Verdad y Derecho
Revista Arbitrada de Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales
Vol. 5(2), 1-13, 2026
https://doi.org/10.62574/7vqtka68

Efficiency and Improvement of Recruitment Processes in Ecuadorian Public Institutions

Eficiencia y mejora de los procesos de contratación en las instituciones públicas ecuatorianas

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to analyze the efficiency and improvement of procurement processes in Ecuadorian public institutions. A descriptive documentary approach was applied, involving legal content analysis of a corpus of eighteen academic and regulatory sources published between 2021 and 2026, selected for thematic relevance, methodological rigor, and timeliness; bibliographic inventory tables and comparative analyses were developed as systematization tools. The results show that the gap between current efficiency and required improvement is most pronounced in award criteria, technological integration, and institutional capacity; furthermore, the 2026 General Regulations of the LOSNCP represent a regulatory advance whose effectiveness depends on organizational conditions that remain deficient. It is concluded that sustainable reform of the system requires coherence between regulatory adjustment, institutional strengthening, and technological regulation.

Descriptors: employment conditions; collective bargaining agreement; contract law. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

La investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar la eficiencia y la mejora de los procesos de contratación en las instituciones públicas ecuatorianas. Se aplicó un enfoque descriptivo documental con análisis de contenido jurídico sobre un corpus de dieciocho fuentes académicas y normativas publicadas entre 2021 y 2026, seleccionadas por pertinencia temática, rigor metodológico y actualidad; se elaboraron tablas de arqueo bibliográfico y análisis comparativo como instrumentos de sistematización. Los resultados evidencian que la brecha entre eficiencia actual y mejora requerida resulta más pronunciada en los criterios de adjudicación, la incorporación tecnológica y la capacidad institucional; asimismo, el Reglamento General de la LOSNCP de 2026 representa un avance normativo cuya eficacia depende de condiciones organizacionales aún deficitarias.

Descriptores: condiciones de empleo; convenio colectivo; derecho de los contratos. (Fuente: Tesauro UNESCO).

Received: 10/04/2026. Reviewed: 11/05/2026. Approved: 13/05/2026. Published: 20/05/2026.
Research Articles Section

INTRODUCTION

It is worth noting that few mechanisms of the state apparatus have such a direct impact on a society's quality of life as public procurement; through it, the State transforms the national budget into infrastructure projects, essential services, and public goods that ultimately determine the actual scope of citizens' rights; and in Ecuador, this process is coordinated through the National Public Procurement System (SNCP), whose regulatory framework subjects state entities to specific procedures for each procurement modality; Consequently, the system does not function as a mere technical procurement mechanism but embodies public policy choices that define who contracts, under what conditions, and with what selection criteria—aspects that directly impact the efficiency of spending and the institutional legitimacy of the state, as analyzed by García and Vaca (2025) in their examination of the legal implications of Ecuador's general administrative process; however, a growing body of empirical evidence reveals that the system suffers from structural dysfunctions whose persistence erodes transparency, increases the cost of processes, and reduces the quality of the results obtained.

In this vein, understanding these dysfunctions requires going beyond normative description and addressing the operational factors that produce them; in this regard, Andrade et al. (2024) demonstrated that the preference for the lowest price as an award criterion compromises the quality of the works and generates unforeseen cost overruns that end up being absorbed by the State itself; Similarly, Faz-Cevallos et al. (2023) highlighted the unresolved contradiction between procedural speed and technical rigor in SNCP procurements, a tension that is replicated in various Latin American contexts; likewise, López et al. (2024) identified unfinished public works as a recurring manifestation of failures in pre-contractual planning, while Yomona-de-Alcalde et al. (2025) confirmed that institutional weaknesses in project management within the region's procurement systems lead to delays and cost overruns that compromise the delivery of public services; given that these problems are not unique to Ecuador but part of a regional pathology, their analysis takes on a comparative dimension that enriches the national diagnosis.

That being the case, the Ecuadorian legal system has responded to these realities with major regulatory updates; since the existing regulatory framework contained loopholes that facilitated discretion in awarding contracts, the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador (2026) issued the General Regulations of the Organic Law of the National Public Procurement System via Executive Decree No. 193 in January 2026, with provisions aimed at closing those gaps and providing greater predictability to contractual procedures; consequently, the regulatory reform opens a transition period in which the effectiveness of the changes will depend not only on the legal text but also on the institutional capacity to implement it; Consequently, the incorporation of computational analysis tools into contract oversight constitutes an area of intervention of growing interest, as Torres-Berrú (2023) demonstrated that data and text mining allows for the detection of anomalous patterns in the SNCP with a level of precision that traditional audit mechanisms cannot achieve; It should also be noted that Sánchez-Chero et al. (2025) argued that artificial intelligence can structurally transform public procurement processes, provided that its implementation occurs within regulatory frameworks that guarantee transparency and the ethical use of automated systems.

