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Protocol for public opinion survey, Ecuador 2025

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This observational survey protocol aims to investigate public opinion about security and democracy in Ecuador during the critical period in 2025 and 2026. This study will focus on university students, exploring the relationships between trust in the president, approval of his administration, and support for democracy versus the possibility of moving toward regimes with greater military power. The main objective is to understand how trust in different social groups and institutions, perceptions of security, and gender roles influences these political attitudes. Data will be collected monthly from April 2025 to April 2026 using an online questionnaire administered to a representative sample of higher-education students at Milagro State University (UNEMI). The longitudinal design ensured continuity of the same respondents' data over time. Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, nonparametric tests, and logistic regression models, were used to identify the trends and correlations. This study aims to provide anticipated insights into how security perceptions and gender roles could influence policy support, based on data collected in 2025 and 2026. This study emphasizes the importance of balancing security needs with democratic principles, contributing to a more informed and strategic approach to governance in Ecuador.

KEYWORDS

public opinion, security, democracy, governance, gender roles

1 Introduction

Recently, there has been growing interest in the political dynamics of Ecuador, a country that has experienced significant political polarization during and after the period of the “Revolución Ciudadana” (2006–2017) (Boese et al., 2022; Ramírez Gallegos, 2021; Moncagatta, 2021). This era was followed by a phase of democratic resilience, albeit with challenges in political alteration (2017–2020) (Stoessel, 2024; Valarezo, 2023; Ramírez Gallegos, 2018). Since 2021, the presidency of Guillermo Lasso has marked a shift to the ideological right, but his term was interrupted because of the threat of impeachment initiated by the political opposition of “correísmo,” repeating a pattern of interrupted presidential terms studied in the region (Llanos and Pérez-Liñán, 2021; Pessoa, 2020). In this context of the socio-political crisis, early elections brought Daniel Noboa to power, the son of Ecuador's wealthiest man, who established a governance style with increased military competencies.

In 2024, Ecuador was going through a particularly critical period due to the declared internal armed conflict and the permanent state of emergency that the country is experiencing. This exceptional situation poses significant challenges to governance and democratic stability (Stoessel, 2024). While militarization may be seen as a necessary measure to ensure security in the short term, it should not be seen as a substitute for fundamental democratic principles (Andrade-Vásquez, 2024). Rather than replacing democracy, security

policies must be integrated within a framework that respects and strengthens democratic institutions (Morales, 2022; Basabe-Serrano, 2014).

With the dawn of 2025, a pivotal moment arises for Ecuador, as the country transitions to a new political era. This period provides an opportunity to examine the intersection of governance, security, and democratic principles under evolving circumstances. In 2025, Ecuador will enter a new political phase with the inauguration of a new government, offering a unique opportunity to analyze the impact of militarization and violence within a shifting context of internal armed conflict. Public opinion data will be collected between April 2025 and April 2026 to assess how these dynamics will influence governance, democratic stability, and perceptions of security under a renewed political framework. Understanding the interaction between militarized security policies and democratic principles is crucial for evaluating the broader implications of democratic resilience in times of conflict.

Few studies have explored the potential effects of increased military power under a hardline civilian regime, as will be analyzed in the Ecuadorian context starting from 2023. Given the recent emergence of these phenomena, research on the implications of this governance model is limited.

The literature shows that similar scenarios of increased polarization and military involvement are present in other countries in the region, such as El Salvador under Bukele (Cruz, 2022; Sandoval-García, 2022), and a similar trend could potentially occur in Argentina under Milei (Solar, 2022). Evidence suggests that in highly polarized contexts, the combination of military power with bureaucracy can restrict citizens' capacity for dissent and political participation (Tomini et al., 2023; Tomini, 2018). Additionally, it is necessary to study whether the president and government can legitimize their actions over time (Gerschewski, 2023a, 2013). This situation presents an opportunity to evaluate the relationship between public opinion demands and the new military order in the context of intense social conflict. In the Ecuadorian context, citizens' perceptions of security and the future of democracy are crucially relevant, as these opinions reflect not only the current state of trust in institutions and government but also the expectations and aspirations of the population (Paul, 2022; Latinobarómetro, 2023; Inglehart et al., 2014; Del Tronco, 2013; Ospina Peralta, 2024).

