Political Trust and Ecological Crisis Perceptions in Developing Economies: Evidence from Ecuador

Marija Verner

ABSTRACT

Could an individual's perception of the possibility of a future ecological crisis be linked to their level of political trust? Studies of environmental attitudes have identified political trust as an important predictor of support for environmental taxation or risk perceptions surrounding specific local environmental hazards, but less is known about its role when environmental risks are perceived as diffuse and distant. Using original survey data from Ecuador, this article finds that political distrust predicts heightened ecological crisis perceptions and that higher educational attainment intensifies this relationship. A follow-up analysis of the AmericasBarometer's Ecuador survey shows that political distrust also predicts higher concern about climate change. These findings suggest that when evaluations of political institutions reflect perceptions of environmental risks, individuals blame the government for environmental failures. The implications of this study are particularly relevant for political institutions in developing economies, where the public sector often spearheads development efforts.

Keywords: Political trust, risk perceptions, environmental attitudes, climate change attitudes, survey research, Ecuador

As media coverage of extreme weather events and bleak future predictions from climate scientists become increasingly frequent, it is not surprising that phrases such as "environmental catastrophe" and "climate crisis" have become more prevalent in public discourse. However, not all individuals conform to these narratives. What, then, motivates people to catastrophize environmental problems? To address this question, we must examine what factors contribute to making people feel secure from environmental risks. Specifically, what is the relationship between trust in government and environmental risk perceptions?

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Previous studies have shown that people who trust government institutions are less concerned about hazardous waste sites (Bord and O'Connor 1992; Liu et al. 2020), genetically modified foods (Harrison et al. 2004), or the environmental impacts of aquaculture development (Mazur and Curtis 2006). In these situations, the objects of environmental concern are specific and often local in nature. However, it remains unclear whether trust in government plays a role in shaping perceptions of environmental risks that are diffuse and uncertain, particularly those that may unfold only in the distant future.

In contexts where tensions between the environment and development persist, people's trust in the government plays a crucial role in shaping their perceptions of the future of environmental protection. When individuals lack trust in political institutions, they tend to blame them for environmental failures, which can create a sense of pessimism about the prospects for environmental sustainability. This tendency is even stronger among more educated individuals, who closely monitor the government's activities and are more likely to prioritize environmental issues. Conversely, people with higher trust in political institutions, often those with higher self-ascribed social status, tend to be less concerned about the future of the environment. This suggests that the government's developmental orientation may be serving the interests of certain groups over others. This argument is particularly relevant for societies in which governments are responsible for leading development efforts.

This article draws on both original and secondary survey data from Ecuador, which is a great case for examining the connections between political trust and perceptions of environmental crisis. It is a middle-income (World Bank n.d.b) economy where natural resource extraction is a key driver of economic development. In 2020, natural resource rents in Ecuador accounted for 4.8 percent of its total GDP, an extreme drop from a peak of 18.9 percent in 2006 but still among the highest figures in South America, second only to Guyana (19.2 percent) and Suriname (8.1 percent) (World Bank n.d.a). The country's reliance on natural resource extraction exposes it to a range of environmental challenges, including deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution. These challenges are compounded by the country's vulnerability to climate change (ND-GAIN 2020), which has led to more frequent and more intense extreme weather events, such as floods, landslides, and droughts. These factors have played a significant role in shaping Ecuador's environmental landscape and fostering a vibrant environmental justice movement.

The original Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics in Ecuador survey that was carried out in March 2022 (Moncagatta et al 2022) allowed me to investigate the characteristics of Ecuadorians that are most concerned about the possibility of an ecological crisis. The survey findings reveal that a lack of trust in various political institutions is a strong predictor of heightened ecological crisis perceptions. To corroborate these results, I conducted a follow-up analysis using the AmericasBarometer 2018/2019 Ecuador survey to test how political trust predicts concern about climate change. The follow-up analysis confirms the earlier

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findings: respondents with low levels of trust in political institutions are also more likely to take climate change seriously. Furthermore, the analysis reveals an interactive effect between an index of trust in different political institutions and educational attainment: respondents with low levels of government trust and high levels of education are more likely to be concerned about the possibility of an ecocrisis. These conditional effects are observable only at low levels of political trust and do not hold when political trust is high.

This article makes two important contributions to the literature. First, unlike previous studies that focused on specific and often localized environmental hazards, this one investigates how political trust predicts a broader array of perceptions of the environmental crisis. These perceptions do not outline specific risks or harms that would make it easier to assign responsibility to political authorities. Nevertheless, the study finds that deep distrust in state institutions is associated with heightened risk perceptions of an environmental crisis, whatever that means for respondents.

Second, while previous studies have mainly focused on WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) societies (Bord and O'Connor 1992; Carlton and Jacobson 2013; Fairbrother 2017b; Harring and Jagers 2013; Harrison et al. 2004; Kallbekken and Sælen 2011; Kim et al. 2013; Konisky et al. 2008; Liu et al. 2020; Mazur and Curtis 2006; Tjernström and Tietenberg 2008), this study presents findings from a middle-income economy that operates in a different discursive landscape, characterized by vulnerability to climate change and debates on unequal global contributions to it (Bush and Clayton 2023; Eisenstadt and West 2017a, b). Ecuador's particular context highlights the need to expand research on the relationship between political trust and environmental attitudes to developing countries that face significant economic development choices with potentially far-reaching global consequences (Hochstetler 2020). This study provides insights into the attitudes and concerns of individuals who live in contexts in which governments lead development efforts by oftentimes relying on natural resources.

The article is organized as follows. It begins with a review of the literature on the relationship between political trust and environmental attitudes and a discussion of the environmental politics landscape in Ecuador. Based on this background, the study presents hypotheses on the relationship between political trust and ecological crisis perceptions, followed by an analysis of survey data and a discussion of the results.

Political Trust and Environmental Attitudes

Political trust is a complex and multidimensional concept that reflects people's perceptions of how well political institutions function (Newton 2007, 344). In other words, political trust is the extent to which people perceive that political institutions are benevolent and trustworthy (Tam 2019, 2). Trust is a relationship between two parties, in which one party willingly exposes its vulnerability to the other party, which may have the power to cause harm or breach that trust. Trust

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is rarely absolute, but instead selectively given to certain individuals or entities within particular domains (Levi and Stoker 2000, 476).

Political distrust is a consequence of long-term policy failure and is not generated overnight (McLaren 2012, 201). It is not always easy to distinguish between political trust as a set of orientations toward specific political parties and politicians (especially those in power at the time the respondents take a survey) and political trust as a set of more general orientations toward the workings of a political system (McLaren 2012, 201–2). This is not necessarily problematic for this article, as it examines both long-term and recent policy issues in Ecuador that have potentially raised environmental concerns. Nevertheless, political trust is an important concept for political scientists because it reflects general attitudes toward political stability (Newton 2007) and has significant implications for democracy (Mishler and Rose 2001).

