

Explaining the length of party manifestos in gubernatorial elections in Ecuador

Determinantes del tamaño de los planes de gobierno en las elecciones provinciales en Ecuador

Régis Dandoy, Luisa Sofia Acurio

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Abstract

Party manifestos have been widely analysed in political science, with a particular focus on their content rather than on their format. This article focuses on one specific aspect of the format of party manifestos as it attempts to understand the variation of their length by digging into the Ecuadorian case. Using empirical data on the content of party manifestos drafted by candidates for the gubernatorial elections (2009-2023), this article concludes that time and party size matter when one wants to understand the production of these political documents. Party manifestos drafted in more recent years tend to be longer while large political parties tend to produce longer documents. In a context where the electoral management bodies take party manifestos into account for the registration of candidates worldwide, the identification of the determinants of their length proved to be increasingly relevant.

Keywords: Ecuador, party manifestos, gubernatorial elections, length, candidates

Resumen

Los planes de gobierno han sido ampliamente analizados en la ciencia política, con un enfoque particular en su contenido más que en su formato. Este artículo se enfoca en un aspecto específico del formato de los planes de gobierno, ya que procura explicar la variación de su tamaño al profundizar en el caso ecuatoriano. Utilizando datos empíricos sobre el contenido de los planes de gobierno redactados por los candidatos y las candidatas en las elecciones provinciales (2009-2023), este artículo concluye que el tiempo y el tamaño del partido importan cuando se quiere comprender la producción de estos documentos políticos. Los planes de gobierno redactados en años más recientes tienden a ser más largos, mientras que los partidos políticos grandes tienden a producir documentos más largos. En un contexto en el que los organismos electorales a nivel mundial toman en cuenta a los planes de gobierno para el registro de candidatos, la identificación de los determinantes de su tamaño se evidenció cada vez más relevante.

Palabras claves: Ecuador, planes de gobierno, elecciones provinciales, tamaño, candidatos

Introduction

Party manifestos are political documents widespread in a large number of electoral democracies, often under different names such as party or candidate manifestos, party programs, election programs, election manifestos, government plans, or working plans (Ramírez 2018). Party manifestos are important documents as they not only provide a policy platform for parties and candidates in periods of electoral campaign but are also helpful in non-electoral times for activities such as government participation, coalition building or simply party management. As a result, these documents have been widely analysed in political science, with a particular focus on their content rather than on their format. But any analysis of party manifestos cannot separate both perspectives as it is not difficult to appreciate that the format of a political document may have an impact on its content. Similarly, party manifestos display large variations in terms of length, style, structure, etc. (Krouwel & Van Elfrinkhof 2009), and there is generally no common format of party manifestos over time and space.

This article focuses on one specific aspect of the format of party manifestos: their length. Indeed, the length of party manifestos matters (Gabel & Huber 2000; Volkens 2001; Hans & Hönnige 2008). A rapid proof of that is the fact that almost every content analysis of party manifesto uses frequencies. Given that you are comparing documents with varying length, one has to use frequencies rather than absolute figures. For instance, allocating one page to an issue such as environment out of a 10 pages-long party manifesto is not equal to one similar page in a 100 pages-long manifesto. In the first example, the environment occupies (10%) of the document, while it occupies (1%) of the second document. Similarly, a number of research projects have integrated the length variable as an independent or control variable in their models (Robertson 1987; Marks et al. 2007; Duncan & Van Hecke 2008).

The length of party manifestos is also a critical variable for the validity of data (Laver, Benoit & Garry 2003; Slapin & Proksch 2008; Benoit, Laver & Mikhaylov 2009). Among the variables considered to make a “good” party manifesto, these documents should be long enough to produce sufficient data. According to Volkens (2001: 40), “the kind of information one can get by analysing election programmes depends above all upon their length. The longer the programmes are,

the more detailed the information one can get from them about policy positions”. In their meta-analysis of survey-based and manifesto-based approaches, Gabel and Huber (2000) found out that manifesto length is the only variable that matters in explaining residuals in the positional models, with the exception of country dummies and extreme parties.

Similarly, previous studies have also demonstrated that party manifesto length may have an impact on the amount of information, the number of electoral pledges, or the diversity of issues dealt with in such documents (Daubler 2010). For instance, there is more policy information in longer manifestos (Benoit, Laver & Mikhaylov 2009), while a greater diversity of policy areas was found in longer manifestos (McCluskey 2008). Hans and Hönnige (2008) demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between the length of a party manifesto and the number of items mentioned in the document. They found out that no less of 80% of the variation of the number of items in a given party manifesto could be explained to a large extent by its length. In the case of Belgium, the length of party manifestos is statistically related to the number of policy issues mentioned in the document and to their standard deviation (Dandoy 2011).

