

Ecuador's Social Movements, Electoral Politics, and Military Coups

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Summary and Keywords

In the 200 years since Ecuador gained independence from Spain in 1822, it has experienced many of the social problems that have plagued other Latin American countries. Ecuador experienced a high degree of political instability during the 19th century, and a series of extra-constitutional and military governments marked much of the 20th century. At the dawn of the 21st century, Ecuador followed the rest of Latin America's "pink tide," which introduced progressive governments that sought to address long-standing problems of poverty and inequality. The country has endured numerous coups, *caudillo* and populist leaders, and forms of government ranging through conservative, liberal, populist, military, and civilian "democracy." The diversity in political institutions led the political scientist John Martz to observe that Ecuador, although little studied among scholars of Latin American issues, "serves as a microcosm for a wide variety of problems, questions, and issues relevant to various of the other Latin American countries." Despite a high degree of political instability, the country is also home to very strong popular movements that opened up space for the election of the left-wing government of Rafael Correa in 2006. His administration resulted in a remarkable shift from a period of extreme instability to political stability, with notable gains in economic growth and corresponding drops in poverty and inequality.

Scholarly research on Ecuador has often reflected the country's current political environment. In the 1950s, in the midst of the emergence of populist politics, researchers defined the country's landscape in terms of its personalist leadership, particularly as represented by the perennial leader José María Velasco Ibarra. In 1972, General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara led a military coup that removed Velasco Ibarra from office. In the midst of a petroleum boom, he established a nationalist regime similar to that of Juan Velasco Alvarado in neighboring Peru. A massive Indigenous uprising two decades later introduced a generation of studies that examined ethnonationalist-based social movements. Those movements led to Correa's election in the midst of a broader turn to the left in Latin America, which once again influenced the direction of investigations.

Keywords: Ecuador, social movements, elections, coups, populism, ethnicity, Indigenous peoples, Latin American politics

Regionalism

Archaeologists trace the first significant evidence of civilization in present-day Ecuador to Valdivia on the northwest Pacific Coast of South America about 5,000 years ago. The consolidation of state-level structures did not happen until the Inca rulers expanded their empire, known as *Tawantinsuyu* [land of four quarters], northward from its capital in Cusco (Cuzco), Peru, in the late 15th century. In 1532, the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro captured the Inca ruler Atahualpa, and two years later his lieutenant Sebastián de Belalcázar seized the city of Quito. After its founding in 1563, the Spanish kingdoms ruled Ecuador for the next 259 years as the *audiencia* of Quito within the viceroyalty of Peru. In an attempt to create a unified national identity, independence leaders renamed the new country “Ecuador” after the equator that it straddles.

Ecuador is currently the fourth smallest country in South America, after Suriname, Uruguay, and Guyana. Despite its small size, its physical and human geographies have had a significant impact on the evolution of its economic, political, and social structures. The country is divided into four geographic zones: the tropical Pacific coastal lowlands, the temperate Sierra highlands, the eastern upper Amazon basin often called the *Oriente*, and the Galápagos archipelago, which lies 780 kilometers west of the mainland. Regional divisions are so pronounced that even the country's declaration of political independence from Spanish colonial control was not a unified and coherent action. Quito declared its liberation from Spain in 1809 in an action separate from Guayaquil, which proclaimed its independence in 1820. When patriots defeated Spanish forces outside of Quito at the Battle of Pichincha on May 24, 1822, the inhabitants of Quito watched passively, while those from Guayaquil fought under the leadership of the Venezuelan general Antonio José de Sucre.

For eight years after independence, Ecuador joined with Colombia and Venezuela in the Confederation of Gran Colombia. When Ecuador separated from Gran Colombia in 1830, its constitution defined the new country as a weak federation of Guayas on the coast, Azuay in the southern highlands, and Quito in the northern highlands. Three decades later, the country nearly dissolved as four governments claimed to rule the territory, with one in Quito, another at the port of Guayaquil, and two more in the southern cities of Cuenca and Loja. The strongly centralizing government of Gabriel García Moreno, which came to power in 1861, finally overcame this crisis. Even so, regionalism continues to be a central feature of Ecuadorian politics, with Guayaquil petitioning at the beginning of the 21st century for autonomy from the rest of the country.

Since Ecuador's independence, regionalism has been apparent in the economic and political divide between the liberal outward-looking commercial coastal port city of Guayaquil and the more isolated, conservative administrative city of Quito in the highlands. Ecuadorians have long recognized the existence of these divisions. In the 1950s, the political scientist George Blanksten (1951, p. 161) noted that “the story of Ecuador is a tale of two cities.” This focus on Quito and Guayaquil, however, marginalizes the southern urban center of Cuenca, the eastern Amazon (stereotypically viewed as a “savage” area, but since

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the 1970s it has provided oil revenues that fund development in the rest of the country), and rural Indigenous communities (which contributed a large part of the independence army but gained little from the struggle). Significant regional and social differences divide Ecuador and complicate the notion of thinking about the country as a unified nation.

Economically and demographically, since before the Spanish conquest, the highlands dominated the rest of the country, with the Incas focusing their efforts on that region to the exclusion of the coastal and Amazonian regions, where their imperial project achieved little success. Two parallel mountain chains with over thirty volcanos, eight of them active, dominate the region. One of these, Cotopaxi, is the world's highest active volcano. The equator reaches its highest point in the world on the snow-capped southern slopes of Mount Cayambe, and because of the equatorial bulge, the peak of Mount Chimborazo is the furthest point from the center of the Earth and once was thought to be the world's highest mountain. Nestled between the two mountain chains are a series of fifteen fertile intermontane basins. Quito, the Incas' northern capital as well as the country's current capital, is located in one of these basins. The coastal plain of Ecuador is wider than that of the Peruvian coast, and because the cold Antarctic Humboldt Current turns out to sea just before it reaches Ecuador, the coast is much wetter and hotter than in Peru.

