A Vision for Ecuadorian Psychology: Challenges and Possible Paths

Academic Ad-Hoc Collective, 2025[1]

Abstract

Ecuadorian society currently faces various social problems. Among them, the country has the highest number of homicides in South America, one of the highest in the world—and an alarming increase in forced emigration. This reality impacts collective well-being and demands concrete responses from those of us who practice psychology for, from, and about Ecuador. In this collective article—posed from our diverse identities, epistemologies, and positions—we build a relative consensus on our vision for Ecuadorian psychology. We propose the urgency of transforming it, strengthening social relevance; scientific relevance; research; observance and impact on public policy; academic leadership; professional associations; undergraduate and graduate training; engagement with local communities; interculturality; and the competent and critical articulation of local and international knowledge.

Keywords: *psychology, training, research, liaison, scientific relevance, social relevance, Ecuador.*

Mental phenomena have been examined across cultures for millennia. The mind has been approached, among many others, through Greek thought (psyche, "soul" or "life breath"), Chinese traditions (hun and po, ethereal and corporeal souls; qi, vital energy; or xin, heart–mind), Indian perspectives (manas and prana, mind and life breath), and Andean worldviews in South America (subjectivity understood in relation to community and nature: Ayllu, Sumak Kawsay). Modern Western psychology emerged in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century, initially as a science and later as a profession. In Latin America, the first

[1] The article was prepared by an ad hoc group of twenty people who conduct research from, for, or about Ecuador and who are interested in fostering transformations in psychology and in society more broadly. The initiative was proposed by Manuel Capella, who also facilitated the coordination process. Members of the collective contributed valuable input in a horizontal manner, from different countries, perspectives, and stages of the process. The collective does not constitute a permanent group and is not tied to a single institution, project, or school of thought. In alphabetical order, the members of the collective were: Roger Alvarado, ralvaradopa@ulvr.edu.ec, Universidad Laica Vicente Rocafuerte, Guayaquil, Ecuador; Nicolás A. Alvarez-Frank, MA, nalvarez@clarku.edu, Doctoral Candidate in Clinical Psychology, Frances L. Hiatt School of Psychology, Clark University; Teresita Borja-Alvarez, tborja@emerito.usfq.edu.ec, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidad San Francisco de Quito USFQ, Quito, Ecuador; Lorena Campo Aráuz, PhD, campoloren@yahoo.com, Research Group Conducta, Pensamiento y Vida (GICOPEVI), Universidad de Ávila, Spain; Manuel Capella (coordinator), mcapella@ucu.edu.uy, Faculty of Psychology, Universidad Católica del Uruguay, Montevideo, Uruguay; Ruth Clavijo, ruth.clavijo@ucuenca.edu.ec, Faculty of Psychology, Universidad de Cuenca, Cuenca, Ecuador; Gina Donoso, PhD, Democracy Institute, CEU, Budapest, Clinical Psychologist, independent researcher and consultant on trauma and humanitarian response, ginadonoso@gmail.com; Gabriella Gaus Hinojosa, Doctoral Candidate, Counselling Psychology, Bilingual Psychological Services Specialisation, University of Wisconsin–Madison; Paz Guarderas-Albuja, PhD, mguarderas@ups.edu.ec, Grupo de Investigaciones Psicosociales, Universidad Politécnica Salesiana; María Jara-Rizzo, maria.jarar@ug.edu.ec, Faculty of Psychological Sciences, Universidad de Guayaquil, Guayaquil, Ecuador; Verónica León-Ron, mvleon@utn.edu.ec, Universidad Técnica del Norte, Ibarra; Claudio López-Calle, claudio.lopez@ucuenca.edu.ec, Faculty of Psychology, Universidad de Cuenca, Cuenca, Ecuador; Rodrigo Moreta-Herrera, School of Psychology, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Ambato, Ecuador; Christian A. Palacios Haugestad, c.a.p.haugestad@psykologi.uio.no, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Oslo; Clara Paz, clara.paz@udla.edu.ec, Research Group Well-being, Health and Society, School of Psychology and Education, Universidad de Las Américas, Ecuador; José A. Rodas, jose.rodasp@ug.edu.ec, Faculty of Psychological Sciences, Universidad de Guayaquil, Guayaquil, Ecuador; School of Psychology, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland; Ella Marie Sandbakken, ella.sandbakken@oslonh.no, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Psychology, University of Oslo; Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Oslo New University College; María Fernanda Soliz, Director of the Health Area, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Lecturer at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador; Nadia Soria-Miranda, nadia.soriam@ug.edu.ec, Faculty of Psychological Sciences, Universidad de Guayaquil, Guayaquil, Ecuador; Emilia C. Zamora-Moncayo, emilia.zamora@mail.utoronto.ca, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada.

