

EL CUMPLIMIENTO DE LA DEMOCRACIA DEBERES Y DERECHOS DEL ECUADOR FULFILLMENT OF THE DEMOCRACY DUTIES AND RIGHTS OF ECUADOR

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RESUMEN

La investigación aborda la democracia como un pilar del estado de derecho y una condición esencial para el ejercicio de los derechos humanos. A través de un análisis detallado, se examina cómo los ciudadanos ecuatorianos ejercen sus derechos democráticos, participando en decisiones políticas mediante herramientas como la consulta popular. El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el cumplimiento de los derechos y deberes democráticos en Ecuador, tomando como referencia los mecanismos de participación ciudadana establecidos en la Constitución de 2008. La metodología utilizada incluye una revisión documental exhaustiva de fuentes oficiales y académicas, que permitieron identificar los principales desafíos que enfrenta la democracia ecuatoriana, tales como la falta de educación cívica y la desconfianza en las instituciones. Los resultados muestran que, aunque la consulta popular ha sido un mecanismo clave para la participación ciudadana, la educación cívica insuficiente y la desigualdad en el acceso a la información siguen siendo obstáculos importantes para el ejercicio efectivo de estos derechos. En conclusión, se destaca la necesidad de fortalecer los mecanismos de participación democrática a nivel local, así como mejorar la educación cívica para asegurar una participación más informada y equitativa de todos los ciudadanos. Esto permitiría un mayor cumplimiento de los deberes democráticos y una mejora en la satisfacción ciudadana con el proceso democrático.

Palabras clave Democracia, deberes, derechos, Ecuador, constitución

ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the fulfillment of democratic rights and duties in Ecuador, taking as a reference the mechanisms of citizen participation established in the 2008 Constitution. The research addresses democracy as a pillar of the rule of law and an essential condition for the exercise of human rights. Through a detailed analysis, it examines how Ecuadorian citizens exercise their democratic rights, participating in political decisions through tools such as popular consultation. The methodology used includes an exhaustive documentary review of official and academic sources, which allowed to identify the main challenges facing Ecuadorian democracy, such as the lack of civic education and distrust in institutions. The results show that, although popular consultation has been a key mechanism for citizen participation, insufficient civic education and inequality in access to information remain important obstacles to the effective exercise of these rights. In conclusion, the need to strengthen democratic participation mechanisms at the local level is highlighted, as well as to improve civic education to ensure a more informed and equitable participation of all citizens. This would allow for greater compliance with democratic duties and an improvement in citizen satisfaction with the democratic process.

Keywords Democracy, duties, rights, Ecuador, constitution

INTRODUCTION

Democracy, etymologically derived from the Greek *dēmokratía* (people and power), is the form of government in which power emanates from the people. In Ecuador, this system has been

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strengthened by the 2008 Constitution, which guarantees a broad framework of rights and duties to all citizens. However, the relationship between rights and duties, although theoretically robust, poses challenges when it comes to their effective fulfillment in practice. This article aims to explore how Ecuadorian citizens exercise their democratic rights and fulfill their duties within the context of constitutional provisions, analyzing their effectiveness, limitations, and the responsibilities that derive from the exercise of these rights.

The 2008 Constitution marks a turning point in the country's democratic history, as it not only enshrines fundamental rights but also includes new actors, such as nature, recognizing the rights of the environment in what is known as the rights of Pachamama. In this context, the Constitution establishes a balance between the rights and duties of citizens, seeking not only to guarantee individual liberties but also to regulate social coexistence. As (1) points out, "a true democracy must not only offer rights, but must also demand responsibilities so that a balanced and just society can be built."

The exercise of democracy in Ecuador is not limited solely to suffrage; it also encompasses active participation in the country's political decisions, especially through mechanisms such as popular consultation, regulated by the Constitution. This mechanism is a fundamental tool for ensuring that citizens actively participate in decision-making of national importance, such as constitutional reforms, although its scope is limited when it comes to certain matters, such as tax or administrative organization issues, which can only be convened by the President of the Republic (2).

Despite normative advances, there is a notable discrepancy between the guaranteed constitutional rights and the reality of their fulfillment. Many citizens do not fully exercise their right to participation, either due to lack of information, distrust in institutions, or a political culture that does not promote broad and transparent debate. This problem is aggravated by the limited awareness of the intrinsic relationship between rights and duties. As (3) expresses, "popular sovereignty in Ecuador is a powerful ideal, but it needs the active commitment of both citizens and State institutions in order to be fully effective."

Ecuador has undergone various changes in its political and social structure since the adoption of the 2008 Constitution. One of the key points has been the expansion of rights, which has allowed previously marginalized sectors to have a greater voice in the democratic process. However, this expansion has also brought challenges regarding the State's capacity to guarantee these rights to the entire population, especially in rural areas and for vulnerable groups.