The connection between political trust and environmental attitudes is important because, "Distrust lies at the heart of the serious crisis of sustainability that humanity is failing to address, insofar as distrust of environmental scientists, communicators, and policymakers are all undermining public demand for better public policies" (Fairbrother 2017a, 1). However, the literature has not always found consistent associations between political trust and environmental attitudes. For example, a comparative analysis of 33 nations showed that people who trusted their governments were more likely to be concerned about the environment but that the association vanished once the model imputed missing income data (Franzen and Vogl 2013, 1004). This finding highlights the role of wealth in environmental attitudes and supports the idea that worldwide, they are often seen as luxury attitudes. Previous survey work in Ecuador challenged this classic postmaterialist explanation by demonstrating that income does not predict climate change beliefs and environmental concerns (Eisenstadt and West 2017a, b, 2019).

A parallel analysis in Franzen and Vogl's study, which focused on the United States, did not find any effects of government trust on environmental concern either (2013, 1004). Moreover, the effects of government trust on pro-environmental attitudes can vary depending on the issue type and scale (e.g., local, national, or global) (Konisky et al. 2008). For example, individuals with higher political confidence were more likely to address pollution and global issues but not resource scarcity and local or national issues (Konisky et al. 2008). However, trust in government, coupled with the openness and accessibility of information in a society, can increase concern about climate change, as the study of 26 countries showed (Tjernström and Tietenberg 2008). Similarly, political distrust can drive environmental activism in societies with facilitative political opportunity structures; that is, more democratic societies and societies with a high density of environmental NGOs (Tam 2019).

The link between political trust and attitudes toward environmental taxation has been well established in the literature. Studies have shown that political trust is positively associated with support for environmental taxation as a policy instrument (Harring and Jagers 2013; Kallbekken and Sælen 2011; Kim et al. 2013). Moreover, experimental evidence has linked cynicism, a specific dimension

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of political trust measuring the perception that public officials lack honesty and integrity, with willingness to pay environmental taxes. Specifically, people who felt that public officials lacked integrity were less likely to support pro-environmental government measures, compared to those who had faith in the integrity of politicians (Fairbrother 2017b). In these cases, institutional trust is crucial because citizens want to be confident that their financial contributions will be used efficiently in redistributive processes.

The relationship between government trust and environmental attitudes is also evident when individuals are asked about specific environmental risk perceptions. Trust in government was a major factor in explaining individual concern about a local hazardous waste site and its health implications in the United States (Bord and O'Connor 1992). Australians with high levels of trust in government institutions were less worried about the environmental risks associated with aquafarming (Mazur and Curtis 2006). Similarly, urban consumers in Italy and the United States who trusted government agencies in control of genetically modified foods felt safer about consuming these foods (Harrison et al. 2004). In China, those who trusted the government more were less concerned about chemical hazards than those who trusted the government less (Liu et al. 2020). And in Florida, individuals with higher levels of trust in government institutions had lower climate-related coastal environmental risk perceptions (Carlton and Jacobson 2013).

Political trust can play a significant role in people's perception of the government's ability to take action on environmental issues (Tam 2019, 2). Reacting to early summer 2022 extreme weather events in the United States (floods in Montana, wildfires in New Mexico, drought in Nevada, and others), meteorologist Andrew Hoell remarked, "The U.S. has a *certain* amount of capacity to cope with extreme events" (Canon 2022, emphasis added).

Government capacity to address environmental issues varies across different countries. Even the most capable governments may face challenges when they need to address multiple environmental problems simultaneously, as seen in the concurrent and intensifying extreme weather events in the United States (Canon 2022). However, when trust in government and its capacity is strong, individuals may not feel the need to worry as much about environmental problems (Tam 2019, 3).

These research examples have largely focused on specific, localized environmental hazards, and less is known about how trust in government shapes perceptions of abstract and distant environmental risks. Additionally, it is crucial to assess the generalizability of these findings to other contexts, especially less affluent ones. Traditional explanations of environmental attitudes may have limited relevance in developing countries, which are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change than developed countries (Eisenstadt and West 2017b, 232). In low- and middle-income economies, individuals tend to be more concerned about climate change than those in high-income economies, as they perceive the benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation to be high and involve low costs, whereas those in wealthy countries see low benefits but high costs (Bush and Clayton 2023). Developing countries are also undergoing significant economic transformations,

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including energy source choices, and are set to become major contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions in the future (Hochstetler 2020, 2). As a result, understanding the role of political trust in shaping environmental attitudes in these contexts is crucial for developing effective environmental policies.

Environmental Politics in Ecuador

According to recent comparative metrics, Ecuador's environmental performance has been mediocre overall and poor in specific subindicators. In 2022, Ecuador's Environmental Performance Index (EPI, Wolf et al. 2022) was 46.5, ranking it 66th out of 180 countries (higher scores mean better performance). The EPI assesses countries based on their climate, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality policy objectives. To provide some context, Denmark, the highest-ranking EPI country, scored 77.9, while India, the lowest-ranking country, scored 18.9. However, Ecuador's performance is particularly weak in several specific areas of environmental quality. The country is ranked 141st based on the quality of water resources, 138th on the quality of agriculture, and 81st on the quality of sanitation and drinking water (Wolf et al. 2022, xii, 163, 153, 92). In contrast, other nations in the region—Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay—are among the top global performers in agriculture quality (Wolf et al. 2022, 142).

The Complexity of Issues and Interests

Environmental issues are a major concern for the public in Ecuador. The country is particularly susceptible to extreme weather and seismic events, such as floods, landslides, droughts, and earthquakes. Almost half (about 46 percent) of average natural hazard occurrences in Ecuador between 1980 and 2020 were hydrological events that included floods or landslides (World Bank n.d.b), whose frequency and intensity are linked to climate change. The negative impact of climate change on agricultural productivity, particularly in the highlands, is another area of worry (Cáceres-Arteaga et al. 2020; Fernández et al. 2015), aggravated by the absence of land tenure in agricultural areas and lack of government-funded programs for managing the environment and climate change (Fernández et al. 2015).

Ecuador's extractivist model of development has further exacerbated environmental concerns (Chiasson-LeBel 2016). Environmental hazards and lived experiences in extractive areas have raised concerns about safety, health, and environmental quality in communities (Eisenstadt and West 2017b, 2019). Recent events have also added to these concerns. For instance, the nation's protected Amazon rainforest in the Cayambe-Coca National Park experienced a major oil spill in January 2022. The government has initiated administrative and legal actions against the private company that owns the pipeline, OCP Ecuador (*Al Jazeera* 2022), but the outcome of these actions remained unclear at the time of writing this article.