Given the importance of length in the understanding of the content of party manifestos, this article attempts to explain the variation of their length by digging into the Ecuadorian case. In this regard, the length of party manifestos will be mobilized in our models as a dependent variable in order to identify its main determinants. Using empirical data on the content of party manifestos published in Ecuador for the gubernatorial elections (2009-2023), this article intends to explore the impact of a series of variables related to the types of candidates and their politic manifestos and their political parties. Even though the explanatory power of the models remains modest, we observe that time and party matter when one wants to understand the production of these documents. Party manifestos drafted in more recent years tend to be longer while large parties also tend to produce longer manifestos. In a context where the electoral management bodies take into account such documents for the registration of candidates worldwide, the identification of the determinants of their length proved to be increasingly relevant.

Literature and hypotheses

The variation of the length of party manifestos has not to be proven. Many authors have observed that there are significant differences in manifesto length across time, countries¹ and parties. For instance, Morkevicius (2003) observed that the length of party manifestos in 25 Western countries is unusually highly dispersed as some are very short while others are gigantic. Benoit, Laver and Mikhaylov (2009) witnessed that some party manifestos included in the *Comparative Manifesto Project* data are more than 200 times longer than others. But if the length of party manifestos varies and if it matters for political science, what explains this variation? This article explores the determinants of manifesto length by outlining five main hypotheses.

First, time appears as a crucial factor. A trend towards the increase of the length of party manifestos over time has often been observed, especially in the case of the post-war period election programmes, that generated a historical transition towards new policy issues and dynamics in the Western world (Budge 1987; Klingemann, Hofferbert & Budge 1994; Volkens 2001; Bara 2005; McCluskey 2008; Hans & Hönning 2008; Rocha & Morales 2008; Dandoy 2011; Dolezal et al. 2012). Analysing data from the Comparative Manifesto Project for 13 West-European countries, Green-Pedersen (2007) found out that the average length of a manifesto has quadrupled from the 1950s to the 1990s. These findings were confirmed by Daubler who observed that for 19 countries “the size of a ‘typical’ manifesto is now about five times what it used to be around the 1950s” (2010: 8). His analysis suggests that time effect is considerable in substantive terms: a year later in terms of the election date is associated with a (4%) increase in length of party manifesto. Even if the changes in international environment – i.e., mainly Europeanisation and globalisation – should limit the scope of party manifestos (Caul & Gray 2000), we expect that manifestos drafted in more recent years tend to be longer than older manifestos (Hypothesis 1).

1 Several authors also observed that the length of party manifestos varies across countries (Daubler 2009, 2010) while manifestos tend to be longer in older democracies than newer ones (Volkens 2001). As a result, research designs focusing on single-country studies evacuate the impact of country (fixed) effects on the length of these documents.

Differences in length of party manifestos are also to be observed across parties within the same country. This has been empirically observed for a variety of countries and territories across time, such as in the case of Austria (Dolezal et al. 2012), Belgium (Dandoy 2011), Denmark (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2009), Germany (Klingemann 1987), Ireland (Mair 1987), Israel (Bara 1987), Scotland (Agasoster 2001), or even in the case of the Euromanifestos (Gabel & Hix 2002). The literature explains this variation by mobilizing three main variables at the party level: party size, party ideology and government participation.

Regarding party size, the reasoning is that political parties that have access to larger resources produce longer manifestos. Larger parties tend to have a larger (parliamentary) staff and access to state funding that allows them to allocate more resources to the drafting of party manifestos. In addition, large parties tend to focus on a larger range of issues, while small parties only address specific issues (Gabel & Huber 2000; Van Heck 2018). Parties that represent a larger share of voters are likely to represent a heterogeneous electorate and a multitude of interests. Large parties consequently have to discuss a much broader range of policies in order to appeal to their electorate (Daubler 2010). On the contrary, small parties are often niche parties, which seek the votes of a small segment of society. For such parties, it may be sufficient to provide a small set of policy proposals that is of key interest to their core voters. Daubler (2010) and Dolezal and colleagues (2012) observed that larger parties publish longer documents than smaller parties while, for the Belgian case, Dandoy (2011) concluded that manifesto length seems to be insensitive to variables such as party size. We nonetheless expect that manifestos drafted by larger parties tend to be longer than manifestos drafted by smaller parties (Hypothesis 2).