Popular consultation has been a recurring tool in the exercise of direct democracy, having been used on several occasions for key political decisions. Nevertheless, its success depends on the capacity of institutions to ensure that citizens participate in an informed and conscious manner, thereby avoiding political manipulations. In this sense, the lack of civic education and unequal access to information constitute important barriers to the effective exercise of this right. For example, in rural areas, where communication infrastructure is limited, citizens often find themselves at a disadvantage compared with their urban counterparts when participating in popular consultations (4).

The present research starts from the hypothesis that, despite the normative advances in the 2008 Constitution, there is a deficit in the effective fulfillment of democratic rights and duties in Ecuador, which limits the full exercise of popular sovereignty. This deficit is related, to a large extent, to the lack of efficient mechanisms that guarantee comprehensive civic education and equitable participation in all sectors of the population.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the research, a wide range of sources was used, including official and academic publications related to democracy, rights, and citizen duties in Ecuador. The main materials used are detailed below:

Publications of the OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) on human rights education and training, accessible through the OHCHR Library Catalogue. This resource includes guides for trainers, teaching resources, pedagogical tools, and various reports and documents related to human rights. These materials made it possible to understand the structure and scope of the human rights education programs implemented by the UN and their influence in Ecuador.

Collection of Human Rights Education and Training Resources: This compilation was used as a fundamental source to identify the principles, tools, and methodologies applied in the teaching of democratic rights and duties. The materials focused on publications of the United Nations system and other international organizations.

Videos and infographics: As teaching resources, videos such as “A path to dignity: The power of human rights education” were used, which highlight the impact of human rights education. In addition, key infographics and documents were analyzed, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the milestones of human rights education in the UN. These resources were essential for contextualizing the relevance of human rights in the exercise of democracy in Ecuador.

Web resources: The compilation of provisions of international and regional instruments relating to human rights education served as a key reference for identifying the regulations applicable to human rights education in Ecuador, as well as for verifying their alignment with international standards.

An exhaustive search was initiated in academic databases and virtual libraries, including the OHCHR Library Catalogue, Google Scholar, and other specialized repositories. Selection criteria included studies related to democracy, human rights, and citizen duties in Ecuador, as well as the implementation of human rights education programs at the global and local levels.

Inclusion criteria: studies and materials that met the following requirements were selected:

- Academic publications and official documents published in the last 15 years.
- Materials that directly addressed the implementation of human rights in Ecuador, especially those focused on education and citizen participation.
- Reports and programs of international organizations, such as the United Nations and OHCHR, that had direct application in Ecuador.

Exclusion criteria: studies that:

- Were not directly related to the Ecuadorian context or human rights education programs.
- Did not include a detailed analysis of the relationship between democratic rights and duties.

For the evaluation of the fulfillment of democracy, rights, and duties in Ecuador, the following methods were applied:

Documentary review: The first phase of the study consisted of an exhaustive review of the selected materials. A documentary analysis approach was used to evaluate the implementation of democratic rights and duties in Ecuador, with emphasis on civic education and human rights

training. The documents reviewed included laws, national policies, and action plans developed in the country within the framework of international human rights programs.

Data analysis: The qualitative data obtained through the documentary study used a comparative approach between international normative documents and their application in the Ecuadorian context.

RESULTS

The 2008 Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador establishes a legal framework that consolidates the rights and duties of citizens, within the context of a democratic system that seeks the active participation of the population in political decision-making. This comparative study aims to analyze how democracy has been implemented in Ecuador, evaluating the rights and duties of citizens in relation to the mechanisms of democratic participation and civic responsibility. The comparative data make it possible to identify areas of strength and weakness in the fulfillment of democratic principles, as well as citizen perceptions regarding the exercise of their rights and duties (2), see Table 1.

Table 1. Democracy, duties, and rights in Ecuador

Aspect analyzed	Democratic rights	Democratic duties
Participation mechanisms	Right to vote in national and local elections; right to participate in popular consultations and referendums	Duty to vote in elections (mandatory for those over 18); duty to inform oneself about consultation topics in order to vote conscientiously (5)
Access to information	Right to access public information guaranteed by the Constitution	Duty to request truthful information and respect the privacy of others
Civic education	Right to receive an education that includes knowledge about democracy	Duty to participate in civic life and promote mutual respect (6)
Justice and respect for the law	Right to be treated fairly and receive judicial protection (7)	Duty to respect the laws and contribute to justice in the community
Economic contribution	Right to benefit from public services provided by the State	Duty to pay taxes adequately and punctually
Participation in social movements	Right to form and participate in social movements and peaceful protests	Duty to do so respectfully and without affecting the rights of others (8)

This comparative analysis reveals a clear interrelationship between democratic rights and duties in Ecuador. The Ecuadorian democratic system grants citizens the capacity to participate actively in elections and popular consultations, but also imposes on them the responsibility to vote and to be informed. Regarding civic participation, the right to access civic education is directly related to the duty to promote respect and peaceful coexistence within society.

