of the study, ending with the conclusions.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN CONTEXT

In Ecuador, the few women who participate in electoral processes suffer aggression towards themselves, their families, and their intimate environments (ONU Mujeres, 2020). The situation worsens in indigenous, rural, and border communities where poverty and inequality reinforce networks of clientelism and corruption. Political organizations show little interest in women's participation and blame them for their absence. Women whistleblowers are silenced within parties that lack regulations, internal procedures, or ethics committees, perpetuating the logic of cover-up.

Support for women politicians comes mostly from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Association of Women for Gender Equity and Autonomy (MEGA), a pioneer in citizen observatories, reconstruction of routes to denounce political violence, and workshops in Napo, Azuay, Guayas, and Pichincha. Currently, the country does not have a specific law, capacity for multilevel action, or legal protocols, unlike Mexico, which is working on multilevel legislative harmonizations, or Bolivia, which enacted a law against political harassment in 2012 (Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia [ACOBOL], 2010; Bardall, 2020; Bardall et al., 2020; Biroli, 2018; Bjarnegård, 2023; Freidenberg & Gilas, 2022; González, 2022; Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2016a; ONU Mujeres, 2020, 2022b).

Even so, Ecuador is one of the only nine countries in the region with parity regulatory frameworks and regulations against gender-based political violence. Its history was revitalized in 1997 with the Quota Law, which grants labor protection. In 2000, a reform of the Organic Law of Elections introduced parity quotas in multi-person lists, despite limitations in the allocation of seats and the size of constituencies (Goyes, 2013; Peralta Zambrano, 2005). The 2008 Constitution guarantees equal participation in elections, and the Organic Law to Prevent and Eradicate Gender Violence (2018) defines political violence. The Democracy Code reform (2020) recognizes this violence and assigns sanctions granted by the TCE.

However, although there is “formal parity” in the law, limitations to female participation increase in each election (Morales Alfonso & Pérez Cárdenas, 2021). Colombia is in a similar situation, with the difference that the armed conflict has prompted the creation of inter-institutional competencies to address political violence immediately (Chaparro Moreno & Jiménez Pava, 2021; Chaparro Piedrahíta, 2022; Garrido Ortolá, 2021). In Argentina, electoral justice actions are implemented to prevent its spread (Lázzaro, 2023). In Brazil, people talk about gender equality and justice, even though there are hate speeches, racism, and a strong conservative tradition (Albaine, 2021; Biroli, 2018).

Table 1 shows the total number of positions held by women in the lower and upper chambers. Only 26.7% were in parliamentary positions, including younger men, who exceeded 31%. Mexico is

at the top, with more than 50% of female deputies in the lower and upper chambers. Bolivia followed, with a difference of 5% for the upper house. Argentina decreased by 44% and 43%, respectively. Meanwhile, Ecuador has parliamentary representation of only 38% of women councilors in local bodies and no fixed data for the National Assembly. Colombia is second to last, with 28% of women deputies in the lower chambers and 30% in the upper chambers. Brazil is close to 132nd place in the world ranking, with only 17% and 18%, respectively.

TABLE 1
WOMEN IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS ACCORDING TO WORLD RANKING
(2021-2023)

Range	Country	Lower chambers (% weight)	Upper chambers (% weight)
5	Mexico	50	50.4
11	Bolivia	46.2	55.6
17	Argentina	44.8	43.1
33	Ecuador	38.7	-
68	Colombia	28.9	30.2
132	Brazil	17.5	18.5

Source: From the database of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's ranking of women in national parliaments (IPU Parline, 2023).

This data is alarming, however. They reveal a significant disparity in women's political representation in Latin America. While Mexico and Bolivia have made remarkable progress, with more than 50% female representation in their legislatures, Brazil and Colombia lag. This variation highlights the need to continue policies that promote equitable participation in parliaments. The regional average of 26.7% of women in parliamentary positions indicates that there is still a long way to go towards gender parity in Latin American politics. It is crucial that countries redouble their efforts to overcome barriers that limit women's access to political leadership positions, ensuring fairer and more diverse representation in democratic institutions.

The presence of women pluralizes decision-making spaces and challenges the patriarchal political culture, which is a central interest in Political Science. Analyzing the repertoires of collective and discursive actions of organizations and MSOs provides reasons to democratize politics based on the social themes of Political Sociology and Communication. This will be discussed in the following section.