Moreover, the government has been battling illegal mining, having declared it a national security threat because of its alleged connections with arms trafficking and

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money laundering (Valencia 2023). For instance, as of March 2023, there were reports of violence following illegal mining in Imbabura Province in northern Ecuador. Local media reported that a military and police convoy came under fire as a patrol halted a truck transporting gold that had been illegally mined (Bnamericas 2023). Poor water and agricultural quality, extreme weather events, ecological hazards, violence related to resource extraction, and other problems make environmental issues a pressing concern for Ecuador.

The landscape of environmental politics in Ecuador consists of multiple competing groups and interests with different visions regarding an array of interconnected issues, including natural resource governance, economic development, environmental protection, and the rights of Indigenous peoples and rural communities. Eisenstadt and West (2019) claim that three different sets of actors exist that represent Ecuador's environmental discourse: rural, peasant, and Indigenous communities that prefer to continue living off the land; government institutions and agencies that use pro-environmental rhetoric but also rely on natural resource revenue; and public intellectuals and Indigenous groups who argue for environmental protection as a way of life. This political and cultural concept is known as *buen vivir* (harmonious living) or *sumak kawsay* in Quechua (Eisenstadt and West 2019, 2). The authors argue that considering the interests these actors articulate creates a more accurate and nuanced picture of environmental politics in Ecuador than the traditional framing of a trade-off between environmental protection and economic development.

Important parts of civil society in Ecuador have actively supported environmental causes, considering them an integral part of the social justice movement.[1] Activists have focused on issues such as Indigenous rights, environmental pollution, exploitation of workers, foreign ownership, territorial autonomy, or local self-governance, depending on the circumstances, or a combination of these factors, taking an anti-extractve stance (Riofrancos 2020, 5). These organized groups and individuals often come from rural, peasant, and Indigenous communities, which they claim to represent. Meanwhile, other groups in society, such as politicians and bureaucrats, have viewed resource extraction as a matter of national interest in lifting the country out of poverty. However, the prevalence of environmental conflicts, failed sustainability reforms, and equity concerns signals that institutions have failed to address environmental injustice (Méndez-Barrientos 2021). Importantly, the conflict between the extractive state and Indigenous communities in Ecuador is not a unique phenomenon but a common instance in many developing nations, including neighboring Bolivia and Peru, as well as African countries, such as Nigeria and Kenya.

Rafael Correa and Resource Nationalism

The tenure of Rafael Correa (2007–2017)—who came to power during the late stage of Latin America's Pink Tide—was critical in shaping the discourse of environmental politics in Ecuador.[2] During Correa's presidency, the country witnessed the

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development of the *Revolución Ciudadana* (Citizens' Revolution) movement. At that time, a new constituent assembly was established, a new constitution that proclaimed "the rights of nature" was written, and approximately one hundred pieces of legislation addressing the fundamental components of the political system were passed (Sánchez and Pachano 2020, 1–2). The 2007–8 Constituent Assembly provided a platform for the emergence of two political projects, anti-extractvism and radical resource nationalism, which eventually became mutually exclusive positions (Riofrancos 2020, 50–52).

Correa, as an advocate of resource nationalism (Riofrancos 2020), avidly challenged local antimining resistance (Arce et al. 2022, 191). His economic development and agrarian policies focused on national gains and prioritized big players, leaving out rural communities, most of which formed the basis of the Indigenous movement. For instance, despite Correa's rhetoric in support of polycentric water resource management, his tenure saw an increase in centralization and bureaucratization of water management in Ecuador.[3] Local institutions that regulated water irrigation experienced government intrusion, and water user collectives and organizations were co-opted (Boelens et al. 2015, 289). Overall, environmental groups kept extensively battling Correa's mining, oil, and other extractive policies (Becker 2013, 48).

For a better understanding of the government's discourse on the environment in Ecuador, two other events related to oil extraction that occurred during Rafael Correa's administration are significant. During Correa's presidency, Ecuador was involved in a legal battle with the US multinational Chevron over environmental damage caused by the oil company Texaco, which Chevron later acquired. The lawsuit was first filed in 1993 by local residents, who accused Texaco of polluting the rainforest in northeast Ecuador with toxic wastewater and crude oil. As the story developed, Chevron argued that the judgment against it was obtained through fraud, bribery, and corruption, and accused the plaintiffs' legal team of paying bribes in the 2011 Ecuador Supreme Court ruling. Correa supported the plaintiffs' case, but critics accused him of using the case for political purposes (BBC News 2018).

Next, in 2007, Rafael Correa announced the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, which called for leaving an estimated 850 million barrels of untapped Amazon crude in the ground in the Ishpingo, Tambococha, and Tiputini oil fields, located inside Yasuni National Park. In return for preserving the wilderness, preventing an estimated 410 million tons of carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere, and safeguarding the isolated Waorani Indigenous groups, Ecuador had sought $3.6 billion in compensation from developed countries, roughly half the revenues the country would have accrued from exploiting the resource. However, in 2013, Correa abandoned the initiative, leading to an outcry from environmentalists, who hailed it as a historic approach to weaning industrial society from its dependence on fossil fuels (Wallace 2013). Thus Correa's resource politics became marked with corruption and false promises.

Although the extractivist model promoted by the Ecuadorian government has received its fair share of criticism, it is also important to acknowledge another

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view. While the model has not achieved the promised harmonious living or alleviated Ecuadorians' environmental concerns (Eisenstadt and West 2017b, 233), natural resource revenue has allowed the government to promote economic development and reduce social inequality. Moreover, they achieved this without introducing redistributive policies that would risk losing the support of the middle class (Riofrancos 2020).

The Indigenous Movement

Ecuador is home to about one million Indigenous peoples, who constitute 7 percent of the country's total population (CEPAL 2014) and a vibrant Indigenous movement. This movement, however, is not homogeneous; it comprises various groups that come together under the umbrella of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE).

The political wing of CONAIE, the Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement (or Pachakutik for short) entered politics in 1996. In its electoral platforms, the party highlights the importance of sustainable and equitable resource use (Becker 2008, 167). In 2002, the movement entered into a controversial partnership with ex-colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, who won the presidency in a runoff election (Beck and Mijeski 2006). In 2000, Gutiérrez had led a popular uprising against then-president Jamil Mahuad, who was accused of implementing neoliberal economic policies that hurt the poor. Gutiérrez's protests were successful, and Mahuad was removed from office, but Gutiérrez himself would later face similar accusations of betraying his progressive base and attempting to consolidate power, leading to his own ouster in 2005.

The Indigenous movement has also won many local elections and has given rise to Indigenous-led municipalities in Ecuador (Radcliffe et al. 2002). In 2006, Pachakutik, CONAIE, and Ecuarunari (CONAIE's highland branch) debated whether to form a political alliance with Rafael Correa or to run an independent candidate. Negotiations with Correa ended when he refused to participate in a primary process with Pachakutik candidates, so ultimately, the Indigenous political party nominated Luis Macas, a Quechua from the Andes region.