Ecuador's third region, the upper Amazon basin, or Oriente, today comprises nearly half of the country's territory but contains less than 5% of its population, most of it rural. That has not changed much from the end of the Spanish colonial rule, when 90% of the population lived in the highlands, with only 7% on the coast, and 3% in the Oriente. Since the conclusion of the wars of independence from Spain in the 1820s, Ecuador has been locked in territorial disputes with the neighboring countries of Colombia and Peru over the delineation of international borders in this region. Occasionally, the disputes have led to open warfare between Ecuador and Peru, most notably in 1941 and again in 1995. Seeking hemispheric unity with the onset of World War II, the United States pressured the two countries to settle their border issues. The result was the 1942 Río Protocol, which effectively ceded over half of Ecuador's territory to Peru. Reclaiming that lost territory became a popular political demand that inflamed nationalist sentiments.

Politicians subsequently constructed Ecuador's identity as integrally tied to the Amazon, even though few people lived there and the central government dedicated little in terms of resources to the region. Ecuador's territorial claims drew on a tradition of Spanish conquistador Francisco de Orrellana's leaving from Quito in 1540 to become the first European to float down the Amazon. The country embraces as a national slogan "Ecuador was, is and will be an Amazonian country." Although the slogan was important as a rhetorical device for politicians who used the issue to make nationalistic statements and to denounce their opponents, until relatively recently the Amazon remained marginal to Ecuadorian state formation and economic development. Discovery of rich oil deposits in the Amazon in 1967 resulted in an economic boom for the ruling class, ecological disaster for the Amazon, and increased impoverishment for its inhabitants. Even so, many Ecuadorians believe that the Amazon (both because of issues of territoriality and the potential

economic wealth from petroleum and other mineral exploration) is key to their national salvation.

Ethnicity

Successive Inca and Spanish invasions simplified what was previously a diverse ethnic and linguistic landscape. Before the conquests, many more Indigenous groups existed in Ecuador than survive today. In a process best described as “ethnocide,” the number of Indigenous groups dropped from twenty-four before the Inca conquest to ten in the 1980s, including a drop from twelve to three on the coast. Although many predicted extinction for these peoples, they still retained their own vibrant cultures, languages, dress, music, and traditions and instead grew in strength and political presence, including recreating previously lost ethnic identities.

Spanish colonial administrators attempted a division of the population into two “republics,” one for the Spaniards and another one for the Indians. The European-descent population has always been a small but dominant force in society. They are the ones who have always controlled the land and labor force and have benefitted from the wealth of the country. The native population was relegated to the role of paying tribute to their new overlords. The bipartite division proved to be highly problematic, partly because of entrenched class divisions within both Indigenous and Spanish societies. Wealthy Spaniards with access to economic resources or prestigious administrative posts enjoyed more rights and privileges than artisans or women who were also of European extraction. Likewise, the persistence of an Indigenous ruling class into the colonial period meant that not all Indians were equally subject to abusive and exploitative labor drafts. In fact, the presence of Indigenous intermediaries facilitated white dominance in the Americas. In addition, migration fostered economic and social inequalities, because not all Indians were subject to the same labor and taxation demands. Furthermore, divisions between European-born (*peninsular*) and American-born (*criollo*) whites led to cleavages within the dominant society that eventually resulted in independence in the early 19th century. In addition, the proliferation of mestizo groups in the interstices of colonial society further undermined the neat bipartite division that the Spanish crown hoped to maintain.

The 1830 constitution drafted after Ecuador gained its independence from Spain limited citizenship rights to literate (and therefore white, since other groups did not receive an education) males who were married or older than 22 years and owned property worth at least 300 pesos or were engaged in an independent “useful” profession or industry (it explicitly excluded domestic servants and day laborers). Although this constitution declared the government to be “popular, representative, alternative, and responsible,” only the 2,825 people (0.3% of the population) who met the stringent citizenship requirements selected the government that ruled over the rest of the country. Although over time the restrictions were relaxed, the percentage of Ecuadorian residents with citizenship rights rose slowly, reaching only 3% in 1940. It was not until 1978 that constitutional reforms

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removed literacy restrictions, effectively granting citizenship rights for the first time to the majority of Ecuadorians.

Six Indigenous groups (the Awá, Chachi, Epera, Manta, Tsáchila, and Wankavilka) survive in the coastal region and speak similar languages. Each of these groups is small and has struggled to preserve its ethnic identity. Traditionally, their economies were based on hunting, gathering, and fishing, but with their integration into the market economy they began to engage in agriculture, both for household consumption and growing coffee and cacao for export. The Awa (which means “people,” but who are often called Coaiquer after a nearby small Colombian town) live on both sides of the Ecuadorian-Colombian border. The Chachi (traditionally called “Cayapas”) clashed over limited resources with the Afro-Ecuadorians who occupy the same region. The Epera is a little-known group that numbers about 150 people. Better known are the Tsáchila, which means the “true people” or the “true word,” who were previously called the Colorados because of their red body paint. Their body paint led to their exploitation as a tourist curiosity in the 1950s when the government built a road through their territory and whites began to colonize the zone. On the rest of the coast, Indigenous communities either died out or disappeared into a homogeneous mestizo culture, frequently through the economic influence of export-oriented agribusiness that has resulted in the formation of a rural proletariat.

Most Indigenous peoples live in the Sierra highlands, and although they comprise many different ethnic groups, they are grouped under the umbrella category of “Kichwa.” The Kichwa are broken into different “pueblos,” or peoples, the Cañar, Chibuleos, Karankis, Kayambis, Kisapinchas, Kitus, Otavalos, Panzaleos, Pastos, Puruhaes, Quisapinchas, Salasacas, Saraguros, Tomabelas, and Warankas. They are part of the ethno-linguistic Quechua family, the largest surviving Indigenous language in the Americas that stretches across the Andean highlands from Colombia to Chile and includes between eight and twelve million speakers. As a result of the 15th- and 16th-century spread of the Inca Empire in the Ecuadorian highlands, along with the subsequent Spanish missionary impulses, many of the Kichwa-speaking peoples in this region lost much of their linguistic, religious, and cultural distinctiveness. There remains, however, a strong sense of place and tradition, and it would be a mistake to lump the entire region into one category. Regional divisions result in identities remaining overwhelmingly local.