THEORETICAL APPROACH TO GENDER-BASED POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Violence against women in politics (VAWIP) lacks a precise definition because of its recent emergence and scarce scientific formalization, reflected in the small number of high-impact publications that prevent identifying its gaps (Kuperberg, 2018). There are ambiguities in spatio-temporal delimitations and in empirical data (Guadarrama Sánchez & Aguilar Pinto, 2021), since research generally focuses on consequences and not on their intersections with other objects of study. Conceptual development identifies five types of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and semiotic (Bardall, 2020; Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2020), highlighting the relevance of studying violence in digital social networks as spaces in which women circulate (Beltrán et al., 2023; Erikson et al., 2023; Orchard et al., 2023; Suárez & Mitrović, 2022; Weaving et al., 2023).

Common sense, social imaginaries, and beliefs based on misogyny, sexism, and machismo operate within VAWIP, which calls for a conceptual framework in line with the Global South and its intersectional dimensions (Biroli, 2018; Hill Collins, 2015; Reverter, 2022). Although the concept arises from Political Science's commitment to democratic institutions and the democratization of the state (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2016a; Morales Alfonso & Pérez Cárdenas, 2021), it can also be approached through sociology and communication.

Until now, parity demands have had a limited impact because of the growing backlash against feminism. The current neoconservative wave weakens institutional processes at the state level and social spaces where identities, capacities for recognition, and collective organization are forged. In this study, VAWIP is a form of violence perpetrated against leaders, voters, activists, and representatives, which

generates discrimination and inequality at various levels and degrees of participation, both by action and omission. This includes intimidation, harassment, systematic exclusion, and even physical violence, specifically against women in politics. This affects not only the direct victims, but also the quality of democracy. Such a definition allows us to analyze its impact on different social and political spheres, highlighting the role of organizations, collectivities, and MSOs in halting its march into other spheres.

Feminist collective action is a phenomenon that combines various organizational structures, aims, goals, objectives, and levels of coordination (Diani, 2015; Neveu, 2000; Tarrow, 1997), as described by the theoretical models of Oberschall (solidarity networks), Tilly (sociability and political contention), McCarthy and Zald (selective incentives), McCarthy (mobilization structures), Zald (interpretive frameworks), Melucci (symbolic construction of identity), and Tarrow (Political Opportunity Structure).

We understand that they are heterodox forms of action and discourse that question the patriarchal and capitalist order within, outside, and across the socio-political field, thereby defining (strategic) positions that allow them to move towards realistic and concrete utopias. Their agents follow the course of “the rational way” inspired by the Habermasian model of the public sphere in the promotion of an informed citizenry that debates public affairs (Pleyers, 2020). Organized women structure solidarity networks in favor of equality, justice, and equity and have institutionalized, in some cases, the gender perspective (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019; Varela & Trebisacce, 2021) by getting more states to adopt public policies and legal orders through repertoires of action, relationships, and discourse that vary according to the context. Common repertoires include legal battles and protest by the state when commitments, agreements are not fulfilled, or when there is simply a regression of rights. In recent years, public-digital advocacy strategies, such as X-activism (technopolitical), have been designed to move issues from the collective agenda to the public agenda (Puente et al., 2021).

Some movements have adopted intersectionality against the privilege-oppression axis (Hill Collins, 2015; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2019) and alliances have been created with other actors in the public space.

To illustrate the above, we present the methodological strategy of our study to analyze the collective and discursive-digital action repertoires of women's organizations in the context of the snap elections in Ecuador (2023).

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

By designing a relational discourse analysis (RDA) which links the critical-analytical, we focus on the intermediation actions-subjects-discourses, opening a space between the sociological and the communicational. We argue that reality is constructed by those who name it, but practices interact with discourse in an associative way. Since a faithful representation of social facts is not possible and all analyses contain biases, we seek to portray the micro-, macro-, and mesostructural relationships in question. Society, the object of sociology, and communicative processes, the object of communication, become interdependent representations of data (recorded traces), evidence (data to defend an argument), and conceptual-type ideas (theoretically accepted facts) (Becker, 2019).