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psychology training programmes were established in the 1940s, such as in Chile in 1946 and in Colombia in 1949 (Salas et al., 2024; Salas et al., 2025). In Ecuador, the Institute of Psychology at the Universidad Central was founded in 1950, and in 1963 the Universidad de Guayaquil created the first undergraduate psychology programme, with an emphasis on education and vocational guidance. The history of psychology in Ecuador, from its origins to the present, has been both compelling and marked by difficulties (Capella & Andrade, 2017; Capella et al., 2020; Cruza-Guet et al., 2009; López-Calle et al., 2025).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, major changes in public policy took place, characterised by substantive advances in rights alongside tensions and inconsistencies that were widely questioned. These dynamics shaped psychological training, practice, and research. In 2008, the concept of Sumak Kawsay or "Buen Vivir"—rooted in the Andean cosmovision—was incorporated into public policy, encouraging explicit attention to care, well-being, and quality of life (Radcliffe, 2012). This orientation led to significant public investment in social development, followed by a decade of structural reforms that did not, however, achieve long-term consolidation. From 2018 onwards, after a period of heavy public spending and debt accumulation (2007–2017), austerity policies were reinstated and public investment was reduced. Earlier reforms were reversed and new measures were adopted, with observable consequences for care systems and collective well-being.

Contemporary Ecuadorian psychology encompasses a plurality of voices. This plurality is reflected in the authorship collective of the present article, as well as in our varied epistemological and ontological positions. Positivist, postpositivist, critical realist, constructivist, and constructionist approaches coexist with more critical perspectives, including liberation, community, anticolonial and decolonial psychologies, poststructuralist approaches, and feminist traditions, alongside viewpoints that, from beyond disciplinary boundaries, address processes with mental dimensions. We regard this diversity as both legitimate and generative, provided that it is grounded in rigorous training, clear arguments regarding validity, and a sustained commitment to intercultural dialogue. The field requires not only abstract epistemological debates but proposals capable of addressing the concrete, everyday problems of the population. In this article, we consider the challenges facing Ecuadorian psychology—understood as psychology conceived, practised, or researched from, about, or for the country—and outline possible ways forward.

Ecuadorian society today

A detailed examination of all the problems currently affecting Ecuadorian society lies beyond the scope of this article. In some instances, even official data may not be entirely reliable, as shown during the 2020 pandemic context (Capella, 2022b) or in the recent national census, which was criticised for major methodological shortcomings (Celi, 2023). Nonetheless, it is important to highlight some of the most pressing issues in order to consider how psychology might respond to them.

Ecuador faces severe structural and governance problems. The country currently has the highest homicide rate in South America—and one of the highest globally—and has seen an increase of more than 600% in child homicides since 2019. These trends are linked primarily to drug trafficking, accompanied by state neglect or complicity and by criminal infiltration into certain governmental institutions (Solíz, 2022; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2025). Poverty, inequality, unemployment, migration, ethnic and gender disparities, and violence remain widespread (Jiménez-Borja et al., 2023). The situation is further complicated by an energy crisis that left parts of the country without electricity for up to fourteen hours per day during several months of 2024, difficulties in the education sector, and what the government refers to as "inadequate employment" (World Bank, 2025; Jiménez-Borja et al., 2023).

Against this backdrop, "between January and October 2024, more than 80,000 Ecuadorians were internally displaced as a result of armed violence… and Ecuadorians now constitute the second largest population crossing the dangerous Darién Gap route" (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2025). Key elements of democracy are at stake in Ecuador, whether democracy is conceived from a liberal or postliberal perspective (Capella, 2024). Situations of violence reveal a kaleidoscope of interwoven factors that include global, state, and collective actions and omissions (Campo, 2019; Campo & Reyes, 2023).

Some official gender-related data are illustrative. According to one major survey, seven in ten women over the age of fourteen reported having experienced some form of violence in their lifetime, with those most affected being women with low levels of education and racialised ethnic groups (INEC, 2019). Violence also occurs in educational contexts. Studies show that four in ten surveyed students and faculty members reported experiencing sexual harassment in university settings, as did five in ten individuals with diverse sex–gender

identities (Larrea et al., 2023). Approximately 70% of surveyed university students reported having experienced childhood maltreatment (Jiménez-Borja et al., 2020). Reported consequences include depression, anxiety, and absenteeism (Reyes et al., 2024). Although conservative and sexist attitudes regarding gender roles persist in Ecuadorian society, there are also signs of change. For example, years earlier a majority of respondents affirmed that men and women have equal rights to work under dignified conditions and to earn money (INEC, 2019).