The aim of future research, which begins with a public opinion survey, is to test several factors influencing trust in the president and the degree of approval of his administration, as well as support for democracy, compared to the preference for regimes with significant military involvement.

The interplay between the support for democratic governance and military involvement presents a nuanced reality that defies simplistic binaries. In some contexts, armed forces are regarded as integral to democracy, embodying popular representation and national unity. Nonetheless, as prior research has shown, the alignment between democracy and militarization is neither universal nor consistent. This study acknowledges that these elements, while not inherently contradictory, may function as independent dimensions of political life (Ariely and Davidov, 2011; Ridge, 2023). By situating this complexity within Ecuador's current socio-political challenges, this analysis aims to deepen our understanding of how security imperatives and democratic commitments interact in the context of institutional strain and public uncertainty.

Moreover, a study on Libya demonstrates that public trust in the military can coexist with support for democratic governance, especially in contexts characterized by insecurity and institutional fragmentation. This duality highlights the military's role as both a stabilizing force and a potential obstacle to democratic consolidation, shedding light on the complex dynamics of governance in non-democracies (Abouzzohour, 2023). These findings are particularly relevant to Ecuador's current socio-political challenges, in which institutional strain and public uncertainty create a backdrop in which security imperatives and democratic commitments must navigate a delicate balance.

This study was designed to evaluate whether there is a correlation between public opinion for or against the president, the government, as well as aspects of social capital, institutional trust, citizen political polarization, and the increasing militarization in Ecuador during periods of high social conflict. Therefore, the research protocol not only seeks to provide a detailed understanding of the current dynamics of public opinion in Ecuador but also to offer valuable resources for formulating public policies that balance the need for security with the imperative to preserve and strengthen democracy. Using a representative sample of university students and robust methodologies to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study aims to contribute to an informed and well-founded debate on the country's political and social future. By employing a panel study, this research will provide a clear picture of the degree of public legitimization and participation across Ecuador, leveraging the national reach of UNEMI's student body through both in-person and virtual modalities to achieve a comprehensive national perspective.

1.1 Theoretical framework of security and public opinion in Ecuador

After the Cold War and in the context of globalization, the traditional concepts of national security of the twentieth century were insufficient to address the new socio-political phenomena linked to the conflicts of the twenty-first century. In this new panorama, the deregulation of the local national gave way to orders and legislation governed by global dynamics, while individualism was prioritized, even in the field of security (Kaldor, 2001a, 2001b; Uribe, 2004).

In the Ecuadorian case, analysis of the impact of these changes on security requires considering both the individual perspective, which affects interpersonal trust, and the loss of social capital, which weakens collective cohesion (Hernández, 2019; Mantilla et al., 2023). These effects are aggravated by exacerbated militarization and a high probability of human rights violations in contexts where high crime and the presence of military activities converge (Flores-Macías, 2023, 2021).

In addition, legislation and the prioritization of public spending on security forces alter the interaction between state governance and orientation toward military order. This approach emphasizes the protection of state sovereignty and the fight against broad threats, such as transnational organized crime (Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2024; Kollias et al., 2018). The effective use of force and its results have a direct impact on trust in institutions and democratic legitimacy. In contexts marked by strong presidentialism, this impact can also be measured through the approval or legitimacy of the head of

government in the executive branch (Magaloni, 2020; Mantilla et al., 2023; Cox and Morgenstern, 2001).

In short, a hybrid and comprehensive model is proposed, in which security at the personal, community, and national levels interact dynamically. This approach recognizes that national security policies, such as counter-narcotics initiatives aimed at combating terrorist organizations, can lead to unintended consequences at the personal or community level, such as an increase in human rights violations, as evidenced by Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2024, 2021) and Flores-Macías (2023). Likewise, it considers how global changes in security doctrines have particular effects following Kaldor (2001a, 2001b) theoretical framework. On the other hand, organized civil society, especially human rights organizations, can significantly influence public security policies by making cases visible and promoting institutional responses. A recent example in Ecuador at the end of 2024 illustrates this interaction: the disappearance of four minors after being captured by the Ecuadorian Armed Forces and their subsequent discovery dead and with their bodies charred (El Universo, 2025). Although there is no certainty about the direct participation of the military in the crime, this case has raised more questions than answers regarding the implementation of security policies, where civil society organizations and the families of the victims came to the fore in the face of state security policy.

