Evolution and Progress of Women's Participation in the Ecuadorian Policy Period 2009–2019

Marcelo León[1(✉)], Wladimir Sosa[1(✉)], Angélica Guamán[1(✉)], Rodrigo Rivera[1(✉)], and Mireya Serrano[2(✉)]

[1] Universidad Nacional de Loja, Loja, Ecuador
marcelo.leon@unileon.es, wladimirsj.93@gmail.com, guamangie@gmail.com, bryan.rivera@unl.edu.ec
[2] Asociación de Becarios del Ecuador ABREC, Loja, Ecuador
mireserranob@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper analyses the evolution of women's political participation in Ecuador in the last decade, 2009–2019. This is highly important since it helps to develop an international and regional retrospective on equal political participation. When measuring the political participation of Ecuadorian women, official data from the National Electoral Council-Ecuador was used, as well as, other state databases. The results of this research indicate that, firstly, there has been a substantial change in the participation of Ecuadorian women's policy over time, and in the legislation and its application. Secondly, there is a notable gender disparity. Male are mostly seen as candidates for political position such as Mayors, Governors, or Presidents. This reflects cultural marked aspects in the Ecuadorian society. Thirdly, the country is deficient in its vertical parity policy, and does not have a horizontal parity. And finally, this paper shows that the political participation of women in Ecuador depends on the region.

Keywords: Political participation · Women · Ecuador · Equality · Gender

1 Introduction

The end of the 20th and the initial years of the 21th century was a period of time marked by a sustained economic growth; nonetheless, Latin America and other regions have low equality levels and not strong indicators of well-being [26]. Countries have been under a process of growth and expansion of the economic variables of the countries [16], however, this have not been translated in a better access to income-generating opportunities [22, 27], or access to information [10–13], or in other non-economic conditions such as self-esteem [23, 24], or better life conditions to people [30], such as health and education [21, 24]. If these economic problems have not been solved or partially solved, is less probable that gender gaps are reduced. Nonetheless, it has also been argued that the scenario for women and minorities groups, regarding employment and the general situation have been improving in the last decades [30].

Roles of women and men have been changed in the last decades at the worldwide level, as well as in particular regions. There has been an evolution in the dimensions of

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the role of women into the social, economic and political aspects of the society [26]. It is also important to mention that women and men have different positions at the society, and different resource access, where not only roles, but also necessities are different. This differentiation is helpful to understand how to achieve long term emancipation for women [24].

In the field of the politics, this has not been an exception. Men have dominated the field of politics. They have been those with the power to make decisions and develop unequal normative systems and parameters that have normalized gender inequalities [2, 3, 21, 27]. It was not until the 20th century that women got the right to active and passive suffrage, thus, the right to vote and be elected [17]. Not surprisingly, women access to politics is weak [30], they have been always excluded from politics [17], and are not well represented in high level positions [30]. Hence, this group have to fight to be nominated for politics positions, and if they are considered, they are allocated in lower prestige positions [8, 18]. In fact, between 1980s and the first decade of the 21st century, there were only seven female presidents democratically elected, 20% of women were able to be part of the parliamentary seats, and up to 22 percent of elected municipal council representatives [9].

One of the greatest achievements of the women's movement, in several countries, was to debate about gender. By itself, gender equality is an important objective [30]. Indisputable, if women win votes that are directly related with a traditional norms evolution [17] and the greater the emphasis on gender equality, the greater the link with a cultural change process associated with democratization [17]. However, even in these cases, gender inequality is still present. For instance, in Africa since the 80 s the proportion of women having cabinet positions has increase, but women are still not assigned to the strategically policy areas like military force, foreign affairs, or economics, or the "masculine" ones [18]. Additionally, if we compare men and women, women tend to think that men are more like qualified to run for office and are more politically ambitious [20].