The size of the party is often related to its status: larger parties tend to participate more often in cabinets while smaller parties tend to remain in the opposition. Similar to the argument of the resources that could be mobilized depending on party size, governing parties are expected to have access to more resources (staff, expertise, time, etc.) and may mobilize the state and ministerial bureaucracy, cultivate closer contacts with interest groups and therefore produce longer and more substantial party manifestos (Daubler 2010; Dolezal et al. 2012). Governing parties also possess a larger stock of existing policies to

work from and may want to advertise at length their accomplishments while in cabinet (Dandoy 2014b). They may also want to develop their policy positions on every issue dealt with by their government (Marks et al. 2007; Dandoy 2011), especially concerning the policies related to the portfolios held by their ministers. However, there are also arguments in favour of longer party manifestos drafted by opposition parties. Opposition parties are less constrained by their past policies and, since they are less known among the electorate and the interest groups, they may need to extensively lay out their proposals in their manifestos (Garry & Mansergh 1999). Daubler (2010) and Dolezal and colleagues (2012) empirically confirmed that governing parties tend to produce longer documents while Dandoy (2011) found no impact of the government-opposition divide on party manifesto length. Overall, we expect that manifestos drafted by incumbent parties tend to be longer than manifestos drafted by opposition or new parties (Hypothesis 3).

Party ideology is similarly expected to have an impact on party manifesto length. For instance, Gabel and Hix (2002) observed that conservative parties tend to issue shorter manifestos than other parties. When dealing with subnational elections, ideology may similarly play a role on the length of party manifestos, in particular, regarding regional parties. Given that the core ideology of these parties is focused on the sub-national level of government, one may expect their manifestos to be longer than national parties in sub-national elections. The reasoning behind this hypothesis is that political parties specialize their campaign discourse based on their core policy level: national parties concentrate their efforts on national elections while sub-national parties concentrate their efforts on sub-national elections. Given that their policy expertise is focused on one region or province, regional parties should reflect that specific knowledge and discuss it to a larger extent, as compared to national parties. We expect that, in the framework of subnational elections, manifestos drafted by regional parties tend to be longer than manifestos drafted by national parties (Hypothesis 4).

In some instances, a political party may decide to create an alliance with other parties when competing in elections. A direct consequence of these electoral alliances is the necessity to present common policy proposals to the electorate and therefore, to draft a common or joint manifesto. This electoral strategy is not without

consequence on the length of the joint party manifesto. Indeed, the joint manifesto may constitute the common denominator of the different parties' positions. The parties in the alliance develop a common manifesto that discusses only the issues and positions that the different parties have in common and upon which they share the exact same view. As a result, we expect those manifestos from candidates supported by an alliance of parties should be smaller than manifestos drafted by individual parties (Hypothesis 5).

However, the causal link between the electoral alliance and the length of the joint manifesto might lead to the opposite phenomenon. The joint manifesto may result in the sum of the manifestos of each member of the electoral alliance. Rather than focusing solely on common policy issues, the parties aggregate their different – and sometimes diverging – positions and write an extensive manifesto presenting all policy issues and points of view. In this sense, we expect that manifestos from candidates supported by an alliance of parties should be longer than manifestos drafted by individual parties. In addition, we expect that the impact of the electoral alliance on the length of the joint manifesto would be larger in the case of an electoral alliance gathering a large number of parties (as opposed to an electoral alliance gathering only two parties).

Data and variables

In this section, we briefly present the data used to explore the determinants of party manifesto length in Ecuador as well as the main dependent, independent and control variables. Party manifestos are important documents in Ecuador as all parties and candidates draft these documents and use them for their electoral campaigns. They can be scrutinized by competing parties and candidates, journalists, academics and representatives of the civil society. A typical electoral campaign in Ecuador can display efforts of comparative and thematic analysis of the campaign pledges and policy proposals contained in the manifestos of the candidates and political parties. These comparisons and analyses are relatively mediatized, commented and used in debates organized between candidates.

In addition, the drafting of party manifestos is regulated in Ecuador and these documents are formally considered to be a pact

between the candidate and his or her voters, as well as the basis upon which citizens can follow-up and control the actions and decisions of the elected candidates (Consejo Nacional Electoral 2014). In addition, citizens may revoke the elected governor in case he or she does not fulfil the pledges made in his or her manifesto (Ley Orgánica de Participación Ciudadana art. 25). According to the article 97 of the electoral law (the so-called “Democracy Code”), persons seeking to participate in elections in Ecuador have to present their manifestos to the National Electoral Council (CNE), as part of the legal requirements for being accepted as candidates. The same article also regulates the content of these documents as they have to discuss at least four issues: a diagnostic of the current situation of the territory they seek to represent, the policy objectives of the candidate, a pluriannual workplan, and mechanisms of accountability.