While Pachakutik firmly advocates for environmental preservation, the greater Indigenous movement has taken divergent positions in contentious politics. In the 2019 October mobilizations, the Indigenous movement took an anti-environmental stance when it protested against the government's decision to end fuel subsidies that cost the government US$1.3 billion annually. The subsidies were eliminated to shore up Ecuador's economy, but the decision led to a rise in oil prices and clashes between protesters and riot police. The president declared a two-month national emergency and accused his opponents of attempting a coup (BBC News 2019).[4]

One example of more traditional pro-environmental stances taken by the Indigenous movement in Ecuador is the 2008 march to the Ecuadorian National Assembly in Quito by Indigenous people and CONAIE to protest the mining law

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proposed by Correa. The law expanded state power over foreign mining corporations, a win for resource nationalists, but also expanded mining activities, which triggered groups' taking an anti-extractve stance (Riofrancos 2020). The protests were met by the police force and pepper spray, which kept the protesters away from the legislators (Denvir 2009; Reuters 2008).

Another notable mobilization took place in 2019, when Waorani Indigenous Ecuadorians and their supporters, organized by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), gathered at the National Assembly Building to protest, through a sit-in, the Brazilian government's developmental plans in the Amazon. CONFENIAE's president, Marlon Vargas, firmly declared, "In Ecuador, extraction is the worst enemy of the Amazon peoples and nationalities" (EFE News Services 2019).

In addition, in June 2022, Indigenous Ecuadorians and CONAIE protested conservative president Guillermo Lasso's economic policies with roadblocks. The protest demands were wide-ranging, but some of them focused on stopping additional mining and oil development projects.

While it may seem obvious, it is still important to note that frequent mobilizations for environmental causes in Ecuador suggest that many Ecuadorians hold their government institutions responsible for environmental failures and seek appropriate actions. However, it is crucial to recognize the nuanced attitudes and environmental perspectives within the Indigenous movement and to avoid essentializing Indigenous identities while expecting them to be nature stewards in all circumstances.

Theory and Hypotheses

I argue that the logic of how trust in national government relates to risk perceptions of localized environmental hazards will extend to risk perceptions of more abstract or distant harms. An individual's trust in political institutions may reflect their perception of the government's ability to deliver public goods, such as a high-quality environment in a general sense (Franzen and Vogl 2013, 1004). The provision of a clean and healthy environment is the responsibility of governments, which are expected to use rules, monitoring, enforcement, and, if necessary, punishment to ensure its protection (Bickers and Williams 2001; Ostrom 1998).

Modern environmental movements encourage and celebrate individual initiatives in preserving the global commons but also argue that such initiatives are limited without the decisive actions of large actors, primarily governments and major business corporations. This is because individual cooperation in managing shared resources, as in the tragedy of the commons, can be limited without government intervention, which can involve control mechanisms and privatization policies (Ostrom 1990).[5] It is also critical to consider scenarios in which citizens could potentially be at risk from the actions or lack of action of political authorities or institutions, compelling them to address the question of trust (Levi and Stoker 2000, 495). Therefore, the logic of how trust in national government relates to

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risk perceptions of localized environmental hazards is likely to extend to considerations of more abstract or distant harms pertaining to the evaluations of future environmental conditions, particularly when the government's responsibility for economic development is taken into account.

This theory focuses primarily on nations where the government plays a leading role in both development and resource extraction and where the government's development strategy is subject to conflict. This is because trust in the government is seen as indicating either agreement or perceived benefits from the government's approach to development. In developed countries, conversely, private companies are seen as primarily responsible for economic growth. In Ecuador, the Revolución Ciudadana movement led by Correa emphasized the transformation of the state into the key driver of economic activity, with the aim of directing every aspect rather than just regulating it. The movement's supporters sought to promote redistribution and reduce the income gap as their main objectives (Sánchez and Pachano 2020a, 5). The *buen vivir* concept was meant to serve as a model for structural transformation, aimed at transitioning from the extractivist form of the primary export model to the post-extractivist form of the multiexport model. The ultimate goal was to achieve a way of life that was in harmony with the environment (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2020, 254).

Observing how governments balance economic development and environmental protection can lead individuals to develop long-term abstract environmental concerns. Many developing countries end up following the so-called grow now, clean up later approach to economic development. While this framing may appear simplistic given the multifaceted nature of environmental justice issues (Eisenstadt and West 2019), it succinctly summarizes the tensions that arise when societal goals of economic development and environmental protection conflict. The Environmental Justice Atlas (EJOLT n.d.) reported 63 environmental conflicts related to fossil fuels, mining, land rights, and other environmental issues in Ecuador at the time of writing this article. By comparison, the numbers of environmental conflicts documented in other countries with similar population sizes are much lower, with 16 in Senegal, 15 in Romania, 7 in Kazakhstan, and 5 in the Netherlands (EJOLT n.d.).

The active scene of contentious politics over the environment and economic development, coupled with geographic and economic vulnerability to climate change, creates fertile ground for the public to develop long-term worries about environmental risks. People who value the environment perceive the situation as unjust and attribute blame to key social actors, such as governments and corporations (Stern and Dietz 1994, 80). Broadly, environmental governance issues reflect conflicts between civil society and governing agencies over legitimacy and authority (Boelens et al. 2015, 281).

Another source of long-term environmental concerns is climate change. While climate change may feel spatially and temporally distant for many people (Egan and Mullin 2017), this may not be the case in more vulnerable areas in the developing world. Climate change concerns involve more elements of abstraction

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and longer time horizons than risk perceptions of localized environmental hazards or experiences of extreme weather, which are also partially attributed to climate change. However, as argued earlier, they are still closely related to government trust. Respondents in many parts of the world believe that national governments have the primary responsibility to address climate change (Leiserowitz et al. 2022, 14). This is because governments are expected to provide security and order, which are threatened by climate change, as well as to communicate this information openly.

Trust can be viewed as an element of the absence of harm caused by political leaders or institutions. People revise their sense of trust based on their experiences (Newton 2007, 10), and those most concerned about the state of the environment will think that government institutions have failed them (McLaren 2012, 205). This suggests that when individuals feel that their governments are effective in providing public goods, including environmental protection, they are more likely to trust their leaders and institutions. Conversely, when trust in government is low, individuals may perceive environmental risks as more severe, as they may lack confidence in their government's ability to address these issues. This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

H1. *Respondents who distrust the government more will also be more worried about the ecological crisis.*

When citizens lack trust in political institutions, they are more likely to closely monitor and criticize them (Tam 2019, 2). The assessment of trust reflects opinions about an institution's reliability and competence (Levi and Stoker 2000, 476). However, it is important to note that individuals must possess the cognitive capacity and skills to carry out these assessments. High educational attainment has consistently been identified as a strong predictor of pro-environmental attitudes across different countries (Fitzgerald 2019; Franzen and Vogl 2013; Lee et al. 2015). Therefore, the combination of government trust and education may play an important role in shaping perceptions of environmental crises. Because citizens with higher levels of education may possess the necessary skills to make informed judgments about government actions related to environmental issues, education may amplify the relationship between distrust in political institutions and ecological crisis perceptions.