Highland Indigenous communities were integrated into Ecuadorian culture through their economic roles. The Saraguros in the southern Loja province earned a degree of economic independence through cattle production on large ranches, which sometimes put them at odds with Indigenous communities elsewhere in the country who were largely comprised of poor people chronically short of land. Land and agricultural production were important to all highland Indigenous peoples, but they also supplemented their economy with other activities. For example, the Cañar people in southern Ecuador began manufacturing Panama hats in the late 19th century as a way to cope with poverty as their land underwent a process of fragmentation and erosion. Ironically, in 1532, the Cañaris were one of the groups that considered the Spanish invaders to be their liberators from Inca tyranny, but they subsequently assumed an Inca identity as a strategy of adaptation to

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cultural imperialism and economic exploitation. The central highland province of Chimbo-razo has the highest concentration of native peoples. Fernando Daquilema's 1871 rebellion against taxes paid to the church and the state gave them a reputation as Ecuador's most rebellious Indians. The Salasacas in the central province of Tungurahua and the Otavalos in the northern province of Imbabura gained economic independence and respect through their weavings. The Otavalos, in particular, won international renown for their textile production and Saturday tourist market, and many observers considered them to be an economic success story. In the 1950s, a tourist trade began to flourish in Otavalo, and weavers changed textile designs and types of fabrics in order to cater to this market. The Otavalos marketed their products themselves in Colombia, New York, Europe, and around the world. They provided a counterpart to the popular (but inaccurate) stereotype of a static, backward, doomed Indigenous society, and they challenged the perception of a homogenous native population with common and undisputed interests.

Eight different ethnic groups survive in Ecuador's upper Amazon, the largest being various groups of Kichwa speakers. Although they share a language similar to that spoken by the highland Kichwas, their forest culture was quite different from that found in the Sierra. The Shuar, the second largest group, long had a reputation as headhunters and savages and for their ability to survive in the face of external onslaughts. The word *Shuar* simply means "people," and outsiders (including ethnographers) previously labeled them as *Jívaro*. The word *Jívaro* has no meaning in the Shuar language, but instead comes from Puerto Rico, where it refers to a wild or untamed beast. The Shuar rejected it both because it is a term foreign to their culture and because of its historic negative association with "savages" and headhunting. Related to the Shuar are the Achuar, who shared the same area and many of the same customs and traditions and spoke a similar language.

Smaller groups in the Amazon included the Sionas, Secoyas, Cofán (AI), and Waorani. All of these groups faced the devastating impact of evangelical missionaries and intensive petroleum exploration in their territory, due to the roads, pipelines, diseases, and economic and cultural changes that the invasive groups brought. In November of 1993, the Sionas and Secoyas fought back by suing Texaco in New York for more than one billion dollars for a variety of environmental abuses, including dumping more than 3,000 gallons of oil a day into their lagoons. Chevron subsequently bought out Texaco, but a quarter of a century later, the case still wound its way through the court system. The Waorani (sometimes called *Aucas*, a Kichwa word meaning "savages," by outsiders) are best known for spearing to death five North American missionaries in 1956. The eighth and smallest Indigenous group in the Ecuadorian Amazon was the Zápara (which means "person of the forest"). Their history highlights the devastating impact of Western civilization, as their numbers collapsed from about 200,000 people before contact with Europeans to 200 at the beginning of the 21st century. Zápara history demonstrates not only the catastrophic repercussions that the European conquest, which began 500 years ago, continues to exercise on native peoples of the Americas, but also the vitality and survival of Indigenous cultures.

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Ecuador's African-descent population was concentrated primarily in the northwestern coastal province of Esmeraldas and in the Chota Valley in the northern highland province of Imbabura. A popular legend holds that the Afro-Ecuadorians are descendants of escapees from a slave ship that was bound for Peru but shipwrecked off the Esmeraldas coast in 1553. Under the leadership of Alonso de Illescas, they forged inland and intermixed with Indigenous peoples in the area, sometimes fighting with them over limited land and resources. After 150 years of independence, they eventually allied with Quito and the Spanish crown.

Mestizos comprise the majority of Ecuador's population, and they worked as both rural *campesinos*, or peasants, and poor laborers in urban areas. On the coast, lower-class mestizo peasants working as a rural proletariat on export-oriented agricultural plantations were known as montuvios. Montuvios tended to be mobile and to migrate among plantations during harvests and to urban areas in search of employment. Until well into the 20th century, Ecuador remained an overwhelmingly rural and agricultural country. With increased educational opportunities in the second half of the 20th century, many mestizos and montuvios migrated to urban areas and entered professions.

In Ecuador, as in the rest of Latin America, the myth of *mestizaje* holds that a new Latin American culture was forged from the blending of three separate traditions (European, Indigenous, and African). Although this Latin American version of the "melting pot" theory held partly true for the mestizo segment of the Ecuadorian population, it threatened to subvert the unique history and surviving cultural traditions of Indigenous and African communities. Rather than embracing ethnic diversity, *mestizaje* contended that the ethnic identities must be suppressed in order for the country to progress forward, and modernization was often associated with the "whitening" of society. This ideological framework created a situation of racial discrimination that placed Indigenous and African groups at a disadvantage in society. In addition, ideologies of *mestizaje* implied the presence of a coherent national identity in Ecuador that has never existed. Local and regional forms of identity have always been the primary factors in people's sense of self. The formation and structure of these identities underlie movements for social change and have influenced economic and political developments in the country.