The constructed database contains all the party manifestos drafted by candidates that participated in gubernatorial elections in Ecuador in 2014, 2019 and 2023, as well as 13 party manifestos drafted for the 2009 elections². We opted for an analysis of gubernatorial elections for two reasons. First, it allows taking into account sub-national dynamics in the analysis of electoral processes, since there are large variations in the profile of the provinces (geographic and demographic differences, not to mention different political influences). Territory is a relevant dimension for the analysis of electoral processes in Ecuador. Election results vary across provinces and there are differences between the characteristics of the party system at the national level and at the provincial level for national elections (Polga-Hecimovich 2014; Pachano 2015; Freidenberg & Pachano 2016). Second, the analysis of the candidates running for the provincial seats in the national legislative elections could be an alternative. But, given that the electoral system used for these elections is rather complex (as it is based on panachage) for most of the studied period, it is methodologically more convenient to analyse the elections of the provincial governors (Dandoy 2019).

2 The missing manifestos are those of Julio César Robles Guevara (province of Carchi 2019), Diego Morales (province of Azuay 2023), Bélgica Imperio Villamarín Ruiz, (province of Chimborazo 2014), Gissel Iliana Rosado León (province of Los Ríos 2014), Harold David Alcívar Briones (province of Manabí 2014) and Gina Zita San Miguel Palacios (province of Napo 2009).

Gubernatorial elections are organized every four or five years in 23 provinces of Ecuador (the province of Galapagos does not directly elect its head of provincial executive)³. The powers of the governors are widespread. Each governor legally represents his or her province, presides the provincial council and proposes projects of ordinance in the areas of competences of the province (for more details, see the article 263 of the Ecuadorian Constitution). In addition, the governor plays a significant role in the elaboration of the provincial budget, the development and urban planning, and the security plan of his or her province. The party manifestos for these gubernatorial elections were collected from the platform publicly available on the website of the Ecuadorian National Electoral Council (CNE).

Our database therefore consists of 532 party manifestos over four different electoral periods in 23 provinces. Besides the specific case of the 13 documents collected for the 2009 gubernatorial elections (2,42 %) of the total number of candidates in the database, the number of candidates running for gubernatorial elections in Ecuador largely varies: 116 candidates in 2014 (21,56%) of the total number of candidates in the database, 223 candidates in 2019 (41,45%) and 186 candidates in 2023 (34,57%)⁴. The increase of the number of candidates for the 2019 gubernatorial elections is partly explained by the weakening of the dominant party PAIS (Dandoy 2019). We partly control for the impact of this variation over time by taking into account the number of candidates per province.

The operationalization of our dependent variable proved to be difficult. The format of the manifestos drafted by gubernatorial candidates in Ecuador varies to a large extent, and the majority of the documents consists in a .pdf file containing a poor-quality scanning of the document. As a result, it is impossible to use word count. Instead, we used the number of pages as a proxy for the length of the party manifestos. While this is not an ideal measure (some candidates included graphs, tables and maps that take space in the document while poorly impacting the word count), it nonetheless allowed us to evaluate the time and energy spent by the candidate and his or her staff

3 There are no legislative elections at the provincial level in Ecuador. As for the gubernatorial elections, the candidate that attracts the largest number of votes is designated as governor and there is no runoff election.

4 For a detailed analysis of the candidates and results of the gubernatorial elections of 2014 and 2019, see Dandoy (2014a) and Dandoy (2019) respectively.

in drafting the document. On average, the length of party manifestos is 28,46 pages. We can observe, however, a huge variation in the number of pages across candidates in gubernatorial elections: it varies from a minimum of one page (five candidates) to a maximum of 428 pages (drafted by Rommel Mauricio Rosales in the province of Imbabura in 2019).

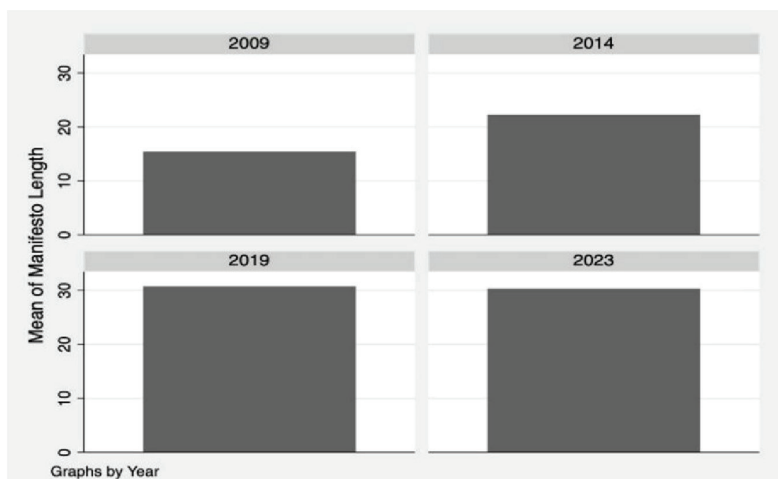
No less than five hypotheses are tested in this article and each of them is associated to one (or several) independent variables (see the descriptive statistics of the main variables in the Appendix). The first independent variable concerns the impact of time on party manifesto length and is based on dummy variables for each of the four gubernatorial elections analysed in this article (2009, 2014, 2019 and 2023).