H2. *The positive relationship between distrust in government and worries about the ecological crisis will be stronger among more educated respondents.*

Political trust can also vary depending on the current political leadership. In developing countries, governments may use developmental projects to secure or repay political support, which means that supporters of these parties may view their efforts favorably, even if they come at the expense of the environment. In Ecuador, those who generally trust the current executive and sympathize with Guillermo Lasso's center-right party, Creating Opportunities, may not necessarily

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have heightened environmental crisis perceptions. Similarly, those who trusted the National Assembly and supported the leftist union of the Citizens' Revolution and the Democratic Center, dominant political forces in the National Assembly during the survey fieldwork, may not necessarily view environmental crises as a major issue. While political trust is an important predictor of environmental crisis perceptions, it is essential to consider individuals' political affiliations and the specific parties and politicians they support. This is because political affiliations can influence their trust levels and subsequently, their perceptions of environmental crises.

H3. *Copartisanship will moderate the relationship between trust in specific institutions and environmental risk perceptions.*

Data

Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics in Ecuador is a semirepresentative online survey ($N = 3{,}823$) conducted in Ecuador in March 2022 by the Universidad San Francisco de Quito and partners at the University of Colorado Boulder (Moncagatta et al. 2022). One limitation of the survey is that it is an urban sample: 98 percent of respondents are from the two largest cities in the country, the capital, Quito, and Guayaquil. However, this data collection project allowed for including substantively interesting measures of ecological crisis perceptions that are not available in major public surveys. Besides, most of Ecuador's urban population is located in mountainous and coastal areas, so they are highly vulnerable to climate change; specifically, El Niño events and related disasters like landslides and floods (World Bank n.d.b.).

The dependent variables in this study are three survey items measuring ecological crisis perceptions. The respondents were asked to evaluate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: 1) Humans are severely abusing the environment; 2) The so-called ecological crisis facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated; 3) If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major environmental catastrophe. The answers range from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The source for these survey questions is the 15-item New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) scale (Dunlap et al. 2000). Scholars have been using different subscales of the NEP (Jylhä and Akrami 2015), and the three items used in this study are intended to form a distinct subscale of perceptions about the possibility of an ecological crisis.

Figure 1 shows how the answers to the statements on an ecological crisis are distributed in the sample of urban Ecuadorians. The vast majority of respondents strongly agree (the modal answer) with statements that humans are severely abusing the environment and that if things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major environmental catastrophe. But there is much more variation in answering the question about the exaggeration of an ecological crisis.

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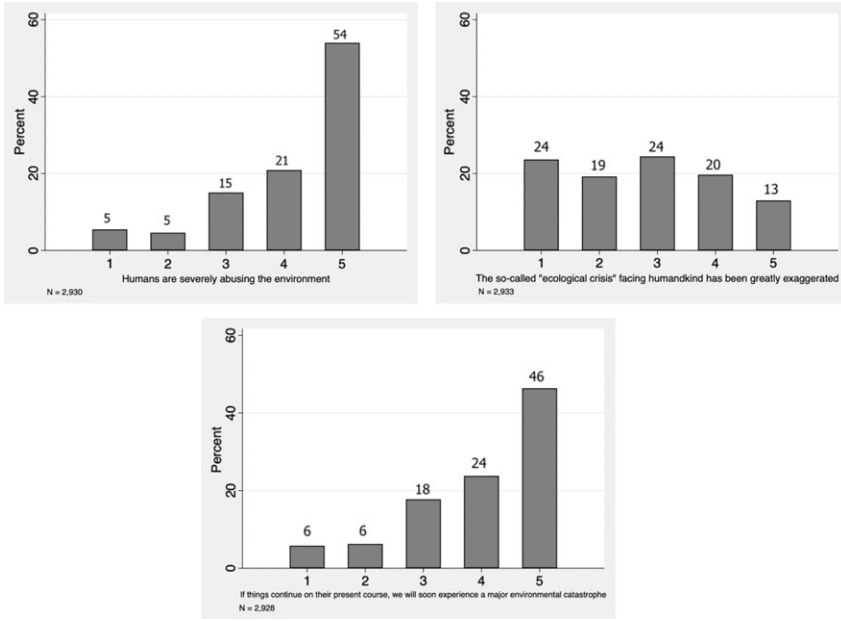
Figure 1. Ecological Crisis Perceptions in Ecuador



Notes: From 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. Numbers above bins are rounded unweighted percentages (missing values were dropped from this analysis). Source: Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust and Politics in Ecuador 2022

Note that this item has deliberately been designed so that lower values would indicate a more pro-environmental worldview to mitigate bias by making the respondents pay more attention to the survey questions. Most of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with this statement, but the second most popular answer is "strongly disagree," and the most unpopular one is "strongly agree."

This question intends to capture peoples' opinions about the dominant environmental narrative. Some scholars believe that the apocalyptic narrative adopted by climate advocates is dysfunctional, works against their goals, and could remove potential allies (Laird 2021). This could explain why the answers to the question about the exaggeration of the narrative of the ecological crisis are more equally distributed in comparison to others: individuals may be realizing the gravity of the problem, as answers to the other two questions show, but the narrative of the ecological crisis may feel too mentally taxing. Because of this item, it is not feasible to create an additive index from the three questions: the Cronbach's Alpha Scale Reliability Coefficient is only 0.46, definitely too low to construct a reliable scale. Therefore, I will proceed by using these dependent variables separately.

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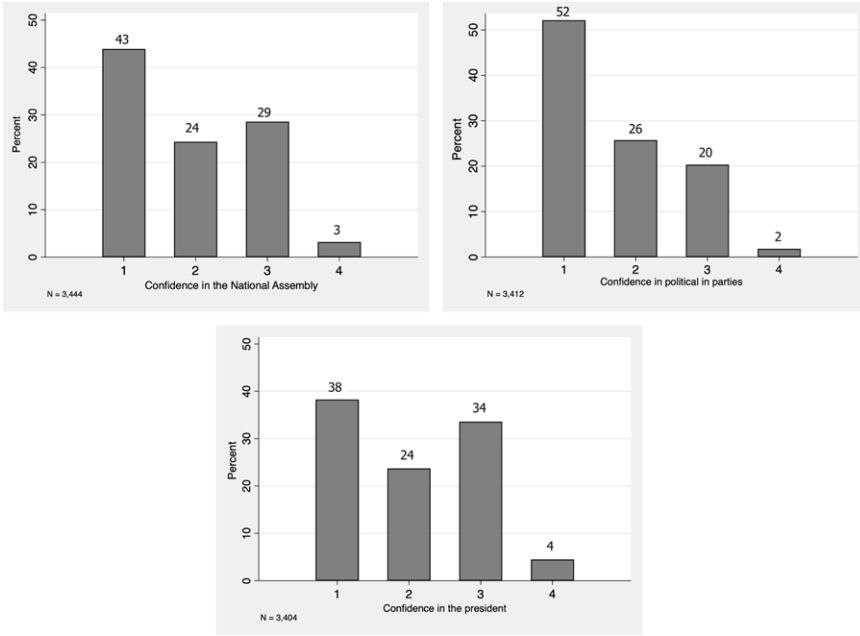
Figure 2. Confidence in Government Institutions in Ecuador