Consequently, the discourse on collective actors reflects socially and politically crystallized worldviews (ideologies) through constructive processes that carry marks of intertextuality around actions and interactions (Filinich, 2014; Potter & Wetherell, 2002). To develop our Relational Discourse Analysis (RDA), we rely on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which reveals hidden power relations based on extralinguistic factors: culture, society and ideology, and seeks "language-society" mediation through linguistic categories (deictics and pronouns), textual forms and hermeneutic processes (apprehending and producing meaningful relations) (Meyer, 2003; van Dijk, 2006, 2010). In other words, the meaning of discourse attends to the conditions of production and reproduction in the context in which knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies circulate.

In this sense, some conceptual tools are omitted in the dialectical relationship between agency (who produces the discourse) and structure (what is interpellated), which opens ontological, epistemic, and theoretical possibilities. To this end, we resort to discursive prac-

tices that generate complex representations according to the available data, evidence, and ideas.

To avoid radical constructivism, we argue that discourse and its narratives emerge from the staging and sharing of shared experiences. Hence, our interest is in the discourses of organizations, collectivities, and social movements (Steinberg, 1999; van Dijk, 2022), in which text accompanies context in a practical sense. We call this “strategic discourse”. Narrative patterns involve repertoires of action against political violence as a function of argumentation, interaction strategies, and discursive variety. A discursive pattern mediated by ideologies,⁵ enunciation conditions, and political reality was revealed. Discourses give support to social practices and vice versa, and this does not necessarily entail mental models,⁶ but leads to a constant flow of effects on social and political reality.

For this paper, a corpus of forty units of analysis-discursive units was constructed to collect the expressions of about 30 organized women. An ad hoc RDA matrix was designed based on the theory of intersectional political violence (Albaine, 2021; Bardall, 2020; Biroli, 2018; Freidenberg, 2017; Freidenberg & Gilas, 2022; Hill Collins, 2015; Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2016a, 2016b) with a certain degree of versatility, such that theory and data complement each other. The analysis was divided into four parts: a) formal aspects (discursive unit, text type); b) central categories (political violence, gender violence, contextual demands,

⁵ We use the term “ideologies” in a concrete sense. Following van Dijk (2006), these are the beliefs, ideas, and reasons for constructing shared social representations. In the case of the mobilized women, they are ideologies of resistance and opposition that reflect a concrete interest: recognition of the principles of parity and alternation established in the Code of Democracy.

⁶ We argue that cognition is not always an appropriate variable for certain contexts. For example, it is more appropriate for scenarios of manipulation rather than resistance or opposition. In our case, organized women are more focused on stopping the regression of rights and concrete gains than on responding to the abuse of discursive power exercised by the authorities, the media, and the elites.

place of enunciation); c) secondary categories (TCE/CNE); and d) discursive strategies (argumentation, interaction, and discursive varieties) in two dimensions: one focused on women's action repertoires and the other on discursive practices. The period studied was May-June 2023, which is crucial for the expressions of collective and discursive action of women who demanded that the TCE/CNE comply with parity. It was designed using nonprobability purposive sampling to select the most useful and verifiable discursive excerpts. It was ethically decided to use activists' initials to avoid moral deviation. Their discourses were analyzed and interpreted through narrative patterns, the findings of which are presented below.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The relational discourse analysis (RDA) of organized women during the 2023 snap elections reveals a framework in which legal defense, media advocacy, and digital activism were strategically intertwined. The interpretation of the 40 units of analysis unfolded across three complementary levels: the semantic, which examined lexical choices and their political-ideological connotations; the enunciative, which observed the construction of collective identities and positions of authority; and the argumentative, which identified rebuttal tactics, semantic opposition, or appeals to legal frameworks. The section on legal actions and discursive repertoires shows how the response to the violation of the parity principle combined judicial resources with a cohesive discourse capable of challenging electoral power.

Regarding public and media activation, there is evidence of a synchronized use of media outlets, social networks, and staged events to reinforce demands and broaden their resonance. In terms of achieving objectives, sustained pressure resulted in a legal victory that, beyond its immediate effect, highlights the structural limitations of the political system and underlines the urgency of active and ongoing female participation to achieve the democratization of Ecuadorian politics. Finally, the section on categories at play synthesizes, based on the frequency of key terms, the thematic axes that underpin the activists' discourse and complement the previous interpretation. Our analysis also considers the

variation in levels and meanings, recognizing that not all expressions are direct and that many are produced collectively (Potter & Wetherell, 1994/2002). According to the principle of detail, which involves attending to word choice, its consequences, and the barriers in discursive production, the findings of each subsection are presented below.