Estimating the ethnic composition of Ecuador's population is a difficult and complex undertaking, largely due to the fluidity of ethnic categories and the lack of reliable statistical data. According to self-reporting in the 2010 census, 72% of the Ecuadorian population was mestizo (mixed Indigenous and European), 7% montuvio (coastal peasants of mixed Indigenous, African, and European heritage), 7% Indigenous, 7% Afro-Ecuadorian, and 6% European. In particular, estimates of the number of surviving Indigenous peoples vary greatly, from 7% in the 2010 census to estimates as high as 40% according to Indigenous organizations. Although during the 20th century the absolute number of Indigenous peoples increased, due to migration and assimilation, the percentage of Ecuador's population (based on language, religion, dress, culture, and geographic locale) who identify themselves primarily as "Indigenous" has dropped, with a corresponding rise in the mestizo segment of the population. These variances in estimates are largely due to vague

boundaries between Indigenous and mestizo worlds, particularly due to a phenomenon known as situational ethnicity. For example, a person could work as a day laborer in an urban area during the week and identify as a mestizo, speaking Spanish, wearing Western clothes, eating European foods, and attending Catholic mass. On the weekend, this same person might return to a native village and engage in traditional customs, including speaking an Indigenous language and visiting a traditional healer, and fully embrace an Indigenous identity.

Political Structures

Since becoming an independent country in 1830, Ecuador has experienced a high degree of political instability, including a series of dictatorships and military governments. It has had 20 different constitutions and over 100 executive leaders, including 34 between 1830 and 1895 and 21 between 1931 and 1948. As in much of Latin America, feuds between liberals and conservatives characterized the 19th century. This was a chaotic period during which caudillos with no clear political philosophy were ascendant. Gabriel García Moreno, who was president from 1861–1865 and again from 1869–1875, introduced a period of modernizing conservative and strongly pro-Catholic rule until his assassination in 1875.

Eloy Alfaro's 1895 Liberal Revolution brought in a period of liberal hegemony over political structures that introduced new modernizing ideas and economic policies to Ecuador. Alfaro attempted to break conservative landowners' stranglehold on Indigenous labor on the large landed estates called *haciendas* in the highlands. The construction of the Guayaquil and Quito Railway Company facilitated and accelerated the migration of highland laborers to the coast, where they snapped up higher-wage jobs first on cacao and then on banana and other plantations engaged in the monoculture agricultural export economy. The coast, along with the surrounding low-lying hills, subsequently developed an export-oriented agricultural economy that included the production of cattle, bananas, rice, sugar, coffee, and maritime products, such as shrimp and tuna. Counterpoised against the liberal and commercial coast were the conservative, Catholic, Sierra highlands. Whereas export-oriented agriculture dominated the coast, domestic agricultural production, such as cattle, potatoes, corn, barley, and wheat destined for a local market, was more important in the highlands.

At the beginning of the 20th century, only 20% of the country's population lived on the coast, but by the time of Ecuador's first national census in 1950, the figure had risen to 40%. Simultaneously, people moved from rural to urban areas in search of higher-paying jobs and more economic opportunities. In 1950, 71% of the population still lived in rural areas. In the 1974 census, for the first time the coastal population surpassed that of the Sierra highlands. The port of Guayaquil grew into the country's commercial center and largest city, with a population of over two million people. Because of its central role in the export economy, it was subject to external influences, including the influx of liberal and anarchist ideas.

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The 20th century witnessed only three periods of political stability (as defined by civilian control of government with peaceful and constitutional changes of power) and these corresponded with growth in the export economy. An expansion of the cacao export economy led to the first period of political stability, from 1912 to 1925. But working-class discontent lay barely below the surface. On November 13, 1922, port workers in Guayaquil launched a massive general strike to press their demands. The military brutally suppressed the protest with a bloody massacre on November 15 that left hundreds of workers dead. Young military officers who were discontented with oligarchical rule led a July 1925 coup (known as the *Revolución Juliana*) that launched a period of economic modernization and social reforms, including progressive labor legislation. In that environment, leftists founded the Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano (PSE, Ecuadorian Socialist Party) in May 1926. The socialist party subsequently served as a base to defend the interests of urban workers and rural peasants and Indigenous peoples.

The Great Depression introduced in 1929 was one of the most chaotic periods in Ecuador's political history, with a series of coups and failed governments. It also saw advancements in social policy, most significantly with a 1937 law that recognized the rights of rural communities and a 1938 labor code modeled after Article 127 of the 1917 Mexican constitution. Peasants and workers subsequently embraced that progressive legislation to advance their interests.

On May 28, 1944, workers, students, peasants, women, and Indigenous peoples rose up against the liberal president Carlos Arroyo del Río and caused the downfall of his government. Arroyo del Río's repressive government had become increasingly unpopular, particularly after he conceded half of the Ecuadorian territory to Peru subsequent to a 1941 border conflict. The "Glorious May Revolution" terminated a period of liberal domination over the political system and opened up space for broader political participation.

Workers, artisans, peasants, intellectuals, and political leaders took advantage of the openings that the May 1944 revolution provided to found the Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador (CTE, Confederation of Ecuadorian Workers) in July 1944. Communist and socialist party leaders as well as people from an anarchosyndicalist political persuasion played a large role in forming the organization and defining its ideology. The CTE sought to improve the living conditions of the masses through industrializing the country, raising salaries, shortening the work week, protecting the right to strike, eliminating feudal trappings in agriculture, defending democracy, and embracing other elements that favored the proletariat within the framework of an international working-class struggle. The CTE established close relations with Mexican labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano's communist-dominated Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina (CTAL, Confederation of Latin American Workers), which was established in Mexico in 1938 as the regional bureau of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

The May 1944 revolution also introduced a growth in the export economy, this time in bananas, as well as an unusual "democratic parenthesis" of 1948–1960 where a sequence of elected civilian governments successfully finished their terms of office and passed off

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power to a competing party. During this time, Ecuador became the world's largest exporter of bananas, providing up to 25% of the global market, but the vast majority of workers, peasants, and Indigenous peoples enjoyed few benefits from the economic growth.