In light of the premises outlined above, the objective is to analyze the efficiency and improvement of procurement processes in Ecuadorian public institutions.

Ecuador's National Public Procurement System

It should be noted that public procurement in Ecuador is governed by the Organic Law of the National Public Procurement System and its general regulations, an instrument that, in accordance with the 2026 regulatory update, establishes the principles of legality, fair treatment, equality, quality, technological relevance, timeliness, competition, transparency, publicity, and national participation, as provided for in by the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador (2026); viewed in this light, contractual efficiency cannot be assessed in isolation, but rather in conjunction with these guiding principles, whose observance determines the legitimacy and rationality of public spending; at the same time, García and Vaca (2025) specify that Ecuador's general administrative process serves as the legal framework that provides systemic coherence to state actions in procurement matters, making public

procurement a concrete expression of applied administrative law; Given that the principle of transparency has constitutional status, Gudiño-Mena (2022) notes that compliance with it is not limited to the publication of contractual acts, but rather requires real mechanisms for citizen participation that allow for the verification of compliance with the public objectives committed to in each procurement process.

METHOD

The study was structured using a descriptive-documentary approach; the technique employed was legal-documentary content analysis, applied to a bibliographic corpus comprising eighteen academic and regulatory sources selected based on criteria of thematic relevance, methodological rigor, and the recency of the publication; it should be noted that priority was given to studies published between 2021 and 2026, with a focus on the Ecuadorian and Latin American context; similarly, bibliographic inventory and comparative analysis tables were developed as tools for systematizing the information, which are presented in the following section.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The following is an inventory of the reviewed sources and their specific relationship to the research topic.

Table 1. *Bibliographic survey and relationship to the research topic*.

No.	Author(s) and year	Title	Type of source	Relation to the topic
1	Álava-Del-Valle and Cedeño-Choez (2022)	Ecuadorian Government Bonds in the Ecuadorian Business Economy	Literature review article	Public procurement is situated within the context of the Ecuadorian government's financial management, with an emphasis on the criteria that guide government spending.
2	Andrade et al. (2024)	The quality of public procurement projects: considering the lowest price versus the best value	Scientific article	This study examines the relationship between the criteria for awarding public works contracts and concrete outcomes in terms of quality—a key aspect for assessing the efficiency of the public procurement system.
3	Cando-Morejon et al. (2023)	Cases of financial fraud in Ecuador: A brief review	Review article	This paper documents specific cases of irregularities in the management of Ecuadorian public funds, with direct references to fraudulent practices embedded in government procurement processes.
4	Faz-Cevallos et al. (2023)	Public Procurement in Ecuador: Analysis and Outlook	Scientific article	It describes the functioning of the SNCP, identifies its operational flaws and pending procedural