The time variable also allowed us to discuss the impact of two specific elements of the electoral calendar. In Ecuador, it is not rare to observe simultaneous elections, i.e., the organization of elections for different political mandates on the same day. For instance, the 2009 gubernatorial elections were coupled with national, local, parochial and Andean parliamentary elections. But, the organization of simultaneous elections is not without influence on the length of manifestos. As in the case of Ecuador, political parties' draft separate manifestos for each individual election. In that case, these documents would deal with issues that specifically relate to each elections' area of competences and party manifestos are therefore expected to be mutually exclusive. We therefore expect that the organization of simultaneous elections would negatively influence the length of party manifestos. More precisely, the 2009 gubernatorial elections were organized simultaneously with national, local, parochial and Andean parliamentary elections; the 2014 gubernatorial elections were organized simultaneously with local and parochial elections; the 2019 gubernatorial elections were organized simultaneously with local, parochial and Citizens' Council (CPCCS) elections, while the 2023 gubernatorial elections were organized simultaneously with local, parochial and CPCCS elections, and a national referendum.

Another consequence of the electoral calendar concerns the phenomenon of party fatigue. Elections often take place temporarily close to each other, due to: changes in the electoral calendar, early

elections or the organization of referendum in-between national and sub-national elections. The proximity with previous elections is supposed to have a significant impact on the length of party manifestos. Given the party fatigue (the party allocated time, energy, staff and resources in previous elections), one can argue that parties may have the tendency to draft shorter party manifestos. In the case of Ecuador, the 2009 gubernatorial elections were organized less than one year after the 2008 referendum, the 2014 gubernatorial elections were organized one year after the 2013 elections, the 2019 gubernatorial elections were organized one year after the 2018 referendum, and the 2023 gubernatorial elections were organized two years after the 2021 elections⁵.

Graph 1: *Average length of party manifestos per election year*



Source: Own elaboration

In line with the second hypothesis, an independent variable measures the size of the party participating in elections. The size of each party has been operationalized based on its electoral strength, i.e., the candidate's vote shares in a particular province. Incumbency is, by definition, closely related to party size as the candidate that obtains the largest number of votes in a province becomes governor. Incumbency will be

⁵ Yet, Dandoy (2011) observed that the electoral calendar – be it simultaneous elections or party fatigue – had no influence on the length of party manifestos in Belgium.

tested in a third hypothesis (according to which incumbent candidates tend to deliver longer manifestos) and has been operationalized as a dummy variable, i.e., whether the candidate was in power at the time of the gubernatorial elections. Interestingly, incumbents do not always participate in gubernatorial elections in Ecuador. In our database, only 45 incumbent governors participated in these elections and competed for their re-election. This is partly explained by the rule that prevents governors to run for more than two consecutive mandates (Ley Orgánica Electoral – Código de la Democracia art. 349).