Multiple forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence continue to shape Ecuadorian society. Their understanding requires historical memory (Martín-Baró, 1996; Capella et al., 2020), including consideration of when and why indicators of collective well-being have improved or deteriorated. This understanding is essential for developing proposals to address current problems, always in dialogue with other forms of knowledge and in collaboration with diverse social actors. Psychology has a role to play in responding to these issues. Some argue for more rigid or traditional disciplinary boundaries. Others, drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, emphasise the need to avoid psychologism—reducing economic, political, and cultural problems to individual matters (Martín-Baró, 1996)—and to avoid "psychocentric" approaches that overlook key social dimensions (Rimke, 2016). Criminality in Ecuador, for example, does not stem primarily from individual causes but is rooted in structural issues such as poverty, inequality, and institutional weakness or complicity, among others (Preciado-Maila et al., 2024), which are also evident in the context of prison violence (Tapia Tapia & Salao, 2023).

Ecuadorian psychology today

Training

Psychology conceived, practised, and researched from, for, and about Ecuador is at a critical juncture that calls for a thorough review of its training processes (Capella, 2019). Over recent decades, psychology education in the country has expanded markedly. Nearly thirty years ago, only eight public and six private universities offered psychology programmes, most with some form of specialisation (Serrano Jara, 1999). By 2022, this number had risen to thirty-six universities (thirteen public and twenty-three private), with approximately sixty active undergraduate programmes. Of these, 53% corresponded to general psychology degrees without specialisation, whereas 47% offered some type of specialisation, primarily in clinical (57%), educational (25%), and organisational psychology (11%) (López-Calle et al., 2025). This expansion is also reflected in graduation numbers. Between 2010 and 2020, approximately 34,000 individuals obtained a psychology degree in Ecuador, with women representing 75% of graduates. Seventy-four per cent of graduates came from public universities. Whereas around 1,800 psychologists graduated annually in 2010, since 2015 the figure has fluctuated between 3,500 and 4,000 per year (López-Calle et al., 2025).

The principal concern appears not to be quantity but quality, in both technical and ethical terms. One growing phenomenon is fully online training. In 2018, only 686 students were enrolled in virtual undergraduate psychology programmes. By 2021, this number had risen to 3,486 (Machado, 2022). Although online training may be academically rigorous in some cases, its rapid expansion raises questions about quality, as in other cases curricula appear to have weakened, contact hours with instructors have decreased, and supervised practice hours have diminished.

A distinctive feature of psychology training in Ecuador is its long-standing model of undergraduate specialisation, already noted above: roughly three years of general coursework followed by one or two years of specialised training (Cruza et al., 2009; López-Calle, 2023). This model has persisted, becoming a tradition with certain possible advantages, such as early orientation towards specific professional fields, but also with significant limitations, especially when compared with international trends (Moreta-Herrera & Guerrero, 2019; Blanco, 2025).

In 2014, the Ecuadorian state regulated academic provision with the aim of aligning it with such international standards (Consejo de Educación Superior, 2014). One of the main objectives was to replace undergraduate specialisation with a generalist bachelor-level education. This initiative nonetheless failed to consolidate and revealed underlying tensions. On the one hand, the regulatory framework requires undergraduate programmes to train psychologists with professional expertise in a specific field—particularly relevant in health-related assessment and intervention—while, on the other hand, international guidelines advocate generalist undergraduate training followed by specialisation at postgraduate level.

This dissonance continues to create difficulties. From some perspectives, the current legal framework appears to privilege training in health or biomedical-oriented areas to the detriment of other fields such as non-health social psychology, educational psychology, organisational psychology, developmental psychology, or forensic psychology. For those working outside clinical or health

settings, this situation undervalues the historical diversity of the discipline in Latin America and restricts the development of professional profiles aligned with other national needs (Guarderas-Albuja & Carofilis, 2025). At the same time, training a bachelor-level psychologist over four or five years—when in some universities abroad the same period could encompass both an undergraduate and a master's degree—poses its own challenges. Other proposals, which go beyond administrative considerations, open debates about how "mental health" is conceptualised and about its "social" nature within university training contexts (Capella, 2023c; CEDHU, 2024; Solís, 2020b). These remain open discussions that require timely consensus.

Research

Rigorously conducted scientific production—particularly publications in high-impact academic journals—has historically been limited within Ecuadorian universities. This situation reflects structural factors and long-standing conditions that have constrained the sustained development of researchers and scientific communities in the country. The absence of doctoral programmes in the field compounds this challenge, as such programmes could help cultivate an academic body capable of producing research attuned to national needs.