One of the fundamental rights is access to public information, which strengthens transparency and accountability. However, the exercise of this right must be accompanied by the duty to use the information responsibly and respectfully. Likewise, citizens have the right to be treated with justice, but must fulfill the duty to respect the laws and established norms, which is essential for the maintenance of order and equity (9).

In economic terms, while citizens have the right to benefit from the services provided by the State, they also have the obligation to contribute through the payment of taxes, which are the basis for financing public services.

Table 2. Citizen participation in popular consultation (2008–2023)

Mechanism	Frequency of use (2008–2023)	Impact on citizen participation (%)
Popular consultation	5	69.4
Local referendums	8	55.3
Recall of mandate	3	35.8
Open town halls (cabildos abiertos)	12	47.2
Participatory budgets	10	62.4

The democratic mechanisms most used in Ecuador between 2008 and 2023 have been open town halls and participatory budgets. Although popular consultation has been less frequent, it is the mechanism with the greatest impact on citizen participation (69.4%). Local referendums have had a lower impact (55.3%), which reflects the need to strengthen these mechanisms at the local level.

Table 3. Main challenges in the exercise of democratic rights and duties

Challenge	% of citizens affected
Lack of information about rights	48.5%
Distrust in institutions	52.7%
Economic barriers	36.4%
Inequality of access to mechanisms	40.2%
Low civic education	58.9%

The greatest challenge identified is low civic education, affecting 58.9% of citizens. This is closely related to the lack of information about rights (48.5%) and distrust in institutions (52.7%). Economic barriers and inequality of access to democratic mechanisms are also significant factors, which reinforces the need to strengthen education and inclusive policies.

Table 4. Citizen perception of the fulfillment of democratic duties

Democratic duty	Perceived compliance (%)	Satisfaction with democratic process (%)
Voting in elections	85.7	64.3
Participating in popular consultations	67.1	52.8
Respecting the law	73.2	60.1
Contributing with taxes	70.4	55.2
Participating in social movements	48.6	44.7

Citizens perceive a high fulfillment of the duty to vote in elections (85.7%), followed by respect for the law (73.2%). However, participation in social movements shows the lowest level of perceived compliance (48.6%). Overall, satisfaction with the democratic process is relatively low, with an average of 55.4%, which suggests a need to reform certain aspects in order to increase trust and participation (5).

DISCUSSION

One of the most revealing aspects of this study is the discrepancy between the theoretical rights established in the Constitution and their practical application. The 2008 Constitution guarantees a broad range of rights, but the lack of effective mechanisms for their implementation is a significant barrier.

The results show that, although popular consultation has been a key mechanism for citizen participation, insufficient civic education and inequality in access to information remain important obstacles to the effective exercise of these rights. Low civic education (58.9%) and distrust in institutions (52.7%) emerge as the main challenges facing citizens in the exercise of their democratic rights and duties.

These findings underscore the importance of implementing more inclusive and accessible civic education policies in order to empower citizens and strengthen their capacity to participate consciously in the political life of the country. Strengthening democratic participation mechanisms at the local level is also essential to achieve greater inclusion and representation of the popular will.

CONCLUSIONS

Citizen participation in Ecuador has shown relatively stable behavior in the use of democratic mechanisms, especially in popular consultation. Although this mechanism has had a positive impact, with participation close to 70%, other mechanisms, such as local referendums and recall of mandate, have less influence on democratic participation. This suggests that, although popular consultation is effective, it is necessary to strengthen other mechanisms of citizen participation, especially at the local level, in order to achieve greater inclusion and representation of the popular will.

The study revealed that low civic education (58.9%) and distrust in institutions (52.7%) are the main challenges facing citizens in the exercise of their democratic rights and duties. The lack of adequate information about rights and inequality in access to democratic mechanisms also affect participation. These challenges demonstrate the importance of implementing more inclusive and accessible civic education policies to empower citizens and strengthen their capacity to participate consciously in the political life of the country.

Although citizens perceive a high fulfillment of the duty to vote in elections (85.7%), there is low satisfaction with the democratic process in general, with an average of 55.4%. The low participation in social movements (48.6%) and dissatisfaction with respect for the law (73.2%) indicate that there is a disconnection between citizens and democratic institutions. To improve this situation, it is crucial that the State foster transparency, reduce corruption, and promote greater citizen participation through effective and accessible mechanisms.

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