The present study gathers some data about the women participation in Ecuador. The first section refers to a review of the literature about the political women participation at a regional and national scale, which serves as a theoretical basis for this document. The second section analyses the electoral context in Ecuador in the past decades. While the third section explains the statistical analysis through excel and stata. Finally, the fourth section details the results and the main conclusions.

2 Regional Vision of Women's Political Participation

Over the years, equal political participation has evolved in Latin America and the Caribbean, as reported in 2015, by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN). There have been important meetings where equal participation has been promoted, and this has helped to boost the presence of women in the political regional arena [9]. In the last years, it has been common to find women Ministers and high female authorities signing international agreements [30]. Regarding the regional meetings, there are several examples. The first one is the I Conference of the International Year of Women, held in Mexico in 1975, where a

continuous and systematized process began, promoting the creation and articulation of institutions and organizations that seek the women equal participation [28, 30].

There has been a systematic leadership lead by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). This institution has been promoting the inclusion of women in the politics at the IV World Conference of Women, held in 1995 in Beijing, China. In later regional conferences, the presence of senior female helped to sensitize about the important role of equality in both public policy and policy maker. Finally, the X Regional Conference of Women held in Quito in 2007 has been one of the most important conference, because it was where a consensus regards the regional agreements on women's equal political rights were achieved.

Nonetheless, the number of women with positions in the executive branch and in parliament has stagnated worldwide, and has only experienced some marginal improvements since 2015. According to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union shows than in 2018, only 30.7% of representatives in the region are women, and they have lower or single chambers, as mentioned by Krook and O'Brien [18]. At the regional level, the three countries with the highest rates of female participation are: Cuba with a 53.2%, followed by Bolivia with 53.1%, and Mexico with 48.2%; while the countries with the lowest values are: Nicaragua with 45.6%, Costa Rica with 45.6%, and finally Ecuador with 34%, as we can see on Fig. 1.

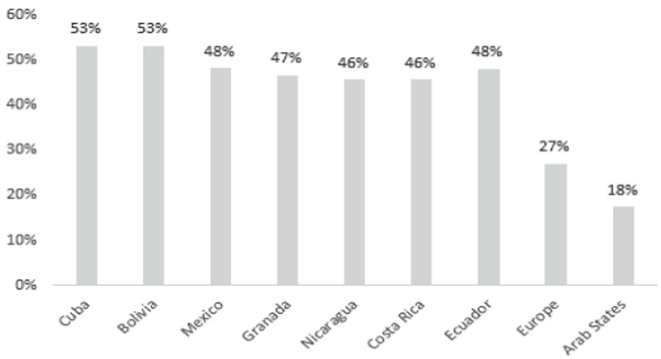


Fig. 1. Female participation.

3 The Political Participation of Women in Ecuador

The year of 1928 was a historically date for Ecuador; under the presidency of Isidro Ayora, women obtained the right to vote being a remarkable milestone in politics and in the public bodies for women. Matilde Hidalgo Navarro de Procel was the precursor in 1929; and Ecuador became the first country in Latin America that granted the vote to women. It was not until 1967 where the woman's right to vote was optional, and mandatory for lawyer's women [28].

Even with those regional milestones, Ecuador has the lowest rate of women participation in the region. Actually, this is also confirmed by the National Electoral Council (CNE), which states that from 2002 to 2014, participation of women in

election process is lower than men participation [5]. As a result, four legal reforms have been promoted by women's movements in Ecuador directly influencing in the improvement of women's participation in Ecuadorian politics [7]. Those reforms are going to be mention chronologically.

First, the Labour Protection Act of 1997. This policy established a minimum quota of 20 women in the multi-personal lists of November 30, 1998, for the elections at national and provincial deputies. Second, the Constitutional Reform of 1998 states an equitable participation of men and women in electoral processes (article 102). The 1998 constitution introduces equal opportunities despite gender. It establishes a minimum percentage of women political participation, which ranges from 30% to a cap of 50%. Finally, the 2008 Constitution approved by referendum in the same year, in its article 116, establishes principles of proportionality, equality of vote, equity, parity and alternation between women and men, or what can be called as horizontal parity [ASAMBLEA]. This document also indicates that in Ecuador, the candidate's selection must be developing in internal democratic processes, where equal participation between men and women has to be guaranteed [6].