From around 2016 onwards, however, publication rates in scientific journals have increased. The authors of this article, alongside many colleagues, attest to this growing effort. For instance, among the twenty most prominent women scientists in the country in terms of productivity in journals indexed in Web of Science or Scopus, three work in psychology and neuroscience (Herrera-Franco, Peña-Villacréses, and Bravo-Montero, 2025). In research on violence—especially gender-based violence, mental health, and educational settings—women researchers have also played a central role (Capella & Rodas, 2024). This pattern reflects both the predominance of women in psychology training, with women representing more than 75% of graduates over the past decade, and the sustained potential of academic communities to generate situated and relevant knowledge, irrespective of researchers' gender. Also notable in the Latin American context is the presence of Ecuadorian researchers among the top 500 highest-impact authors in Elsevier's SciVal ranking (2025), which already suggests progress with regional and international resonance.

Despite these gains, structural challenges remain. State investment in research is low, access to international networks is limited, working conditions for researchers are precarious, and a strong research culture has yet to be consolidated. The link between universities and public policy is also fragile. A core issue concerns the relatively low interest and political will of successive national and local governments to consult researchers when seeking theoretically and empirically grounded solutions to social problems. This disengagement appears to be reflected as well in reductions to public research budgets. Within universities, governing bodies often allocate resources to a range of areas—some with little scientific or social relevance—while relegating research to a secondary position. Other debates related to the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of academic publishing extend beyond the aims of this article.

Employment and professional services for the population

Before the constitutional changes introduced in 2008, state investment in public-sector jobs for psychologists was notably limited. Even afterwards, until 2018, the availability of psychologists in the public health system remained low, with fewer than one professional per 10,000 inhabitants; in contrast, during the same period there were 23.44 physicians per 10,000 people, and the rates for dentists and nurses were 3.2 and 14.54 respectively (INEC, 2020). Access to psychological services within the health sector remains insufficient in view of the real and growing demand, which continues to face emerging challenges (León-Ron et al., 2025).

Education presents its own difficulties. According to the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (MINEDUC, 2016), a psychologist is assigned to an educational institution when enrolment falls between 450 and 675 students. Additional psychologists are added proportionally: one more between 676 and 1125 students, a third between 1126 and 1575, and so on. In practice, however, these ratios are not reliably met. This reflects a logic of minimal and insufficient coverage that does not correspond to actual needs for psychological support in school settings. The result is an excessive workload that affects practitioners' well-being and the quality of their work. In contexts where psychologists also serve as defenders of rights and collaborate closely with justice-system actors, the work carries considerable occupational risks and heightened vulnerability. Other areas of practice, such as legal and forensic psychology, human resources, and others, operate under their own particular labour dynamics.

Professional work, including paid employment, is shaped by economic, political, and cultural dynamics. Some communities—especially those that are more culturally Westernised—may have a stronger demand for professional psychological services, whereas others may not, and this variation is legitimate. Addressing

employment-related issues requires a perspective grounded in work and organisational psychology. Understanding current labour conditions also demands historical analysis. It is essential to ask when employment opportunities for psychologists in the public sector improved or declined, how the private sector evolved, what role nongovernmental organisations played, when and why the quantity and quality of university positions shifted, and how political, economic, and cultural factors shaped these changes. Without such answers, formulating proposals that meaningfully connect training, research, and professional practice—while responding to population needs and ensuring labour rights—becomes difficult.

Other operational and epistemological challenges

A detailed discussion of several additional issues facing Ecuadorian psychology lies beyond the scope of this text. There are tensions concerning professional licensure and state regulation of the profession; dilemmas regarding both the relative benefits and multiple problems of the undergraduate specialisation model (for a constructive critique that may contribute to ongoing discussions, see Blanco, 2025); the growing popularity and limited technical and ethical regulation of practices such as coaching; and the role of organisational psychology in processes that either sustain or challenge structural problems of unemployment and labour precarity.

Underlying many of these points are deeper epistemological debates and their methodological implications. Although these are not examined here in depth, it is relevant to note that positions vary widely regarding how to address the challenges outlined above. From an experimental scientific standpoint, it is important to recognise how training and research have sidelined internationally influential areas such as cognition, neuroscience, psychometrics, and personality. The absence of locally developed scientific work in these fields produces a strong dependence on theoretical models, experimental protocols, and psychometric instruments originating largely in the Global North, especially the anglophone context. This raises legitimate questions about their applicability and validity in Ecuador (Capella & Rodas, 2024). From more critical sociocultural perspectives, the underlying issues highlighted are different and more profound, and some of these will be addressed in a constructive manner in the following sections, particularly in relation to social relevance.

Our vision for Ecuadorian psychology

Drawing on our diverse identities and perspectives, and considering the challenges outlined above, we present a relatively shared vision of possible paths forward.