The 20th century brought a growth in populist styles of political leadership. José María Velasco Ibarra was the most notorious populist leader in Ecuador's 20th-century history, and he contributed his fair share of political instability to the country. He assumed the presidency for the first time in 1934, but he did not manage to complete a full year in office. In fact, he finished only one term (his third, 1952–1956) of his five terms in office. Velasco Ibarra was a charismatic campaigner who declared, "Give me a balcony and the people are mine" (Martz, 1972, p. 1), but he had less luck holding onto power once elected. Although in his campaigns he promised popular reforms that appealed to the masses, he fundamentally remained a part of the privileged ruling class and in office implemented conservative policies that favored his class standing. Logically, this resulted in an erosion of popular support, and his two final terms in office led to two of only three breaks in constitutional rule since the 1944 May Revolution, and the only two periods of military rule in the second half of the 20th century.

The military governments that held power from 1963 to 1967 and again from 1972 to 1979 promulgated agrarian reform laws designed to modernize Ecuador's archaic landholding system. Both the 1964 and 1973 agrarian reform laws failed to change landholding arrangements in a lasting and significant way that benefited farm workers. The junta in the 1970s implemented nationalistic policies, including developing Amazonian petroleum reserves to fund economic developments in the rest of the country. Many in Ecuador came to see the army as progressive because of its development work in rural communities, whereas the navy was affiliated with the dominant class, and the police were more often accused of complicity in committing human rights abuses.

The longest period of uninterrupted constitutional rule and peaceful changes of power in Ecuador ran from 1979 to 1997. That sequence came to an end with the election of Abdalá Bucaram, a populist cut from the same cloth as Velasco Ibarra, in 1996. Bucaram, one of the richest people in Ecuador, campaigned on promises of aiding the poor. Once in office, however, he implemented neoliberal economic policies of privatization, austerity, and trade liberalization that benefited his privileged class standing. Within six months, his economic policies and prevalent problems with corruption alienated his power base and a mass uprising evicted him from power (Torre, 2010). For the next 10 years, 10 different people held the office of chief executive, and Ecuador had seemingly returned to the status quo ante of frequent extra-constitutional changes of power.

The last coup of the 20th century in Latin America occurred in Ecuador on January 21, 2000, when an alliance of lower-ranking military officials and Indigenous leaders evicted Jamil Mahuad from power. Mahuad was a Harvard-educated technocrat who while in office faced soaring inflation, the decaying value of Ecuador's currency (the sucre), and an economy in free fall. He responded by eliminating subsidies on cooking gas, freezing per-

sonal bank accounts, and providing funds to shore up failing banks. Those policies triggered a series of popular protests that led to his removal from power. The Indigenous leader Antonio Vargas, former Supreme Court president Carlos Solórzano, and Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez formed the Government of National Salvation, which held power for several hours. Rather than playing a repressive role, violating people's human rights, and defending the economic interests of the ruling class, as has been common in other countries in Latin America, the military's support for Indigenous peoples and popular demands caught many people by surprise. A counter-coup from the upper echelons of the military (with the complicity of the U.S. embassy), however, removed the junta and placed Vice President Gustavo Noboa in office. The political structures continued on as before.

Popular Movements

In August 1944, Indigenous leaders, together with labor leaders and members of the socialist and communist parties, gathered in Quito to form the *Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios* (FEI, Ecuadorian Federation of Indians). The FEI was conceptualized as a peasant wing of the CTE that would agitate for peasant and Indigenous concerns from a class-based perspective. Although it emerged out of leftist political party and labor union organizing efforts, the FEI was the first successful attempt in Ecuador to establish a national organization for and by Indigenous peoples. Although subsequently surpassed by other peasant and Indigenous federations and organizations, the FEI stands out as a milestone in the history of Ecuador's popular movements. From the 1940s through the 1960s, it flourished as the main national organizational expression of highland Indigenous and peasant groups, particularly in their struggle for land. Promulgation of an agrarian reform law in 1964 represented an achievement of this goal and marked the beginning of the FEI's decline.

The shortcomings of the agrarian reform law gave rise to the emergence of new issues, including the defense of native cultures and languages (which led to the formation of bilingual schools), traditional lands, and human rights (including a struggle against cultural and racial discrimination). To confront these issues, Indigenous peoples formed new organizations to take the place of the FEI. Whereas leftists supported the FEI, reforms in the Catholic Church led progressive religious personnel to play a leading role in the new organizations. The earliest was the *Federación de Centros Shuar* (Shuar Federation) that Salesian missionaries helped organize in the southeastern Amazonian provinces of Morona Santiago and Zamora Chinchipe in 1964. The Federation advocated for Shuar self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, defense of lands, bilingual education, health care, and civil rights. Subsequently, the Shuar have provided strong leadership of Ecuador's Indigenous movements. In 1980, the Shuar joined with other Indigenous groups in the Amazon to form the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana* (CONFENIAE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon) to defend their common interests, including land and environmental

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concerns. The CONFENIAE popularized the use of the term Indigenous *nationalities* to emphasize the embrace of vibrant native languages, religions, histories, and cultures.

In the highlands, the Catholic Church played an important role in the formation of two competing peasant-Indigenous organizations. In 1968, the conservative Catholic labor organization Confederación Ecuatoriana de Obreros Católicos (CEDOC, Ecuadorian Confederation of Catholic Workers) organized the Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (FENOC, National Federation of Peasant Organizations) in an attempt to divide the peasant movement and stop its revolutionary tendencies. The peasant movement subsequently overtook the FENOC and converted it into a force for revolutionary changes in Ecuadorian society. In the 1980s, with a rising ethnic consciousness among the rural masses, the organization changed its name to FENOC-I (Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas-Indígenas or National Federation of Peasant-Indigenous Organizations) and again in the 1990s to FENOCIN (Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas Indígenas y Negras or National Federation of Indigenous, Peasant, and Black Organizations). The name change reflected a broader mandate that included Indigenous peoples and Afro-Ecuadorians.