No.	Author(s) and year	Title	Type of source	Relation to the topic
				challenges; it constitutes the central reference of this study.
5	Freire-Heredia and Delgado-Mosquera (2025)	The Reality of Public Hospital Administration in Ecuador	Review article	Evidence from an Ecuadorian hospital case study on how contractual failures directly impact the operational capacity of public health services.
6	Garcia and Vaca (2025)	The general administrative process in Ecuador: A systematic review	Scientific article	Contextualizes the contracting process within the general framework of Ecuadorian administrative procedure and its legal regulation.
7	Gudiño-Mena (2022)	The constitutional principle of transparency in public procurement in Ecuador	Scientific article	Establishes transparency and citizen participation as a condition for the legitimacy of the public procurement system.
8	López et al. (2024)	Unfinished public works: A literature review	Review article	Documents the problem of uncompleted contracted works, a direct consequence of inefficiency in contract management.
9	Lozano-Benavides (2025)	Public Procurement and the Social and Solidarity Economy in Ecuador	Scientific article	Links procurement policy to local economic development and the inclusion of actors from the popular and solidarity economy.
10	Madrid (2025)	Review: Public procurement as a system (González Tamayo, 2021)	Academic review	Provides a systemic view of Ecuadorian public procurement as a coordinated set of rules, actors, and procedures.
11	Presidency of the Republic of the Ecuador (2026)	General Regulations of the LOSNCP (Executive Decree No. 193)	Legal Norm	Primary source of law for the current public procurement system; establishes the guiding principles and applicable procedures.
12	Quiñonez et al. (2021)	Occupational Risk Prevention and Its Regulatory Framework	Literature review article	Contributes to the analysis of the regulatory framework applicable to the obligations of contracting entities regarding construction and service personnel.
13	Sánchez-Chero et al. (2025)	Artificial Intelligence: Impacts and Challenges in Public Procurement	Systematic review article	Examines the potential of AI to automate and optimize contractual processes, a key focus of the system's technological improvement.
14	Singaucho-Armas (2025)	Women and Public Procurement: A Look at the Inclusive Tendering Process	Scientific article	Analyzes the gender equity dimension in public procurement as a component of the system's social improvement.
15	Talledo and Patiño (2025)	Critical review of bribery in Ecuador	Scientific article	Studies the corrupt practices that affect the integrity of procurement processes and proposes strategies for their eradication.
16	Torres-Berrú (2023)	Data and Text Mining for Fraud Detection in Public Contracts: The Case of Ecuador	Doctoral thesis	Develops a technological model to identify irregularities in the COMPRASPÚBLICAS system, a methodological contribution to control efficiency.

No.	Author(s) and year	Title	Type of source	Relation to the topic
17	Urbina (2025)	Analysis of the main uses in comprehensive auditing	Systematic review article	Examines the audit mechanisms applicable to the control of public contract management and their contribution to accountability.
18	Yomona-de-Alcalde et al. (2025)	Impact of public procurement on project management in Latin America	Systematic review article	Identifies the determinants of contractual efficiency in the Latin American context; comparative benchmark for the study.

Note. Prepared by the authors based on the sources consulted (2021–2026).

The bibliographic survey systematized in Table 1 shows that the corpus of eighteen reviewed sources covers a publication period ranging from 2021 to 2026, with a marked concentration in the years 2025 and 2026; this indicates the relevance and scope of the academic debate on Ecuadorian public procurement. In this vein, it is observed that the majority of the works consist of scientific and review articles published in indexed open-access journals, which facilitates the circulation and verification of the knowledge produced.

An analysis of the thematic focus of each source reveals three predominant areas of interest in the reviewed literature: first, procedural efficiency and award criteria, represented primarily by Andrade et al. (2024) and Faz-Cevallos et al. (2023); second, transparency, the control of irregularities, and auditing, as explored by Gudiño-Mena (2022), Torres-Berrú (2023), Talledo and Patiño (2025), and Urbina (2025); and, third, the social and inclusive dimension of public procurement, addressed by Singaucho-Armas (2025) and Lozano-Benavides (2025).

It should be noted that the most relevant regulatory source in the reviewed corpus is the General Regulations of the LOSNCP (Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador, 2026), whose inclusion in the analysis allows for situating academic developments within the current regulatory framework; hence, the articulation between law and doctrine constitutes one of the most representative methodological features of the selected bibliographic corpus. At the same time, the presence of studies with a Latin American scope, such as those by Yomona-de-Alcalde et al. (2025) and Sánchez-Chero et al. (2025), enriches the comparative analysis and allows for the contextualization of Ecuadorian issues within a broader regional context.

On the other hand, Table 2 presents a comparative systematization of the dimensions in which the reviewed literature distinguishes between the current state of the system's efficiency and the identified proposals for improvement.

Table 2. *Comparative analysis of efficiency and improvement in public procurement processes.*