Social relevance

The social relevance we propose for Ecuadorian psychology lies in contributing to the resolution of real problems faced by different groups and individuals, improving their well-being across contexts. For most of the authors of this text, this entails an ethical understanding of the multiple forms of violence that permeate our society and the design of strategies aimed at building peace, considering both individual and social dimensions (Capella, 2022a, 2022b, 2023, 2024; Capella et al., 2024). Among several possible analytic categories, addressing violent expressions of necropolitics appears essential (Mbembe, 2020): manifestations of state power and dominant discourses that, directly or indirectly, determine which populations may and should be neglected, marginalised, and excluded to the point that their death is permitted or even facilitated. Research on necropolitical processes is therefore critical (Capella & Rodas, 2024). Psychology cannot limit itself to approaching violence and peace in naïve or superficial ways; rather, it must assume a potentially transformative responsibility, recognising that subjective distress can be understood as historically determined forms of collective harm rooted in structural conditions of inequality, exploitation, and dispossession. Ethics in psychology is always grounded in social relevance that attends to these structural conditions (Martín-Baró, 2015).

Human rights and transitional justice—despite their current global crisis—constitute an important field. After decades of human rights violations, in 2010 the Ecuadorian Truth Commission released the report No hay justicia sin verdad, documenting patterns of systematic state violence beginning in the 1980s (Donoso, 2013). These patterns, regrettably, persist today in different forms. As Valencia (2011) and Donoso (2018) note, victims of such crimes receive insufficient and fragmented psychosocial support. The country needs professionals capable of accompanying and intervening alongside victims. Faced with this historical debt, Ecuadorian psychology should advocate an interdisciplinary practice committed to processes of truth, justice, and memory, and to the dignity of every person.

Across diverse perspectives, the social relevance of psychology necessarily has an ecological component, as society and nature are not separate (CEDHU, 2024; Solíz, 2020a, 2020b, 2021, 2022). Today, phenomena such as armed conflict and climate change intensify complex

issues including forced migration, food crises, water scarcity, climate anxiety, epidemics, and poverty, all of which have tangible consequences for people's overall health. In this context, social relevance entails preparing psychologists who can respond with creativity, solid knowledge, and adequate skills to emerging social and environmental challenges (Sandoval-Díaz et al., 2024).

Interculturality is essential. Psychology must reconsider whether it is constructed as an inclusive field or as an exclusive and elitist one—as it is often perceived by certain groups in Ecuador (Capella & Andrade, 2017; Capella, 2023b; Donoso, 2018b). It is important to examine how the professional culture of psychology intersects with other alternatives, such as religious practices or traditional healing systems used by different communities and individuals. This can help prevent psychological practice from reproducing forms of cultural violence. It is also important to recognise the legitimacy of diverse forms of knowledge—some of them ancestral—as potential sources of understanding. Indigenous conceptions of the mind in Ecuador, for instance, shape how psychological experience is understood in a multicultural society aspiring to interculturality in several domains. Attending meaningfully to culture, including ancestral knowledge, can deepen our understanding of mental processes in context (Adolfsson et al., 2025; Bateson, 1979; Hill et al., 2021).

Psychology can contribute ethically to promoting well-being in contexts such as education, community health, the inclusion of diverse populations, child development, and others. Professionals may support processes of psychosocial strengthening, vocational guidance, suicide prevention, and crisis intervention, especially in collaboration with marginalised rural and urban communities. Furthermore, certain sociopolitical moments may prompt psychology students in Ecuador to reflect on whether ethical practice implies adopting a more passive or active role during political protests to demand rights (Cuenca-Flores et al., 2021), as well as on whether psychological knowledge—with its potential use or misuse—might benefit or harm particular political projects.

Individuals who adopt explicitly political positions—unlike those who ignore or do not make explicit the ideological assumptions underpinning their work—maintain that the ethical foundations of psychology's social relevance are always ethical–political. From these standpoints —which are not always shared within the Ecuadorian psychology community in its entirety—because they are deemed "political", social relevance requires critiquing and proposing structural and cultural transformations rather than merely functional adjustments to an unjust system. This involves questioning dominant ideology and taking a stance in favour of economic, cultural, and epistemic justice, and against individualism, racism, machismo, and classism, which are present in various forms within curricular content and professional practice (Capella, 2019, 2022a, 2023; Capella & Jadhav, 2020; Capella et al., 2020). Several of us argue that it is both possible and desirable to pursue rigour in objective and empirical analyses while also making ethical–political commitments explicit (Martín-Baró, 1998; Donoso, 2018b).

Our plurality of perspectives on what constitutes social relevance enables us to engage with deep and urgent debates that we consider essential for progress. These discussions concern not only psychology but also the wider fields of global health, public health, and collective health (Abimbola, 2025; Solíz, 2020a, 2020b, 2021, 2022; CEDHU, 2024; Capella, 2023c; Capella, in press; Shelton et al., 2018). Those of us aligned with more critical approaches are called to question disciplinary neutrality, critique psychologism and psychocentric frameworks, and emphasise transformative actions in pursuit of social and ecological justice.