In 1972, Ecuarunari (*Ecuador Runacunapac Riccharimui*, a Kichwa phrase that means to awaken the Ecuadorian Indians) grew out of progressive sectors of the Catholic Church. Similar to FENOC but more closely associated with ethnic organizing efforts of Kichwa-speakers, Ecuarunari sought to “awaken” people and open their eyes to the oppression and exploitation under which they suffered. Its goals were to defend the right to education, health care, and basic services, as well as to struggle against the oppression, exploitation, and discrimination that peasants and Indigenous peoples faced. Ecuarunari promoted the formation of cooperatives and associations at the grassroots level, and it functioned as a development organization that sought to modernize agriculture, develop bilingual education, and work on other, similar projects.

These three main peasant-Indigenous organizations (FEI, FENOC, and Ecuarunari) occasionally worked together on common issues of agrarian reform, bilingual education, and economic reforms, although more often the groups competed for the allegiance of the same Indigenous peasantry. But it was a new organization, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) that emerged at the head of the most powerful and well-organized social movement in Ecuador's history, eclipsing in significance the contributions of previous labor, peasant, and Indigenous organizations. Founded in 1986 with the intent to organize a pan-Indigenous movement dedicated to agitating for social, political, and educational reforms, it emerged as the representative of Ecuador's Indigenous peoples. In a culture where identities and political struggles are overwhelmingly local, CONAIE struggled to create a new comprehensive “Indian” identity that crossed geographic borders and included all Indigenous peoples in Ecuador. Rather than relying on the political left or Catholic Church for support, CONAIE stressed the Indigenous nature of its organizational structure.

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The 1990 census reported for the first time that the urban population (defined as settlements with at least 2,500 people) surpassed the rural population. Economic crises in Ecuador during the 1990s also drove one of the largest per-capita out-migrations (primarily to the United States) of any Latin American country. These migrations had an irreversible impact on Ecuador and were visible in the nature of ethnic identities, social movements, and political structures in the country.

Building on this long history of popular organizing efforts, Indigenous peoples splashed into the national consciousness in June 1990 with a powerful *levantamiento* [uprising] that swept across the country, paralyzing it for a week. Responding to planned celebrations of the 1992 quincentennial of Christopher Columbus's trans-Atlantic voyage, the uprising reflected a growing ethnic consciousness and pressing demands for land. The CONAIE presented the uprising's demands in a 16-point document that summarized its agenda for redefining Indigenous peoples' cultural, economic, and political role in society. The most significant and contentious issue to emerge out of CONAIE and the 1990 *levantamiento* was the call to declare Ecuador a "plurinational state." Rather than organizing around issues of economic exploitation or ethnic identity, Indigenous groups embraced their identities as nationalities with their own languages, customs, religion, history, and territory. Their demands had revolutionary implications that threatened Ecuador's white ruling class, shaking their exclusionary hold on power. Subsequently, the CONAIE and its leaders played a major role in political developments in the country.

For the first half of the 1990s, Indigenous leaders preferred to engage in street protests rather than electoral politics because of a belief that neither the political system nor political parties were functioning in a way that actually represented people's interests. The leaders argued that they could make more effective changes working through civil society rather than engaging in electoral campaigns. Popular distrust of the traditional political class grew as marginalized peoples became disenchanted with the failures of, as they viewed them, empty formal democratic structures to improve their living standards. Nevertheless, some grassroots activists wanted to engage in electoral campaigns. These individuals failed to understand why they should not avail themselves of all tools at their disposal to challenge the ruling classes that governed against their economic and political interests.

In 1995, Indigenous leaders in the Amazon founded a political movement called Pachakutik to campaign for political office. *Pachakutik* is a Kichwa word that signifies change, rebirth, transformation, and the coming of a new era, and the movement opposed the government's neoliberal economic policies and favored a more inclusive and participatory political system. It joined Indigenous peoples with other sectors of Ecuador's popular movements in a project to achieve common goals. The movement assumed a center-left political position that opposed neoliberal economic policies and favored profound changes in society that would create a more inclusive and participatory democracy. Pachakutik experienced moderate success on both local and national levels, including the election of Luis Macas, president of the CONAIE, to a post as a national deputy in the National Assembly in 1996. In the late 1990s, several attempts to implement neoliberal reforms that

were designed to halt hyperinflation and bank failures but hit poor and Indigenous peoples particularly hard brought the CONAIE and Pachakutik to the forefront of political protest in the country. Ecuador faced the irony of having very strong and well-organized popular movements, but a corrupt political system that repeatedly compromised the interests of the people.

Citizens' Revolution

In 2002, almost three years after leading the coup that evicted Mahuad from power after he replaced the sucre with the dollar as legal tender in an attempt to stop a free-falling economy, Lucio Gutiérrez won election as president in alliance with Pachakutik and its social movement base of support. Gutiérrez rewarded Pachakutik with four cabinet posts, including the appointment of two Indigenous leaders as ministers, Nina Pacari as Minister of Foreign Relations and Luis Macas as Minister of Agriculture. The alliance lasted only six months because Gutiérrez's desire not to alienate wealthy business interests led him to retain many of the neoliberal economic policies that he had rejected as a coup plotter, including maintaining dollarization, adhering to stringent International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies, and supporting a so-called free trade pact with the United States. Following his break with the left, Gutiérrez turned to conservative political parties and, with their support and that of his military backers, he managed to hold onto power for two more years.