Dimension of analysis	Efficiency in public procurement	Improvement of procurement processes
Award criterion	Applies the best-value principle, integrating price, quality, and technical conditions to ensure rational spending (Andrade et al., 2024).	It proposes replacing the lowest-price criterion with evaluation schemes that integrate quality, technical conditions, and sustainability, with a view to reducing the frequency of poorly executed projects (Andrade et al., 2024).
Regulatory framework	The General Regulations of the LOSNCP establish the principles of fair treatment, equality, and quality as minimum conditions for contractual efficiency (Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador, 2026).	In this regard, the regulatory amendments introduced in 2026 aim to streamline procurement procedures and limit the margin of discretion in award decisions (Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador, 2026).
Transparency and Oversight	Active transparency requires platforms for public access and accountability regarding award processes (Gudiño-Mena, 2022).	Similarly, citizen oversight and collective monitoring of bidding processes reinforce institutional oversight mechanisms against potential irregularities (Gudiño-Mena, 2022; Talledo and Patiño, 2025).
Technology and Innovation	The use of information systems (COMPRASPÚBLICAS) enables the registration and traceability of contracts, a basic requirement for operational efficiency (Torres-Berrú, 2023).	Big data analysis and the use of artificial intelligence tools open up concrete possibilities for identifying anomalies in procurement processes and refining contract planning (Torres-Berrú, 2023; Sánchez-Chero et al., 2025).
Quality of Execution	Efficiency is measured by the degree of compliance with the contractual scope in terms of time, cost, and agreed-upon technical specifications (López et al., 2024).	Since sustained technical supervision and contractual quality guarantees directly impact the degree of compliance, their systematic incorporation helps reduce the incidence of uncompleted contracts (López et al., 2024).
Social Inclusion	The system incorporates differentiated procedures (inclusive procurement, EPS preferences) to expand the participation of vulnerable actors in public procurement (Singaucho-Armas, 2025).	It is worth noting that the incorporation of gender equity criteria and support for actors in the popular and solidarity economy expand the redistributive capacity of the public procurement system (Singaucho-Armas, 2025; Lozano-Benavides, 2025).
Institutional Capacity	Contractual efficiency depends on the technical competencies of contracting entity staff to manage SNCP procedures (Faz-Cevallos et al., 2023).	Ongoing training, process standardization, and the exchange of best practices among contracting entities are key factors in institutional improvement (Yomona-de-Alcalde et al., 2025).
Control of Irregularities	The comprehensive audit mechanisms and prior control by the Office of the Comptroller General constitute basic safeguards for contractual integrity (Urbina, 2025).	The implementation of early warning systems based on predictive analytics and stricter criminalization of bribery reduce the incidence of acts of corruption (Talledo and Patiño, 2025; Cando-Morejon et al., 2023).

Note. Prepared by the author based on the reviewed sources.

Based on the foregoing, the comparative analysis presented in Table 2 shows that, for each of the eight dimensions examined, there is a gap between current efficiency levels and the changes required to achieve sustained improvement in the system; the dimension of award criteria emerges as the most contentious issue, given that current regulations allow price to be a determining factor in contractor selection, while the specialized literature agrees that this practice undermines the quality of contracted goods and works, as demonstrated by Andrade et al. (2024) when documenting the cost overruns and execution deficiencies resulting from this criterion; provided that this gap is effectively bridged, the General Regulations issued in 2026 introduce procedural adjustments aimed at reducing discretion in awarding contracts, as established by the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador (2026), although their actual impact will depend on substantive modifications to the bid evaluation parameters that go beyond regulatory adjustments.

In this regard, the technological dimension holds the greatest potential for systemic renewal, since its development ranges from the operational use of the COMPRASPÚBLICAS system to the incorporation of data analysis tools and artificial intelligence; provided this transition is carried out with the necessary institutional support, Torres-Berrú (2023) demonstrated that text mining enables the identification of irregular contracts with statistically validated levels of accuracy; likewise, Sánchez-Chero et al. (2025) argue that automating the review of bid documents would shorten award timelines and reduce the margin of discretion in the conduct of public servants. However, this transformation cannot be assumed to be an immediately executable process; given that it requires sustained investment in digital infrastructure and the strengthening of technical competencies among staff in contracting entities—conditions that the system, in its current configuration, does not sufficiently meet.

DISCUSSION

It is worth noting that the award criterion is the focus of the most debate among the authors reviewed, given that the gap between regulatory design and observable results in contract execution is more pronounced in this dimension than in any other

examined; Similarly, Andrade et al. (2024) provided empirical evidence linking the application of the minimum price to deficiencies in the quality of the works, delays in delivery, and cost overruns not included in the reference budgets, which turns an apparent savings in the award into a greater expense for the treasury; In contrast to this interpretation, the General Regulations of the LOSNCP, as established by the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador (2026), introduce the principle of best value as a guiding criterion, although without specifying in sufficient detail the technical weightings that would allow for its operationalization in evaluation procedures, thereby creating an area of ambiguity whose resolution is left to the discretion of the contracting officials ( ); In this vein, Faz-Cevallos et al. (2023) note that the contradiction between procedural speed and technical rigor persists in the Ecuadorian system, since the most expedited procedures do not guarantee the selection of the contractor with the greatest actual capacity; Consequently, Yomona-de-Alcalde et al. (2025) propose adopting multi-criteria parameters that integrate quality, proven experience, and the technical conditions of the bid, replacing models that reduce selection to a single quantifiable variable; As a result, the convergence between these authors' proposal and the 2026 regulatory reform is only partial, since the regulatory advancement does not achieve the methodological specificity that the specialized literature demands to ensure its effective and systematic application in the evaluation committees of contracting entities.