In this context, the relatives of the victims, the civil society organizations that made the case visible, the Armed Forces themselves, and now, the justice system, which has taken into custody the 16 soldiers involved in the capture of the minors, emerge as key actors. This case underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis of security policies, their effects, and the dynamics between the different actors involved in their implementation and oversight.

2 Objectives and hypotheses

This study aimed to investigate several factors that influence trust in the president and the degree of approval of his administration, as well as support for democracy, compared to the preference for military regimes among university students in Ecuador. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To evaluate how trust in the president and his administrative approval correlate with perceptions of security and democratic support.
- To examine the influence of trust in institutions, especially security-related institutions, on political preferences.
- To analyze gender role perceptions in shaping attitudes toward democracy and militarized governance.

2.1 Hypothesis

H1: Higher interpersonal and institutional trust increases support for the president and increases democratic stability.

H2: Perceptions of community security, particularly under “iron fist” policies, bolster support for the president but may undermine democratic ideals.

H3: Traditional gender role beliefs correlate with less support for democratic principles, favoring authoritarianism.

These previous lines of argument guide the analysis of data collected through surveys of university students in Ecuador, providing a clear framework for investigating how various social dimensions and perceptions affect political support and the valuation of democracy.

3 Methods

The UNEMI research team will collect public opinion data from the students of the university to collect data and form a database that will describe the relationship between the opinion of citizens, the approval of the government, and the president regarding his political and strategic turn on the armed forces and the possible continuity of that political line in the following years. The team is multidisciplinary and includes several UNEMI careers. This is an innovative project in the house of study. The team includes research professors from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Commercial Education and Law (Facsecyd), and a Knowledge Management and Scientific Communication group.

3.1 Population selection

To be eligible for this study, participants must meet the following criteria:

- Be 18 years of age or older.
- Be a college student.
- Have access to the internet.
- Mastering the Spanish language
- Accept informed consent via the internet.
- Be residents of Ecuador

The student population at the Universidad Estatal de Milagro (UNEMI) for a national study is methodologically sound and justified. With an enrolment of 60,000 students, UNEMI represents a significant and diverse sample. The institution’s diverse educational modalities, including both on-campus and online programs, mean that its students reside across all provinces of Ecuador, not just Guayas. This geographical diversity allows for a holistic and varied representation of Ecuador’s socioeconomic and cultural realities. Including this population enhances external validity, ensuring that findings can be generalized nationally, capturing trends and behaviors that accurately reflect the country’s dynamics.

3.2 Data collection

For this study, university students over 17 years of age who reside in Ecuador and are enrolled at UNEMI, who have access to the Internet, and who are fluent in Spanish will be recruited. Participants will be selected through online educational platforms, in face-to-face and blended modalities, as well as through emails sent to their institutional accounts. Because UNEMI has students from all over the

country, owing to its online modality, a national sample can be guaranteed.

Prior to starting the survey, the participants will be presented with an informed consent form that they must digitally accept to participate. This form will explain the objectives of the study, the voluntariness of participation, and how personal data will be managed.

The survey will be designed on an online platform that allows for anonymous data collection. The questionnaire included the following sections.

- General information (age, sex, region of residence, ethnic self-identification, income level).
- Public opinion on trust in people from different social strata or specific cleavages (social capital).
- Public opinion on trust in institutions.
- Public opinion on the political regime and government management.
- Specific information about safety in their communities.
- Opinions on gender roles and education.