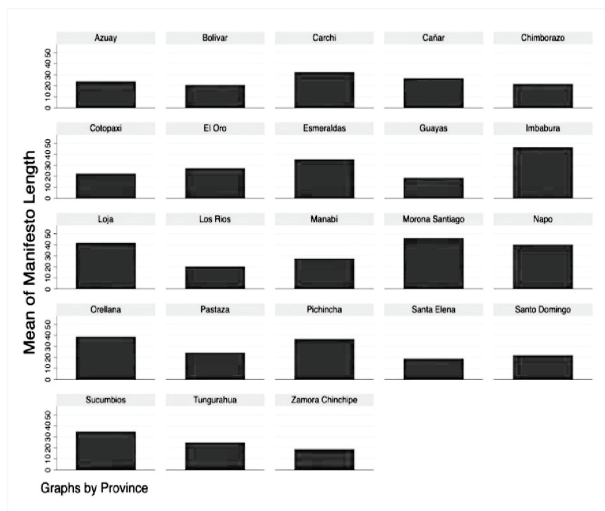
The fourth hypothesis requires distinguishing between types of parties and, in particular, between national and regional parties, as it is expected that regional parties tend to draft longer manifestos in subnational elections. In Ecuador, parties need to administratively register at the National Electoral Council prior to elections and to officially belong to different categories of parties, depending on their policy ambition. National parties focus on national policies and are allowed to participate in elections in any province and at the national level, while provincial parties focus on regional policies and are allowed to participate in elections in only one specific province. Provincial parties are important actors in gubernatorial elections in Ecuador as they have proved to have a large impact on election results in recent years. When they participate in elections on their own, provincial parties are the most successful stand-alone type of parties; when they join an electoral alliance with other political parties, this provincial “bonus” is duplicated (Dandoy 2019). We operationalized the regional party variable as a dummy variable: “1” if the candidate that participates in the elections belongs to a provincial party or to an electoral alliance that includes at least one provincial party, and “0” for all other configurations. On the 2009-2023 period, no less than 37 candidates were supported by a regional party, while 85 of them were supported by an electoral alliance integrating at least one regional party.

The last independent variable concerns electoral alliances. We expect that the main feature of the party or alliance that supports the candidate should have an impact on the length of his or her electoral manifesto. Similar to regional parties, electoral alliances proved to be an important factor for determining a candidate’s electoral success in previous gubernatorial elections in Ecuador. Analyses of the 2014 and 2019 elections confirmed that electoral alliances performed better than

any other type of parties. Joining other political parties and presenting a common candidate has proven to be a successful strategy, compared to strategies where one party supports its candidate on its own (Dandoy 2019). Electoral alliances are indeed a frequent phenomenon in Ecuador as no less than 176 candidates (32,71%) were supported by an electoral alliance on the 2009-2023 period. As outlined above, electoral alliances can concern regional parties, national parties or a mix of both types of parties. In addition, the number of parties in the alliance varies to a large extent, from two partners to a maximum of nine parties, as in the case of Eduardo Mendoza Palma (province of Los Ríos in 2023). We operationalized electoral alliances in two different ways: as a dummy variable and as a continuous variable considering the number of parties supporting the candidate (i.e., from 1 to 9).

Finally, we included a series of control variables in the model. At the level of the candidates, we control for the gender of the candidate (dummy variable), even if gender is not expected to have an impact on the length of the candidate's electoral manifesto. At the provincial level, we control for the size of the province. We used the number of registered voters as a measure of the size of the province, rather than the official number of inhabitants, as it better reflects the demand side in the process of drafting a manifesto. It is likely that candidates from a larger province would draft longer manifestos. We also control for the number of candidates competing in a given gubernatorial election in each province, as a large number of candidates could lead individual candidates to focus his or her manifesto on a small segment of the electorate of the province. We also control for the geographical region of the province, with the help of four provincial dummies for each of Ecuador's regions (metropolitan, coast, mountain and rainforest).

Graph 2: *Average length of party manifestos per province*



Source: Own elaboration

Results

Following Dolezal et al. (2012), our models integrate the different independent and control variables in an explanatory design, using a negative binomial regression model. Since the dependent variable consists in count data (i.e., the number of pages of each party manifesto), Poisson regressions are the most often used tool for modelling it. However, as the dependent variable is over-dispersed (i.e., when the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean), it is more suitable to use a negative binomial regression as it has an extra parameter to model the over-dispersion in Poisson regressions. The confidence intervals are likely to be narrower than those from a Poisson regression. Moreover, the likelihood ratio tests for all models indicate that the over-dispersion parameter alpha is significantly different from zero and thus confirms that the Poisson distribution is not appropriate.

We ran different series of models, based on the hypotheses outlined in the first section. In a baseline model, we first tested the

Hypothesis 1 that concerned the impact of time on party manifesto length. Model 1 confirms that, compared to the gubernatorial elections held in 2009, party manifestos drafted in 2019 and 2023 are longer. This confirms the trend observed in other countries, according to which party manifestos tend to be longer over time. This effect of time is fairly similar across the different tested models.

Model 2 tests the impact of provincial variables on the length of party manifestos drafted for gubernatorial elections in Ecuador. Besides election year dummies, only one variable appears to have an impact: party manifestos are smaller in provinces characterized by a higher electoral competition. When confronted with a large number of opponents, it is likely that gubernatorial candidates focus his or her campaign strategy on a small segment of the electorate and therefore decide to draft a shorter party manifesto accordingly. Interestingly, other provincial variables appear to have no significant effect on the length of party manifestos, be it the size of the province or its geographical position.