As seen in Fig. 2, there has been an increase of women participation from 1995 to 2015, which can be directly related with the Ecuadorian reforms established. At 90s, women participation was almost null; on the following decade, women participation in politics have increased, but still women have not been well represented. It is only since 2010, where the numbers of women participation in politics have been close to reach the suggested Ecuadorian quote.

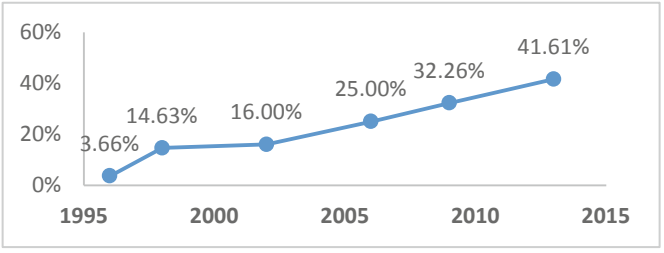


Fig. 2. Evolution of the percentage of participation of women in Ecuadorian politics. **Source:** [1]

It is also important to refer to vertical and horizontal parity. Vertical parity proposes gender parity in the number of delegations, and party bodies. In other words, vertical parity focuses on numerical parity specifically at the stage of the nomination of candidates on the lists. While, horizontal parity is used to refer where not only numerical parity is important. Here the alternation in the nomination of candidates, demanding that women also enter the first places [4].

3.1 Historical Background: Women Participation in Jurisdictional and National Elections from 2002–2008

In Ecuador, information related to the elections processes, are officially presented by the National Electoral Council (CNE). This data helps to analyses the compliance with the legal participation quotas, regarding the equal opportunities principle. For example, if we analyse women participation in the seven electoral processes from 2002 to 2014, it is possible to identify that the highest disparity occurred in General Elections of 2002, where approximately men candidates were twice that female candidates (61% of men compared to 39% of women). In contrast, the more equal elections happened in 2007, regarding the election of Constituent Assembly Members, with a 48.8% presence of women leading candidates.

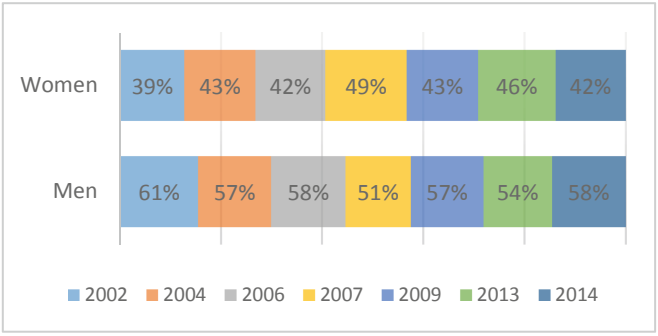


Fig. 3. Historical elections participation: 2002–2014. **Source:** CNE 2016

As seen in Fig. 3, regarding women participation in these seven elections processes, it can be identified that the average of women participation is 43%, and that each new voting process have a higher participation from 2002 to 2007, and a slowly decrease between 2009 and 2014. There is a high probability that these participation values are the result of reform policy implemented in the 2000, regarding candidate's participation.

However, this increase in women participation in elections does not have a direct relationship with women elected authorities. For instance, in 2002, only 21% of the elected authorities were women from the 39% participating. By 2004, the percentage of elected women increased about 8%, but it and fallen again to 23% in 2006.

It is only in the Constituent Assembly elections (2007), where women have a 49% of participation and 35% of election. This is the unique electoral process, where a high percentage of women were elected. Nevertheless, this election was a highly important one since representatives elected where part of the decision-making process to elaborate the new Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador in 2008.