The survey will be conducted monthly from April 2025 to April 2026. The same students will participate each month, establishing a longitudinal follow-up panel. This will allow you to observe changes and trends over time. To ensure that the information is continuous and not interrupted, specific identifiers will be used to anonymize the results and ensure that the data are collected from the same informants each month. Students will be selected from intermediate semesters to minimize the loss of responses due to changes in the academic cycle.

Data will be collected automatically through an online platform and stored in a secure database. Only the research team will have access to these data, and security measures will be implemented to protect participants' information. Once all data have been collected, they will be statistically analyzed to identify trends and correlations. Data analysis tools will be used to process information and generate reports that reflect the public's perception of security and its relationship with the stability of the government and the democratic regime in Ecuador.

This study acknowledges that the exclusive focus on university students from Milagro State University (UNEMI) imposes limitations on the generalizability of its findings. This sample primarily represents younger individuals, either within the typical university age range or older individuals leveraging virtual education opportunities to pursue higher education later in life. Therefore, the results are most applicable to this demographic and should not be extrapolated to non-student adults or other segments of the Ecuadorian population. However, this focus is justified by the study's emphasis on understanding perceptions within public university contexts, particularly in Costa and Sierra regions.

Public universities in Ecuador, especially those in the Costa and Sierra regions, encompass a socioeconomically diverse student body, offering a microcosm for the broader population. The Costa region, where UNEMI is located, has been disproportionately impacted by violence and insecurity, making its students a particularly relevant demographic for analyzing governance, democracy, and security perceptions. Furthermore, university students often play a critical role as agents of social and political change, providing unique insights into societal dynamics and

responses to pressing issues. Although the findings may not comprehensively represent all demographic groups, they provide a focused and meaningful understanding of younger, educated individuals, who are likely to influence future socio-political trajectories.

The study acknowledges the limitations of focusing exclusively on university students but emphasizes the relevance of this population, which is deeply impacted by violence and insecurity, particularly in the Costa region. This approach, enriched by the inclusion of perspectives from the Sierra region, balances socioeconomic and cultural diversity and offers valuable insights within its defined scope. Future research could expand the sample to include broader demographic groups, enhance representativeness, and provide a more comprehensive understanding of public perception in Ecuador.

The results of the study will be presented on an aggregate basis, without identifying individual participants. The findings will be shared with academic institutions, government agencies, and other stakeholders, thus contributing to a better understanding of the country's current situation.

3.3 Translating security concepts into measurable variables

The questionnaire effectively translates theoretical constructs into measurable variables using Likert scales to capture respondents' attitudes and perceptions. Each question group is designed to align with specific security concepts and analytical domains, ensuring coherence between the theoretical framework and empirical data collection. For instance, the first group of questions assesses social capital by asking respondents how much they trust various social groups such as family, neighbors, and people from different religions or nationalities. One example is, "Do you trust people in your neighborhood?" with response options ranging from "Not at all reliable" to "Highly reliable." This operationalizes interpersonal trust and provides insights into community cohesion and personal security.

Similarly, other questions measure institutional trust by evaluating confidence in entities such as the police or military. Questions addressing opinions on democracy and governance assess how respondents perceive the balance between democratic values and security measures, as illustrated by: "Democracy may have problems, but it is the best system of government," with responses ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." These items connect governance and political regimes to security perceptions, capturing how institutional performance influences public attitude.

By organizing the questions into distinct themes, such as social capital, institutional trust, and governance opinions, and translating abstract security concepts into concrete and measurable Likert-scale items, the questionnaire ensures a systematic and comprehensive assessment of public opinion on security.

3.4 Expected results

Public opinion is a concept that contributes to the collective thinking of a community in a specific space and time. The main expected results are associated with assessing how public opinion is related to the acceptance of the government and president in the

context of high social change and armed conflict in Ecuador. Details of the fields of inquiry are presented below.