LEGAL ACTIONS AND DISCURSIVE REPERTOIRES

A non-binding advisory council held by the CNE on May 23 annulled the principle of gender parity for the 2023 snap elections, established in Article 99 of the Democracy Code, which immediately mobilized around 30 activists, collectives, and women's movements. After organizing themselves, they filed three subjective appeals before the TCE, employing political-digital advocacy strategies to generate media buzz. They promoted petition drives and alerts across the country to demand the inclusion of women in multi-person presidential ticket lists before the close of candidacies on June 13. The statements focused on demands, rejection, and questioning of the institutionalization of political participation rights:

1) In that advisory meeting, you could see how both the board members and the representatives of the political organizations were bargaining with our rights, and basically they said: “[sic], we don't have time, so let's just skip the rule” (A.G.O., Mega Mujeres activist).

The expression “they were bargaining with our rights” adopts a defiant tone and suggests a break with the imposition by the CNE councilors. The use of the term “our” fosters a sense of group belonging and ownership of the objective, which goes beyond individual limits or interests. On the other hand, the verb “bargain” reveals an imprecise treatment of previously acquired rights, suggesting irreverence and articulating a message that directly questioned the electoral authorities. They argued that gender equality in political representation is an existing right that should not be restricted by administrative processes or arbitrary decisions. They presented themselves as witnesses and protagonists, employing a tone of moral authority derived from their grass-

roots support and on behalf of the rest of the women in the population. This type of discourse claims a pluralistic stance, which is crucial for bringing the conflict into the public debate, beyond the particularities of the case. Simultaneously, in the public sphere, a series of strategies were implemented to accompany the release of statements and proclamations, which reflected the determination of women organized for political participation rights. The activists meticulously assembled the discursive repertoires that they later shared (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
MEDIA STAGING OF THE STATEMENT*



* The public presentation of the statement, held prominently with the organizations' logos visible, underscores the construction of a collective identity. The body posture and photographic framing reinforce the idea of leadership and their role as spokespersons, while the space in front of the CNE serves as a symbolic backdrop that challenges institutional authority. This staging combines visual and discursive elements to legitimize the demand and project moral authority in the public sphere.

Source: EFE (Redacción, 2023).

It is worth noting that the discourse of organized women in the studied case has two key precedents. First, the long struggle for

political rights in Ecuador, which began with the Quota Law (1997) and was complemented by the Comprehensive Organic Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women (2018), both of which include provisions on parity. Although these laws have created an important legal framework, their partial implementation has led to practices that undermine their purpose. M.B., from the Observatory of Political Violence against Women, warns that although the Quota Law is in force, its design allowed for years for female candidates to occupy secondary positions, such as alternates or places at the end of the lists. If we examine her statements, they allude to a lexical field of subordination and marginalization. The institutional voice of M.B. legitimates the denunciation, as her argument appeals to a regulatory framework, whose legal substance has been hollowed out.

The second precedent is the capacity of organizations to build collective arguments in the face of threats to women's political participation; a skill developed through previous confrontations with state authorities. D.C., former Deputy Mayor of Quito, illustrates this point by noting that, before it was mandatory for women to head the lists, the lack of monitoring mechanisms and real commitment from parties reduced female inclusion to a mere formality, relegating them to the role of "the last wheel of the cart". The metaphor evokes an image of structural irrelevance, supported by the authority of someone who combines direct political experience and social leadership. The idea that previous reforms have been sufficient is refuted, instead highlighting the absence of oversight and political will as central barriers.

On the other hand, the controversy surrounding gender parity in the Ecuadorian political arena has exposed the tension between democratic aspirations and institutional practices. The decision to "skip the rule" due to alleged lack of time, documented in the advisory statement, was interpreted by social organizations as an act of political violence that perpetuates the exclusion of women from decision-making spaces. In their media appearances, activists from various groups deployed rhetorical strategies associated with democracy and equality, challenging the recurring prejudice that "women are not prepared for politics".