Therefore, it is identified that there is no gender equity for electoral process participation between 2002 and 2014, even when the trend tends to converge on 2007. Also, There is still a big gap to achieve gender equity, even when the trend have a progressively reduction between men and women, as we can see on Fig. 4.

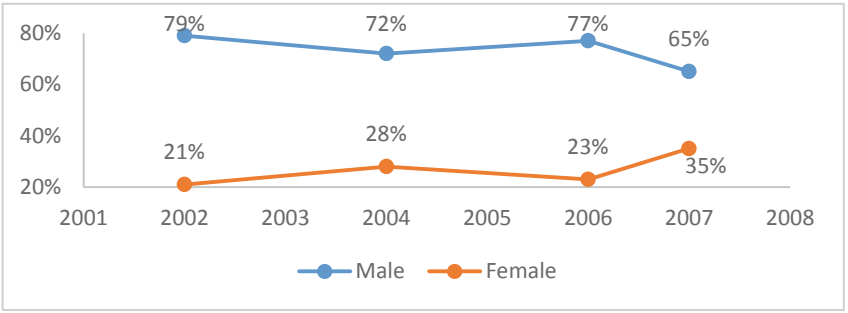


Fig. 4. Evolution of women participation in Ecuadorian politics, expressed in percentages. **Source:** [CNE16; CNE19]

3.2 Historical Background: Women Participation in Jurisdictional and National Elections from 2008–2019

The Montecristi Constitution approved in 2008, in its article 95 established that the participation of citizens is guaranteed, both at the individual or collective scenarios, and every process of decision-making, planning and management of public affairs, it is guided among other equality principles [5]. In fact, in the general and sectional elections in 2009, 44% were women from a total of 39.580 people among the different political positions. The difference in participation between men and women was low. From that total, there was space only for 5.640 political representatives. And not surprisingly, numbers for men where higher that numbers for women, 75% versus 23%, respectively. Lowest percentages for women election are related with President - Vice-president and Mayor Positions. This confirms again previous studies who mentioned that even with a higher participation of women in the political arena; they are still not elected for influential positions [18, 27] (Table 1).

Table 1. Participation of women in the general and sectional elections of 2009, expressed in percentage.

Elections of 2009			
Candidates		Elected authorities	
Parameter	% women	Parameter	% women
Mayors	57%	Mayors	6%
National Assembly Members	48%	National Assembly Members	40%
Provincial and foreign assembly members	47%	Provincial and foreign assembly members	31%
Rural Councillors	44%	Rural Councillors	25%
Urban councillors	47%	Urban councillors	31%
Vowels Parish Boards	43%	Vowels Parish Boards	22%
Andean parliamentarians	43%	Andean parliamentarians	60%
Prefects and vice prefects	13%	Prefects and vice prefects	9%
President and Vice President	25%	President and Vice President	0%
Total participation	***44%***	**Total participation**	***23%***

Source: [5]

In the general elections held in 2013, 2.071 candidates were available for the different dignities, from which 54% were men and 46% women. In this electoral process there was a minimal difference in participation between men and women. In this case, from the 203 dignities elected, 38% of the 46% women participated were elected.

It is important to note that all the Andean parliamentarians participated obtained the votes increasing their power access to Latin America opportunities; nevertheless their presence in this political decision making scenario has never equalled men [15] (Table 2).

Table 2. Participation of women in the general elections of 2013 (%).

Elections of 2013			
Candidates		Elected authorities	
Parameter	% women	Parameter	% women
National Assembly Members	50%	National Assembly Members	47%
Constituents by constituency	46%	Constituents by constituency	44%
Provincial and foreign assembly members	47%	Provincial and foreign assembly members	34%
Andean parliamentarians	40%	Andean parliamentarians	40%
President and Vice President	0%	President and Vice President	0%
Total participation	*46%*	Total participation	*38%*

Source: [5]

In the sectional elections of 2014, 26.911 candidates presented for the different dignities from which 44% were women. There is also a minimal difference between the participation between men and women. In this process only 26% of the 5.628 dignities elected where women.