In this regard, the technological dimension holds the greatest potential for systemic renewal according to the reviewed literature, although the debate is not framed in terms of adopting or rejecting the available tools, but rather of specifying the conditions under which their incorporation will generate real improvements and not additional sources of vulnerability; for this reason, Torres-Berrú (2023) demonstrated that data and text mining applied to the COMPRASPÚBLICAS system allows for the identification of irregular patterns in Ecuadorian public contracts with statistically validated levels of precision, whereby his proposal grants technology an active role in monitoring contractual integrity and shifts oversight from periodic auditing toward continuous automated monitoring; however, Sánchez-Chero et al. (2025) temper this optimism by warning that the incorporation of artificial intelligence into procurement systems raises difficulties related to data protection,

algorithmic impartiality, and human oversight of automated procedures; Consequently, these authors' position does not contradict that of Torres-Berrú (2023), but rather contextualizes it within a set of constraints that the Ecuadorian system does not sufficiently meet in its current configuration; however, this gap between demonstrated technological potential and available institutional capacities represents one of the most pressing practical issues in the reviewed debate; It is worth noting that Faz-Cevallos et al. (2023) have already warned that contracting entities exhibit structural technical weaknesses in the management of the SNCP's procedures , such that the adoption of advanced computational tools requires, as a precondition, sustained investment in staff training and digital infrastructure—areas that current regulations do not address with the necessary specificity; In short, technology can serve as a driver of institutional improvement, but only if its implementation is framed within regulatory and organizational conditions that ensure its operation with fairness, transparency, and effective human oversight.

Viewed in this light, the contrast between the regulatory advances achieved and the effective capacity of contracting entities to implement them reveals one of the most persistent shortcomings documented in the reviewed literature; at the same time, Lozano-Benavides (2025) and Faz-Cevallos et al. (2023) confirmed that legislative reforms do not translate with equal speed into practical transformations in contract management, particularly in decentralized autonomous governments with limited budgets and technical teams of mixed backgrounds; therefore, Executive Decree No. 193 of 2026, as provided by the Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador (2026), requires institutional capacities that are not always available in the procurement units of the system's entities; hence, Yomona-de-Alcalde et al. (2025) determined that pre-contractual strategic planning and the training of specialized personnel represent central determinants for the effectiveness of contract execution within Latin American regulatory frameworks; that is, institutional strengthening does not function as a desirable complement to regulatory reform, but rather as a structural condition without which the regulation lacks practical effectiveness; however, this position generates further debate; in this regard, García and Vaca (2025) specify that Ecuador's general administrative process acts as a legal framework ensuring systemic coherence for state actions, implying that partial reforms in the contractual

sphere must be coordinated with transformations of the administrative apparatus as a whole for their effects to be sustainable; Consequently, sector-specific regulatory changes alone, without a coordinated review of the State's general administrative system, are insufficient to generate the systemic changes demanded by the empirical analysis of the literature.

CONCLUSION

The results suggest implications that operate on three interrelated levels; at the regulatory level, the specification of multi-criteria technical weightings in bid evaluation procedures emerges as the modification with the greatest potential impact, while the replacement of the minimum price with composite parameters of quality and technical capacity structurally reduces execution cost overruns and the prevalence of substandard work in public procurement; At the institutional level, the systematic training of procurement unit staff, the standardization of internal procedures, and the horizontal transfer of best practices among contracting entities constitute investments with verifiable organizational returns that transcend the scope of a single regulatory reform.

However, the technological level requires specific consideration, since the integration of data mining and artificial intelligence tools into the contractual cycle demands a regulatory framework that precisely establishes the criteria for human oversight and the limits of decision-making automation—an indispensable condition for these technologies to function as drivers of institutional improvement rather than as a source of new opacity; Consequently, the three identified dimensions converge on a single requirement: the sustainable reform of Ecuador's public procurement system demands coherence between regulatory adjustment, organizational investment, and technological regulation, as none of these components can operate in isolation to produce lasting results.

FINANCING

Non-monetary

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with individuals or institutions linked to the research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Bolivarian University of Ecuador, Durán, Guayas, Ecuador.

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