Notes: From 1, none, to 4, a lot. Numbers above bins are rounded unweighted percentages (missing values were dropped from this analysis). Source: Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics in Ecuador 2022

The key independent variable is the ten-point *Institutional Trust Index*. This is an additive index of three questions about confidence in the National Assembly, political parties, and the executive. Cronbach's Alpha of this measure is 0.76, rather high, so we can be quite confident about the reliability of the scale. Figure 2 shows the different components of the index. Overall, urban Ecuadorians tend to distrust their political institutions a great deal, especially political parties; however, more people are at least somewhat confident in the presidency.

The models include a host of control variables, such as other measures of political attitudes. One of them is the *Support for Democracy* as the best form of government measure. Another variable measures antipathy for the Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement *(Antipathy for Pachakutik)*. Pachakutik represents the Indigenous movement and puts importance on land rights and environmental protection, so these attitudes may be related to ecological crisis perceptions. *Left-Right Ideology* tests whether urban Ecuadorians are polarized over the environment. The remaining variables are standard controls: education, social class, age, sex, religiosity, and interpersonal trust. To test *H3,* dummy variables were used for whether respondents felt closest to Creating Opportunities (Guillermo Lasso's party) or Citizens' Revolution and the Democratic Center, which dominate the National Assembly.

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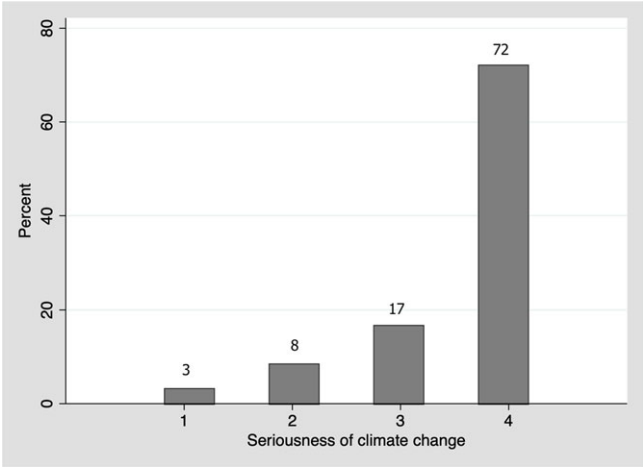
Figure 3. Perceptions of the Seriousness of Climate Change in Ecuador



Note: Numbers above bins are rounded unweighted percentages (missing values were dropped from this analysis). Source: AmericasBarometer 2018/2019

The AmericasBarometer

For a more representative look, I also used the AmericasBarometer 2018/2019 Ecuador survey, with about 1,400 observations. One caveat is that the survey does not include the same dependent variable (as mentioned, perceptions of an ecocrisis is not a common measure in publicly available major surveys), but it does feature a question about climate change concern. Respondents were asked to evaluate their perceived seriousness of climate change from 1 = not serious at all to 4 = very serious. Figure 3 shows that answer distribution is extremely skewed to the left: about 72 percent of respondents think that climate change is a very serious problem. This AmericasBarometer survey provided most variables equivalent to the ones used in the Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics Survey analysis, with the exception of Pachakutik evaluation and self-ascribed social class.

Analysis

Ordinal logistic regressions in table 1 demonstrate strong support for H1: respondents who trust the government do not think that the environment is abused or that environmental catastrophe will occur ($p < 0.01$). They also tend to think that the ecological crisis has been exaggerated ($p < 0.01$). However, the final number of observations in these models is visibly lower than the total sample size because

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Table 1. Predictors of Environmental Crisis Perceptions in Ecuador

Variables	Model 1 Environment is abused	Model 2 Environment is abused	Model 3 Ecocrisis is not exaggerated	Model 4 Ecocrisis is not exaggerated	Model 5 Environmental catastrophe will occur	Model 6 Environmental catastrophe will occur
Institutional trust IDX	–0.086***	–0.105	–0.074***	0.064	–0.075***	–0.093
	(0.017)	(0.075)	(0.016)	(0.070)	(0.016)	(0.072)
Support for democracy	0.252***	0.252***	0.108***	0.109***	0.209***	0.209***
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Antipathy for Pachakutik	–0.083	–0.083	–0.231**	–0.228*	–0.103	–0.103
	(0.126)	(0.126)	(0.117)	(0.117)	(0.121)	(0.121)
Education	0.215***	0.193**	0.118***	0.269***	0.222***	0.202**
	(0.034)	(0.088)	(0.031)	(0.081)	(0.032)	(0.084)
Social class	–0.214***	–0.214***	0.071*	0.068	–0.184***	–0.184***
	(0.046)	(0.046)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.044)
Left-right ideology	0.025	0.024	–0.016	–0.015	0.022	0.022
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Age	0.029***	0.029***	0.003	0.002	0.024***	0.024***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)

(*continued on next page*)

Table 1. Predictors of Environmental Crisis Perceptions in Ecuador (*continued*)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Variables	Environment is abused	Environment is abused	Ecocrisis is not exaggerated	Ecocrisis is not exaggerated	Environmental catastrophe will occur	Environmental catastrophe will occur
Sex (female)	0.119	0.119	0.062	0.063	0.167**	0.167**
	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.071)	(0.071)
Religiosity	0.061**	0.061*	0.050*	0.050*	0.093***	0.093***
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Interpersonal trust	–0.027	–0.028	0.030	0.032	0.012	0.011
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.049)	(0.049)
Institutional trust IDX X education		0.004 (0.014)		–0.026** (0.013)		0.003 (0.013)
Observations	2,871	2,871	2,873	2,873	2,870	2,870

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
Standard errors in parentheses.
Source: Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics in Ecuador 2022.

some respondents did not provide their answers to the environmental perceptions questions. See table SM1 in the supplementary material for results using multiple imputation—the results remain robust with alternative model specification.

Table 2 disassembles the index and looks at how each political institution is related to ecological crisis perceptions. The effects of all types of institutional trust on all dependent variables are negative and statistically significant. The effects of confidence in the National Assembly and political parties are strong on all dependent variables ($p < 0.01$). The effects of confidence in the president are somewhat weaker but nonetheless statistically significant ($p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.1$).