Scientific relevance

Ecuadorian psychology requires scientific relevance and stronger research production generated from within the country and centred on its realities. This calls for rigour supported by continuous updating and solid methodological training in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed designs focused on diverse Ecuadorian populations. Psychological science in Ecuador needs both nomothetic knowledge—measurement of general patterns and theories—and idiographic knowledge—the study of contextually grounded processes and specific cases. Socially engaged methodologies—for example, participatory action research and related approaches—can also produce scientific knowledge. Indeed, participatory methods that avoid extractivism and instead integrate communities as active co-producers of knowledge and research agendas increase the ecological and cultural validity of findings (Uluğ et al., 2023). We support a rich methodological pluralism, provided it is implemented rigorously. Research should strengthen the discipline while also encouraging interdisciplinarity and, where feasible, transdisciplinary efforts (Campo Aráuz & Palys Reyes, 2023; Capella, 2023c; CEDHU, 2017; Solíz, 2020b).

We need a psychology that engages with scientific advances achieved elsewhere in the world and contributes

to them, whether by validating or questioning them. This requires producing situated knowledge while remaining in dialogue with theoretical developments and empirical findings that shape international agendas in areas such as neuroscience, psychometrics, cognitive psychology, personality research, developmental psychology, social, community, and cultural psychology, and evidence-based intervention, among others, including debates surrounding these fields. Such engagement will help avoid intellectual isolation and contribute local empirical evidence. Ecuadorian researchers need to participate in international scientific societies and networks, enabling diverse and horizontal collaboration. This approach must be grounded in the conviction that meaningful contributions are possible and that researchers from Ecuador need not serve merely as data collectors for international studies. National research can be positioned in high-impact scholarly forums and expand the reach of its contributions.

At the same time, it is crucial to review not only international literature but also work produced within Ecuador. Doing so should become a methodological principle that strengthens scientific research practice and enriches epistemological, methodological, and contextual debates.

From positivist quantitative logics, it is coherent to advocate for robust designs and advanced statistical analyses supported by large samples with adequate explanatory power; for the precise use of statistical and analytical tools; and for the implementation of designs with sufficient validity and, where applicable, replicability. Within this framework, rigour goes hand in hand with the use of cutting-edge data-analytic models that enhance the precision of results, increase objectivity, ensure theoretical coherence, and minimise error, all of which are relevant to hypothesis testing. Statistical techniques such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), Bayesian statistics, psychological networks, Big Data approaches, and others are no longer methodologies exclusive to technical sciences and engineering but now form a fundamental part of the development of the social sciences and psychology within international debates (Danari et al., 2023; Freeborn, 2023; Moreta-Herrera et al., 2025). From qualitative logics, it is imperative to train researchers capable of working with sufficient rigour, avoiding analyses limited to superficial description or pseudo-analysis (Maxwell, 2019; Antaki et al., 2003). In both quantitative and qualitative designs, rigour must be accompanied by reflexivity (Jamieson et al., 2023).

In the legitimate effort to increase scientific production, it is important to prioritise quality over quantity, relying on peer review by scholars with adequate expertise and on the validity of the knowledge produced. A high volume of publications of questionable quality—or, for example, published in predatory or quasi-predatory journals—creates more problems than solutions for universities and researchers. Initiatives such as REIPSi (Red Ecuatoriana de Investigación en Psicología) can help to make visible and connect the diverse research being conducted in the country.

A further crucial factor is the academic training of those who undertake research (see section Improving training programmes). Universities must foster a culture that values research. Students need to learn to read and critically interpret existing studies, relate them to everyday life and national problems, formulate new empirically relevant questions and carry out empirical work appropriate to their level of training (undergraduate, master's, doctoral). In the case of university lecturers, we maintain that scientific production should not be regarded as a universal requirement but as a task consistent with each academic's profile. This implies avoiding the imposition of formal research duties on those without the appropriate profile, while providing adequate conditions for those with a vocation for research. This does not preclude encouraging the entire university community to engage with scientific knowledge production. Research should not be a compulsory pedagogical or employment requirement but a set of practices aimed at producing knowledge with both scientific and social relevance.

Observing and influencing public policy

It is essential for Ecuadorian psychology to act in accordance with national and international legal standards and to maintain an informed, critical, and technically grounded relationship with public policy. Many conditions that affect the population's psychological well-being—as well as the possibilities for study, employment, and professional development for psychologists—are directly shaped by public policy decisions in education, health, and labour. Ecuadorian psychology must strengthen its capacity to influence such policies. This requires preparing professionals capable of engaging in dialogue with other disciplines, producing contextually grounded empirical evidence and participating actively in state decision-making spaces. In settings where fundamental rights are threatened by regressive political decisions, psychology should assume a proactive and critical role, combining technical knowledge with a commitment to public political engagement.