- **Trust in the president and administrative approval:** It is hypothesized that higher levels of trust in the president and his administration correlate positively with perceptions of security and support for democracy. Stable interpersonal and institutional trust is expected to strengthen these attitudes, fostering broader public approval of governance and democratic principles (Torrico-Terán and Delgadillo, 2020; Tronco, 2013).
- **Trust in institutions:** Increased confidence in security-related institutions, particularly those perceived as effective in reducing violence, is hypothesized to reinforce support for the president and the administration. However, this may simultaneously promote preferences for militarized governance, reflecting a complex interplay between institutional trust and political attitudes (Levitsky and Way, 2022; Boese et al., 2022; Kuehn, 2017).
- **Political regime and government management:** The functioning of the political regime based on the efficiency of the state's capacity to mobilize resources would produce an increase in support for the regime and the president (Croissant and Hellmann, 2018; Hanson, 2018; Hendrix, 2010).
- **Security in communities:** It is anticipated that perceptions of greater community security, particularly under "iron fist" policies, will enhance support for the president. However, these perceptions are expected to inversely affect support for democracy, as strict security measures may erode the appreciation of democratic values (Paul, 2022; Moncagatta, 2021; Latinobarómetro, 2023, 2018).
- **Gender roles and education:** Gender perceptions significantly influence support for the president and for democracy. Those who believe that men are better political leaders and should be given priority to work when jobs are scarce are also likely to be more supportive of the president and less supportive of the democratic principles of gender equality.

3.5 Statistical methods

To analyze trust in the president and the degree of approval of his administration, as well as support for democracy versus the preference for regimes with high support for the military, a combination of methods and statistical techniques appropriate to handle ordinal data and taking advantage of the sample size of more than 400 respondents is proposed.

To assess confidence in the president and the degree of approval of his administration, a descriptive analysis of the data will begin. This will include the calculation of frequencies and ratios to describe the distribution of responses on the four-level Likert scales as well as measures of central tendency (mean and median) and dispersion (standard deviation) to summarize confidence and approval.

Non-parametric tests, such as the Kruskal-Wallis test, will then be used to compare differences in trust and approval between different demographic strata or specific cleavages, such as regions, gender, and income level. To compare two specific groups, for example, the perception of security between those who approve and do not approve of the president's performance, the Mann-Whitney U test will be used.

In addition, Spearman correlation analysis will be performed to assess the relationship between ordinal variables, such as trust in different institutions and trust in the president.

To model the most complex relationships and explore the factors that influence trust in the president and approval of his discharge, ordinal logistic regression (Proportional Odds Model) will be used. This model makes it possible to estimate the probability of distinct levels of trust and approval based on several independent variables such as demographics, income level, and trust in other institutions. The use of Structural Equation Models (SEM) to simultaneously evaluate the relationships between multiple independent and dependent variables will also be considered.

Regarding support for democracy versus the preference for military regimes, it begins with a similar descriptive analysis, describing the distributions of opinions on democracy and military regimes. Frequencies and proportions will help understand the distribution of responses, while measures of central tendency and dispersion will summarize responses on Likert scales.

To explore the relationship between categorical variables such as support for democracy and experience of insecurity, the chi-square test of independence will be used. The Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests will also be used to compare responses to support for democracy among different demographics from different social strata or specific cleavages.

Spearman's correlation analysis will be used to assess the relationship between support for democracy and factors such as trust in institutions and ideological self-location. To model the probability of supporting a military regime based on independent variables, binary logistic regression will be used. In addition, ordinal logistic regression will be applied to analyze views on democracy. Finally, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) will be considered to reduce the dimensionality of data and identify the main factors influencing support for democracy.

Acknowledging potential limitations in the application of Principal Component Analysis (PCA), this study incorporates additional methodological steps to ensure the robustness of the findings. While PCA is anticipated to identify factors that correspond to support for democratic and non-democratic regimes, previous research has highlighted the challenges in achieving theoretically consistent groupings in contexts with complex public attitudes (Ariely and Davidov, 2011). To address this, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will first be performed on a subset of the data to evaluate the alignment between theoretical constructs and empirical observations. This preliminary step will help identify potential discrepancies and refine the operationalization of variables before applying PCA.

If PCA fails to produce components that align with theoretical expectations, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is employed to uncover latent patterns within the data. The flexibility of EFA allows for the identification of structures that may diverge from initial theoretical assumptions but nonetheless provides valuable insights. If neither PCA nor EFA yields interpretable components, the variables related to support for democratic and non-democratic regimes will be analyzed separately using regression models. This approach enables detailed examination of individual predictive power.