Continuing with table 1 and moving to other variables, support for democracy as the best form of government has a strong positive association with all three measures of environmental risk perceptions ($p < 0.01$). Antipathy for the Indigenous political movement is only related to attitudes that the ecological crisis has been exaggerated ($p < 0.05$). Education is a strong positive predictor of all three dependent variables ($p < 0.01$). This contrasts with self-described social class: individuals with a higher socioeconomic status do not think that environment is abused or that environmental catastrophe will occur ($p < 0.01$). However, there is a weak positive relationship ($p < 0.1$) between social class and the tendency to think that the ecological crisis is not exaggerated.

Importantly, political ideology does not affect environmental crisis perceptions: these attitudes in Ecuador are not polarized along political lines, at least on the traditional left-right scale. Older respondents tend to think that the environment is abused and that environmental catastrophe is very likely ($p < 0.01$), but age has no influence on opinions about the ecocrisis narrative. Women ($p < 0.05$) and more religious individuals ($p < 0.01$) tend to think that environmental catastrophe will occur. Gender has no effect on the other two dependent variables. Religiosity has only a weak positive effect ($p < 0.1$) on thinking that the environment is abused and that the ecological crisis is not exaggerated.

The original survey reflected tendencies in the urban strata of Ecuador, but the results from a more representative survey in table 3 are remarkably similar. There is a negative relationship between confidence in the National Legislature ($p < 0.05$) and a strong negative relationship between confidence in political parties and climate change concern ($p < 0.01$). Confidence in the executive does not have any effect on the dependent variable: recall that in table 2, this measure of political trust has weaker effects than others. Support for democracy and education are strong positive predictors of environmental crisis perceptions, and religiosity has a weaker but statistically significant effect, too. Importantly, no political polarization over climate change, in terms of the traditional left-right distinction, is evident in this sample either.

There are some subtle differences between table 1 and table 3. In table 3, men are slightly more inclined ($p < 0.1$) to be concerned about climate change than women in models that do not include confidence in political parties (model 1 and model 2). Age does not affect climate concern, but interpersonal trust has a positive effect ($p < 0.05$).

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Table 2. Confidence in Political Institutions and Environmental Crisis Perceptions in Ecuador

	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13	Model 14	Model 15
	Environment is abused	Environment is abused	Environment is abused	Ecocrisis is not exaggerated	Ecocrisis is not exaggerated	Ecocrisis is not exaggerated	Environmental catastrophe will occur	Environmental catastrophe will occur	Environmental catastrophe will occur
Confidence in National Assembly	–0.099*** (0.027)			–0.125*** (0.025)			–0.087*** (0.026)		
Confidence in political parties		–0.191*** (0.030)			–0.121*** (0.028)			–0.180*** (0.029)	
Confidence in the president			–0.054** (0.027)			–0.056** (0.025)			–0.045* (0.027)
Observations	2,902	2,884	2,881	2,905	2,886	2,883	2,902	2,883	2,880

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.
Standard errors in parentheses.
Source: Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics in Ecuado, 2022. Control variables included but not displayed.

Table 3. Confidence in Political Institutions and Climate Change Concern in Ecuador

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Variables	Climate Concern	Climate Concern	Climate Concern
Confidence in national legislature	–0.084**		
	(0.036)		
Confidence in the executive		–0.009	
		(0.033)	
Confidence in political parties			–0.124***
			(0.038)
Support for democracy	0.108***	0.090**	0.114***
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)
Education	0.094***	0.097***	0.088***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Left-right ideology	–0.010	–0.003	–0.016
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Age	–0.002	–0.001	–0.004
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Sex (female)	–0.218*	–0.202*	–0.195
	(0.122)	(0.122)	(0.122)
Religiosity	0.140*	0.126*	0.151**
	(0.075)	(0.074)	(0.075)
Interpersonal trust	0.153**	0.137**	0.146**
	(0.068)	(0.067)	(0.067)
Observations	1,374	1,380	1,380

***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.
Standard errors in parentheses.
Source: AmericasBarometer, 2018–2019.

Furthermore, the interactive effect in figure 4 supports conditional H2. More educated respondents from the urban strata of Ecuador with lower trust in government are more likely to align themselves with the narrative of the environmental crisis and believe that it is not exaggerated. People with lower political trust monitor the government's activities more carefully in comparison to those who trust political institutions more, so they are more likely to notice whenever the government fails in the area of environmental protection. Education

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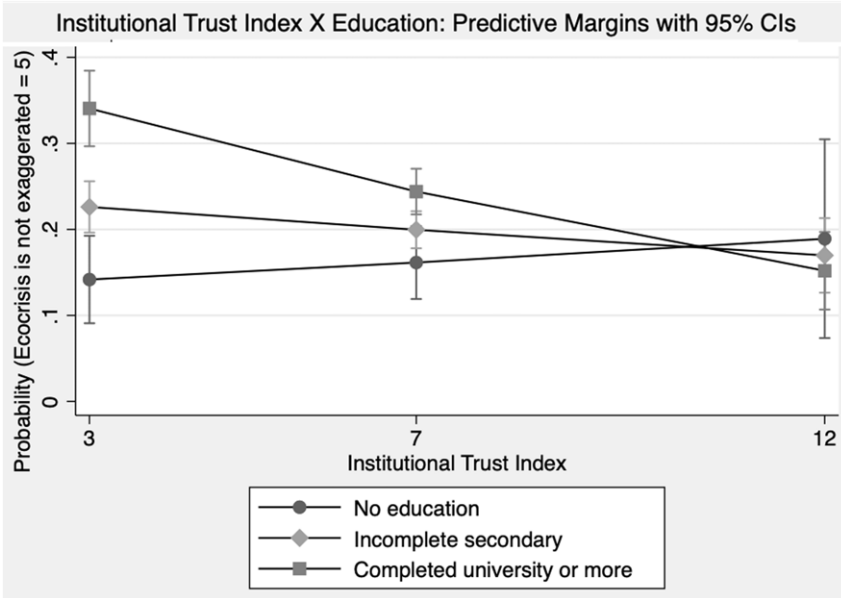
Figure 4. The Effects of Institutional Trust on Belief That Ecocrisis Is Not Exaggerated, Contingent on Education



Source: Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics in Ecuador 2022

does not moderate the relationship between political trust and the other two dependent variables in table 1 (see model 2 and model 6). No support was found for interactive effects between institutional trust and copartisanship (not reported in table 2 for space considerations); therefore we can reject H3.

Discussion

Some readers may note that the association between government trust and attitudes on the ecological crisis is spurious and simply reflects temporal trends: confidence in government has been decreasing (Pharr et al. 2000), and reasons to be worried about the environment have been increasing over time. These models, however, also show us that Ecuadorians who have more faith in political institutions, on average, are also less likely to think that the environment is in danger, which is an important tendency to consider. So, in Ecuador, people with confidence in the government, on average, do not tend to catastrophize environmental problems as much. Moreover, the absence of a moderating effect of copartisanship on the relationship between government trust and environmental crisis perceptions shows that judgments regarding the reliability of the government or politicians go

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beyond partisan or ideological responses to target a particular current regime (Levi and Stoker 2000, 491).