On April 20, 2005, a popular uprising brought down Gutiérrez's government. Gutiérrez derided his opponents as *forajidos* [outlaws], which they subsequently took up as a title of pride and honor. Seemingly without central coordination, thousands of people took to the streets of Quito. Unlike previous uprisings, Indigenous movements played a minor role in the mobilization, with those allied with Gutiérrez's former coup co-conspirator Antonio Vargas coming to the president's support. The national congress voted to remove Gutiérrez for abandoning his post even as he sat in the presidential palace. With Gutiérrez out of office, Vice President Alfredo Palacio completed his presidential term. The most popular member of Palacio's cabinet was the young economist Rafael Correa, who briefly served as Minister of Finance before leaving the government over disagreements with the president's decision to pursue neoliberal economic policies.

Correa used his popularity as finance minister in Palacio's government to run successfully as an independent candidate in the 2006 presidential election. His victory set in motion a rapid and fundamental transformation of Ecuador's political landscape, quickly converting it from one of the most volatile to one of the most stable countries in the Americas. Correa took office on January 15, 2007, with a proclamation that the long, dark night of neoliberalism in Ecuador was finally over. He declared a "citizens' revolution," which included calling for a constituent assembly, fighting against corruption, opposing neoliberal economic policies, increasing funding for health and education, and promoting regional integration. The new president refused to sign agreements with the IMF, and resisted free-trade pacts with the United States. Correa repeatedly attacked the business oli-

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garchy, pledged reforms that would benefit the country's poor, and promised to work to create a more just society.

Correa condemned Ecuador's established party system as fundamentally corrupt and ineffective, and he claimed that it had contributed to the problems that the country now faced. Rather than allying with existing political parties, he created his own political movement called Alianza País (Country Alliance, with "País" also serving as an acronym for Patria Altiva y Soberana—Proud and Sovereign Homeland). Correa campaigned in the October 2006 general election without the support of an established group of congressional candidates, which ensured that, if he were elected to the presidency, he would face an antagonistic legislature. Accordingly, one of his first acts as president was to dismiss the national congress and to convene a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. Despite questions about the legality of the maneuver, the congress was extremely unpopular and the public did not challenge its disbandment.

In a referendum held on April 15, 2007, three months after Correa took office, 81.7% of the Ecuadorean electorate approved the establishment of a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. On September 30, Correa's Alianza País won a majority of seats in the constituent assembly. A year later, on September 28, 2008, 63.9% of those who participated in another referendum approved the new constitution that had been drafted largely under Correa's control. The new document rejected neoliberalism and embraced increased resource allocation to education, social services, and health care. It expanded democratic participation, including extending the vote to those between 16 and 18 years of age, foreigners residing in the country for more than five years, and immigrants living outside the country. It employed gender-inclusive language. The constitution also defended the rights of nature, Indigenous languages, and in a highly symbolic gesture, plurinationalism as a way to incorporate Indigenous cosmologies into the governing of the country.

Ecuador's new constitution so fundamentally remapped the country's political structures that it required the holding of fresh local, congressional, and presidential elections. Alianza País also dominated these contests. The series of electoral victories consolidated Correa's political control but his success came at the cost of marginalizing social movements that had created the political space that the popular president now occupied. During the 2006 election campaign, Correa and Pachakutik had discussed forming an alliance. Some observers dreamt of a shared ticket between Correa and an established Indigenous leader, such as Luis Macas. Indigenous activists wanted their leader to contest the presidency, but Correa refused to consider running as the vice-presidential candidate. Some grassroots activists argued in favor of jumping at the chance to join a ticket, even as a junior partner, that had strong popular appeal and stood a good chance of winning. They thought that it would be a serious strategic mistake to pass on this opportunity. The attempt to forge an alliance, however, quickly broke down in the face of an effective and popular politician. Subsequently, social-movement relations with Correa varied between strategic support in electoral campaigns as the best realistic option to imple-

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ment their agenda and outright opposition to some of the president's policy objectives, particularly those that were based on growing the economy through resource extraction.

Symbolically, one of Correa's signature policy objectives was to forgo drilling for oil in the ecologically sensitive Yasuní National Park in the eastern Amazonian forest in exchange for international development aid. In office, Correa was exceptionally successful at deploying government resources to fuel economic development and reduce rates of poverty and inequality. While applauding his policy objectives, Indigenous activists and environmentalists complained that the president achieved these goals through the extraction of natural resources from ecologically sensitive areas. Activists also opposed legislation that redirected hydraulic resources to mineral extraction. Rather than supporting growing the economy through large-scale mining and petroleum exports, indigenous activists advocated an alternative development strategy that they termed *sumak kawsay* [living well], which prioritized human needs over those of corporations. In August 2013, Correa announced his decision to permit the commencement of drilling for oil in the Yasuní because international donors had not been forthcoming with the expected level of financial contributions. The president's decision further eroded relations with social movements that would otherwise probably have provided the most solid base of support for his administration.

Even without an organized political party or social movement base of support, Correa still performed remarkably well in opinion polls, at times winning the approval of 80% of the population. In April 2009, Correa was re-elected president with 52% of the votes cast, the first time since Ecuador's return to civilian rule in 1979 that a presidential candidate had won a high enough percentage of the vote to avoid a run-off election. Nearly four years later, in February 2013, Correa repeated the feat with an even larger percentage of the vote (57.2%). In the concurrent legislative elections, the Alianza País secured a critical two-thirds majority in the national assembly, becoming the first single party since 1979 to enjoy a legislative majority. A variety of factors contributed to Correa's political success. Unquestionably, he counted on broad public support for his political project of redirecting public resources to the impoverished masses. Correa also faced a weakened and discredited opposition, with many of the traditional political parties in a state of complete collapse. The electorate had also grown weary of the frequent and extra-constitutional changes in power, and many people welcomed the political stability that Correa brought to the country.