In this election, the category of Mayors and Prefects and Vice prefects are the most influential and powerful ones. One is focused on the county level and the other one at the province level, respectively. In both cases, the difference in the percentage of women participating versus women, elected is the 5%, which is also the lower percentage difference between a candidate and elected authorities. This can be the result of the increase in education and work experience in women; the more educated and experienced women are the lower the gap difference between women and men profiles [15] (Table 3).

In the 2017 general elections, 26.911 candidates participated in the election process. From this number of candidates 46% were women. In this specific electoral process, there is a small difference between the participation of men and women. As in 2014, elections, there are 5.628 available elected positions, where 38% of that total were women.

Table 3. Women participation women in the sectional elections of 2014.

Elections of 2014			
Candidates		Elected authorities	
Parameter	% women	Parameter	% women
Mayors	12%	Mayors	7%
Rural Councillors	88%	Rural Councillors	25%
Urban councillors	45%	Urban councillors	34%
Vowels Parish Boards	43%	Vowels Parish Boards	25%
Prefects and vice prefects	14%	Prefects and vice prefects	9%
Total participation	*44%*	Total participation	*26%*

Source: [5]

As seen in Table 4, the highest percentage of women electoral participation is for National Assembly members at national and provincial positions. And there was a small percentage, in fact, the lowest one, for women participation for President and Vice president Positions. Regarding the elected authorities, the highest percentage is for Andean parliamentarians with a 60%, followed by the National Assembly Members with a 53%. Even when the numbers show that women are being represented, it is highly probable that the individual characteristics of the female candidates do not matter to the electorate, because parties are more important. Voters will choose those candidates in the parties that they believe have a great probability to win [20].

Table 4. Women participation in the 2017 general elections.

Elections of 2017			
Candidates		Elected authorities	
Parameter	% women	Parameter	% women
National Assembly Members	48%	National Assembly Members	53%
Constituents by constituency	45%	Constituents by constituency	44%
Provincial and foreign assembly members	47%	Provincial and foreign assembly members	31%
Andean parliamentarians	45%	Andean parliamentarians	60%
President and Vice President	13%	President and Vice President	0%
Total participation	*46%*	Total participation	*38%*

Elaboration: Research team.
Source: [7, 8]

The last election happened on 2019 and it was for sectional elections. 41.517 candidates run for the different sectional dignities, from where 43% were women. However, percentages show that women participation is less than the 50%, and the lowers percentages are for Mayors (14%) and Prefects (18%). As historical, men are significantly more likely than women to be recruited to run for high level positions [21].

As in the other cases, the percentage of elected women is less than the 50%. From the total of 5.607 dignities elected only 27% were women. Most of women were elected as urban councillors (33%) and Vowels in Parish boards (27%), and percentages of election is almost the same as in 2013, 2014 and 2017 elections. Despite of the years, women elections for the jurisdictional positions remain equal (Table 5).

Table 5. Women participation in the sectional elections of 2019, expressed in percentage.

Elections of 2019			
Candidates		Candidates	
Parameter	% women	Parameter	% women
Mayors	14%	Mayors	8%
Rural Councillors	43%	Rural Councillors*	26%
Urban councillors	46%	Urban councillors*	33%
Vowels Parish Boards	44%	Vowels Parish Boards	27%
Prefects and vice prefects	18%	Prefects and vice prefects	17%
Total participation	*43%*	Total participation	*27%*

Source: [5]
Note: Data provided until March 31, in the Los Ríos province the results are not yet available for the repetition of the electoral process.

3.3 Women Participation for General and Sectional Dignities Between 2009 and 2017

In this part of the research, women participation in general election between 2009 and 2017 is analysed regarding the horizontal and vertical parity. Figures were made using a statistical program.