All models in both surveys display a strong association between support for democracy and environmental crisis perceptions. As has been argued, political trust is negatively associated with environmental crisis perceptions but, as additional analyses (not reported) show, positively associated with support for democracy. It is possible that this positive association reflects citizens' support for democratic institutions and political stability (Mishler and Rose 2001; Newton 2007). This could happen despite the negative relationship between political trust and environmental crisis perceptions, which reflects evaluations of the government's environmental protection record.

Both surveys demonstrate that there is no division over perceptions of the environmental crisis based on the traditional left-right orientation. In comparison, political polarization over the environment in the United States is unprecedented, but how far this tendency extends to other countries is questionable. In Ecuador, the strong extractive legacy left by the leftist president Rafael Correa may be one of the reasons why Ecuadorians who associate with the left are not more inclined to catastrophize environmental problems.

Next, table 1 shows that Ecuadorians of higher self-ascribed social class do not tend to think that the environment is abused or that an environmental catastrophe looms ahead. Chiasson-LeBel (2016) argues that extractivist conflicts in Ecuador reflect the conflict between different social classes—an affluent, capitalist class that supports economic development and a poor class that usually reaps fewer benefits from economic development but often bears higher costs. However, respondents from the higher class are slightly more inclined to think that the ecological crisis is not exaggerated, but the effect is weak. In general, these findings contrast with previous survey work carried out in Ecuador, which showed that wealth does not predict environmental concern (Eisenstadt and West 2017b, 2019) or belief in climate change (Eisenstadt and West 2017a). To some extent, these differences may be due to different sampling methods (urban versus nationwide) or measurements (self-ascribed social class versus income) and also different outcomes of interest, such as environmental and climate change attitudes.

The effects of gender in both samples are also inconsistent. The analysis of the urban sample in table 1 shows that women are significantly more likely to concur with the idea that an environmental catastrophe will occur if things continue on their present route.[6] But models in table 3 with a more representative sample show either weak positive effects of being male on taking climate change seriously, or no effect at all.

The positive effects of religiosity confirm some previous findings from Ecuador about climate change beliefs (Eisenstadt and West 2019). In both samples, religiosity has a weak positive effect on catastrophizing environmental problems and concern about climate change. Christianity's approach to environmental protection has not been well understood, but some analysts argue that it can take either a dominion or a stewardship approach (Arbuckle and Konisky 2015, 1246). In Ecuador, there

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is a tendency for a stewardship perspective (humans as protectors of the environment), but it is not particularly strong.

One of the very few differences between the urban sample of Ecuadorians in table 1 and the more representative sample in table 3 is the role of interpersonal trust (sometimes also called social or generalized trust). This factor is not related to ecological crisis perceptions among urban Ecuadorians but is positively related to climate concern in a more inclusive sample. Note that research has failed to establish robust associations between generalized (social) and political trust (Levi and Stoker 2000; Newton 2007), which makes sense in table 3, where they are both related to concern about climate change but in very different ways.

Conclusions

This article has investigated how political trust is related to environmental perceptions in Ecuador. It discussed previous literature on this relationship and continued with an overview of environmental politics in this society. It then hypothesized that trust in government would be inversely related to environmental crisis perceptions and that this relationship would be intensified by higher educational attainment. The rest of the article provided strong support for these hypotheses using two different surveys from Ecuador. Previous studies found mixed effects between government trust and environmental attitudes, but some of them clearly showed that trust in institutions matters when the object of concern is related to very particular and often localized environmental problems. This article demonstrated that government trust matters even when the object of environmental risk is diffuse and looms in the distant future.

I argued that low trust in government and high environmental risk perceptions can be strongly related in contexts with salient and prolonged conflicts over the environment and economic development. Individuals attribute blame for environmental problems to powerful social actors. Higher education intensifies this tendency: distrustful and better educated individuals monitor government activity more closely and find more reasons to believe that the environmental crisis looms ahead. On the other hand, there is a segment of society with high trust in political institutions and higher self-ascribed social status that does not go along with the narrative of the environmental crisis.

These findings are not without their limitations. The reader may point to an endogenous and largely associational nature of the relationship (the so-called attitudes on attitudes problem in the social sciences). Nevertheless, there are important implications for policymakers when two important attitudinal tendencies parallel each other in particular contexts. Furthermore, readers may be less likely to trust the results of the urban-based Ethnicity, Inequality, Trust, and Politics Survey, but there are reasons not to be so skeptical. Almost all urban Ecuadorians live in mountainous and coastal areas that are incredibly vulnerable to climate change, so there is a high chance that they are more deliberate in their opinions about the environment and environmental risks. To strengthen these

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results, this study demonstrated that the output from a more representative survey was very similar.

Policymakers in developing economies should take note of the implications of these findings, as the conflict between government-led extractive practices and environmental preservation is not unique to Ecuador, but instead is a pervasive issue in many middle-income countries. Furthermore, these countries are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change, which makes it all the more crucial to address this issue. Political distrust is not built overnight, and therefore the Ecuadorian government may have been failing its citizens for an extended period of time.

One of the most pressing concerns is the future of environmental quality in the country. It remains unclear whether political institutions in Ecuador can rally people to take action on environmental issues, given the strong association between poor government performance and concern over environmental crises. The situation is further complicated by the behavior of former presidents who have publicly expressed their commitment to environmental protection while simultaneously pursuing aggressive extractive policies. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Ecuadorians who are worried about the environment also place a high value on democratic principles, which suggests that they will continue to voice their concerns using democratic channels.

Notes

I thank the Universidad San Francisco de Quito and Vanderbilt University for providing access to the datasets. I would also like to thank Carew Boulding, Jennifer Fitzgerald, Brett Bessen, and the three anonymous reviewers for comments.

1. Environmental justice is a concept that captures the combination of social and environmental struggles. It refers to unequal distributions of environmental impacts and procedural inequities (Carruthers 2008; Center for Environmental Justice 2022).

2. The Latin American Pink Tide refers to the wave of left-wing governments that came to power in several countries in the region in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These governments emphasized social programs, economic nationalism, and opposition to neoliberalism.

3. Polycentricity describes "the relationships among multiple authorities with overlapping jurisdictions" (Andersson and Ostrom 2008, 71).

4. This situation is similar to the yellow vest *(gilet jaune)* mobilizations in France. People took to the streets in late 2018 when President Emanuel Macron announced his plan to introduce a carbon tax to meet the Paris Climate Agreement goals. The protesters claimed the tax caused an undue burden on the poor because of the higher fuel prices.

5. The rationale behind the tragedy of the commons is related to an individual's tendency to take better care of their private resources and overuse common pool resources.

6. The literature explains the gender gap in environmental attitudes by risk aversion: women are more likely than men to think that disregarding the environment threatens a range of objects they value (Stern and Dietz 1994, 74).

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