A third model gathers explanatory variables at the level of individual candidates. Besides election year dummies, the model includes one independent variable (incumbency) and one control variable (gender). Unsurprisingly, the gender of the candidate has no impact on the length of his or her party manifestos. Following Hypothesis 3, we observe that incumbent candidates in the gubernatorial elections tend to draft longer party manifestos than other types of candidates. It is likely that incumbent candidates have additional resources (staff, expertise, time, etc.) than he or she could mobilize for producing longer and more substantial party manifestos.

A series of party-related variables have been included in a fourth model. The Hypothesis 5, according to which electoral alliances are statistically associated to the party manifestos length, is not confirmed. The party manifestos drafted by candidates supported by an electoral alliance are not smaller or larger than those drafted by candidates supported by a single party. A regression model (not shown) using an alternative operationalization of electoral alliances based on the number of parties supporting the candidate rather than a dummy variable does not produce more significant results. Similarly, Hypothesis 4 is not confirmed by the fourth model. Party manifestos drafted by regional parties do not tend to be longer than manifestos

drafted by national parties in gubernatorial elections in Ecuador. We also tested an alternative operationalization of regional parties based on individual provincial parties only (and therefore excluding electoral alliances including at least one provincial party), but the results remain statistically insignificant (not shown).

On the contrary, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed in this fourth model relying on party-related variables. There is a positive and significant relation between the size of a party (as measured by its ex-post party vote shares) and the length of its manifestos. Manifestos drafted by larger parties tend to be longer than manifestos drafted by smaller parties. The rationale is that parties that represent a larger share of voters are likely to represent a heterogeneous electorate and a multitude of interests, and therefore have to discuss a much broader range of policies in order to appeal to their electorate. This effect remains significant when including dummies for election years and for candidates that belong to the political party of the president.

A last model (Model 5) includes all the independent and control variables tested in the previous models besides election year dummies. From the different province-based, candidate-based and party-based variables, only the variable of party size remains significant.

These models have been rerun in order to adjust for heterogeneity. Using robust standard errors, the negative binomial regression coefficients deliver the same results for the significant variables (not shown), even if the election year dummies for 2019 and 2024 are slightly less significant. We also ran alternative models without taking into account election years. Results indicate that party size remains strongly significant, but two other independent variables also appear slightly significant. Party manifesto length is positively associated with electoral competition (the higher the number of candidates, the longer the party manifestos) and negatively associated with the Coastal province dummy (manifestos drafter in these provinces are shorter in comparison to the ones of the Amazonian province).

Table 1: *Negative binomial regression models explaining the length of party manifestos*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Variables	Baseline model	Provincial model	Candidate model	Party model	Full model
Election year 2014	0.368 (0.229)	0.385* (0.229)	0.352 (0.227)	0.325 (0.223)	0.324 (0.224)
Election year 2019	0.690*** (0.223)	0.900*** (0.234)	0.764*** (0.223)	0.878*** (0.218)	0.955*** (0.229)
Election year 2023	0.676*** (0.224)	0.799*** (0.227)	0.737*** (0.224)	0.818*** (0.218)	0.858*** (0.223)
Province size	-	-5.73e-08 (1.18e-07)	-	-	-7.25e-08 (1.17e-07)
Electoral competition	-	-0.0279** (0.0116)	-	-	-0.0124 (0.0116)
Metropolitan province	-	0.0854 (0.317)	-	-	0.0958 (0.313)
Coastal province	-	-0.181 (0.117)	-	-	-0.170 (0.115)
Mountain province	-	-0.104 (0.0987)	-	-	-0.0736 (0.0969)
Incumbent	-		0.399*** (0.119)	-	0.0199 (0.140)
Gender	-		0.0152 (0.0824)	-	0.0121 (0.0806)
Electoral alliance	-		-	0.0210	0.00641

EXPLAINING THE LENGTH OF PARTY MANIFESTOS IN GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS IN ECUADOR

				(0.0760)	(0.0771)
Regional party	-	-	-0.0330	-0.0100	
			(0.0827)	(0.0837)	
Presidential party	-	-	0.122	0.109	
			(0.105)	(0.106)	
Party size	-	-	0.0139***	0.0124***	
			(0.00233)	(0.00281)	
Constant	2.735***	2.978***	2.645***	2.396***	2.598***
	(0.218)	(0.223)	(0.217)	(0.218)	(0.227)
LR Chi2	21.85	42.36	34.07	69.15	79.36
Pseudo R2	0.0048	0.0093	0.0075	0.0152	0.0175
Log likelihood	-2263.0859	-2252.8291	-2256.9733	-2239.4356	-2234.3264
Observations	532	532	532	532	532

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. The dummies of 2009 election year and of Amazonian province are used as reference categories.