On September 30, 2010, Correa faced the most significant challenge to his position in office. Police officers who were unhappy with the provisions of a new public service law took the president hostage when he arrived at their barracks in an attempt to clarify the legislation's intent. In the ensuing scuffle, Correa was injured and was escorted to a nearby police hospital for treatment. Twelve hours after the protest began, an elite special squad stormed the hospital to free the president. In the process, five people were killed and around 300 injured. Correa publicly declared that he had faced a failed coup attempt, while others downplayed the events as a police protest that had escalated out of control. Regardless of whether a broader conspiracy actually existed, Correa successfully played

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the events to his political advantage. Despite political challenges, the country appeared highly unlikely to sink back into a period of political instability.

A glut of oil on the market, in part from booming shale oil production in the United States, led to a 70% drop in prices between 2014 and 2016. With commodity prices plunging, in June 2015 Correa proposed an increase in inheritance and capital gains taxes in order to make up for a budgetary shortfall to fund social programs. The move led to conservative protests, which forced the president to back down on his proposal and to call instead for national dialogue. Indigenous and environmental groups also launched protests, but this time against the government's continued reliance on an extractive economy. Parts of those social movements challenged the president from the left and proposed alternative and sustainable models to develop the local economy. Others made strategic and opportunistic alliances with the right in order to weaken the popular president.

In December 2015, the national assembly, under the control of Correa's Alianza País, approved a package of 15 constitutional reforms. The most significant question—and the one that led to protests from both the right and the left leading up to the vote—was one that removed a prohibition on indefinite re-election for office holders. Several weeks earlier, however, Correa encouraged the inclusion of a provision that the reform would only take effect after the 2017 elections, thereby barring the president from seeking re-election. That decision also deprived the opposition of their chief unifying issue. Correa had also indicated his desire to retire at the end of his term and to move to his wife's home country of Belgium. Some critics charged that Correa wished to step aside in the midst of a declining economic situation and that he had plans to return in all his glory four years later to reclaim his rightful place as leader of the country.

During Correa's decade in power, social spending on education, housing, and infrastructure lifted millions of Ecuadorians out of poverty. Government social expenditures doubled, as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), from 4.3% in 2006 to 8.6% in 2016. Spending on higher education increased from 0.7% to 2.1% of GDP in the same period, while expenditure on health services doubled. During Correa's time in office, the poverty rate declined from 37.6% to 25.4%, according to World Bank estimates. Equally if not more significant, inequality also fell substantially. Ecuador's Gini coefficient, a standard measure of inequality, fell from 0.55 to 0.47. The significant drops in poverty rates and social inequality were the most notable outcomes of Correa's economic policies.

In 2017, Correa's previous vice president, Lenín Moreno, won election and succeeded him in office. Following the legislative elections of February 2017, the number of Alianza País delegates to the 137-member congress fell from 100 to 74. Although Alianza País still had a clear majority, the reduction in deputies indicated that Moreno would have to be more responsive to the demands of his political opponents. Moreno lacked the charisma that had maintained Correa in power for 10 years, but he also did not have Correa's abrasive personality, which had cost him support from those who might have otherwise sided with him. Moreno was paralyzed after being shot in a robbery in 1998, and the new president had won international recognition for his promotion of the rights of disabled

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people. He was personally well liked, although some observers were concerned whether he would be able to emerge from Correa's shadow.

Within months of Correa's taking office, cracks in the alliance between Correa and Moreno begin to emerge. Moreno reached out to Correa's opponents on both the neoliberal right and social movement left, and rolled back some Correa-era policies that critics had found most objectionable. These actions prompted Correa to lash out publicly at his former vice president, accusing Moreno of betraying his "Citizen's Revolution." In the eyes of Correa's supporters, Moreno was a fake leftist, an opportunist unworthy of his forebear's position, poised to return Ecuador to an era of neoliberal hegemony.

A further and permanent breakdown between the two erstwhile allies came with a February 2018 referendum that reinstated term limits and that prevented Correa from running for the presidency again. Correa returned from his self-imposed exile in Belgium to lead a failed campaign against the referendum. Although at first glance the referendum appeared to symbolize the defeat of Correa's political ambitions, a closer look reveals that Correa won about 37% of the vote—not an insignificant base of support in Ecuador's fractured political environment. Furthermore, Moreno gained about two thirds of the vote in the referendum based largely on a situation in which various opponents of Correa's political project threw their weight behind the current president. Both the conservative opposition and social movement left campaigned in support of the referendum. If Moreno's calculation in the referendum was to strengthen his hold on power, it proved successful: he emerged from the vote with an approximately 60% or 70% approval rating. Such popularity, however, can prove fleeting in Ecuador's fickle political environment, where political allegiances can shift with the wind.

Correa responded by denouncing his protégé as a traitor and "a wolf in sheep's clothing." Seemingly underscoring those charges, Moreno announced plans to privatize some state-owned companies and to undertake measures to promote private enterprise. Among the measures was a plan to dismiss government employees, trim the number of ministries and secretariats, and sell government buildings, vehicles, and other assets. Moreno claimed that Ecuador's debt load—about two thirds of the GDP—and large fiscal deficit had forced him to make amends with the business class. For Correa's supporters, Moreno's reforms confirmed suspicions that the current president was departing from a socialist program.

Despite all of the accusations between the two political leaders, it is not entirely clear what underlay their split, because it did not fall along clear ideological lines. Moreno denied Correa's charges that he was leading the government toward the right and retorted that his predecessor had left the country in a financial mess that he now needed to clean up. And while Moreno implemented austerity measures, he also increased some forms of social spending, including the politically popular "human development bond." Moreno's policies led to questions about how distinct his government was from that of his predecessor, and whether the differences were ones of style and personality rather than substance.

Moreno appeared to face three choices. Either he could return to previously discredited neoliberal policies under the dictates of the IMF that benefited the wealthy but harmed poor people, or he could finance the economy with foreign debt and hope that the price of oil rose, or he could pursue a heterodox adjustment program that included increasing taxes on the wealthy to fund social programs for the more disadvantaged members of society. In Ecuador's historically volatile political situation, it was unclear which direction Moreno would take, and whether he could hold on to the reins of power.

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