In this regard, various national and international academic networks—for example, the Global Psychology Alliance (GPA), the Learning Leadership Institute, or

REIPSi—offer important platforms for strengthening technical influence in the field. Through non-partisan yet scientifically grounded public statements, these organisations can draw attention to policies lacking sufficient empirical support or likely to generate adverse consequences for mental health and collective well-being. At the same time, they can contribute ethical, feasible, evidence-based proposals that promote a psychology committed to the quality of life of the population. We consider links with local governments particularly valuable, as they enable highly contextualised work grounded in local realities.

Observing and influencing academic leadership

It is urgent for Ecuadorian psychology to attend to the technical, ethical, and professional quality of those who take on academic leadership roles in the faculties and departments where the discipline is taught and researched. The appointment of academic authorities should not be based primarily on administrative criteria—let alone on impositions or irregular or unethical procedures—but on deliberative processes that involve the academic community, value scholarly trajectories and ensure the professional suitability of those who assume such posts.

From this standpoint, it is reasonable to expect that those directing academic units in the discipline hold, at minimum, postgraduate training in psychology, verifiable experience in research, teaching and university administration, and an up-to-date understanding of the scientific, ethical–professional and social challenges facing Ecuadorian psychology. An appropriate profile should also include competences in curricular design, knowledge of international standards for psychology training, strong interpersonal skills and the ability to foster academic collaboration within and beyond Ecuador. Appointing academic staff to posts for which they are unprepared—particularly to leadership roles—can be understood as a relative form of institutional corruption.

Models such as transformational leadership are useful here, as they promote an institutional vision oriented towards collective academic development, the strengthening of scientific culture and the cultivation of ethical, democratic, and collaborative work environments (McGregor Burn, 1978; Bass & Riggio, 2006). It is also valuable to explore leadership from gender perspectives, assessing not only how many women attain these roles but also whether their leadership styles reproduce hierarchical patterns or contribute to collective well-being. At a time when training, research, and community engagement all face structural pressures, the role of academic authorities becomes strategic. Influencing their selection and evaluation processes is therefore a concrete avenue through which Ecuadorian psychology may advance rather than regress.

Improving undergraduate and postgraduate training programmes

A priority for Ecuadorian psychology must be to improve the quality of training programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Although enrolment and graduation rates have grown markedly in recent decades, this quantitative expansion has not always been accompanied by an equivalent strengthening of academic quality. In this regard, it is essential to advance the priorities outlined above—social and scientific relevance, influence on public policy and high-quality academic leadership—to consolidate training that is comprehensive, current and rigorous.

Psychology education must be grounded in robust theory and empirical evidence, incorporate relevant onto-epistemological and ethical debates and respond to the psychological problems affecting diverse populations and territories. This requires academic programmes that promote a plural and innovative approach with a critical understanding of the determinants of psychological distress in different sociocultural settings; that integrate theoretical training with practical experience inside and outside the classroom, strengthening clinical, community, educational and organisational skills—among others—with technical and ethical rigour; and that foster a holistic vision of the psychologist as a professional able to critically analyse updated scientific research, apply its findings in practice and generate new knowledge based on field experience (Trujillo & Paz, 2020).

We maintain that training should avoid—or at least mitigate—processes of commodification in higher education when these compromise quality and ethics. At the same time, progress is needed in external evaluation, systematic accreditation and effective regulation of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. This would allow the guarantee of minimum quality standards, limit the proliferation of educational offerings lacking academic substance and guide institutions towards continuous improvement. We consider it particularly important to develop and strengthen, gradually, high-quality doctoral programmes.

Improving community engagement

Community engagement is a substantive function of universities in Ecuador. It cannot be confined to isolated activities or reduced to an administrative requirement with no real impact. Psychology undertaken from, for and about Ecuador needs to rethink critically what is meant by "engagement" and with whom it is built (Bermello &

Capella, 2022). All engagement takes place within concrete economic, political and cultural contexts and must therefore draw on scientific advances, situated diagnostics, recognition of community knowledge and collaborative relationships as symmetrical as possible in terms of power. At present, psychology's engagement with society is very limited, predominantly assistentialist and, in the best of cases, disarticulated. Our view is that a deep transformation in this regard is needed.

Different psychological traditions can contribute to addressing Ecuador's challenges. Community psychology, for instance, offers conceptual and methodological tools that can guide participatory interventions that are ethically grounded and technically robust. Engagement with scientific and social relevance is by no means exclusive to community psychology; it is a cross-cutting principle for all areas of psychological practice. By articulating training, research and community engagement, universities can play a transformative role in the country's collective life, provided these processes are carried out with appropriate academic and ethical standards.