Source: Own elaboration

Discussion

Previous research demonstrated that length matters when one wants to analyse the content of a party manifesto. Length matters, but what explains it? In this article, we intended to explain why some party manifestos are longer than others. The five hypotheses that emerged from the literature could be grouped in two different sets of independent variables. First, the length could be the consequence of a deliberate (endogenous) strategy of the candidate and his or her party. For instance, party manifestos can be longer or shorter depending on whether the party wants to focus on a smaller number of issues; on whether it tries to advertise its policy successes while in government; on whether it wants to attract a large share of voters; or on whether it aims at creating an electoral alliance with another party by focusing only on common issues and positions. Second, the length of party manifestos could be explained by exogenous variables. Party manifestos can be longer or shorter depending on whether the

elections were coupled with other elections, on the size of the political arena where the election takes place, on the degree of competition, etc.

Using empirical data on the content of party manifestos drafted for gubernatorial elections in Ecuador from 2009 to 2023, we demonstrated that the length – and therefore, the content – of these electoral documents could be modestly explained by two sets of variables. First, time is an important factor when one wants to explore the length of party manifestos. We observed a significant trend towards an increase of the length of these documents over time: party manifestos drafted in more recent years tend to be longer than older manifestos. However, there seems to be no impact of alternative factors related to the electoral calendar such as simultaneous elections or the proximity to previous (nationwide) elections. The second variable that is proven to be significant in the different models is party size. Given that candidates supported by larger parties have access to larger resources, such as staff or state funding, and are more likely to appeal to a heterogeneous electorate and a multitude of interests, these analyses confirm that large parties tend to produce longer manifestos.

Also interesting is the fact that no other variables are proven to be significant in the models. In particular, party-related variables and candidate-related variables do not contribute to the explanation of the length of the investigated documents. Party manifesto length seems to be insensitive to variables such as the incumbency of the candidate, the fact that he or she is supported by a regional party, an electoral alliance or even the party of the president. Similarly, province-related variables are also insignificant, meaning that elements such as the size of the province or the degree of competition in a particular gubernatorial election has no impact on the electoral platform drafted by the candidate. This is surprising when one remembers the impact of the provincial asymmetry on Ecuadorian politics, as the national political arena in this country is dominated by the two large metropolitan provinces (Pichincha and Guayas).

These interesting findings also indicate that the Ecuadorian case – and potentially other countries the region – differs from the conclusions of similar studies done in a West-European context (see in particular Daubler (2010) and Dolezal et al. (2012)). Combined with the modest explanatory power of the regression models presented here, we are convinced that further research could focus on the inclusion

of variables that manage to take into account the specificities of the Ecuadorian or Latin-American political dynamics, in order to fully understand the process of manifesto drafting and its importance for (sub-national) elections.

In a later stage, the objective of this research is to enlarge the comparison to other gubernatorial elections by going back over time and by including other types of elections such as legislative or mayoral elections. Applying the same research design to other electoral processes with different features in Ecuador will teach us more about the dynamics at play when considering the length of a party manifesto. An interesting research question could also reverse the relation between the dependent and independent variables and test whether the length of party manifestos has an impact on electoral successes. For instance, a longer manifesto could discuss more policy issues and attract a larger variety of voters or could simply improve the credibility and dedication of its candidate. But the main methodological challenge for future research is located at the level of the dependent variable. Rather than assessing the size of a party manifesto based on its number of pages, a more accurate – but labour-intensive – task requires to assess length by the number of words, sentences or quasi-sentences in a political document.

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EXPLAINING THE LENGTH OF PARTY MANIFESTOS IN GUBERNATORIAL
ELECTIONS IN ECUADOR

Appendix

Table 1: *Summary of the main variables*

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Dependent Variable</i>					
Party manifesto length	532	1	428	28.45	28.63
<i>Independent Variables</i>					
Party size	532	.3338488	78.96418	13.37658	15.27291
Electoral alliance	532	0	1	.3252788	.4689149
Incumbent candidate (dummy)	532	0	1	.0836431	.2771095
Presidential party (dummy)	532	0	1	.1078067	.3104247
Regional party (dummy)	532	0	1	.2267658	.4191296
Election Year (dummies)	532	0	1		
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Province size	532	61817	3189183	732148.7	875538.8
Gender (Woman)	532	0	1	.1840149	.3878569
Electoral competition	532	2	20	9.424581	4.595422
Region (dummies)	532	0	1		

Source: Own elaboration