To analyze the panel data, where data from the same individuals are collected over at least six consecutive months, a specific regression model for panel data will be employed. This method allows for control of fixed effects and other unobservable factors that may influence the

dependent variables. The Fixed Effects Model will be utilized to eliminate unobserved individual variability that could bias the results. By focusing on within-individual differences over time, this method enables a more precise assessment of the relationships between key variables, such as trust in the president, approval of their administration, and support for democracy. This ensures that the observed changes are attributable to independent variables rather than to invariable individual characteristics.

In summary, the combination of descriptive analyses, non-parametric tests, correlation analysis, and regression models will allow a robust and detailed understanding of the relationships between demographic, social, and perception variables and the dependent variables of trust in the president, approval of his administration, and support for democracy. These statistical methods ensure a thorough and statistically significant analysis, providing a solid basis for interpreting the results of the study and better understanding the attitudes and perceptions of respondents in Ecuador.

3.6 General ethical issues

The Public Opinion Survey on the National Reality of Security in the Republic of Ecuador for the year 2024 will be conducted under strict ethical standards. This research is observational and focused on data collection through questionnaires administered to university students. The fundamental principles of dignity, human rights, autonomy, informed consent, integrity, privacy, confidentiality, equality, justice, equity, non-discrimination, and well-being of participants will be respected, in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations for the Approval, Development, Surveillance and Control of Observational Research and Intervention Studies on Human Beings.

The anonymization of the data collected will be guaranteed using specific identifiers for the longitudinal follow-up of the same individuals throughout the study, which will run from

April 2025 to April 2026. This approach makes it possible to maintain data continuity and integrity without compromising participant confidentiality. The results will be managed with strict security measures to protect the participants' personal information.

At all times, the precautionary principle will be observed to minimize any risk to the participants. This research will be reviewed and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (CEISH) of the Ministry of Public Health, ensuring that all current regulations comply with and that the rights of research subjects are protected.

The questionnaire was reviewed, evaluated, and validated by the Ethics Committee. This committee was validated at "Clínica Kennedy" in Ecuador under the code HCK-CEISH-2022-006. This thorough validation process ensured that the research adhered to the highest ethical standards, maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of the data collected while safeguarding the rights and well-being of the participants throughout the study period.

4 Discussion

In the Latin American context, previous research shows that the role of the head of government has a significant impact on the performance of the democratic regime. The greater the power of the executive, the greater the probability of democratic decline, either

because state resources are used in a patrimonial or clientelist manner by a charismatic leader and his administrative cadre (Haggard and Kaufman, 2016b, 2016a; Mazzuca, 2012; Haggard and Kaufman, 2012), or because the national elite accumulates unequally distributed resources while repressing the opposition and population to maintain power (Gerschewski, 2023a, 2023b, 2013; Tanneberg, 2020; Coppedge, 2017). Both dynamics have been described in two studies on how democratic regimes sustain themselves, transform themselves into a hybrid form of democracy, or definitively transform into an autocratic regime (Hellmeier et al., 2021; Maerz et al., 2023; Levitsky, 2004).

In the case of Ecuador, it is important to look in detail not only at the variables linked to political elites, especially those linked to the head of government, but also in public opinion, which is sensitive to socio-political changes within the country. With regard to the former, local intellectuals have shown the strong weight of presidential formation in the structure of the state (Montufar, 2016; Montufar, 2022; Ayala, 1982), and its effects have also been described in the so-called third wave of autocratization (Lührmann, 2019; Hellmeier et al., 2021), although the characteristics of this socio-political process had previously been mentioned even with references to personalist and populist leadership (de la Torre, 2020, 2017, 2013; Freidenberg, 2018; Freidenberg, 2012), as well as constitutional changes that promoted greater presidentialism in the region (Alcántara et al., 2018b; Alcántara et al., 2018a).