It is important to mention that in general elections there are 7 positions available, being the president and vice president the most influential or important positions, followed by the National Assemblies. In the sectional elections, there are 5 categories: Mayors, Rural councillors, Urban councillors, Prefect and vice prefect and vowels of parish boards in sectional elections, where mayors and prefects and vice prefects are the most influential ones.

Women maintain a relative parity in the participation with a range of 40% and 53%, except for the dignity of President and Vice President where women participation is not representative, as seen in Fig. 5.

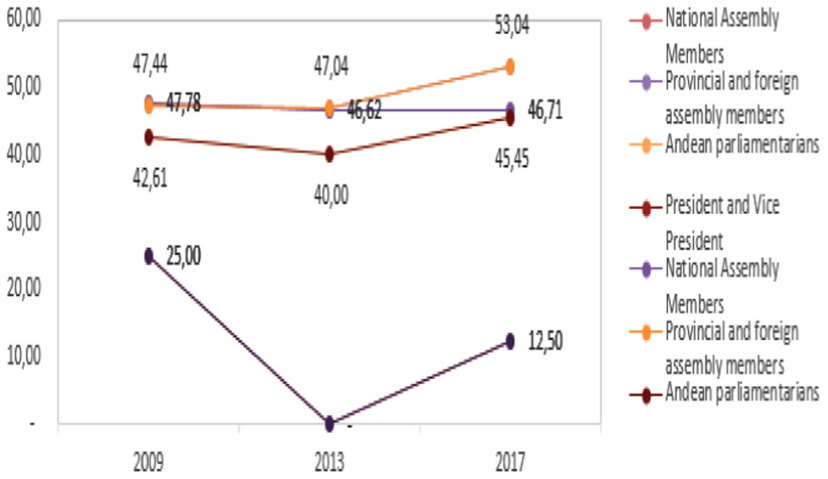


Fig. 5. Women's candidacy for general elections in the period 2009–2017. **Source:** [5]

In the case of the elected authorities since 2009, the average of participation is 45%; however, women have not been able to win the highest cabinet positions, such as President (Fig. 6).

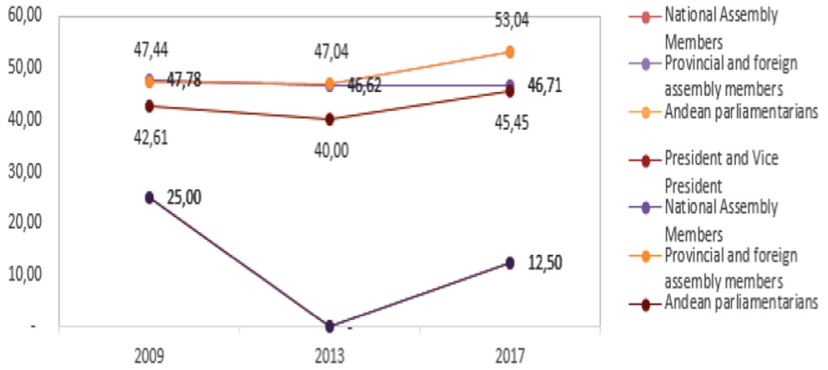


Fig. 6. Women elected in general elections during the period 2009–2017. **Source:** [5]

In the case of women participation for sectional authorities, it is evident that female participation has been considered mostly to occupy lower cabinet positions. There is a low participation for Mayor or Prefect. Even when the women participation is low for power and influential positions, there have an average participation of 61%, which can be considered relative gender parity (Fig. 7).