2) We have a huge responsibility to defend those spaces and not allow ourselves to become a façade, a decoration, or a mouthpiece for party leaders and political organizations (G.A., activist in Violet Coalition Yes, No to Violence).

3) I've been hearing several political figures, including women, say that there aren't qualified female candidates to participate in the elections ... we have to enforce the Democracy Code and the Constitution (S.M., activist at the Association of Feminist Lawyers of Ecuador).

In fragment 2, the women state that defending the spaces they have won is an ongoing obligation. They resist becoming mere façades, decorative elements, or instruments of political parties or organizations. Instead, they emphasize the importance of amplifying women's voices in the political-electoral arena. Furthermore, the use of the first-person plural “we have” constructs a collective “we” in terms of identity that calls for action and legitimizes the militant voice of organizational affiliation.

In excerpt 3, the dual authority of the speaker's legal profession and activism marks a situated testimony that connects professional experience with public denunciation; both positions evoke the role of organized women in relation to party elites. At the same time, decorative representation (empty quotas) is questioned in the imperative to defend conquered spaces, and certain practices that hinder substantive equality are denounced.

Later, a direct counterargument to the “lack of cadres” stereotype is presented, dismantling the idea that parity is a voluntary concession and reaffirming its nature as a legally enforceable mandate. The discourse shifts the focus of the debate from charity or party goodwill to the mandatory fulfillment of rights and institutional responsibility. The use of the first-person plural (“we”) consolidates a collective identity that addresses authority with a shared voice; and at the argumentative level, activists resort to refutation and irony to expose the inconsistency of eliminating the principle of parity when it comes from women in positions of decision-making:

4) It is astonishing that we allow Mrs. Diana Atamaint and the board members, through a Consultative Council that has no authority [sic], to make changes regarding what can and cannot be applied in an election (K.P.S., women's rights activist).

5) This is a struggle that we, as a women's movement, have been engaged in for several years. It's not something that just came to our minds now: it's neither a whim nor a fancy, it's a fundamental right (R.U., member of the Political Coordination of Ecuadorian Women).

In particular, the expression "it's not just a whim or a fancy" uses a double negation and contrasts the trivial ("whim", "fancy") with the essential ("fundamental right"). This argumentative strategy seeks to dismantle the stereotype that the demand for parity is circumstantial, reaffirming its legal and legitimate nature. Taken together, frustration and determination combine to demonstrate high levels of cohesion among the activists.

At the same time, they expose the tension between electoral institutions, parties, and the collectives promoting greater female representation, in a context where CNE decisions are seen as setbacks in participation, representation, and political equality. If we follow this line, we observe a constant critique of the political-electoral system through internal democracy and the masculinization of parties. There are persistent concerns about the dominant hierarchical structure, which perpetuates gender inequality and hinders the effective participation of women. By identifying these barriers, organized groups are firmly committed to reversing the problem:

6) We already know that the leaders or party bosses, often men, come to an agreement (M.C., lawyer, activist, and member of organized women).

7) There is no political organization that is free from difficulties and problems, from limitations... but we must also point out that political organizations as a whole have not undertaken this in a serious and committed manner (R.R., member of the National Women's Coalition).

The political system has problems because only a few men hold power and do not want to change that, according to activists. The idea of the “party boss” reveals a lack of transparency and favoritism. Political parties are also criticized for not being serious or committed. It is said that institutional failures should not be a reason to exclude women. On the contrary, it is urgent to include them. The more difficult the environment, the more necessary it is to democratize decision-making and ensure their participation. Not only is this fair, but it also strengthens democracy, as including more voices brings plurality to the political system. The interventions in this section challenge the exclusionary practices of political parties and electoral authorities and defend gender parity as a historic and legal achievement. Terms like “party bosses” criticize the concentration of power among men, while phrases like “it is not a whim or a fancy” reinforce that parity is not negotiable. The use of “we women” creates a collective identity that challenges institutions. Strategies are used to expose the incoherence of the political-electoral system and to mobilize support. These media actions, rooted in a highly political discourse, denounce the masculinization of parties and the lack of institutional commitment, while also legitimizing the women’s movement’s involvement in the debate on gender parity in Ecuadorian democracy. Let us briefly look at the public and media presentations.