On the second aspect, public opinion, the publications of Latin American colleagues have contributed to great descriptions of the perception of regional leaderships and support for democracy or authoritarian and unlimited leaderships (Paul, 2022), in the report on the population that prefers this type of leader at the head of government, 34% of Ecuadorians would have supported him in 2022 (Paul, 2022, 2–3), although it should be noted that those with more education are more resistant to authoritarian personalities, while those who feel safer in their neighborhoods tend to support strong leaders.

As of 2024, Ecuador has gone through one of the most violent periods in its recent history, transitioning from an "island of peace" to a nation grappling with significant internal conflict. This study aims to contextualize this shift, including the rise in intentional violent deaths linked to organized crime and the occurrence of massacres within prisons (Pontón, 2022), which has led the government of President Daniel Noboa to declare an internal (not international) armed conflict based on legal reforms to give greater power to the Ecuadorian armed forces in the face of transnational organized crime (Andrade-Vásquez, 2024). This has even led to hypotheses about a failed state due to the inability to maintain the monopoly of force within its territory, among other legal aspects in crisis (Guerrero et al., 2024).

However, there is a need for detailed monitoring of the citizens who are analyzed in this proposal as constituents who put a governing body in political power to conduct security policy. In this regard, it is necessary to evaluate the role of the citizenry, through public opinion, on the approval of the government of Daniel Noboa with respect to its political and strategic turn on of the armed forces and the possible continuity of that political line in the following years. If the average duration of a strong leader in Ecuador is ten years, it is worth inquiring about what aspects motivate voters to continue with the proposal of the government hand-in-hand with the military that Daniel Noboa proposes in the face of the proposals of the political opposition in the country. There has been no

research on this last aspect owing to the emergence of this phenomenon. This project seeks to fill this gap in the knowledge of public opinion, social capital, government support, and the democratic regime in Ecuador.

The tendency to a vicious circle that repeats itself according to the strength that the leader at the head of government manages to accumulate, followed by a public opinion that supports the Bukele-style “iron fist” style management in El Salvador, which in turn reinforces the need for a strong leadership to confront the insecurity and impunity that has penetrated deeply into the Ecuadorian justice system (Ospina Peralta, 2024). The data from the last 15 years (31 years) show that the relationship between the strong leadership of the head of government and democratic decline is a phenomenon already experienced in Ecuador, and it is worth paying attention to the changes of the new leader who has been able to mobilize state resources to get out of a scenario of high violence. Claiming a victory in the popular consultation of the year 2024 and even daring to violate the Mexican diplomatic headquarters and that public opinion supported him because it was interpreted as a sign of an “iron fist” that the country would need to stop the violence and insecurity that Ecuador is experiencing.

To contrast these historical relationships in the Ecuadorian case, the data from the *World Values Survey*, as well as *Latinobarómetro*, will be reviewed and contrasted with the second half of 2024 with the survey carried out by researchers from the State University of Milagro (UNEMI) to closely monitor the situation and events of Ecuadorian socio-political change. Data from these sources are typically available for the first quarter of each year. Therefore, it is advisable to conduct the analysis after the first quarter to ensure that the most recent and up-to-date information is used for comparison.

5 Conclusion

This research on the perception of security and its relationship with support for the president and democracy in Ecuador is framed in the complex and dynamic socio-political context of the country in 2024. The longitudinal methodology used will make it possible to capture changes and trends over time, providing a detailed view of the attitudes and perceptions of university students residing throughout the national territory. Perceptions of gender and security are anticipated to significantly influence attitudes toward the president and democracy, with potential implications for public policymaking.

This study contributes to the knowledge on how public opinion, especially in contexts of high insecurity, can influence governance and democratic stability. The findings will be valuable for designing strategies that balance the need for security with the strengthening of democratic principles and offer informed guidance for

policymakers in Ecuador. This research highlights the importance of considering citizen perceptions in the construction of policies that effectively respond to the concerns of the population, promoting a safer and more democratic environment.

Ethics statement

Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

JC-A: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MF-H: Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – review & editing. RS: Writing – review & editing. MA: Writing – review & editing. EV: Writing – review & editing. PA-M: Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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