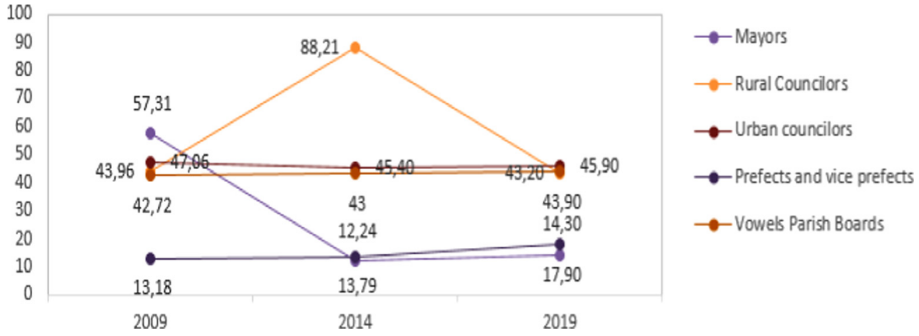


Fig. 7. Women's Candidacies for sectional elections 2009–2019. **Source:** [5]

In the case of the elected authorities since 2009, an average participation of 20 spaces is in the urban councils, which obtain greater preference from the citizens to exercise the position. Mayor's positions, on the other hand, even when they have a high level of influence on the society, have the lower women candidatures. Numbers have not changed from 2009 to 2019, they are around 5 candidacies. Same scenario happens for the Prefects and vice prefect's positions, where historically numbers are less than 15 positions. Hence, horizontal parity is not achieved (Fig. 8).

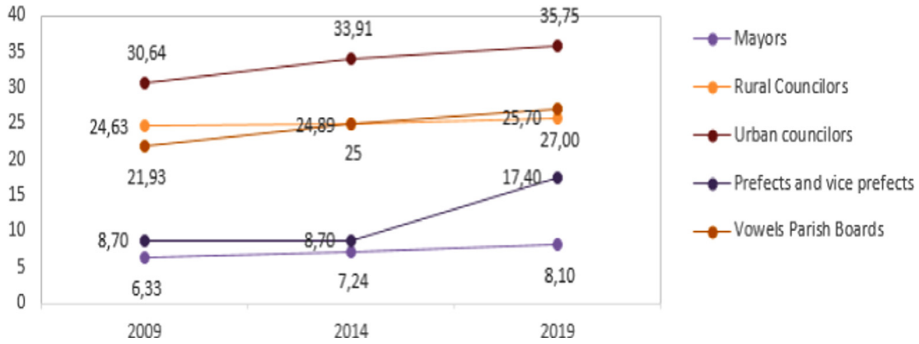


Fig. 8. Women's candidacies for sectional elections 2009–2019. **Source:** [5]

4 Conclusions

Currently, equal participation is a development goal set by international organizations and adapted by the different development plans and national legislatures of each country. Over time, the necessary policies have been implementing to ensure and guarantee the participation of women's policy in the country.

At the public sector, women's participation has gotten important achievements. The principles of equal opportunities are established, in the run for different dignities of popular election. However, despite this equal opportunities scenario proposed, in

general and sectional elections, the vote of citizens in the exercise of democracy shows a strong preference of the electors for male candidates to occupy the dignities as mayor's offices, prefectures, or president positions, conditioning reflected by cultural aspects and trust issues. In other words, women participation in election have increase for the lower cabinet position as we can see on sectional elections from 2014 to 2019, but the number of women elected is still low. It was only on 2017 that elected women achieved the cap proposed in the normative. A few percentage of women have been nominated for high political positions such as President, Vice president, Mayors or Prefecture, but only a few have been elected for this elections.

In the way of the equal participation of women in Ecuadorian politics, many substantial changes have been seen for equity; nevertheless, Ecuador has a vertical parity and does not have a horizontal parity, to face problems such as the heading of male lists, or so that in the unipersonal positions there is no mandatory parity.

As a result of this research, the team group suggest that in order to achieve equal participation of women in Ecuadorian politics, we have to move from a vertical to horizontal parity, where beyond equal access opportunities established in the normative documents of the country, application of those norms could help to significantly reduce the equity gap in Ecuador. Undoubtedly, some improvements have occurred in women participation; but still, there are topics and maybe normative documents that have to be elaborated in order to comply with the gender equality principles.

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