PUBLIC-MEDIA ACTIVATION

While women in politics face significant challenges and lack serious attention from the National Electoral Council and political parties, organized groups are actively using digital advocacy strategies and public presentations to highlight issues of equality and parity, challenging the institutions. Despite slow progress and the need for comprehensive reform, these initiatives, reinforced by media cases and supported by percentages and historical records, are persistently pushing for greater representation of women in the political sphere. On digital social networks, there is a continued effort to hold institutions accountable, often using more transgressive narratives. To this end, percentage data is used to make visible the relationship between women’s participation and representation in Ecuador:

8) If [women] are seen or are at the top of the list, they have a greater chance of being elected (M.B., activist at the National Observatory of Women's Political Participation).

9) The response has been positive, but it should be noted that it has always been under pressure from women's movements (A.V., activist for women's political rights).

10) The issue of parity is not something that has just appeared today. It is the result of the historical struggle of women. It has been a demand for decades ... when, in the Congress of that time, women such as Anunciata Valdez and Cecilia Calderón, through the Women's Commission, made [the struggle] visible (N.V., activist for women's political rights).

The previous statements highlight the importance of being strategically visible. Being on the electoral list is key to being elected. The constant pressure from women's movements has achieved real progress. Phrases such as "being first on the list" and "under pressure" indicate both the opportunity and the political cost of having representation. Without mobilization and persistence, institutions would not have made room for women, which shows that there is an unequal distribution of opportunities. Additionally, it points out that the more institutions resist guaranteeing political rights, the more necessary it becomes for women to participate directly and consistently in politics to achieve gender parity democracy.

The ongoing efforts of women's movements have highlighted their tactics for capturing the media's attention. In an adverse political environment, they chose discursive strategies that went beyond the electoral event, focusing on gender parity as the main objective. While honoring the struggles of past generations, they reaffirmed the ongoing importance of gender equality in the political sphere, despite structural and cultural limitations. Ultimately, public and media activation combines strategic visibility, historical memory, and sustained pressure on institutions.

The centrality of parity is not limited to the electoral moment but projects itself as a permanent axis of democratic contention. The

reference to historical milestones and iconic political figures provides a sense of continuity that legitimizes current demands. The collective voice is established as a political subject capable of questioning and overflowing institutional frameworks, and the causal relationship between mobilization and achievement is consolidated as a shared truth. Thus, the persistence of legal actions highlighted in speeches denounces existing barriers and emphasizes that, the greater the institutional resistance, the greater the active presence of women in decision-making spaces must be. It is reaffirmed that the democratization of Ecuadorian politics depends on their effective participation. By moving from the general context to specific achievements, we can assess the responses in relation to the scope of the objectives.

ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

After several low-intensity demonstrations outside the CNE and TCE, media pressure, and digital advocacy strategies, a ruling was issued ordering compliance with the law for the 2023 snap elections. This decision marked an important milestone in the struggle for gender equality in Ecuadorian politics. Feminist and human rights organizations celebrated the ruling as a significant step toward more equitable representation in the positions to be elected. As a result, statements of triumph and celebration were recorded:

11) We are celebrating the women of Ecuador, what we achieved yesterday through the ruling of the Electoral Contentious Tribunal, which was nothing more than the guarantee of rights already enshrined in the regulations and laws for gender parity and women's participation (T.I., feminist activist).

The implementation of this ruling brought about a significant change in the composition of electoral lists for the 2023 snap elections. Political parties were forced to adjust their candidate selection strategies to comply with gender parity requirements. The adaptation process sparked internal debates within some political organizations, but it also opened new opportunities for women who had previously been marginalized from Ecuadorian politics. Furthermore, the women's movement

in Ecuador repositioned its image within the political sphere and access to institutionalized politics. This renewed momentum was characterized by the inclusion of diverse voices and intersectional perspectives. Young activists took on a leading role by using social media as a platform to amplify their messages and demands. As a result, there was greater visibility of gender-based political violence. As usual, conservative sectors expressed concern over what they considered an “imposition” of gender quotas, arguing that it could undermine meritocracy in the candidate selection process. To contextualize these arguments, we focus our attention on the key categories that emerge from the discourse, which are presented in the following categories at play.