Revitalising professional associations

Ecuadorian psychology must recognise that its professionals and academic staff are, fundamentally, workers who require fair, stable and respectful labour conditions. This means promoting strong professional organisations that defend labour rights effectively and ethically, without subordination to contingent political or institutional interests, particularly in contexts where professional practice entails significant risks to health and life. Although professional colleges and associations exist in the country, their impact has been uneven and often limited by internal conflicts or insufficient representativeness. It is necessary to foster technical, ethical and democratic leadership capable of working collectively and taking an active and brave position regarding current challenges facing the discipline and the country.

It may also be desirable—though still a matter of debate—to advance towards a unified national association that brings together psychologists from all areas of specialisation, promoting professional cohesion and the collective defence of high-quality psychological practice in Ecuador. Among several potential tasks, such organisations could, in collaboration with universities and policymakers, work to articulate teaching, research and professional practice more robustly.

Connecting the local and the global

As has already been argued, Ecuadorian psychology needs to strengthen its integration with international circuits of scientific production while remaining attentive to the specificity of local contexts (Capella & Andrade, 2017). This requires overcoming the current fragmentation between research conducted within the country and developments in other regions of the world. The goal is simultaneously to make visible the knowledge produced in Ecuador and to participate actively in global dialogues, regional collaborations and academic networks that enrich our understanding of psychological processes.

If scientific production does not resonate locally and regionally, disciplinary debates will continue to depend on imported references, and the long-criticised intellectual isolation that hinders connections between local and global research spaces will persist. One possible strategy—among others—is to promote pedagogical exchange and joint academic publication between Ecuadorian university communities and institutions in other continents (Castro & Capella, 2020).

The world can learn from the Ecuadorian case, and Ecuador can learn from experiences elsewhere. Ecuador is, for instance, among the countries with the highest homicide rates globally, and its government was among those that managed the 2020 pandemic most poorly (Capella, 2022b; Capella et al., 2024). These issues have been discussed in academic forums internationally, including several with participation from psychologists. Students, professionals and scholars in other countries can learn a great deal about the psychological dimensions of these processes, both regarding the forms of suffering involved and the ways in which communities confront such situations through critical, creative and active approaches.

Processes of dehumanisation are documented in Ecuador—though not exclusively in that domain—in relation to criminality and the prison system (Tapia Tapia & Salao, 2023). Yet dehumanisation also occurs in many other countries and contexts, including situations currently under United Nations investigation for actions "consistent with genocide" (Abimbola, 2025; United Nations, 2024; Capella, in press). Institutional crises thus challenge the foundations of peace not only in Ecuador but regionally and globally (Capella, 2024). Finally, problems such as climate deterioration and global inequity concern humanity as a whole, and Ecuadorian psychology has the potential to contribute meaningfully to these dialogues. Advancing in this direction—connecting the local and the global—is one way of building epistemic justice.

Conclusion

The authors of this article work from, for or about Ecuador, drawing on diverse epistemological and ethical–political positions. We recognise that such diversity entails plural visions—at times convergent, at times not—regarding what Ecuadorian psychology is and what it ought to be. Nonetheless, through an effort at epistemic translation and the search for partial consensus, we share a common concern: the urgent need to transform our discipline so that it can respond effectively to the country's specific realities and to global challenges. The hypothetical possibility of isolated advances in the country's governance cannot be ruled out, provided that those who assert them can demonstrate objective evidence. Some of this evidence may go unnoticed because it is not currently recorded in reliable official sources or in the empirical studies consulted. That said, the social landscape in Ecuador is extremely violent, offering no immediate prospect of improvement or simple solutions. Confronted with these challenges, we outline a vision with several possible paths for collective progress.

These paths involve strengthening and consolidating both scientific and social relevance, taking an active role in identifying, analysing and intervening in relation to complex phenomena such as the severe violence affecting the population, persistent inequities, difficulties in accessing fundamental rights such as health and education, and the construction of peace; enhancing undergraduate and postgraduate training through updated, rigorous and ethically engaged programmes capable of preparing professionals and researchers who can contribute technically robust and contextually grounded solutions; influencing public policy and academic leadership by fostering informed and critical dialogue with decision-makers across sectors; developing research by increasing and improving scientific production of national and international relevance; building ethical, meaningful and intercultural engagement with local communities; strengthening professional associations to guarantee dignified working conditions and effective collective representation; and connecting the local and the global by participating in academic networks and international research, while engaging critically with debates beyond our national and disciplinary boundaries.

The proposal presented here is an open invitation to dialogue, critical reflection and collective action. It remains to be seen how widely this vision is shared within and beyond the academic and professional community. From our perspective, we offer these ideas in the hope that they may inspire concrete and urgently needed transformations for the benefit of society as a whole.

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