CATEGORIES IN PLAY

Let's analyze the co-occurrence of present categories according to their frequency of appearance (Table 2). This visualization allows us to identify the main concerns and recurring themes. A strong interconnection was observed between concepts such as gender, violence, and power, suggesting a critical approach to patriarchal structures. Furthermore, the notable presence of terms like body and autonomy indicates the centrality of struggles for self-determination.

TABLE 2
CO-OCCURRENCE ANALYSIS OF CATEGORIES*

	Contextual demands	Gender violence	Political violence
Clientelism	1		
Democracy	1	1	7
Rights		2	12
Women's rights		1	7
Inequality	1	3	14
Elections			3
Snap elections 2023		1	6
Women's empowerment		1	2
Gender equality			2

	Contextual demands	Gender violence	Political violence
Lack of governance		1	8
Feminism		2	23
Political legislation		2	14
Fight for rights		1	2
Gender parity			6
Political participation	1		8
Politics		1	9

* The co-occurrence analysis reveals that the categories with the highest density (feminism, inequality, rights, and political legislation) are closely linked to political violence and gender-based violence, suggesting that activists articulate their demands within a framework that combines structural denunciations and normative proposals. The recurrence of gender parity and political participation as connecting nodes reinforces the idea that struggles for representation are not conceived in isolation, but rather as part of a set of interdependent claims. The network of terms shapes a lexicon of confrontation and enforceability, consolidating a collective voice that appropriates legal and political language. Moreover, it translates the historical experience of exclusion into a coherent repertoire of demands, reinforcing the need to transform the structures that perpetuate inequality.

Source: The authors with ATLAS.ti.

The interrelation of terms suggests that organized women constantly navigate between structural constraints and opportunities for collective action, influencing other actors in the social and political arena. If future studies were to be conducted, they could delve deeper into the dynamics and logics of these relationships, exploring how the intersections between agency, structure, and discourse influence strategies and outcomes in the short, medium, and long term. In the following section, we present some conclusions about the role of women's sectors in the context of the 2023 snap elections in Ecuador, with the firm intention that our data will help pave the way for debate.

CONCLUSIONS

The collective action taken by organized women during Ecuador's 2023 snap elections was not the result of isolated reactions or fragmented impulses. Instead, it was crafted as a complex, multichannel strategy where legal avenues, discursive production, and media-digital advocacy intertwined to form a coordinated front of political pressure. The legal victory, exemplified by the Electoral Disputes Tribunal's ruling that reinstated the principle of parity, was a direct outcome of this tactical synergy, which combined mobilization, argumentation, and visibility.

Within this framework, discourse served not only an expressive function but also became a tool for transformation. Parity was asserted not as a moral aspiration or symbolic demand but as an enforceable right, devoid of any trace of institutional concession. Simultaneously, the construction of an enunciative "we" elevated individual experiences to a collective voice with political authority, clearly distinguishing itself from the language of party power. Even while avoiding explicit references to feminism as a movement or to structural violence, the activist discourse managed to shield itself from delegitimization and deploy a powerful narrative without exposing itself to a conservative backlash.

The communication strategy, far from being merely instrumental, served to redefine political language from within, broadening the range of available meanings and reconfiguring the frameworks of legitimacy. The absence of direct confrontation with traditional media can be understood as a consensual discursive tactic, aimed at preserving symbolic circulation channels without diluting the substance of the demand. This process reveals that the struggle for parity is not confined to the legal-normative sphere but also operates as a symbolic dispute over the control of frameworks of representation. In the face of weakened institutions and political parties unwilling to transform their internal structures, organized women activated a repertoire of actions that, rather than seeking accommodation within the existing order, questioned its very foundations. Thus, the movement not only produced immediate effects in the composition of electoral lists but also left a lasting discursive mark on the Ecuadorian political field.

For a close, the democratization of politics cannot be conceived without the effective, sustained, and leading participation of women, whose actions –rooted in a genealogy of struggle, contemporary languages, and settings– have opened new possibilities for real, collective, and effective equality in Ecuador.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND FUNDING

We thank the organized women for their courage and commitment to deepening Ecuadorian democracy. This article was not funded by any entity, institution, or private company.

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SEMBLANZAS CURRICULARES

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